

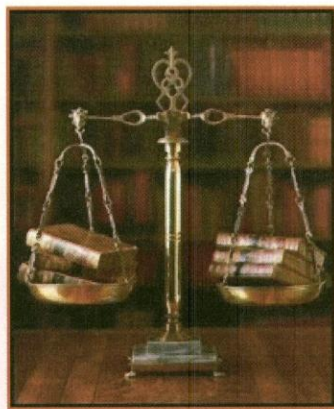
Without education, the present shall see only heartache



“And nothing to look backward to with pride, and nothing  
to look forward to with hope”

*- Robert Frost*

## **State of Delaware Justice of the Peace Court**



**Truancy Court**

**Annual Report 2009 - 2010**

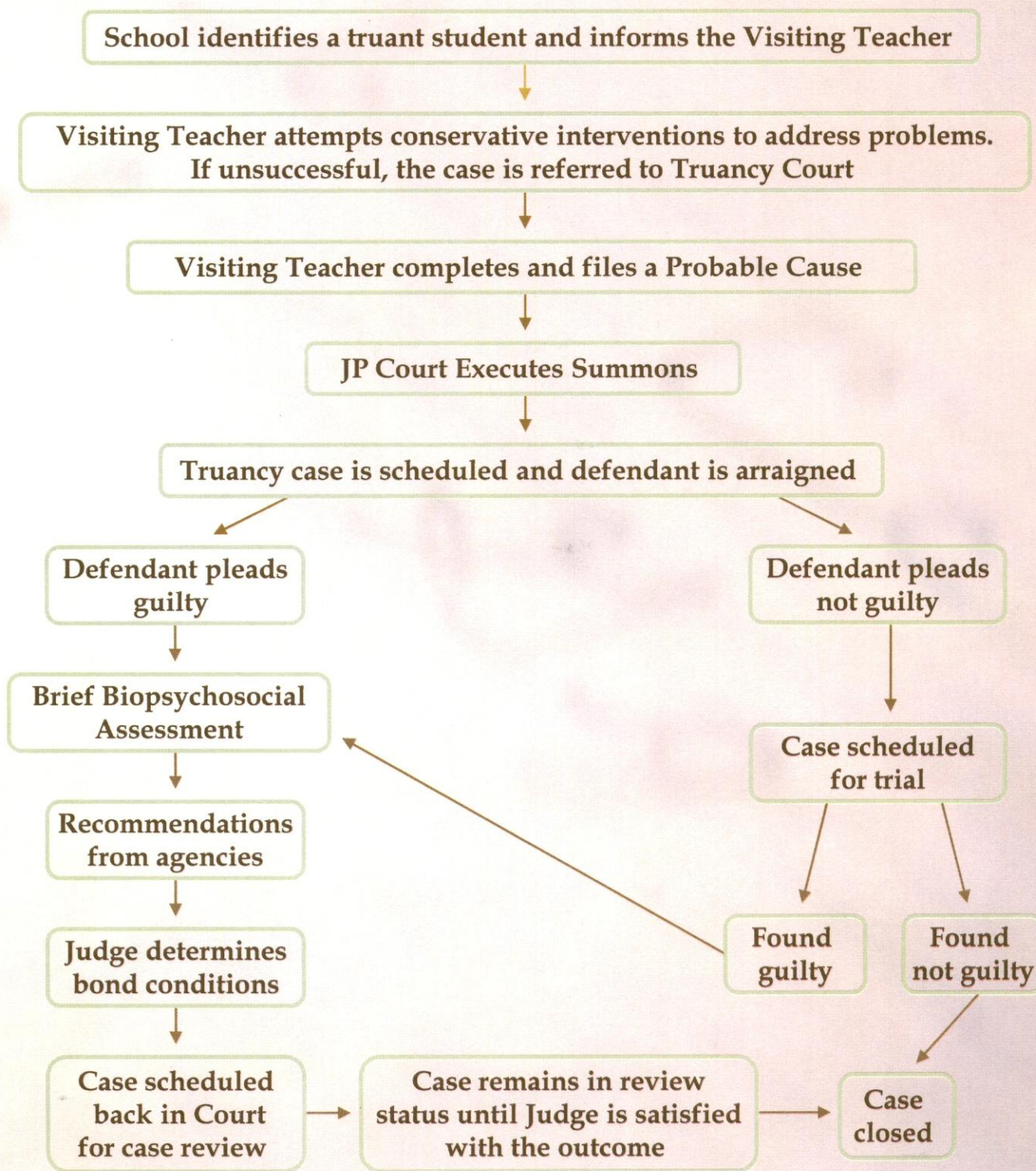
## The Truancy Court Model

Truancy historically has been a reliable predictor of juvenile delinquency and often is a signal of personal and/or family issues that have gone without appropriate interventions. Some of these issues include homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse, child abuse/neglect, unmet educational needs and limited access to healthcare. Delaware's Truancy Court serves as the hub for the support and intervention services necessary to address these issues, thereby increasing the likelihood of consistent school attendance. Truancy Court is innovative in its remedial, non-punitive approach to improving school attendance, as opposed to the more disciplinary measures of enforcing the law and mandating change seen in traditional court settings. The comprehensive, wrap-around approach to addressing truancy is evidenced by the parties involved in a typical truancy case. In addition to the parent and child, the following people are vital components of the process:

- Judge trained in handling Truancy cases
- Behavioral health providers who take referrals, conduct drug testing and schedule assessments
- Educational advocates and outreach partners
- Informal community supports

In addition to these partners, Truancy Court works closely with the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families. The Court maintains contact with active workers through Prevention & Behavioral Health, Family Services, and Youth Rehabilitative Services in order to make informed decisions, initiate appropriate interventions, and avoid duplication of services.

## How a Case Enters Truancy Court



## The Truancy Court Partners

For 2009-2010, 846 new cases were filed with Truancy Court, compared with 768 cases for 2008-2009. The Court's success is contingent on developing a timely and appropriate intervention plan for each case, which calls for a myriad of support services, of which behavioral health is but one piece. Without our community partners, the gains we have made in the battle against truancy since the Court's inception in 1996 would not be possible. The following programs have been integral components of the intervention process:

- **ABR Counseling** - Adolescent substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services
- **Aquila of Delaware** - Adolescent substance abuse assessment and treatment services
- **Barnes and Associates** - Mental Health Treatment services for children and adults
- **Catholic Charities** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Children and Families First** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Cornell Abraxas** - Electronic monitoring
- **Delaware Guidance Services** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families** - Prevention and Behavioral Health, Youth Rehab. Services and Family Services
- **Frank Everett & Associates** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Kent/Sussex County Counseling Services** - Adult substance abuse assessment and treatment services

- **People's Place** (KC, SC) – Substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services for children and adults
- **Phoenix Mental Health** (KC, SC) – Substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services for children and adults
- **Project Stay Free** (NCC) – Electronic Monitoring
- **SODAT** (NCC) – Substance abuse assessment and treatment services for children and adults

### **The Visiting Teachers**

Over the past four years, there have been 3,723 cases filed with Truancy Court. The Visiting Teachers are not only responsible for filing charges with the Court, but also for the ongoing monitoring of attendance and academic performance of each case until closure with Truancy Court. The Visiting Teachers attend arraignments, as well as all subsequent case reviews, serving as the primary source of information for the judges.

In addition, their close monitoring between case reviews allows for swift intervention, should a case deteriorate and require more immediate action by the Court. If Truancy Court is better viewed as a fluid reaction of events, then the Visiting Teachers are the catalysts, precipitating the energy for positive change. But their work begins long before Truancy charges are filed with the Court. The filing of charges against a parent and/or student represents the more aggressive intervention in addressing truancy. Prior to this step, the Visiting Teachers utilize more conservative, but no less vital, measures in an effort to engage parents and students.

These strategies can include face-to-face meetings with parents, students and school staff (in the home or school), agenda books, attendance contracts, tutoring, transportation assistance, after-school programming, and reviews of special education components.

In summary, the Visiting Teachers use their diverse experiences in education, counseling, social work, and administration to comprehensively assess cases and identify not only the obstacles to regular attendance, but also the solutions. It is only after their considerable efforts have proven ineffective that they bring a case to Truancy Court. It is important that their community outreach efforts on behalf of Delaware's students are recognized.

### **The Truancy Court Judges**

A review of the Truancy Court landscape amidst the backdrop of an annual report would not be complete without recognizing the Judges and their contributions to the process. Their specialized training, experience and diverse backgrounds provide for innovative interventions, uniquely nurturing yet authoritative guidance, and insights necessary for serving a wide range of student profiles, from the elementary student with 6 unexcused absences to the 15 year old on Level III probation whose days out of school far outnumber those attended. We wish to thank the Truancy Judges for their assiduous efforts on behalf of this segment of Delaware's student population.

### **Looking at the Numbers**

A review of the statistics for 2009-2010 indicates a 10% increase in statewide filings compared with 2008-2009. New Castle County filings increased 8% from 2008-2009. Kent County filings were up 20% from 2008-2009, when 153 cases were filed. Sussex County filings increased by 8%, compared to 2008-2009.

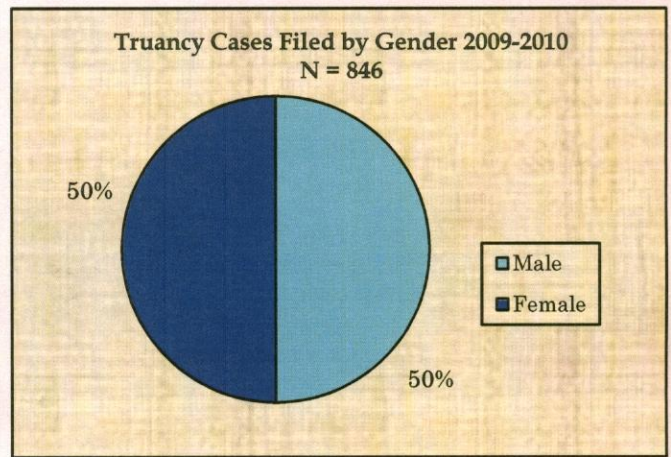
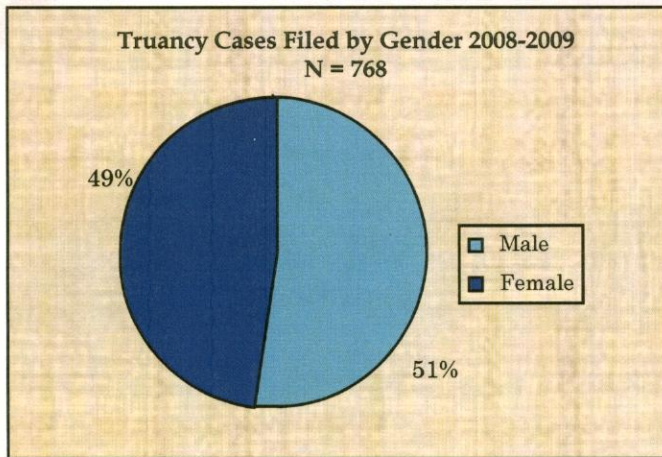
## Cross Comparison of Case Filings

NEW CASTLE COUNTY	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Appoquinimink	28	7	18	23
Brandywine	140	188	90	78
Christina	157	218	123	176
Colonial	60	95	128	55
Red Clay	76	68	60	113
NCC-Vo-Tech	5	9	0	0
Charter Schools	0	0	7	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>459</b>
KENT COUNTY	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Capital	44	65	36	49
Caesar Rodney	63	48	49	60
Lake Forest	47	44	48	40
Smyrna	92	112	7	15
Poly Tech	0	1	0	0
Charter Schools	84	6	13	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>183</b>
SUSSEX COUNTY	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Cape Henlopen	31	11	19	40
Delmar	11	43	16	8
Indian River	80	88	67	86
Laurel	11	21	9	6
Milford	55	21	46	52
Seaford	25	14	7	5
Woodbridge	17	24	25	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1026</b>	<b>1083</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>846</b>

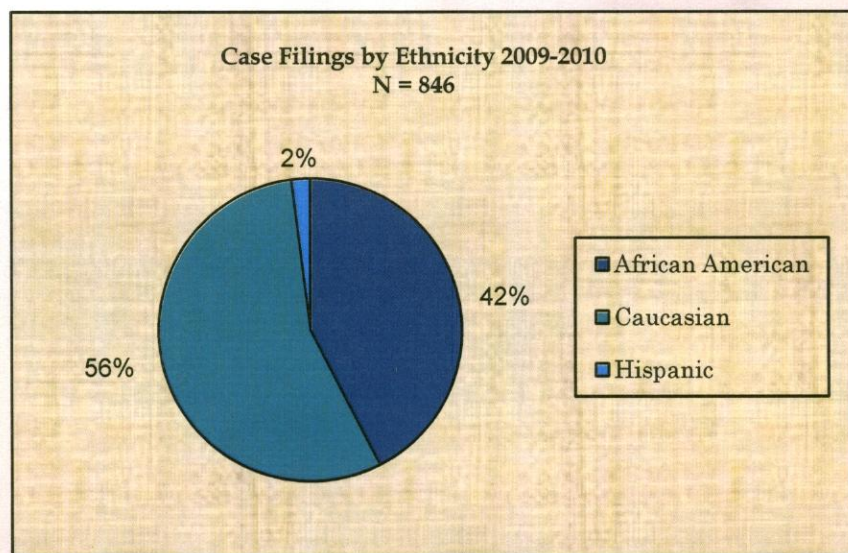
## Student Demographics

For 2009-2010, cases filed with Truancy Court averaged 12.95 years of age and a grade level of 6.25. These numbers represent a slight decrease from 2008-2009.

As shown below, truancy filings for 2009-2010 were split equally between males and females. This represents only a minor change from 2008-2009.



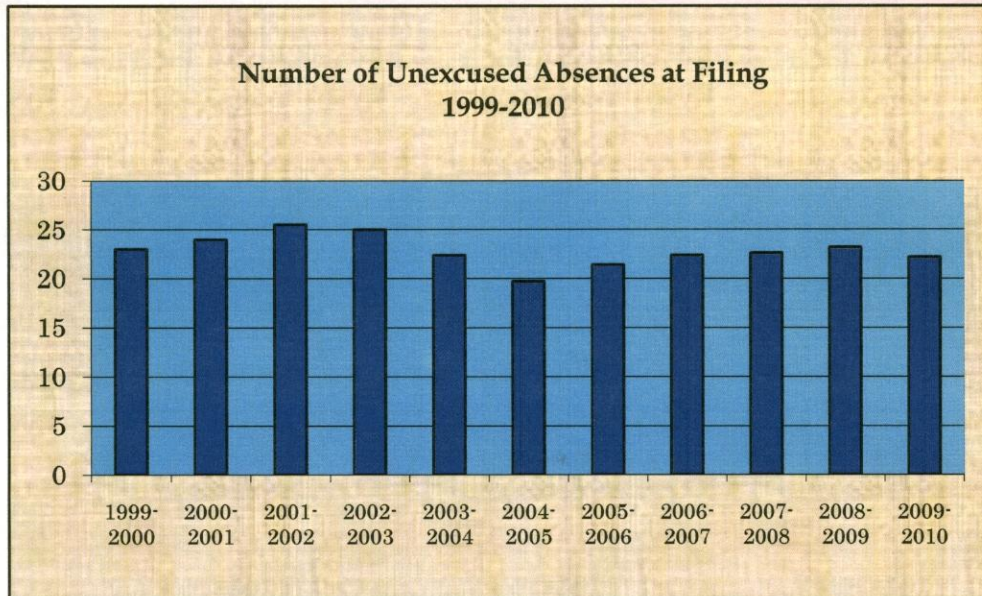
Caucasians remained the largest segment of cases filed with Truancy Court in 2009-2010 (56%), a 1% increase from 2008-2009. African-Americans comprised 42% of filings for 2009-2010, identical to 2008-2009.





## Absences at Filing

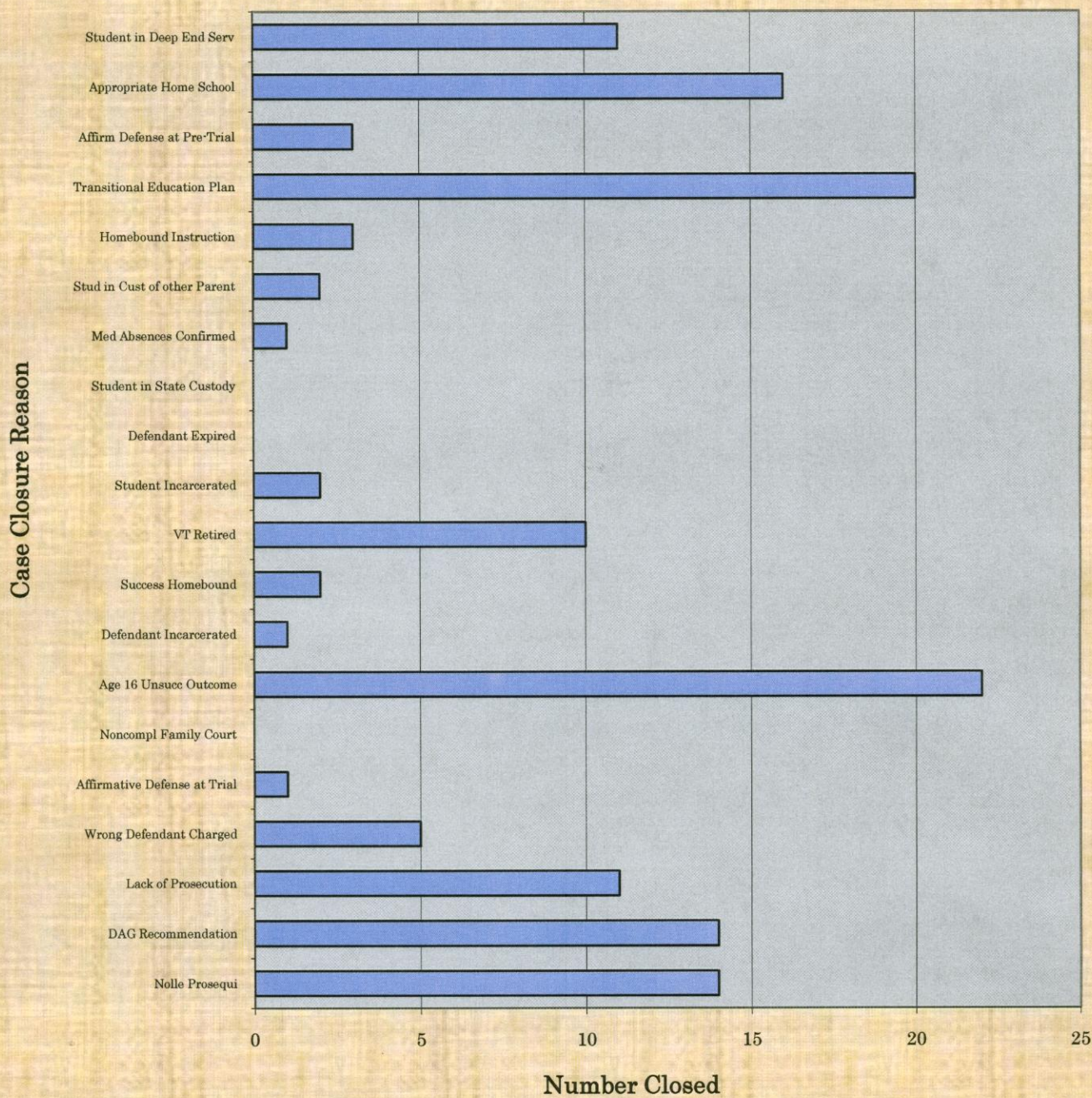
The average number of unexcused absences at filing for 2009-2010 was 22.2. This represents a slight decrease from 2008-2009 (23.2). 2004-2005 remains the only year since the Truancy Court's inception that the average number of unexcused absences at filing was below 20.



## Case Outcomes/Dispositions

51.7% of cases closed (663) in 2009-2010 achieved compliance with the Court, compared with 47% in 2008-2009. Of the remaining 320 cases, 37 were Visiting Teacher dismissals, 83 were defendants who relocated in Delaware, 33 moved out of state and 29 were closed as non-compliant-unsuccessful outcome. The remaining 138 cases were dismissed for a variety of other reasons, as depicted in the following graph.

Truancy Cases Closed 2009-2010  
N = 138



## Thank You

Among the countless interactions between students and families, Visiting Teachers, Judges, behavioral health providers and community partners, it is easy to forget the people behind the scenes. Those individuals who provide the community outreach, maintain safety in the courtrooms, and process the paperwork for thousands of case events are as vital to the system as any of the aforementioned components. They set the example and a standard of teamwork from which all of us could learn. Without them, the system would surely come to a halt. It is important to recognize these dedicated Judicial Case Processors, Security Officers, Constables and Court Managers for their immeasurable contributions.



**For more information about Truancy Court, contact:**

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