



**NCSE** | National Center for School Engagement

# **TRUANCY IN DENVER: PREVALENCE, EFFECTS AND INTERVENTIONS**

**Produced by:  
National Center for School Engagement**

**August, 2006**



**ntpa**

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**national truancy  
prevention association**

Sponsored by the National Truancy Prevention Association & The Office of Juvenile  
Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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This project was generously funded by the National Truancy Prevention Association and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice

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## Introduction

In the United States, one-third of students who start the ninth grade will not obtain a traditional high school diploma (Barton, 2005). Poor school attendance is an early indicator that a student is having problems. Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs of students headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion, or dropping out (Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry, & Cothorn, 2000; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1994; Morris, Ehren, & Lenz, 1991). A lack of commitment to school has been established by many studies as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout ( U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2001; Blum, Beuhring, and Rinehart, 2000; Huizinga et al., 2000; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Loeber, & Farrington, 2000; Welsh, Jenkins, and Harris, 1999; Kelly, Loeber, Keenan, & Delamatre, 1997; Huizinga et al., 1994). Furthermore, two studies have found that truants have low self-esteem and experience greater feelings of rejection or criticism from their parents than non-truants (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams & Dalicandro, 1998).

Truancy is a gateway offense that generates the involvement of non-attenders in many service systems. Delinquent truants may become involved with the state juvenile or municipal court. Drug using truants may enter alcohol and drug abuse services. Truants with social emotional difficulties may require mental health or special education services. Neglected or ungovernable truants often end up on human service case loads. Pregnant truants are served by the public health system. Since so many sectors are affected by truancy, prevention and reduction activities must include a large cross section of agencies.

Denver has a long history of collaboration between educators, judges and social services workers to tackle truancy. In the mid nineties, a city attorney from the Department of Human Services recognized that the families and children served by social services were involved in many different agencies. He brought together a committee to discuss a fictitious, multi-problem family. Through this case study, the committee recognized that school nonattendance was at the heart of the issues. This recognition initiated the Geraldine Thompson Family Project (GTFP) which consisted of numerous professionals who met monthly until 2004 to discuss how to prevent and reduce truancy in Denver by focusing on systems coordination and integration.

A subcommittee of GTFP was formed in 1996 to explore programmatic options. This committee was aptly named, the Creative Options Committee (CO). This committee operated parallel to GTFP, with CO meeting in the evenings and GTFP meeting over the lunch hour. The membership of these committees was very diverse, including school staff, judges, magistrates, social service workers, city government representatives, and law enforcement. As a result of these discussions and the attention to the issue of truancy, funds were obtained from the City of Denver (Safe School and Healthy Student Initiative and Drug Free Schools) and the Denver school district for truancy intervention programs. In the late 1990's, interventions focused on middle schools. Many of the middle schools had truancy officers, catch-up classrooms, and Student Attendance Review Boards (SARB). Unfortunately, budget cuts in early 2000 to 2003, eliminated many of these interventions and supports.

In 2005, the GTFP essentially disbanded and the Creative Options Committee continued to meet. In spring 2004, the committee recognized that many ideas were suggested but very little data was available to inform action. For this reason a planning grant from the National Truancy Prevention Association (NTPA) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

(OJJDP) was pursued and secured. Creative Options partnered with The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) to conduct this needs assessment. The findings from the 10-month study are described in this report.

## **Method**

This needs assessment was designed as a utilization focused research project (Patton, 1996). Throughout the process, we considered how this data would be used to inform action. To this end, the project was divided into four phases; exploration, mapping, consensus building, and resource development. These phases overlapped significantly. The exploration phase involved collecting data from numerous sources. Data included agency statistical data as well as qualitative interviews, focus groups and observations. An initial half-day meeting held in January 2006 included over 50 stakeholders. At this time, the preliminary data were presented and people had a chance to engage in dialogue about meaning and interpretation. This meeting further informed the exploration process and fueled additional inquiry. A second full-day summit occurred in April, 2006. Six truancy experts came from across the country to share effective practices implemented in their community. Following these presentations, we presented the data collected in Denver. The intention was to provide possible programmatic interventions and then demonstrate the prevalence of the problem. Finally, the group broke into three subgroups and discussed policies, practices and partnerships that would address the specific data points and use best practices.

### **Data collection**

Data were collected from September 2005 to April 2006. Statistical data were collected from many Denver agencies. All data collected reflect the three school years from August 2002 to June 2004. For convenience, the following short form is used for school year; SY02-03, SY03-04 and SY04-05 (SY=school year). Some of the judicial data collected was only available by state fiscal year which runs from July 1 to June 30. These years are described in this report as FY02, FY03 and FY04 (FY = fiscal year). It is assumed that much of the school year data overlap with the fiscal year data.

Using the expertise in the Creative Options group, stakeholders identified the key pieces of information that either they could provide or they felt we should collect. Secondary data were collected from the Denver Department of Human Services, State Court Administrator's Office, Colorado Department of Education, District No. 1's (henceforth referred to as Denver Public School) Legal and Social Work Services and the National Incident Based Reporting System. These statistics were already aggregated before being provided to us. Raw data was obtained from Denver Public School (DPS)'s Department of Technology Services about individual student's attendance and disciplinary issues. All identifying information was stripped from the data set.

In addition to the quantitative data, interviews, focus groups and observations were conducted. These data provided an in-depth understand of truancy in Denver. The Creative Options members completed an online survey to identify key stakeholders to interview. From this list, interviewees were purposively selected in order to get a broad range of diverse professionals. Patton (2002) describes purposive sampling as the selection of information rich cases, meaning people who have a great deal of information central to the purpose the research. Additionally, some snowball sampling was used to identify participants who had critical information. Ten people were interviewed. They included stakeholders from juvenile court (one

judge and one magistrate), DPS (two social workers and one attorney), Denver Human Services (one case manager), the Mayor's Office (key person at the office of education and children), and community members (one guardian ad litem, one parent involvement advocate, one newspaper reporter). Two focus groups were conducted with each of the following groups: students, parents, and teachers for a total of six groups. Participants were recruited by school-based social workers and counselors. The students were identified as having some attendance problems to being chronically truant. The two student focus groups included one middle school and one high school. Finally, two observations of truancy court were conducted to better understand this intervention. The questions used in the focus groups and the interviews are in Appendix A. We did not strictly adhere to these questions; instead the protocols were used simply as a guide. In this way, we were able to ask unique questions for specific individuals. Additionally, this allowed us to pursue questions that emerged from previous interviews. All interviews were taped and transcribed.

In addition to these data, a truancy court survey was administered to families who participated in truancy court from November 2005 to April 2006. This survey was given to the family after their hearing by the social worker when time permitted. Participation was voluntary therefore not all families responded to the questionnaire.

## **Analysis**

Much of the data provided were already aggregated and therefore did not need analysis. Instead these data were integrated into the report to provide a comprehensive picture of truancy. DPS's Department of Technological Services provided a large data set. These data include 3 years of student attendance data, disciplinary data and key demographic variables. For this report, descriptives and cross tabs were run.

For the qualitative data analysis, we used open coding (Corbin & Straus, 1990) to break down the textual data into manageable pieces. Nvivo, a qualitative software analysis package was employed to develop and check for themes. Yin (1989) calls for "continuous interactions between the theoretical issue being studied and the data being collected" (p. 62). To this end, the themes were shared with key stakeholders to aid in interpretation and establishing validity. Data were shared at the half day summit in January and again at the full day summit in April. Additionally, a small group of key stakeholders met in May to review all data and develop action steps. In this way, analysis occurred throughout the data collection process (Mertons, 2005). This recursive progression let us construct and systematically generate the findings as new data were collected, thereby deepening the inquiry. More specifically, each interview was read and reflections were noted in the margins of the hard copy transcript. We developed new questions and sometimes determined the next interviewee based on what we learned in the last interview. For final analysis, a tree structure of the codes was developed in Nvivo. All transcripts, field notes and memos were imported and subsequently coded to these "tree nodes" (codes). As needed additional codes were added, deleted or merged. Comparisons and syntheses, patterns and themes were developed. This process helped to develop an explanatory framework of the data.

## **The Setting**

Denver is the capital city of Colorado and is situated at the entry way to the Rocky Mountains. The population is approximately 550,000 people spread across 154 square miles. The estimated number of school aged youth (ages 5 – 18) in 2003 was 90,000

(<http://www.census.gov>). The City and County of Denver are incorporated; therefore the county judicial district has the same catchment area as the municipal district. Consequently, District No. 1 in the City and County of Denver, also referred to hereafter as Denver Public Schools (DPS), serves the entire city of Denver.

The official enrollment of DPS was approximately 70,000 students during the 2004 – 2005 school year. There are 151 schools across the city, including 73 elementary schools, 15 K-8 schools, 17 middle schools, 14 high schools, 19 charter schools, 7 alternative schools and 6 other schools. The majority of DPS students are Hispanic (57.4%) followed by White (19.7%) and African American (19.7%). A smaller percentage is Asian (3.1%) and American Indian (1.2%). Approximately, 43% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals (<http://www.dpsk12.org/aboutdps/facts/>).

According to the DPS student attendance policy, truancy is defined as “the absence without permission of the parent/guardian and the school principal” (<http://www.dpsk12.org>). In accordance with Colorado statutes, a habitual truant is defined as a student between the ages of six and 16 with four or more unexcused absences in a month or ten unexcused absences in a school year. In this report we use habitually truant and chronically truant interchangeably. .

At the outset of the school year, a new superintendent was appointed. Immediately after his announcement, he identified school attendance as one of his top four priorities. In November, an initial draft of his plan for the district was released. Another version followed in February 2006. This document, called The Denver Plan, contained three goals. Component D of Goal III states that “all students not subject to serious medical concerns will demonstrate excellent attendance – 97% of eligible school days.” The objectives of this goal include establishing

- high attendance expectations,
- a uniform method of tracking attendance,
- heightened awareness of student attendance patterns, and
- a wide array of interventions to promote attendance among chronically truant students (The Denver Plan, p. 72, 2006).

Currently, DPS has four levels of intervention in place to deal with unexcused absences. The first level of intervention occurs after one and up to five unexcused absences. After the first unexcused absence, either a school staff person or an automated call system contacts the home. After three unexcused absences, the classroom teacher is expected to find out why a student is absent by inquiring with office staff or calling a parents’ workplace or home. After five unexcused absences, a letter is mailed to the home to inform the parents of the consequences of ongoing absences. The second level of intervention includes creating an attendance plan for the truant student. This occurs only if the first level of intervention has not been successful. A second letter is mailed home and an attendance contract may be drawn up in collaboration with the parent, student and the school social worker. This attendance plan is placed in the student’s record. The third level of intervention may involve a referral to a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) for schools that have this program in place. Finally, the fourth level of intervention includes another letter sent to the home and a petition is filed in juvenile court. If the unexcused absence continues after a court order, DPS staff will file a contempt of court citation. Parents are notified by the school social worker or attendance monitor of these legal actions. According to DPS policy, when a student has 30 unexcused absences a petition must be filed.

Truancy petitions are heard in the Denver Juvenile Court which has exclusive jurisdiction over all juvenile matters within the county. This includes status offenses, misdemeanors and felony cases. Additionally, dependency and neglect cases are heard in juvenile court. No family court exists in Denver County. Currently, one magistrate in the juvenile court hears all truancy cases weekly on Fridays. The court hears approximately 5,600 cases per year. In 2005, 9% of all juvenile cases were truancy cases (Planning and Analysis, State Court Administrator's Office, 2006 data extraction). This percent has dropped in the past three years. In 2003 and 2004, truancy cases comprised 17% and 12% respectively. This drop could reflect budget cuts in the state judiciary and a growing hesitancy to use the court for truancy reduction. In spring 2003, the state legislature introduced a bill to remove truancy from the court entirely; however, it did not pass out of the education committee.

The juvenile court has a wide array of sanctions that it can impose on parents and truant youth. The majority of truant students have court appointed counsel because most families are indigent. It is possible for the family to hire their own attorney. The school district is represented by their own legal counsel who serves as the prosecutorial agent.

In truancy court, all students typically receive a court order to attend school. Additionally, other sanctions and supports may be ordered by the judge. Sanctions may include community service, an ankle monitor, and/or denial of personal items like cell phones until attendance improves. If a student still does not attend school, a contempt of court citation may be filed by the school district and the student may be sentenced to detention. This sentencing option was not formerly permitted, however in 2002, the state legislature passed HB02-1079 which allowed for incarceration in juvenile detention for a contempt of court-order school attendance.

The truancy court also provides supports to students to ensure school attendance. Treatment plans are often mandated that include supervised activities with goals that are relevant to the child's ability to obtain a quality education. Finally, many truants are assigned a case manager from the Denver Human Services or the City and County of Denver Safe City Office. In addition to the magistrate and her clerk, there are many professionals in the truancy court when a case is heard such as school representatives including the attendance clerk and/or school nurse, the DPS legal counsel, and the DPS social worker(s). A state contracted guardian ad litem represents the family and student. Denver Human Services staff the court with a social worker and the City and County of Denver Safe City Office also provide a case manager. Typically older children attend court; however younger children who are truant often do not. Instead, it is the parent who is held accountable.

## **Findings**

The challenge of developing findings from this project is intensified by two factors. First, a large amount of data was collected from multiple sources. Congruency between these data was not always evident. For example, the numbers of truant students served in truancy court varies between DPS, the judiciary and Department of Human Services. Instead of prioritizing or emphasizing certain pieces of data, we attempted to represent and interpret each stakeholder's perspective. A second challenge was that both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Although collecting the data was not problematic, the analysis of these data was difficult, especially integrating the results. Instead of reporting the quantitative and qualitative separately, the data were weaved through a framework that we developed. Our framework begins with the prevalence of truancy in the Denver community. Secondly, the effects of truancy

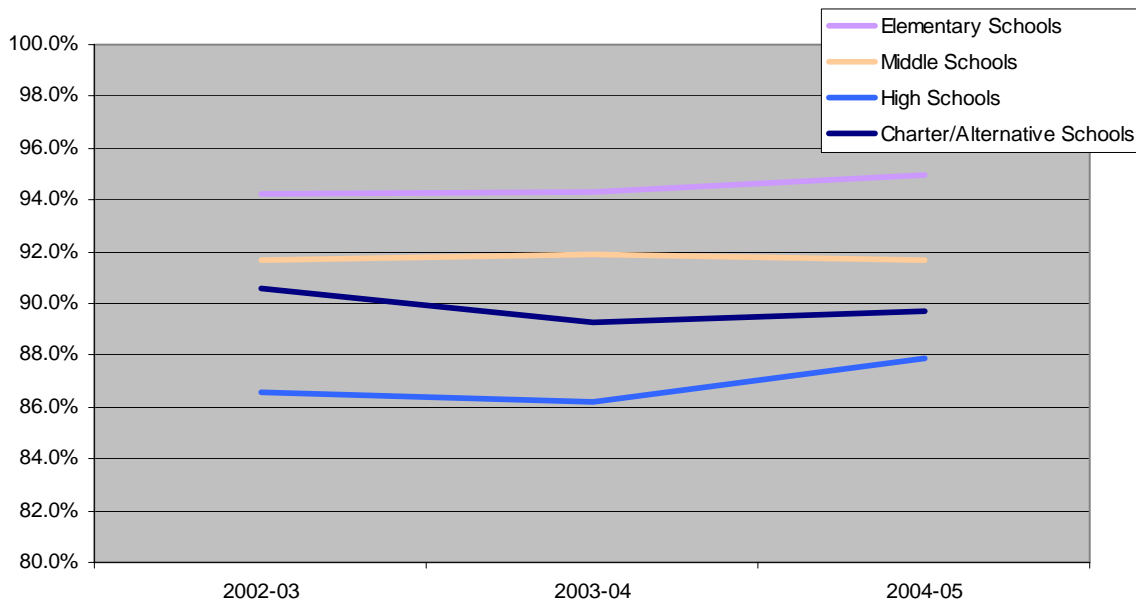
for the students, teachers, families and the community are described. Thirdly, current and recommended interventions are portrayed. Overlaying this framework are the multiple systems that intersect around truancy. Wherever possible, each perspective is described. Finally, additional overarching themes which cut across both the qualitative and quantitative are discussed.

## Prevalence of Truancy in Denver

Understanding the prevalence of truancy in the community is a critical first step to developing solutions. The members of the CO committee have historically been very interested in statistics related to truancy. However, as one interviewee said, “*we have such a big set of systems that there is just so much there that you can’t get people’s hands around it.*” Tracking these data is difficult and time consuming. The source of data used by CO has typically been the DPS attendance reports. One interviewee said, “*It would be great for you to get where the attendance figures are now.*” Another person said that she got her information from the local newspaper. Interviewees typically thought that truancy was getting worse but many admitted that they just don’t know. The importance of understanding the prevalence of truancy over time cannot be underestimated.

Attendance rates are a common metric used by school districts and communities. The Denver Public Schools Attendance Report is generated annually by the Department of Planning and Research. These data include all schools in Denver, including charter and alternative schools. Student average daily attendance is calculated as the number of days present divided by the number of days enrolled at the school (DPS Attendance Report, 2006). The average daily attendance rate is aggregated by school level (elementary, middle and high schools), by gender and by ethnicity. Additionally, the charter and alternative school attendance rates were aggregated separately. As shown in Figure 1, elementary schools have the highest attendance rate followed by middle and finally high school.

**Figure 1: Mean of Average Daily Attendance by School Level for School Year 02-03, 03-04, & 04-05**



The average elementary school attendance rate did not dip below 90% in the past three years. In SY04 -05, the attendance rate ranged from 91% to 99.4% for elementary schools. The mean middle school attendance rate was consistently 91% for the past three school years. In SY04-05, middle school attendance rates ranged from 87.4% to 95.8%. The mean high school attendance rate was between 86% and 87% for the past three years. In SY04-05, high school attendance rates ranged from 79.2% to 98.2%. The mean attendance rate for alternative and charter schools was 89-90% for the past three school years. In SY04-05, the attendance rate ranged from 16.2% to 100% for charter and alternative schools. Schools reporting 100% attendance were either online or an incarcerated setting. These data will pull up the mean of this grouping of schools.

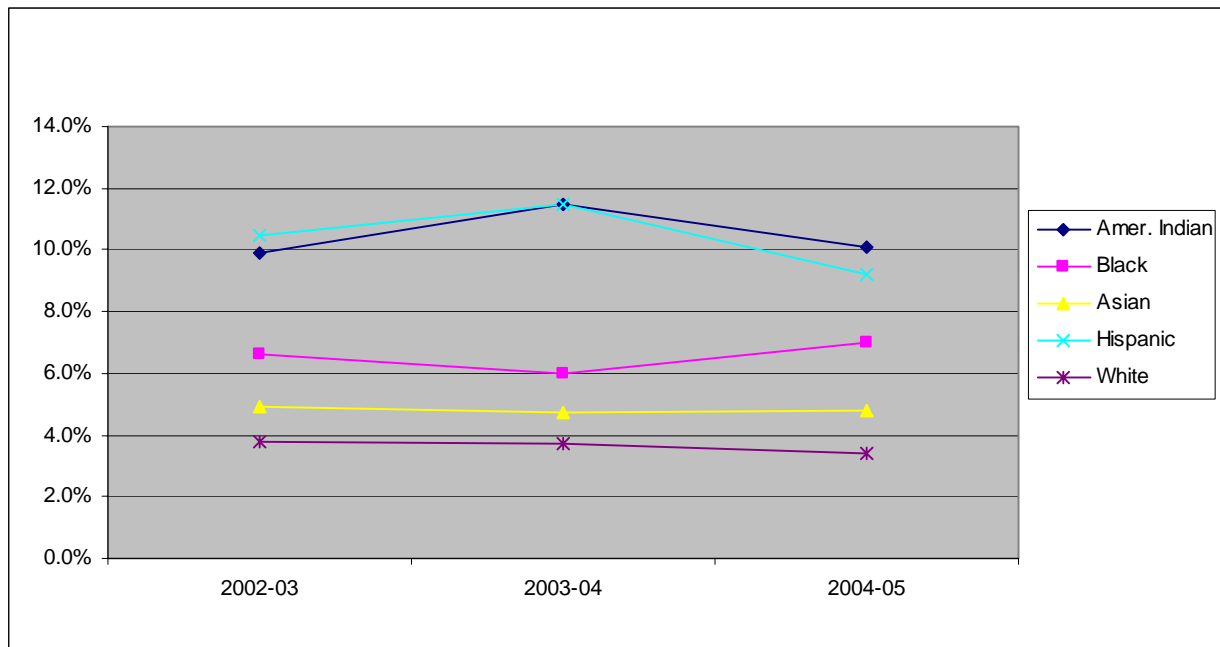
The difference between the attendance rate for male and female students is not significant. For the past three school years, attendance rates for boys and girls were nearly identical at 94% to 95%. However, when we look at attendance rates by ethnicity, we find noticeable differences. As shown in Table 1, these differences increase as students move from elementary to middle and, finally, to high school.

**Table 1: Attendance Rates by School Year and Ethnicity**

	<b>Amer. Indian</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Elementary Schools</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
2002-03	91.6%	93.8%	95.7%	94.0%	94.9%	94.2%
2003-04	91.9%	93.8%	95.8%	94.2%	94.7%	94.3%
2004-05	92.8%	94.8%	96.4%	95.0%	95.2%	95.0%
<b>Middle Schools</b>						
2002-03	87.0%	92.2%	95.4%	91.2%	92.8%	91.7%
2003-04	88.0%	91.8%	95.5%	91.6%	92.8%	91.9%
2004-05	86.0%	91.9%	94.7%	91.4%	92.6%	91.7%
<b>High Schools</b>						
2002-03	81.7%	87.2%	90.8%	83.5%	91.1%	86.6%
2003-04	80.4%	87.8%	91.1%	82.7%	91.0%	86.2%
2004-05	82.7%	87.8%	91.6%	85.8%	91.8%	87.9%
<b>Charter/Alternative Schools</b>						
2002-03	88.5%	90.4%	93.1%	89.9%	92.3%	90.6%
2003-04	88.8%	90.3%	88.5%	87.1%	93.6%	89.3%
2004-05	87.5%	91.2%	92.3%	87.3%	92.7%	89.7%

As shown in Figure 2, American Indian and Hispanic attendance rates have decreased by 10%-12% from elementary to high school for each of the three school years. This was calculated by subtracting the attendance rate for each ethnicity at elementary school from the high school attendance rate. This decline is twice as high as the decline for Black, White and Asian students.

**Figure 2: Percentage Decrease in Average Student Attendance from Elementary to High School by Ethnicity**



Attendance rates reflect the days that a student is actually in school. Absences are factored into this rate, however, excused versus unexcused absences are not. In order to understand truancy, absences must be split into both excused and unexcused. The decision about whether an absence is considered excused is made by a local school staff person. According to DPS policy, an absence must be excused by both the parent and the school principal. In the DPS student and parent handbook, a temporary illness, mental, physical or emotional disability, and suspension or expulsion all qualify for an excused absence (Policy JE-R). However, both parents and students in the focus groups reported that these policies are not consistently implemented

At the school building level, absences are coded as unexcused or unverified. An unverified absence means that the school is not sure about the nature of the absences. Often unverified absences are converted to excused or unexcused but sometimes absences are not pursued and unverified remains the absence code. For the purpose of this analysis, unverified absences are aggregated with unexcused. DPS recently implemented a new management information system with the intention of improving the accuracy of these data. It is hoped that there will be less unverified absences using this system. However, one teacher explained that the old system

*“was great, but what was great about it is that you could run attendance every day... and get a list of everybody that was absent for the day... and you could tell how many days in a row the student had been absent... And it helped to keep kids from slipping through the cracks which they do a lot under the (new) IC system.”*

Since SY05-06 is the first year that the new system is being implemented, only time will tell if the data will be more accurate than with the previous system.

These school building data are aggregated at the district level. To ferret out actual unexcused absences from all absences, this data set was obtained from DPS’s Department of Technology Services. These data reflected the end of year information about the entire

population of the school district for the three school years between 2002-2005. The variables used in this analysis include:

- School Year: The school years in this data include 02-03, 03-04, and 04-05.
- Grade: The grade is reflected as the end of year grade in which the student is enrolled.
- Ethnicity: Five ethnicities were identified; American Indian, African American, Asian, Hispanic and White.
- Gender: Students were identified as either male or female.
- Mobility Indicator: The number of schools attended by the student during the school year was included. The maximum number of schools attended was five schools. The data was recoded into either one school attended or more than one school attended.
- Total Number of Excused Absences: Excused absences included excusals due to injury, medical, school activity, school business, in school suspension, out of school suspension, family business, legal business, religious reasons, transportation or other excused. These were coded at the local school level and were aggregated at the district level this data set was provided for this analysis.
- Total Number of Unexcused Absences: Excused absences include unverified, truancy or other unexcused or in school unexcused absences. These were coded at the local school level and were aggregated by the school district in the data set.
- Discipline Referrals: This variable included each student's total discipline referral incidents for the entire school year. This may include office referrals or other disciplinary actions.
- Exit Code: This variable provides the reason for a student exiting DPS. These reasons include transfer, death, illness, institutionalization, dropout, military service, expulsion, runaway, graduation, GED completion, overage for education services, court action (penal institution), or no trace of enrollment.

Many other variables were provided including incidents of in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, the student's end of year status, the school(s) attended by the student, and the student's month and year of birth. In-school and out-of-school suspensions were not used in this analysis because they were incident counts not total days of suspension. Free and reduced lunch was not included and therefore could not be used as a proxy measure for socio-economic status (SES). The school attended was provided and it is expected that certain schools may have higher excused and unexcused absences due to policies, record keeping or other reasons. These data are not described in detail in this report, however, school level truancy statistics can be found in Appendix B. For students who attended more than one school, their absences are counted in their end of year school. Since many truant students may end up in an alternative school, this could inflate the percent of chronic truants for these schools.

Description of the Population. This section describes unexcused absences for students in DPS for three school years; 2002 through 2004. The data set obtained from DPS includes all students who were ever enrolled in DPS at any time, for any amount of time, during these school years. Table 2 indicates the total number of students enrolled for each school year. Total student enrollment for each year is approximately 89,000 students. As mentioned previously, DPS *active* student enrollment based on the October 1 count date is stable from year to year. In SY02-03 official student enrollment was 72,617, in SY03-04 it was 72,489 students, and in SY04-05, it

totaled 73,018 students. The approximate 18% student differential is because it includes the total number of students who ever enrolled in DPS compared to the DPS students who actually attend for the entire school year. The difference of over 16,000 students represents the number of students who move in and out of the DPS school district. This means that approximately 18% of all students ever enrolled in Denver schools move out of the district during the school year. According to the state demographer's office, there are approximately 90,000 school aged children in Denver County (ages 5 – 18). The slight difference between the census estimate of 90,000 and the total enrolment of 89,000 may be explained in a variety of ways. Some students who live outside Denver County may exercise school choice to enroll into Denver schools. Some students who live in Denver may attend private school or choose to enroll outside of Denver County. Regardless of these discrepancies, it is unforeseen that approximately 16,000 students dis-enroll from Denver school district within one school year. By looking closer at each student's leave codes, we find that the most common reason students withdrew from DPS was to attend school in another county, state, or country (60% in SY02-03, 68% in SY03-04, 65% in SY04-05). These are considered transfers out of the district. The second most important reason was an aggregation of codes that we categorized as dropout. These codes were 'no show at projected school', 'dropout (16 years and older)', 'mutual consent (under the age of 16)', 'runaway and other causes', and 'no trace of enrollment in a school'. These clusters of leave codes represent the second highest reason for students' exiting DPS (18% in SY02-03, 13% in SY03-04, and 16% in SY04-05). Another leave code worth noting is "under age 7", these leavers are young students who enrolled and DPS and then withdrew (not transferred or home schooled). Approximately 5% or 1000 students had this leave code in each of the three school years. Since these children are not of compulsory age, they are not considered truants; however, this early school withdrawal may have implications for school readiness when they reenroll later at age 7. Additionally analyses would be necessary to better understand this phenomenon.

In general, most students exit Denver schools during the early months of school in July, August and September. This is not surprising since most students who exit DPS are transferring to another school. In the qualitative data, teachers in the high school focus group reported that many of their classrooms are overenrolled. One teacher described her experience when she started her computer class in the fall. She had only 25 computers for 35 students. When she approached her principal, she was told to wait a few weeks and those extra students would be gone. This teacher confirmed that this was indeed what happened. Of course, we do not know if students dropout of the class because they don't have a seat or if this is just an artifact of students settling in to other classes or other schools? Other high school teachers confirmed that they did not have enough desk space for all the students enrolled. One teacher said,

*"If I had all the kids show up, I wouldn't have enough geography books. One time they rounded them (students) up on the street and they brought them into fifth period and I didn't have enough books".*

With classrooms reaching capacity and limited books and seats, we should not be surprised that many teachers may not welcome chronic truants back into the classroom. As one interviewee said, *"The teachers don't want them back in their classrooms."*

**Table 2: Total student enrollment during school years 2002 through 2004**

School Year	Total Students Ever Enrolled	Active Enrollment (October 1)
2002 - 2003	89,580	72,617
2003 - 2004	88,963	72,489
2004 - 2005	89,689	73,018

Regardless of these enrollment discrepancies, this data set describes all students ever enrolled in DPS for each of the three school years. Tables 3, 4 and 5 describe the gender, ethnicity and grade of students who were ever enrolled in DPS for school years 2002 – 2004. There is a relatively even split of girls and boys enrolled at DPS. The majority of students ever enrolled in DPS are Hispanic, followed by White, African American, Asian, and American Indian respectively. The largest number of students enrolled is in Kindergarten and ninth grade. It is also important to note the decreasing enrollment from 9th to 12th grade. This drop is particularly disturbing between 9th and 10th grade with a drop of between 2400 – 3300 students in each of the three school years.

**Table 3: Gender by School Year**

School Year		Number	Percent
2002 - 2003	Female	43,623	48.7%
	Male	45,956	51.3%
	Missing	1	.0
2003 - 2004	Female	43,246	48.6%
	Male	45,717	51.4%
2004 - 2005	Female	43,599	48.6%
	Male	46,090	51.4%

**Table 4: Ethnicity by School Year**

School Year		Number	Percent
2002 - 2003	American Indian	1,132	1.3%
	African American	17,294	19.3%
	Asian	2,890	3.2%
	Hispanic	49,793	55.6%
	White	18,287	20.4%
	Missing	184	.2%
2003 - 2004	American Indian	1,151	1.3%
	African American	16,796	18.9%
	Asian	2,825	3.2%
	Hispanic	50,276	56.5%
	White	17,909	20.1%
	Missing	6	.0%

School Year		Number	Percent
2004 - 2005	American Indian	1,126	1.3%
	African American	17,011	19.0%
	Asian	2,724	3.0%
	Hispanic	51,108	57.0%
	White	17,682	19.7%
	Missing	38	.0%

**Table 5: Grade by School Year**

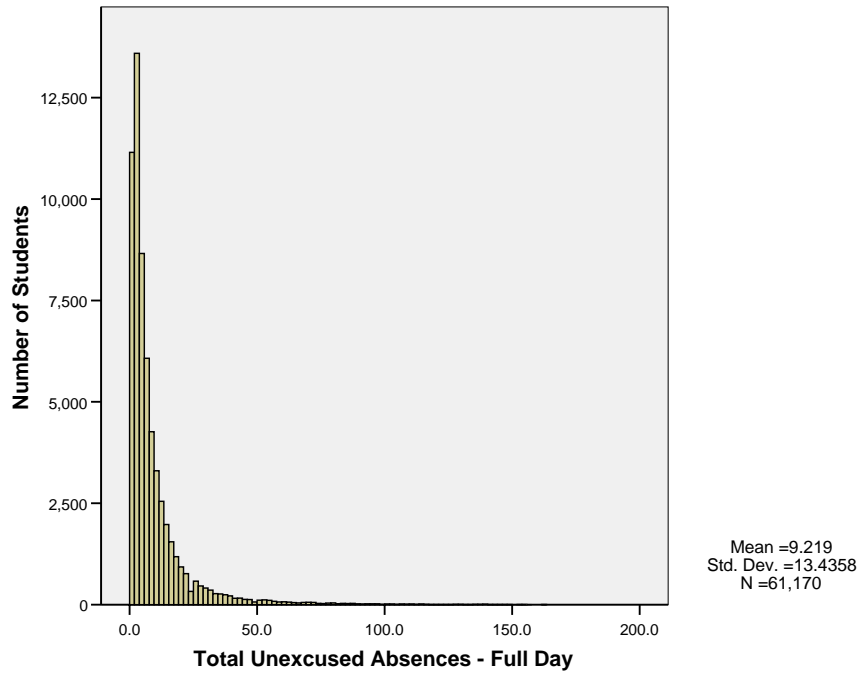
School Year		Number	Percent
2002 - 2003	K	7,360	8.2%
	1.0	7,492	8.4%
	2.0	6,904	7.7%
	3.0	7,035	7.9%
	4.0	6,844	7.6%
	5.0	6,977	7.8%
	6.0	6,755	7.5%
	7.0	6,321	7.1%
	8.0	5,821	6.5%
	9.0	8,055	9.0%
	10.0	5,195	5.8%
	11.0	4,506	5.0%
	12.0	4,245	4.7%
	5 <sup>th</sup> Yr.	24	.0%
Missing	6,046	6.7%	
2003 - 2004	K	8,004	9.0%
	1.0	7,316	8.2%
	2.0	7,045	7.9%
	3.0	6,536	7.3%
	4.0	6,756	7.6%
	5.0	6,564	7.4%
	6.0	6,595	7.4%
	7.0	6,267	7.0%
	8.0	5,955	6.7%
	9.0	8,099	9.1%
	10.0	5,655	6.4%
	11.0	4,427	5.0%
	12.0	4,234	4.8%
	5 <sup>th</sup> Yr.	15	.0%
Missing	5,495	6.2%	
2004 - 2005	K	7,779	8.7%

School Year	Number	Percent
1.0	7,901	8.8%
2.0	6,789	7.6%
3.0	6,686	7.5%
4.0	6,273	7.0%
5.0	6,547	7.3%
6.0	6,332	7.1%
7.0	6,162	6.9%
8.0	6,041	6.7%
9.0	8,688	9.7%
10.0	5,383	6.0%
11.0	4,622	5.2%
12.0	4,539	5.1%
5 <sup>th</sup> Yr.	83	.1%
Missing	5,864	6.5%

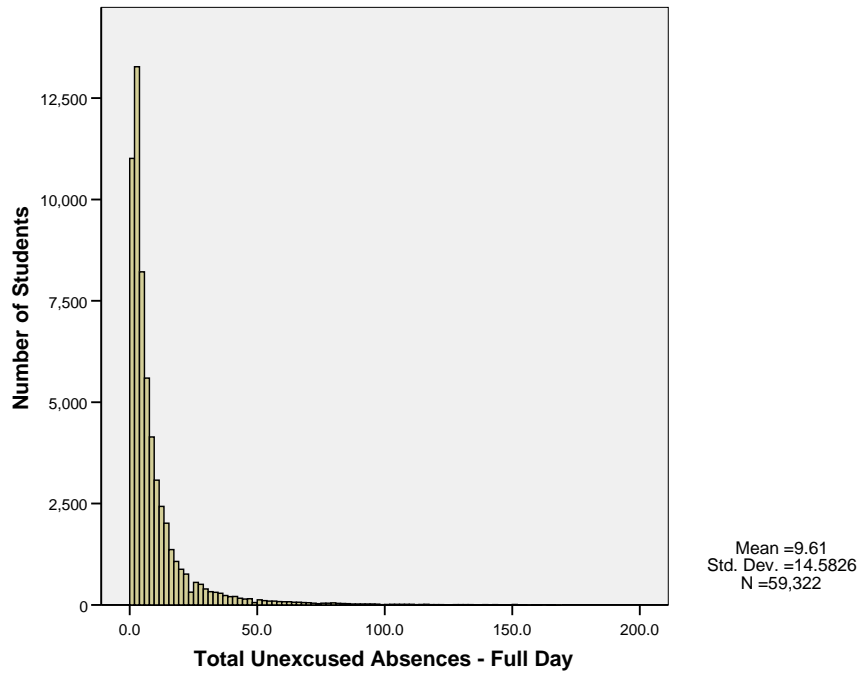
Unexcused Absences. The data described in Tables 2 – 5, are the data that were used for the analysis on unexcused absences with one exception. Since 5<sup>th</sup> year high school students represent such a small number, these cases were removed from the data set for the analysis. Only students in grades K through 12 were included. The data set contains each student and their total unexcused absences at the end of the school year. Unexcused absences include full day absences only. If the student missed less than a half day of school, the absence is not counted in these data. Therefore, period skippers are not included. We can assume that these data underestimate actual truancies because students may skip one class and return for other classes during the day.

To understand how the unexcused absences are distributed, a histogram was created (See Figures 3, 4 and 5) for each school year. Students that do not have any absences are not included in this histogram. Unexcused absences for each school year are not normally distributed as might be depicted in a bell curve. Instead there are many students who have low numbers of full day unexcused absences and a few students who have very high numbers of unexcused absences.

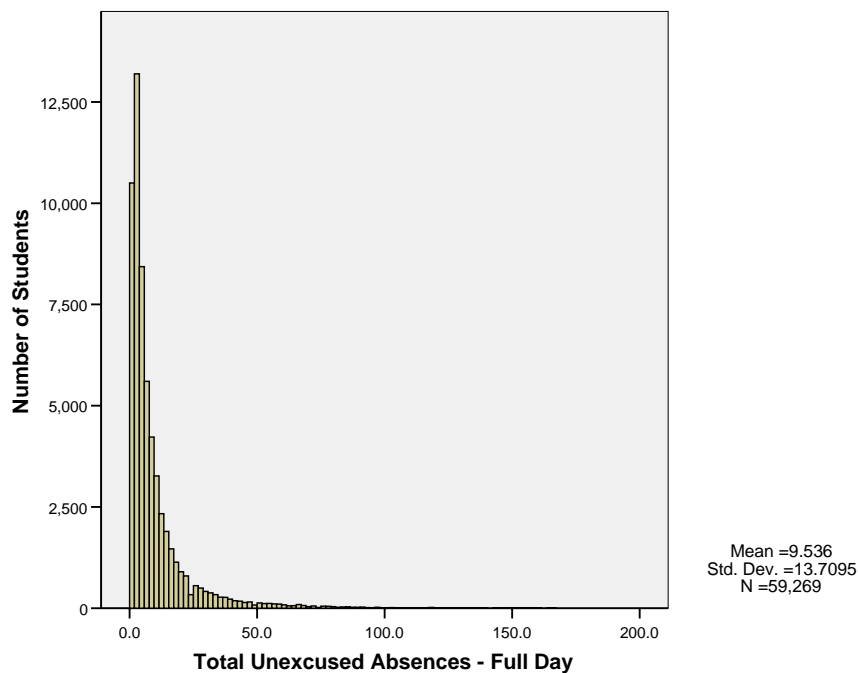
**Figure 3: Number of Unexcused Absences SY02-03**



**Figure 4: Number of Unexcused Absences SY03-04**



**Figure 5: Number of Unexcused Absences SY04-05**



The average unexcused absence for all students in DPS is approximately 6 full days (see Table 6). The minimum number of unexcused absences was 0 and the maximum unexcused absences was 163 in SY02-03, 169 in SY03-04 and 167 in SY04-05. However, since these data are positively skewed, a better measure of central tendency is the median. The median number of unexcused absences was approximately 2 full days. Over 65% of all DPS students had at least one unexcused absence. If we look only at those students who have at least one absence, the average number of unexcused absences jumps to more than 9 full days. This is very close the state definition of chronically truant which is 10 days absent in a school year. Keep in mind that unexcused absences include unverified absences. This means that the school either did not know the nature of the absence or it was an unexcused absence.

**Table 6: Description of Unexcused Absences by School Year**

School Year	#of students with Unexcused Absences	Minimum Unexcused	Maximum Unexcused	Mean Unexcused	Std. Deviation	Median # of Unexcused	Total Unexcused
2002 - 2003	61,170 (68%)	.0	163.0	6.3	11.9	2.0	563,948
2003 - 2004	59,322 (67%)	.0	169.0	6.4	12.7	2.0	570,070
2004 - 2005	59,269 (66%)	.0	167.0	6.3	12.0	2.0	565,164

For a deeper understanding of truancy in DPS, we need to look at unexcused absences by gender, ethnicity and grade. Consistent with the attendance rates, the number of unexcused

absences is about the same for boys and girls. As shown in Table 7, the mean of unexcused absences for male and female students has been approximately 6 full days per school year. The median number of absences is 2 full days.

**Table 7: Average Number of Unexcused Absences by Gender**

School Year	Gender	#of Students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
2002 - 2003	Female	43,612	.0	163.0	6.2	11.6	2.0
	Male	45,943	.0	156.0	6.4	12.2	2.0
	Missing	1	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	89,556	.0	163.0	6.3	11.9	2.0
2003 - 2004	Female	43,240	.0	166.0	6.3	12.2	2.0
	Male	45,708	.0	169.0	6.6	13.2	2.0
	Total	88,948	.0	169.0	6.4	12.7	2.0
2004 - 2005	Female	43,562	.0	167.0	6.2	11.6	2.0
	Male	46,044	.0	165.0	6.4	12.4	2.0
	Total	89,606	.0	167.0	6.3	12.0	2.0

However, the number of unexcused absences differs depending on the student ethnicity (see Table 8). American Indian, African American and Hispanic students have higher average unexcused absences than Asian or White students. The median number of unexcused absences is also higher. With the exception of Asian students, minority students have more unexcused absences than the total population of students. The differences in the mean of unexcused absences by ethnicity are best displayed in Figure 6.

**Table 8: Average Number of Unexcused Absences by Ethnicity**

School Year	Ethnicity	#of Students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
2002 - 2003	American Indian	1,132	.0	140.0	8.2	13.2	3.0
	African American	17,285	.0	149.0	6.8	10.8	3.0
	Asian	2,889	.0	139.0	4.3	10.2	1.0
	Hispanic	49,784	.0	163.0	7.3	13.1	3.0
	White	18,282	.0	140.0	3.4	8.6	1.0
	Total	89,372	.0	163.0	6.3	11.9	2.0
2003 - 2004	American Indian	1,151	.0	151.0	8.9	16.1	3.0
	African American	16,792	.0	133.0	6.9	11.5	3.0
	Asian	2,824	.0	165.0	3.9	9.8	1.0
	Hispanic	50,270	.0	166.0	7.4	14.1	3.0
	White	17,905	.0	169.0	3.3	8.7	.0
	Total	88,942	.0	169.0	6.4	12.7	2.0
2004 - 2005	American Indian	1,126	.0	120.0	8.6	14.5	3.0
	African American	16,984	.0	136.0	7.0	11.9	3.0
	Asian	2,721	.0	139.0	4.3	9.8	1.0
	Hispanic	51,078	.0	165.0	7.2	12.9	3.0
	White	17,659	.0	167.0	3.3	8.9	.0
	Total	89,568	.0	167.0	6.3	12.0	2.0

**Figure 6: Average Unexcused Absence by Ethnicity**

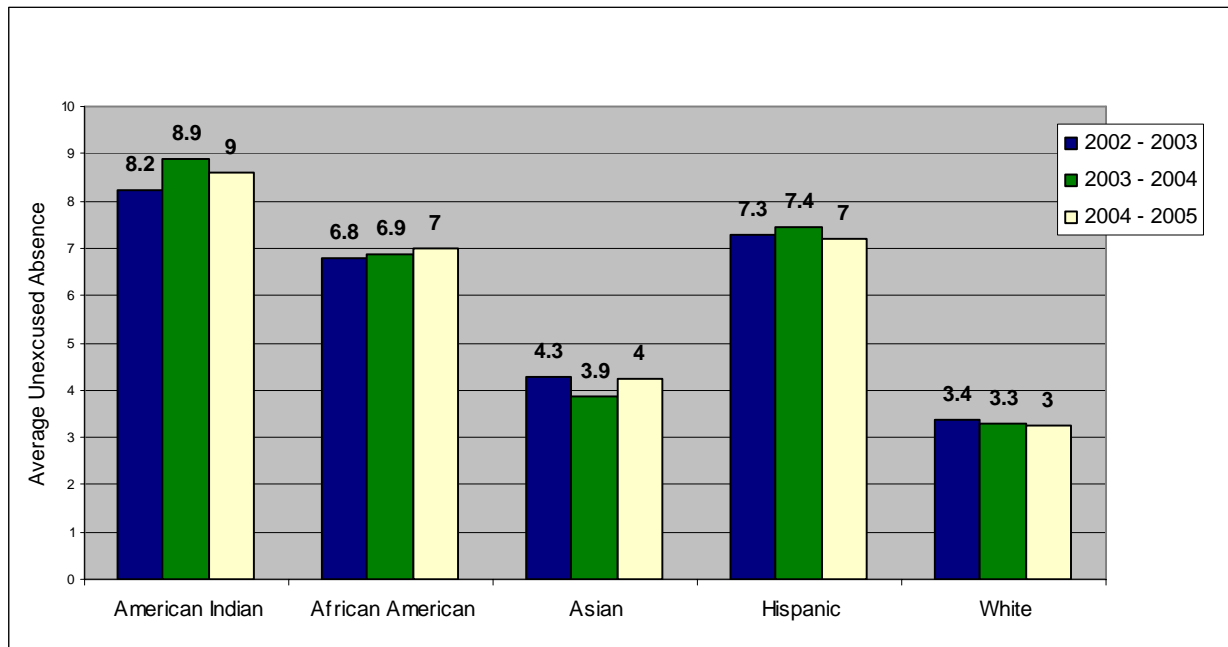


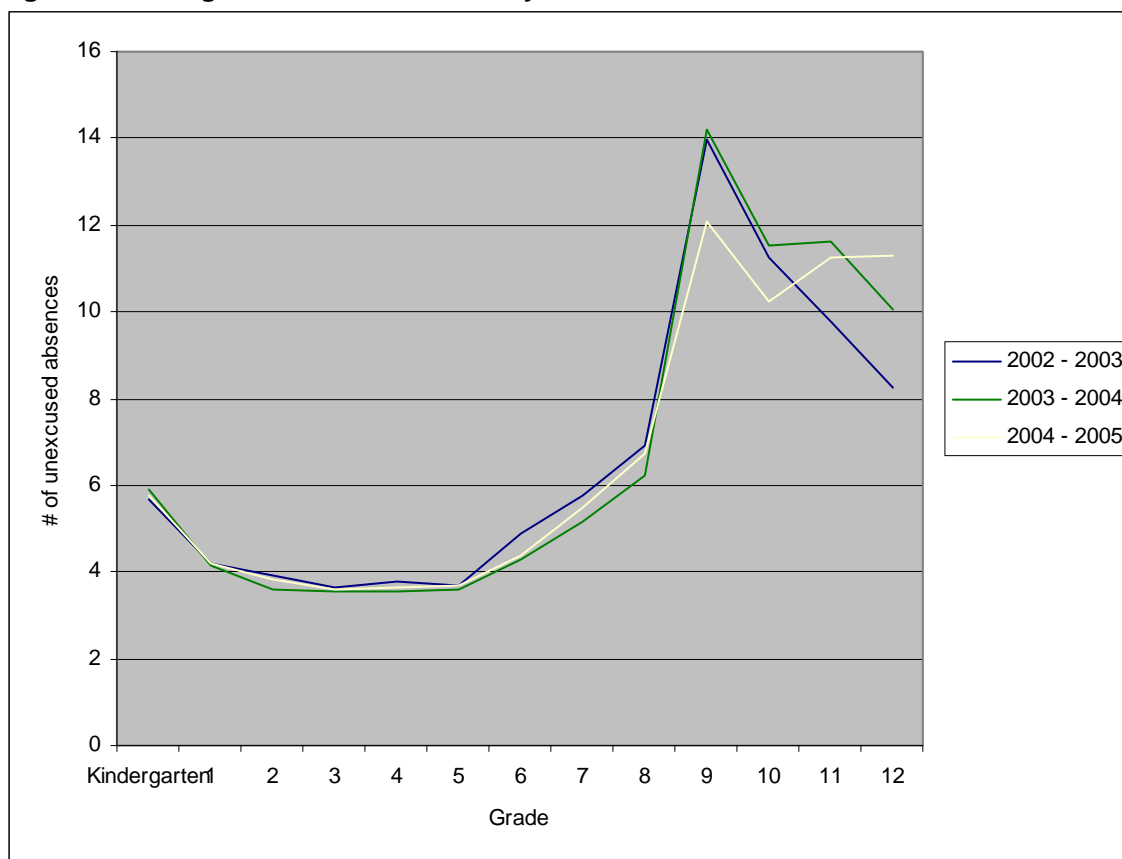
Table 9 demonstrates that the number of unexcused absences differs by grade. This relationship is best portrayed in Figure 7. Mean unexcused absences start high in Kindergarten, decrease in the first grade and bottom out in grades 2 through 5. In sixth grade, unexcused absences increase, peaking at ninth grade and again, decreasing through 12th. This pattern can be described as a “swoosh and a hook”.

**Table 9: Average Number of Unexcused Absences by Grade**

School Year	Grade	#of Students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
2002 - 2003	Missing	6,046	.0	64.0	4.4	7.5	1.0
	Kindergarten	7,360	.0	128.0	5.7	8.0	3.0
	1.0	7,492	.0	55.0	4.2	6.0	2.0
	2.0	6,904	.0	52.0	3.9	5.6	2.0
	3.0	7,035	.0	125.0	3.6	5.5	2.0
	4.0	6,844	.0	75.0	3.8	5.5	2.0
	5.0	6,977	.0	52.0	3.7	5.3	2.0
	6.0	6,755	.0	99.0	4.9	7.3	2.0
	7.0	6,321	.0	135.0	5.8	9.0	3.0
	8.0	5,821	.0	140.0	6.9	11.8	3.0
	9.0	8,055	.0	162.0	14.0	22.9	4.0
	10.0	5,195	.0	163.0	11.3	18.9	3.0
	11.0	4,506	.0	154.0	9.8	16.6	3.0
12.0	4,245	.0	149.0	8.2	14.0	3.0	
	Total	89,556	.0	163.0	6.3	11.9	2.0
2003 - 2004	Missing	5,495	.0	69.0	4.4	7.8	1.0
	Kindergarten	8,004	.0	79.0	5.9	8.1	3.0

School Year	Grade	#of Students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
	1.0	7,316	.0	77.0	4.2	6.2	2.0
	2.0	7,045	.0	79.0	3.6	5.5	1.0
	3.0	6,536	.0	87.0	3.6	5.3	1.0
	4.0	6,756	.0	70.0	3.5	5.3	1.0
	5.0	6,564	.0	64.0	3.6	5.3	2.0
	6.0	6,595	.0	96.0	4.3	7.4	1.0
	7.0	6,267	.0	109.0	5.1	8.6	2.0
	8.0	5,955	.0	137.0	6.2	10.4	2.0
	9.0	8,099	.0	169.0	14.2	24.7	3.0
	10.0	5,655	.0	161.0	11.5	19.3	3.0
	11.0	4,427	.0	153.0	11.6	19.1	4.0
	12.0	4,234	.0	166.0	10.1	17.2	3.0
	Total	88,948	.0	169.0	6.4	12.7	2.0
2004 - 2005	Missing	5,864	.0	103.0	4.1	7.4	1.0
	Kindergarten	7,779	.0	100.0	5.8	8.1	3.0
	1.0	7,901	.0	97.0	4.2	6.2	2.0
	2.0	6,789	.0	64.0	3.8	5.6	2.0
	3.0	6,686	.0	63.0	3.6	5.3	2.0
	4.0	6,273	.0	64.0	3.6	5.4	2.0
	5.0	6,547	.0	62.0	3.7	5.4	2.0
	6.0	6,332	.0	159.0	4.4	7.6	2.0
	7.0	6,162	.0	104.0	5.5	9.1	2.0
	8.0	6,041	.0	150.0	6.7	11.7	2.0
	9.0	8,688	.0	167.0	12.1	20.8	3.0
	10.0	5,383	.0	160.0	10.2	17.8	2.0
	11.0	4,622	.0	160.0	11.3	18.8	3.0
	12.0	4,539	.0	139.0	11.3	17.5	4.0
	Total	89,606	.0	167.0	6.3	12.1	2.0

**Figure 7: Average Unexcused Absence by Grade**



It is important to note that these data are very consistent across each school year. Additionally the trends for gender, ethnicity and grade are also consistent between school years. This consistency from year to year provides confidence that these data represent the actual reality of unexcused absences. Many people question the accuracy of local school attendance data; however this consistency from year to year should assuage this concern. If the data were truly inaccurate, we might expect to see wild variations in unexcused absences from year to year. DPS has recently implemented a new system for tracking student information, including attendance. If the attendance data for school year 2005-2006 differs markedly from the past data, we might be concerned about the accuracy.

Chronic Truancy. As previously mentioned, the state’s definition of habitually truancy is 4 days of unexcused absences in a month or 10 full days of unexcused absences in a school year. Since the data reflect end of year totals, we looked at how many students had 10 or more unexcused absences in the school year.

**Table 10: Number and Percent of Chronic Truants in DPS**

School Year		Number	Percent
2002 - 2003	Not Chronic Truant	72,129	80.5%
	Chronically Truant	17,427	19.5%
2003 - 2004	Not Chronic Truant	71,863	80.8%

School Year		Number	Percent
2004 - 2005	Chronically Truant	17,085	19.2%
	Not Chronic Truant	72,293	80.7%
	Chronically Truant	17,313	19.3%

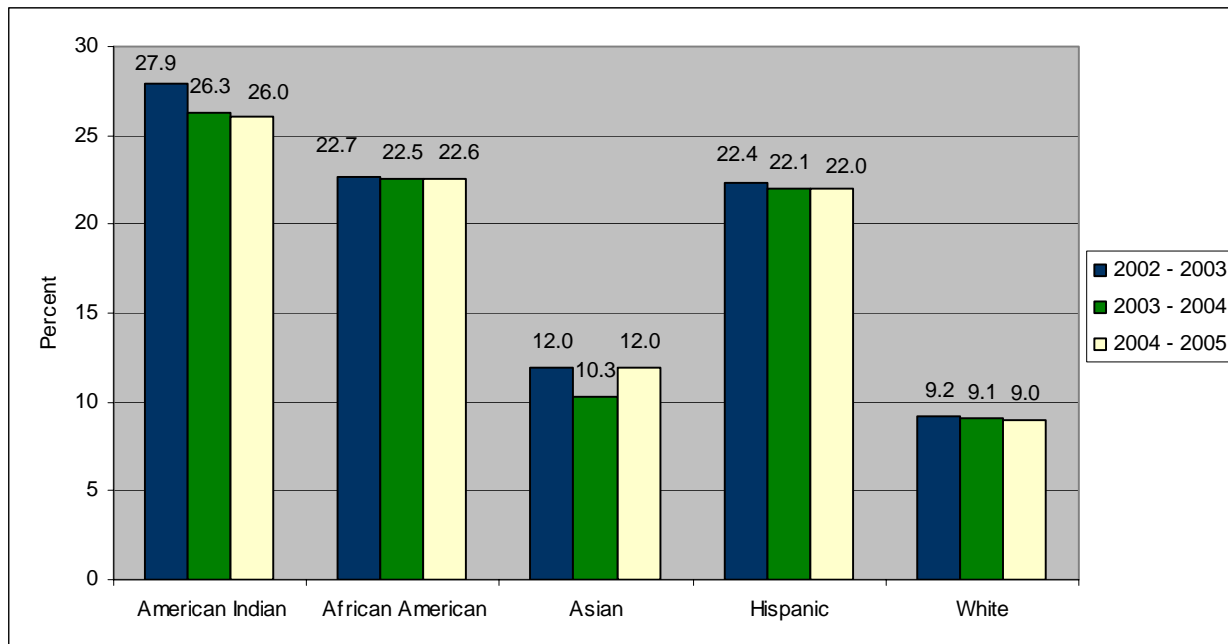
As with the mean of unexcused absences, we also need to look at gender, ethnicity and grade to understand how chronic truancy might vary by these demographics. As indicated in Table 11, boys are no more likely to be chronically truant than girls. Boys and girls are represented equally in truancy.

**Table 11: Number and Percent of Chronic Truants by Gender**

School Year	Status	Female		Male	
		Number	%	Number	%
2002 - 2003	Not Chronic Truant	35,189	81%	36,939	80%
	Chronically Truant	8,423	19%	9,004	20%
2003 - 2004	Not Chronic Truant	35,055	81%	36,808	81%
	Chronically Truant	8,185	19%	8,900	19%
2004 - 2005	Not Chronic Truant	35,182	81%	37,111	81%
	Chronically Truant	8,380	19%	8,933	19%

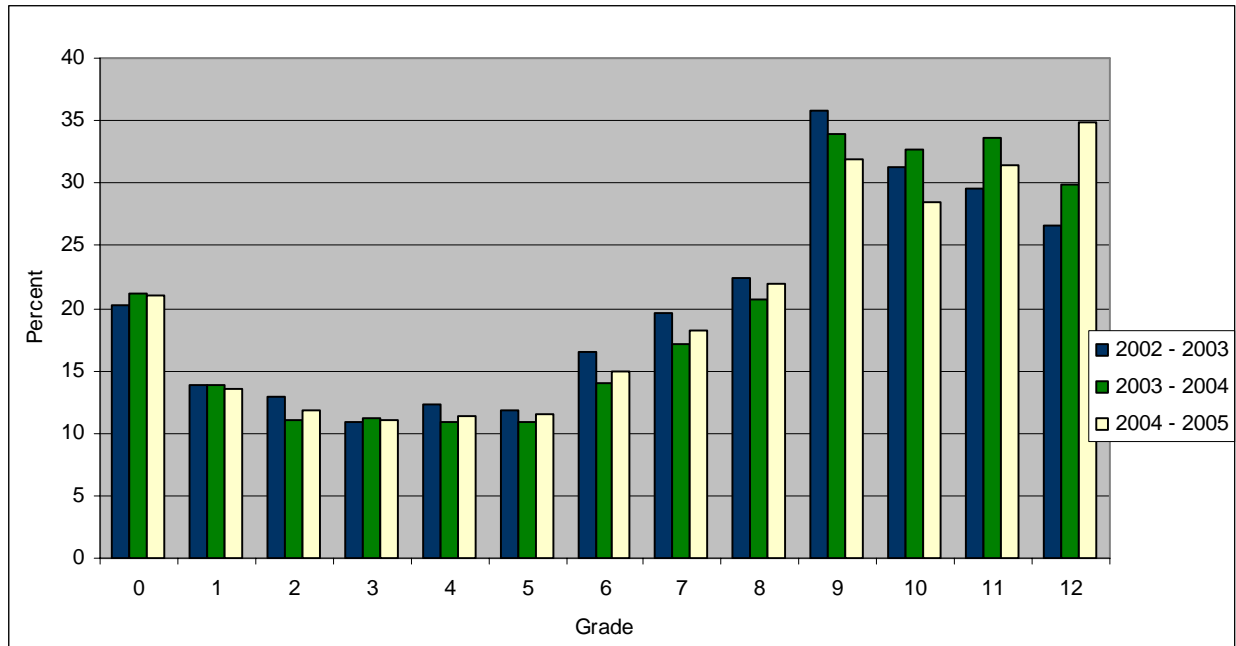
As shown in Figure 8, ethnicity does make a difference in whether a student is chronically truant or not. Twenty-six to twenty-eight percent of American Indian students are chronically truant followed by 23% of African American students and 22% of Hispanic students. The lowest percentages of chronic truants are White (9%) and Asian (10-12%). These data are consistent across the three school years.

**Figure 8: Percent of Chronic Truants by Ethnicity**



In looking at the grade of the student and chronic truancy, it is important to note that the Colorado state definition of chronic truancy only applies to students who are within the compulsory education age. During the time of this study, Colorado students ages 7 to 16 must attend school.<sup>1</sup> However, for the purposes of this analysis, we are considering all students regardless of age as long as they were enrolled in a DPS school. Unexcused absence affects a student’s learning and their teacher’s work load, regardless of age. Although not legally chronically truant, these students would be considered legally truant by the state definition if they met the compulsory education age. In looking at percent of chronic truants by grade, the “swoosh and hook” pattern can be observed (see Figure 9). These data are relatively consistent across school years, with one exception. The percent of 12th grade chronically truant students has steadily increased from 27% to 35% in school years 2002 through 2004. These data level off the hook effect seen in Figure 7.

**Figure 9: Percent of Chronic Truants by Grade**



Much research has demonstrated that chronic truancy contributes to negative long term outcomes (Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry, & Cothorn, 2000; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1994; Morris, Ehren, & Lenz, 1991). Using exit codes, we find that approximately 60% of students who left DPS for juvenile incarceration were chronically truant. Sixty percent of students who were expelled from DPS were chronically truant. Twenty percent of students who left to be home schooled were chronically truant. This is relevant because anecdotally, we heard that some parents choose home schooling in the face of a truancy court petition. As one teacher said,

*“He had attendance problems and they pulled him out and were supposedly doing home schooling, then all of a sudden, they show back up with this child and he is way behind.”*

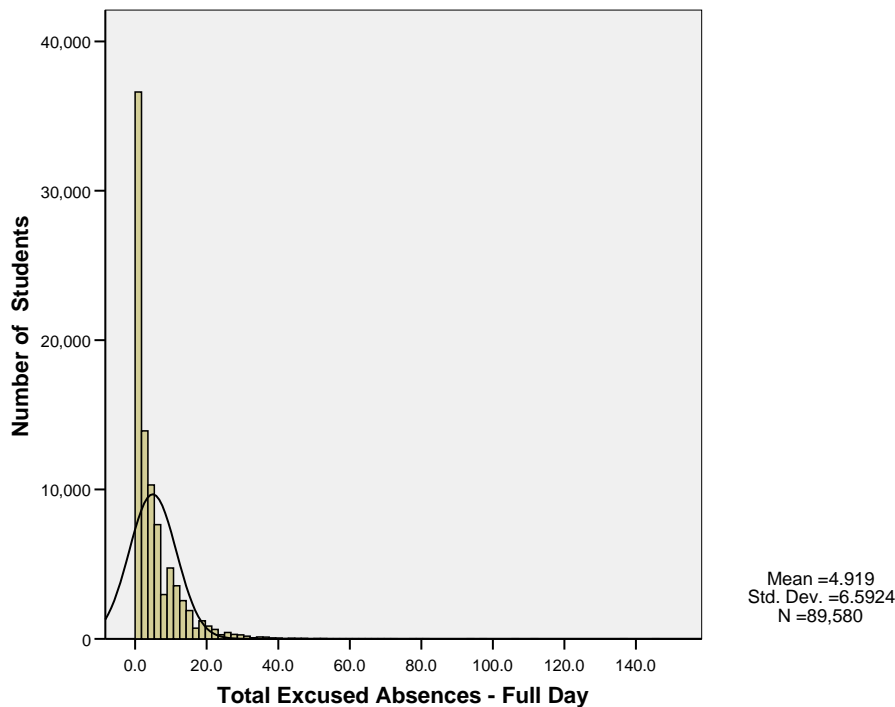
<sup>1</sup> Senate Bill 73 was passed in April 2006 which raised the compulsory education age from 16 to 17.

Moreover, a school social worker recommended, “*I think that our home school legislation probably needs to be tightened up.*” It is also possible that students were truant from school due to bullying or social issues and therefore parents decided that home schooling was a better option. Approximately, 16% of students who attend more than one school in a school year were chronically truant. This figure is surprisingly low considering that mobility is often assumed to be connected with missing school. However, we do not know the nature of movement between schools. Some student transfer could be due to enrollment in gifted or magnet programs in another school. This “good” mobility is not distinguished in this data set.

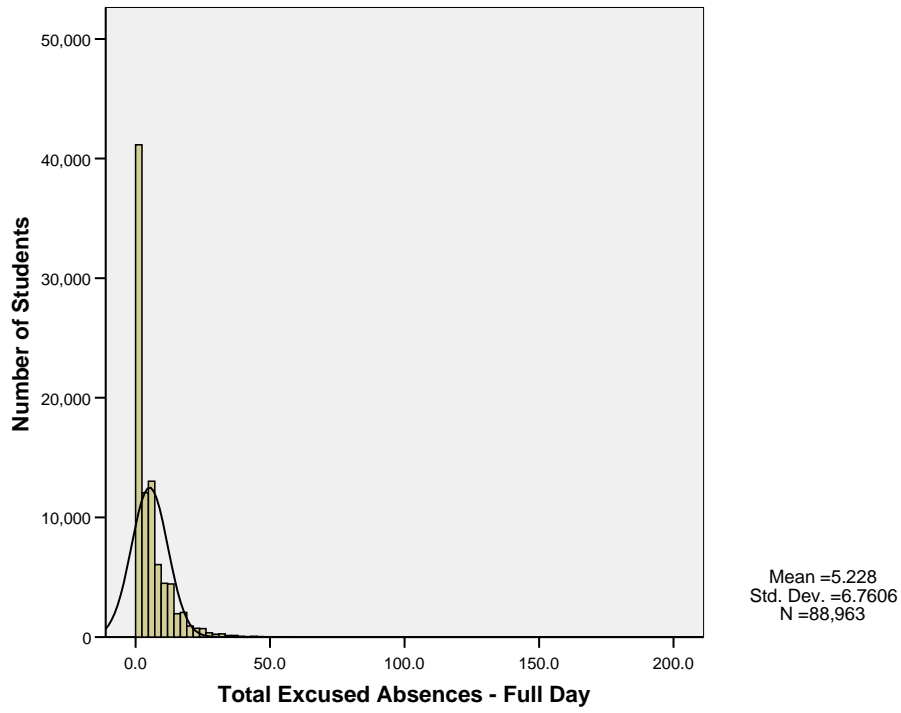
Another concern is that truant students are more likely to dropout. Fifty percent of students whose exit code was “dropout” were chronically truant. This reflects students who officially signed a dropout form. However, approximately 13% of students whose exit code was “mutual consent (under the age of 16)”, “runaway or other cause” or “no trace of enrollment in another school” were chronically truant. These students might be considered undocumented dropouts. Adding these exit codes together, 63% of students who are no longer in the school setting were chronically truant.

Excused Compared to Unexcused Absences. Absence from school detracts from a student’s academic achievement (Caldas, 1993, Lamdin, 1996). For this reason, we explored the excused absences in addition to the unexcused absences. Once again excused absences are also not normally distributed (see Figures 10, 11, and 12). Some students have no excused absences, while many have a few excused absences. Finally there are a few students who have many excused absences. This would be the case for a chronically ill child.

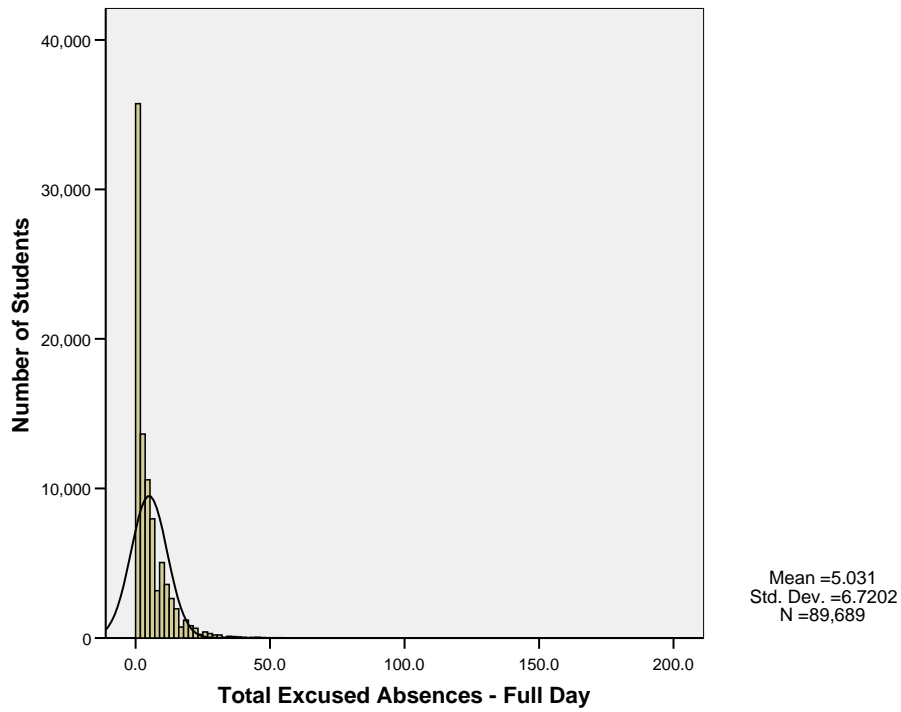
**Figure 10: Number of Excused Absences for SY02-03**



**Figure 11: Number of Excused Absences for SY03-04**



**Figure 12: Number of Excused Absences for SY04-05**



To simplify the data, students were divided by school level using their grade. Elementary schools included students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Middle schools included students in sixth through eighth grade. High schools included students in 9th through 12th grade. Fifth year high school students were excluded. Although there are some schools in DPS that have grades kindergarten through 8th or 12th grade, the data was not categorized in this way.

Table 12 illustrates the differences between excused versus unexcused absences. For elementary and middle school students, excused and unexcused absences are relatively equal. Elementary students had on average 4 excused absences and 4 unexcused absences for a total of 8 absences per school year. Middle school students had on average 5- 6 excused absences and 5 unexcused absences for a total of 11 absences per school year. Remarkably, this pattern changes in high school. High schoolers’ average unexcused absences are double their excused absences. High school students had on average 8 excused absences and 16-17 unexcused absences for a total of 25-26 absences on average per school year. In order to meet the 97% attendance rate goal described in the Denver plan, students should not have more than 6 absences in a school year. Even elementary students, with the lowest total average absences have more than that number.

**Table 12: Average Excused, Unexcused and Total Absence by School Level**

		Elementary			Middle			High		
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Median	Mean	Std. Dev.	Median	Mean	Std. Dev.	Median
<b>SY02-03</b>	<b>Excused</b>	4.1	5.3	2.0	5.8	7.3	3.0	5.8	7.6	3.0
	<b>Unexcused</b>	3.8	5.6	2.0	5.8	9.4	2.0	11.4	19.4	3.0
	<b>Total Absences</b>	7.9	8.0	6.0	11.6	13.3	8.0	17.1	22.0	9.0
<b>SY03-04</b>	<b>Excused</b>	4.5	5.7	3.0	6.3	7.5	4.0	5.7	7.5	3.0
	<b>Unexcused</b>	3.7	5.6	2.0	5.2	8.9	2.0	12.2	21.1	3.0
	<b>Total Absences</b>	8.2	8.3	6.0	11.5	12.8	8.0	17.9	23.5	10.0
<b>SY04-05</b>	<b>Excused</b>	4.5	5.5	3.0	6.1	7.8	4.0	5.2	7.3	2.0
	<b>Unexcused</b>	3.8	5.6	2.0	5.5	9.6	2.0	11.3	19.1	3.0
	<b>Total Absences</b>	8.3	8.4	6.0	11.6	13.8	8.0	16.5	21.6	9.0

## Effects of Truancy

Truancy is a problem that extends beyond the school campus. Several themes were identified from the interviews and focus groups that indicate truancy has effects for students, teachers, families and the community. Students who were truant had academic and social emotional issues. Academic issues included falling behind in school, failing classes and dropping out. All teachers talked about how chronic truants are very behind in their class content and that this results in struggles when they try to catch up. One teacher said, *“That’s the biggest thing for me... the kids are lost because we learn something new every day in there (classroom).”* Students talked about getting used to ditching and not knowing how to prepare for class because of the bad habits they had formed. One student said, *“We are so used to ditching and stuff already so you’re not used to bringing stuff to class”*. Both teachers and

students mentioned that truancy leads to dropout. As one teacher said, *“If they’re not in class, we can’t teach them... and they wonder why we have a high dropout problem here.”* Another teacher felt like some students know that they are going to dropout ahead of time. A middle school student in one focus group confirmed this saying she was waiting to dropout because *“you can dropout in the 10th grade”*. Teachers commented that the highest numbers of dropouts are freshman, stating *“we’re losing them at 9th and 10th grade”*. This further confirms the high numbers of chronic truants in 9th grade and the drop in enrollment from 9th to 10th grade (see Figure 8 and Table 9). Students also mentioned that once they dropped out of school they were depressed. One student said, *“I come (to school) because last year I dropped out and it was just depressing at home. All you do is sleep and do whatever and like I don’t know it was the same old thing.”* A social worker mentioned that many truants are just not connected to the school and their classmates. She was concerned that students were missing out on socialization opportunities.

Teachers reported feeling that a lot of the school staff’s time and resources are spent trying to get kids to attend class. Teachers mentioned that they make numerous phone calls home and feel that often this doesn’t necessarily get the student back to school. Teachers were most concerned about the energy it takes to get truants back up to speed with their school work. One teacher said,

*“It’s more of a feeling as if they (truants) are wasting my time. You know. Because you have to do, you have to go over things all over again.”*

Another teacher described how this affects the quality of the relationship with the student.

*“I have to work hard on not having it impact my interaction with a student because I get so frustrated, and really I have to work hard on that.”*

Teachers talked about the effect of truancy on other students saying,

*“It really takes away from the other students as well because you have to stop your class and go back, it takes all your time that you could be spending to help with something else.”*

The frustration that teachers experienced due the disruption of missed class time was unanimous. Some teachers also reported feeling that the students who were missing class were so disruptive that it was better to have those students ditch than attend. One teacher said,

*“They tend to be the most disruptive group. So sometimes, yah, it may sound like I am being cynical but it might be a blessing that they’re gone.”*

Teachers were happy when students returned to do their work but only if they felt the students were serious about succeeding. A few teachers talked about knowing which students were ready to learn and indicated that they will put their attention into those students.

Families are often affected by their child’s truant behavior. Both students and parents talked about the strain on the parent-child relationship when parents cannot get the student to attend. One parent talked about taking away privileges such as access to a Play Station to encourage attendance. Many parents talked about the “battle” to get students to attend. The consequence of missing work to attend truancy court was also described as an “inconvenience”. Student mobility between schools may also be increased due to truancy. According to a school district person,

*“Families tend to ‘shop’ schools. They look for schools that are not as strict in prosecuting for truancy”*

This was described by some professionals as “working the system”. Apparently even students are acquainted with this strategy. As one middle school student said,

*“Because last year when I went to Jefferson, they told me that they (Denver) can’t do anything because I go from like Jefferson to Denver and whatever I did last year did not affect what I did this year.”*

Mobility between schools and districts may also be exacerbated by school staff. As one professional noted,

*“I absolutely think the school has made it too easy for kids to leave. Too easy to transfer. It’s a problem so go some place else... all you have to do is say we’re going to expel you or you can leave and that’s their option.”*

Although there is no specific DPS policy that permits a school to “push out” a student, the informal acts of pushing truant students out of the school environment appear to be common. There is a stop gap in DPS policy to ensure that this does not happen to students over the age of 16. According to DPS Policy JE-R students over 16 years of age who have unexcused absences or trancies for twenty (20) consecutive school days may be withdrawn, however, no student shall be withdrawn until the school has made a substantial effort to contact the student and/or parent by telephone or home visit, and have identified the reasons for non-attendance and have attempted to address them.

It may not be surprising that truants over the age of 16 are encouraged to explore other options like employment. However, this does not only occur with students 16 years of age and over. The DPS data indicate that in school year 2004-2005, 18 students had an exit code of “mutual consent (under the age of 16)”. One student who had this exit code was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Another interview confirmed this occurrence saying, *“Kids are able to enroll in night school and they’re 13 or 14, how does that happen?”*

Finally, in two professional interviews and in both teacher focus groups, people talked about truancy as perpetuating a cycle of poverty. This was described as a combination of low expectations for educational attainment and modeling of parents relying on welfare for their income. One teacher said,

*“We don’t expect them to be in class...I think the highest expectation we can have for a student is to actually expect them to be in class. I don’t think we have that here.”*

One professional explained that,

*“As long as the kid lives at home, the parent gets that money and since TANF has been severely cut back, that is how these parents are living”.*

As another professional interviewee pointed out, the cycle is perpetuated because *“kids who are truant become our delinquents. They become our neglectful parents.”* A teacher in the middle school focus group supported this perspective saying,

*“And because of the cycle..., it just isn’t a choice because they (students) get within themselves. They don’t know how to go back.”*

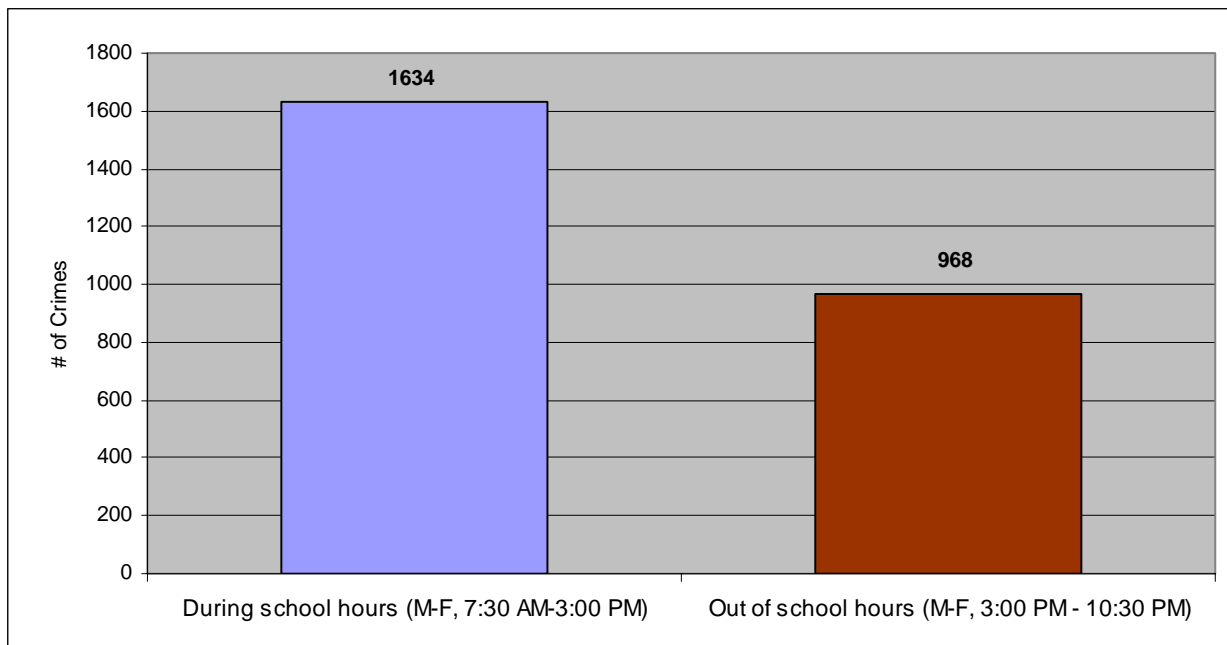
This cycle of poverty affects the community as does juvenile delinquency which is discussed next.

Much research has demonstrated that truancy and delinquency are highly correlated. In 1991 and again in 1993, three grand juries in Dade County, FL analyzed the data from more than 5,000 of the county’s most serious juvenile offenders and found that excessive truancy was one of the three traits most of them had in common (Final Report of the Dade County Grand Jury, 1993). After police opened a truancy center in North Miami Beach and began picking up school-aged youth on the street during school hours, crime diminished substantially in the targeted neighborhoods. For example, vehicle burglaries decreased by 22%, and residential burglaries and criminal mischief both decreased by 19% (Berger, & Wind, 2000). According to the Census

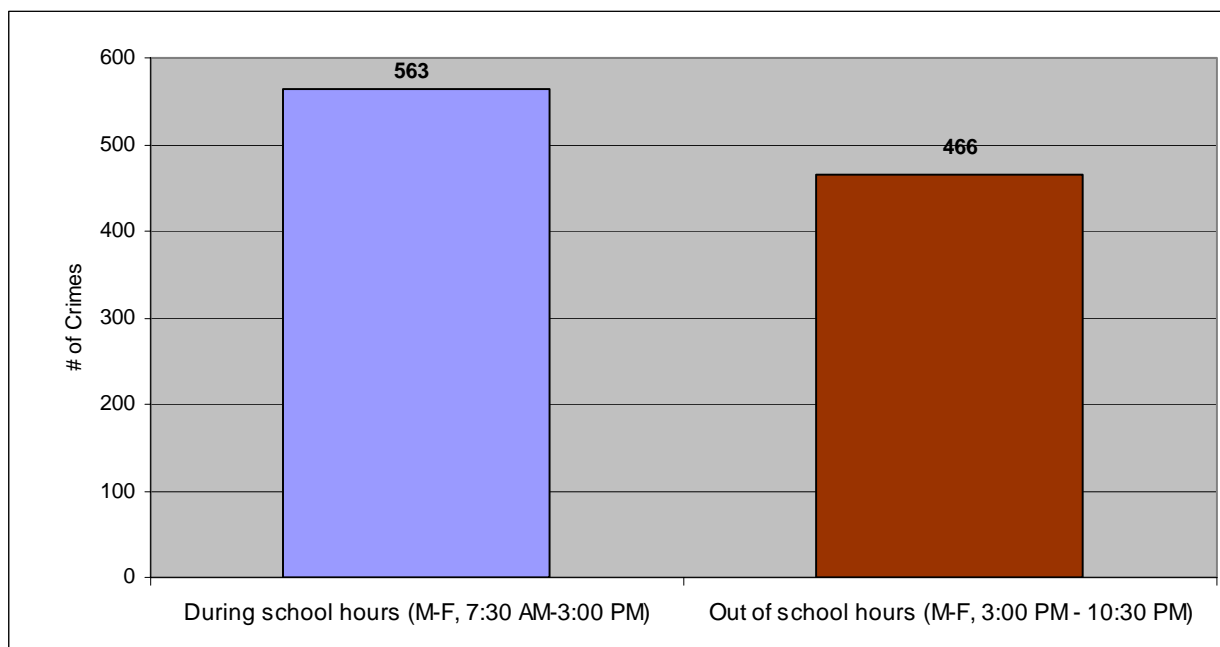
of Juveniles in Residential Placement, there were 1,332 truants in juvenile detention in 1997, 913 in 1999, and 784 in 2001. The Census Bureau conducts this survey biannually for Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention by counting juveniles in detention nationwide on a single day in late October.

Because of this strong connection between truancy and delinquency, we looked at daytime crime rates for school aged youth for SY04-05. Using Denver County data from the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) for SY04-05, incidents of crime by youth ages 10 – 17 are 26% higher during school hours than the same time period out of school hours. Incidents are defined as “one or more offenses committed by the same offender or group of offenders acting in concert, at the same time and place” (retrieved April 14, 2006 from <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/NIBRS/concepts.html>). These crimes may involve multiple youth but may not result in an arrest or conviction. Figure 13 illustrates this relationship for incidents of crime *by* youth. Figure 14 demonstrates a similar though less severe pattern for crimes *against* youth. Crimes against youth ages 10 – 17 are 13% higher during the school hours than the same time period after school. Since crime incidents by and against youth of school age are higher during school hours, it can only be assumed that these crimes are being committed by students who are not engaged in the classroom.

**Figure 13: Incidents of Crime by Youth (10 – 17) School Year 2004 - 2005**



**Figure 14: Incidents of Crime by Against Youth (10 – 17) School Year 2004 - 2005**



The interview data and the focus group data confirm that when students are skipping school, they are usually up to no good. When the chronically truants were asked what they did when they were truant, responses included hanging out, cruising in cars, and “getting into trouble”. One youth said, *“Basically, I can’t say what I do when I am not in school.”* Parents echoed this sentiment. One parent explained,

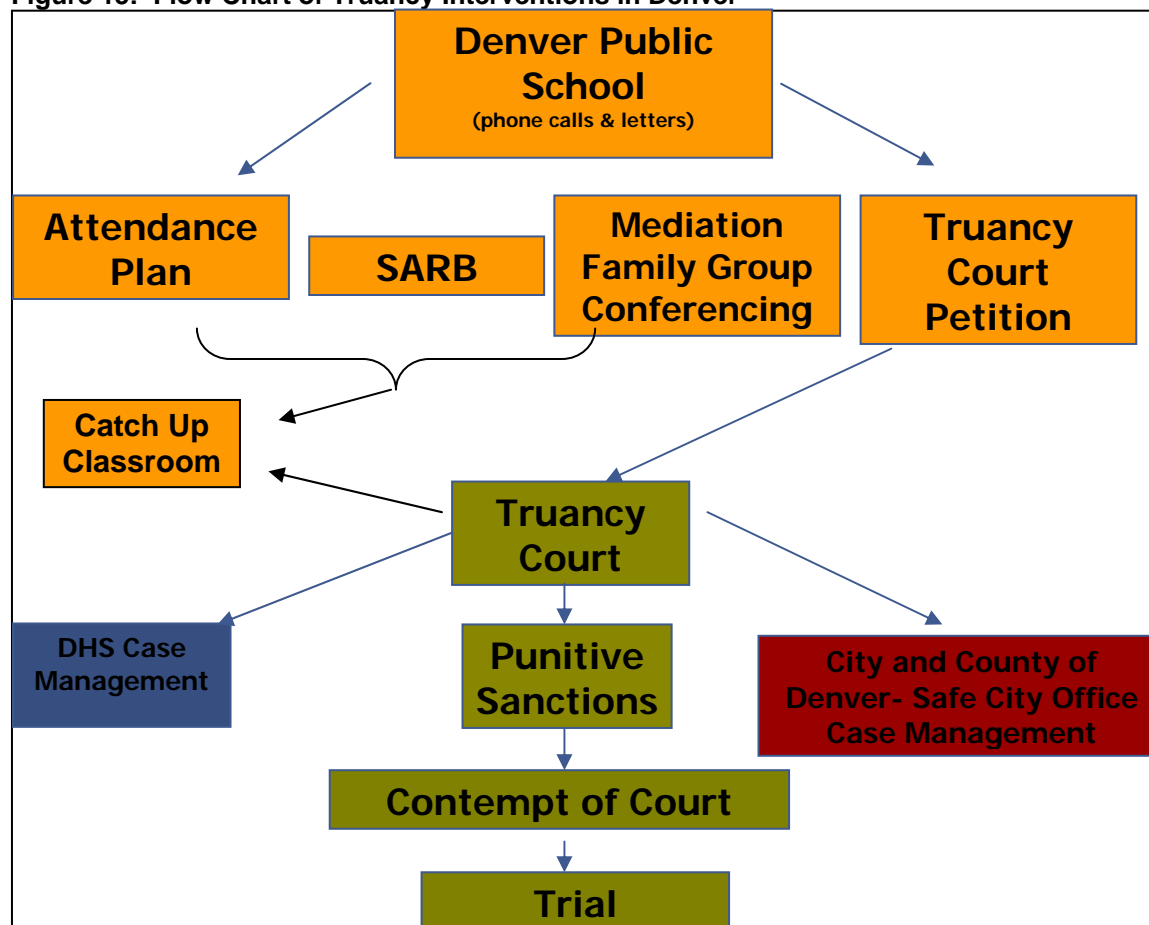
*“Because the last time, he left school he brought a friend and that friend, another day, came to my house to rob us with three other children.”*

Interestingly, only interviewees who are involved in the juvenile justice system (judges, magistrates, attorneys) talked about truants being involved in criminal activity. School people typically did not talk about this effect of truancy.

### **Denver’s Truancy Reduction and Prevention Interventions**

Interventions designed to reduce and prevent truancy include both incentives and sanctions. A full continuum is critical to meet the variety of needs and circumstances of truant students. Figure 15 illustrates the range and flow of interventions in Denver. Many agencies provided programs or services to reduce truancy. In addition to the schools, the Denver Judiciary, Denver Department of Human Services and the City and County of Denver Safe City Office intervene with truant students and their families.

Figure 15: Flow Chart of Truancy Interventions in Denver



Denver Public Schools. The first intervention comes from the school. As stated earlier, all schools are required to notify the parent of an unexcused absence. Essentially, notification by phone or letter ensures that basic liabilities are covered. Anecdotally, students, parents and teachers told us that often a letter or voice mail is intercepted by the student before it even reaches the parent. When asked about the 5 day letter, teachers seemed to be confused about its purpose. One teacher thought it was the last step before court another teacher told us, “*They (parents) can get more than one five day letter.*” Yet another teacher thought it was only for students who had five consecutive days of unexcused absences. Regarding phone calls home, a high school teacher said,

*“It’s kind of a gray area... and communication sometimes isn’t very clear who we need to call. I’m not sure what the policy is now, I don’t know if anybody knows.”*

According to both teacher focus groups, teachers were unsure about the phone call policy. However, one teacher did say that, “*At the beginning of the semester, it takes a huge amount of time... until we turn it over (to the office).*” This confusion seems to get translated to the parents. One parent told us that “*The calls come too late; they (the school) only call after the kids have missed so much school*”.

In some cases, the phone call and letter are the only interventions before a student is administratively withdrawn from the school. As one teacher said,

*“They brought in the parents, they gave them some due process, brought them in and said, well where’s your son or daughter at? One more day and you can forget about coming here.”*

Another teacher talked about a student that she was trying to engage in school but the student never came back. The teacher said, *“I never saw that little girl again.”* It is unclear whether these anecdotal stories are reflective of the mobility in and out of the school district.

DPS also has more elaborate interventions than a phone call or a letter, including developing an attendance plan with the student, student attendance review boards, mediation or family group conferencing, and filing a truancy court petition. Attendance plans are developed in collaboration with the student, parent and a school social worker. Typically, the plan includes eliminating all unexcused absences. Students who have had an attendance plan told us that they are often required to bring an attendance form to each of their classes. The teacher is asked to sign this form to indicate that the student indeed attended class. It is unclear how effective these contracts are in improving student attendance. One student said, *“They put you on a contract but they don’t really tell you nothing if you don’t go to class.”* However, another student said that she had to attend all her classes *“because I am on a contract.”* Parents in both focus groups seemed to be aware of the attendance contract because they were required to come to the school and participate in a conference about their child’s attendance. One parent said, *“If she doesn’t come like one day without an excuse, they make her do detention and they work because she’s got a contract and she has to be here.”* Another parent explained that after her son was suspended from school due to truancy, she was required to come to the school to develop the attendance contract. It appears that the attendance contract is a good method for involving parents in creating solutions. However, the number of students who get an attendance contract is relatively low compared to the number of students who qualified for attendance contracts. Table 13 illustrates the number of students who received an attendance plan in the school years 2002 through 2004 (as reported by 36 school social workers – not all not all social workers responded).

**Table 13: Number of Students Who Received an Attendance Plan**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Charter/Alternative</b>
2002-03	135	103	347	75
2003-04	162	154	400	70
2004-05	153	316	350	72

From the prevalence data in the past three school years, very few of the chronically truant students are receiving attendance plans. At the elementary level, consistently 2% of chronic truants received attendance plans in the three school years (SY02, SY03, and SY04). However for middle school students, the percent who receive attendance plans has increased. In SY02-03, 2.8% of chronic truants got attendance plans. In SY 03-04 this increased to 4.7% and finally in SY04-05, the percent increased again to 9.3%. For high school students the percentages are lower and more consistent over the three school years with 4.9% in SY02-03, 5.4% in SY03-04, and 4.8% in SY04-05. It is unclear why the percentages have increased so dramatically for middle school truants.

As indicated in Table 14, Student Attendance Review Boards (SARB) are located at many of the middle schools and a few of the high schools in Denver. Student Attendance Review Boards (SARB’s) are committed to improving student attendance and academic

achievement. Ideally, the SARB is composed of professionals from various community-based organizations and public agencies. The objective of the SARB is to divert truant students from the juvenile justice system and to find the most appropriate agency that will help the student. Students with high numbers of unexcused absences are referred to this group by the school social worker or attendance monitor. The group talks to the student about the reasons for the absence and creates dialogue about the impact their absence has on other students and the teacher. The group then develops a plan for the student to return to school and account for his/her actions. Some SARB's will see a group of students during one session, whereas other SARB's will see less students but on an individual basis. There is no conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of the SARB's. One DPS interviewee said,

*“What we found was that this would be successful for a short period of time. So they'd write a contract as a result and kids and families would honor it for a short period of time. And then, a lot of times, would fall back into their truancy ways.”*

Another interviewee said,

*“I thought the SARB's were a good idea but they didn't address enough of the cases... and unless we could get enough people to run SARB's, it wasn't a productive effort.”*

The numbers of active SARB's operating in the district confirms this feeling. Very few SARB's are active and in SY04-05 this number decreased.

**Table 14: Number Schools with an Active Student Attendance Review Boards**

School Year	Elementary	Middle	High	Charter/Alternative
2002-03	0	17	0	0
2003-04	0	17	3	0
2004-05	0	10	1	1

Another small but important intervention used by DPS is Family Group Conferencing and Truancy Mediation. Family Group Conferencing (FGC) offers a holistic approach to resolve truancy issues. Extended family members, defined as people who have influence in the child's life, are invited to participate in a facilitated process. This process involves a professional mediator meeting individually with the student and FGC participants to help prepare for the FGC session. Once the pre-session work is completed, the mediator facilitates a family group conference in which family members make decisions that address the future of the truant child. During the process, professionals such as school social workers, teachers, administrators, support services liaisons, and/or others, present information to the family about the student's situation. FGC enables many people to participate in the process, which gives the family and the truant child a sense of ownership of the solutions and outcomes.

Truancy Mediation brings together students, parents, and school representatives to discuss poor attendance, academic decline, behavioral issues, and emotional concerns. The mediator, a neutral third party, facilitates communication and follows a structured procedure designed to help parties identify issues and interests and explore possible solutions. The mediator has no authority to impose an outcome. Any agreements reached are based upon solutions that are satisfactory to all parties. These two complementary interventions were first funded by the Colorado Department of Education in SY03-04 for three middle schools. During that first year, only 2 students received services. However once the program was fully implemented in the following school year, 35 students received Family Group Conferencing or Truancy Mediation. This is a voluntary program for families and is generally used as an

alternative to truancy court. In rare case, the student will have a truancy petition or court appearance before FGC or Truancy Mediation. Unfortunately, it is too early to know how effective mediation or family group conferencing will be. However, these interventions are being evaluated by an external evaluator for DPS. In the meantime, anecdotally, one social worker told us,

*“What I have heard the social workers say is that we can’t force people to do this. So it’s offered as an option, as an alternative to going to court but for some reason, not many families are picking up on doing it.”*

Even when incentives were provided, such as grocery store gift cards, families still declined to participate.

In the late 1990’s and into early 2000, DPS employed as many as 10 full-time truancy officers per school year to work in a variety of schools. This number has declined significantly in recent years. In SY02-03 and SY03-04, there were 4 truancy officers employed. In SY04-05, only one truancy officer was employed to work in 2 elementary and 5 middle schools. Truancy officers conducted home visits and provided transportation to truant students to guarantee school attendance. The primary focus of the truancy officers has been the middle schools. Five of the ten interviewees talked about the success of truancy officers. Additionally, the middle school teachers also reminisced about having truancy officers. The general sentiment was that truant students are not necessarily bad kids but just get lost in the system and truancy officers were able to reconnect with these students. One person said, *“Having truancy officers was effective because they chased down kids... it was a great approach”* Another person said *“One thing that I am sure made a difference is the relationship between the truancy officer and the kid.”* Another interviewee thought that

*“Truancy officers served as a real link in the community, not only with the students but with the parents, with the businesses and with the administration of the school.”*

The teachers from the middle school missed having truancy officers to *“round up the kids and drag their bottoms to school.”* The effectiveness of truancy officers has not been evaluated by DPS.

Students who have missed an excessive number of school days are often behind in their school work. This creates a burden for the teacher and an obstacle for the student’s reintegration into the regular classroom. As one interviewee said, *“We had more problems with teachers because they didn’t want them (chronic truants) back in the classroom.”* DPS has responded to this need with catch up classrooms operating at the middle school level. Catch-up Classrooms (CCR) are designed for students whose absences are significantly affecting their grades. Students are enrolled in a special course to help them “catch-up” and keep-up on their school work. Students receive a grade for the class and it is considered an elective course. Classes are taught by paraprofessional teachers with support from the school social workers. There generally are 6 to twelve students in a class, which enables CCR teachers to provide individualized attention and support. Table 15 specifies the number of students served in the catch-up classrooms. Keep in mind that this intervention is currently only available at the middle school level.

**Table 15: Number of Students Served by Catch Up Classrooms**

School Year	Elementary	Middle	High	Charter/Alternative
2002-03	0	563* (14 schools)	0	0
2003-04	0	675* (16 schools)	0	0
2004-05	0	151 ( 3 schools)	0	0

\* One middle school's data was not included due to gross inaccuracies.

Data from the interviews suggests that judges, teachers and social workers all support the effectiveness of the catch-up classroom. A juvenile court judge described this intervention as “*a stroke of genius*”. One teacher said,

*“I’ll tell you it is a great intervention... there are kids who have difficulty feeling a sense of community in the overall school but that small classroom where they really feel respected, where the work is individualized and where they get a lot of extra attention... and they see their grades go up, it really is motivating.”*

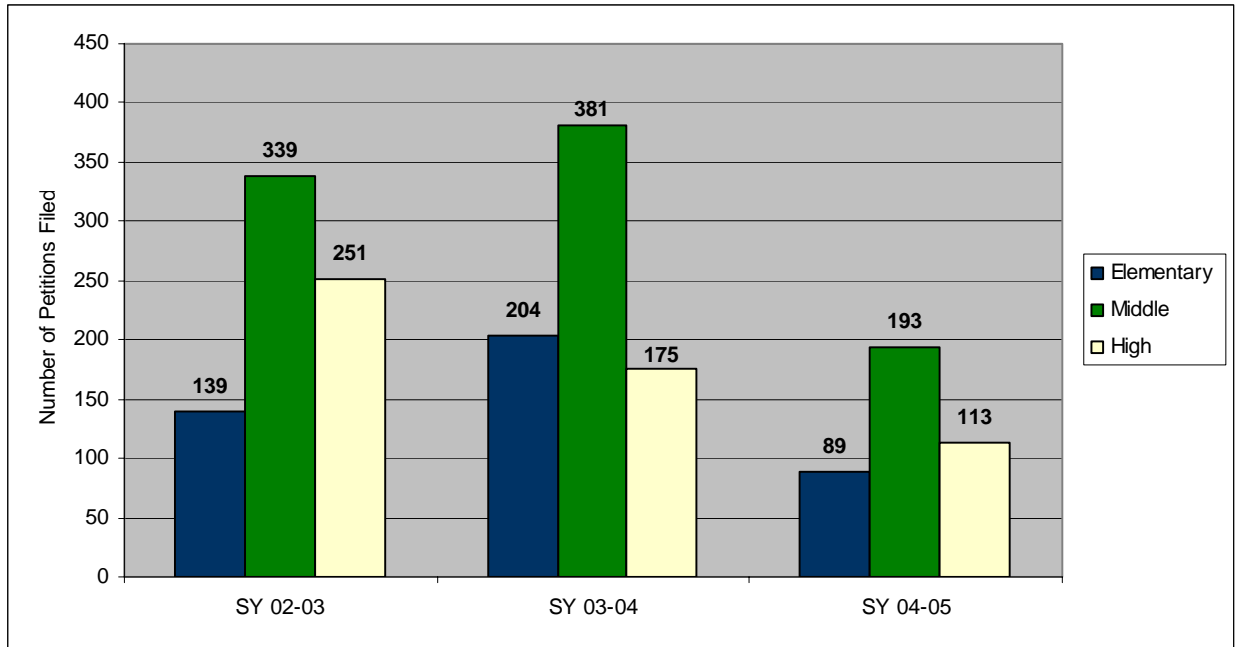
According to the external evaluation of this program, grades and attendance improved while students were in the program. However a one-year follow-up indicated that most grades and attendance patterns were similar to when the students were originally identified as needing the program. The exception was math grades that improved at follow up from D’s to C’s and science grades which were maintained one year later (C’s). Catch-up classrooms that were prevalent in SY02-03 have all but disappeared; only three middle schools currently have catch up classrooms. One interviewee said, “*So I love the idea of the catch-up classroom but I guess we’ve lost most of them because of the budget crunch again.*”

Truancy petitions are intended to be a last resort intervention for recalcitrant truants. However, this deep-end, punitive sanction is an important part of the continuum. Colorado Revised Statute 22-33-104 enables school districts to adopt written attendance requirements and policies that specify the maximum number of unexcused absences before a truancy petition is filed. DPS Policy JE-R requires the school initiate a judicial proceeding against a student with more than 30 truanies or unexcused absences. As shown in Table 10, approximately 20% of students met the state definition of chronically truant in school years 2002 to 2004 (10 days or more unexcused). Approximately, 4% of students met the definition required for a truancy petition in school years 2002 to 2004 (30 days or more unexcused). This is approximately 3,900 students each year.

The legal department at DPS is notified by school social workers or attendance monitors when a petition should be filed, however, not all referrals to truancy court result in a truancy petition. Furthermore, not all students who meet the requirement of chronic truancy get a truancy petition. Figure 16 illustrates the total number of truancy petitions by school level for the last four school years. The number of petitions filed by DPS is highest for middle school students in school years 2002 through 2004. High school truancy petitions have steadily declined from 251 in SY02-03 to 113 in SY04-05. Overall, the total number of truancy petitions has also declined in SY04-05 from 729 in SY02-03 to 760 in SY03-04 to a much lower total of 395 in SY04-05. Based on the numbers from Table 10, we know that between 2% and 4% of students who meet the definition of chronically truant have a petition filed in truancy court. Based on the DPS policy requiring petitions for students with more than 30 days absent, only

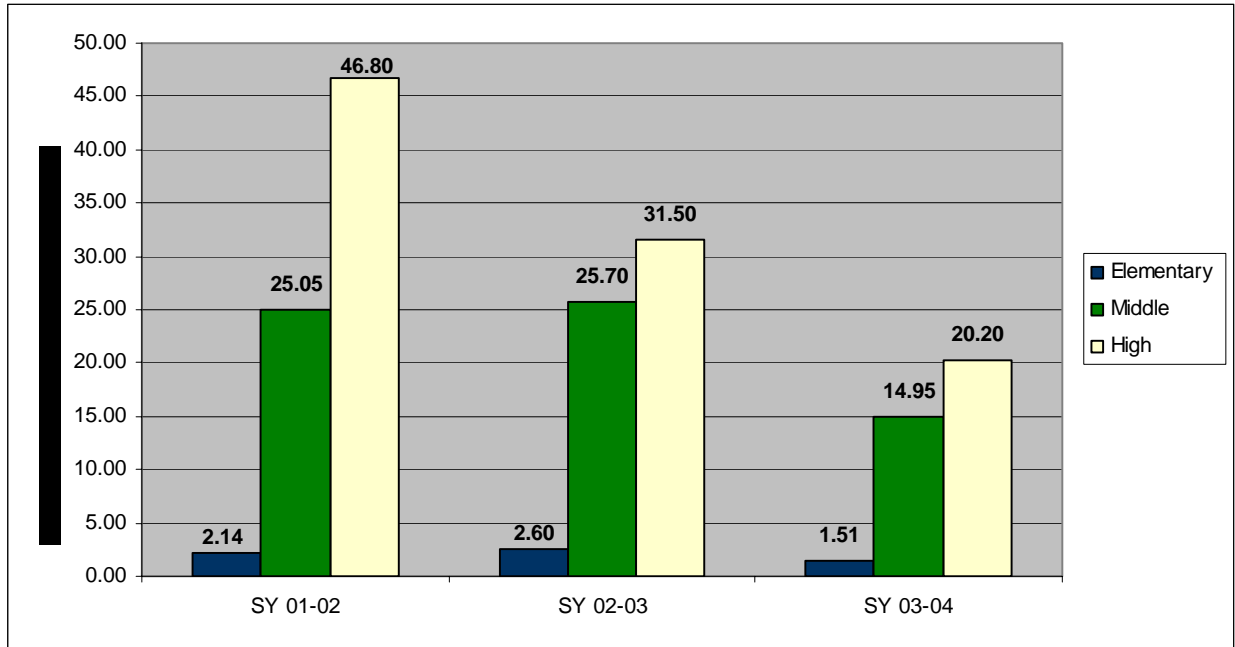
20% in SY02-03 and 19.5% in SY03-04 of these students received a petition. This percent drops dramatically in SY04-05 to only 10%.

**Figure 16: Total Truancy Petitions by School Level**



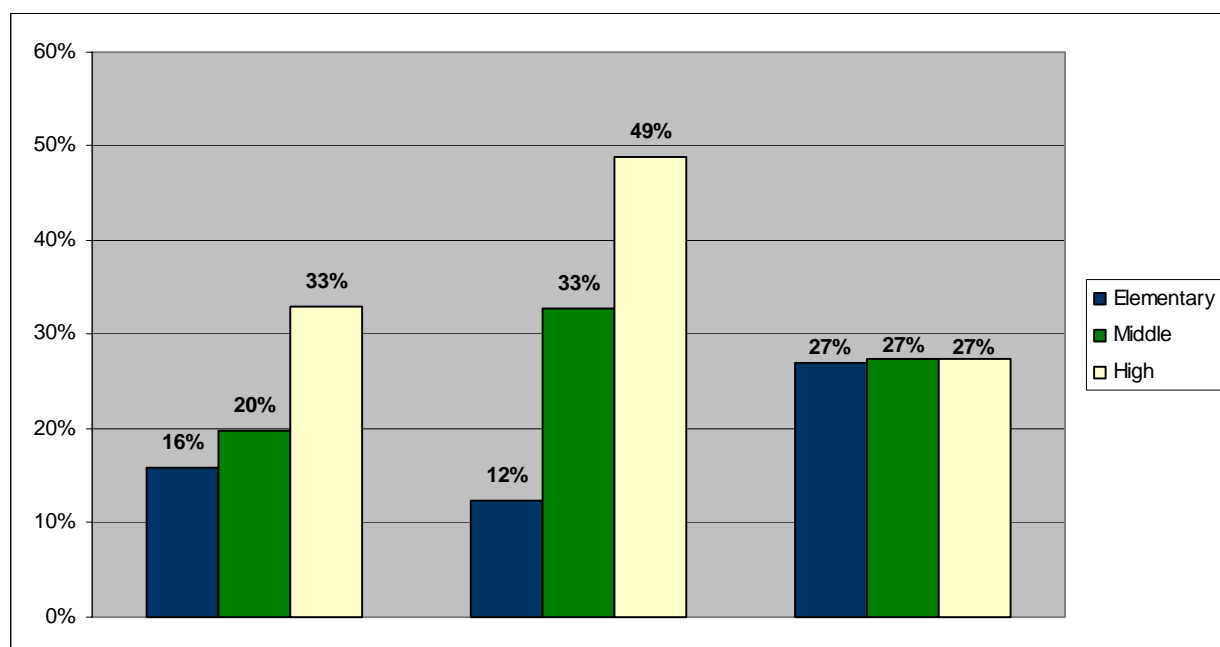
Once a truancy petition is filed and the case is heard, DPS monitors the student's attendance. If the student does not comply with the court order, a contempt of court petition can be filed. The average number of all of these truancy court actions per school is illustrated in Figure 17. The highest average of actions has consistently been at the high school level, followed by middle and elementary school. Average court actions have declined for middle and high school and remained relatively stable for middle schools.

**Figure 17: Average Number of Actions Per School**



Court action data could be duplicative, meaning one student may have multiple actions. In order to better understand how many truancy petitions result in contempt hearings, Figure 18 illustrates the percent of petitions to contempt hearings. This percentage provides an estimation of how many truancy petitions were not successful in returning the student to regular attendance. For SY02-03 and SY03-04, the highest percent of petitions that resulted in contempt hearings was for high school students, followed by middle and lastly elementary students. In SY03-04, almost 50% of all truancy petitions resulted in contempt hearings. In SY04-05, however, exactly 27% of truancy petitions turned into contempt cases for elementary, middle and high school. These oddly consistent figures may mean that DPS's legal department changed their criteria for filing contempt cases.

**Figure 18: Percent of Petitions to Contempt Hearings**



It must be recognized that all of the interventions described at the school level are largely coordinated by the school social workers. Social workers are a pivotal player in recognizing and intervening with truancy. They work with families to develop the attendance contract. They refer students to the SARB's, mediation and family group conferences. The social worker sends the request for a petition to DPS's legal department. Social workers also provide a myriad of other supports to truant students, including home visits, transportation, family counseling and appropriate referrals to community based agencies. As one person said, *"In DPS, truants have always been addressed by the social workers"*. Additionally, one social worker mentioned that she felt they needed more support from teachers and the school administration to address truancy. She felt like too much of the burden was placed on social workers.

Finally, at the building level there are some common strategies to deal with truancy. These strategies include out-of-school suspension, administrative withdrawal and expulsion for truancy. There is no DPS policy that sanctions out of school suspension or expulsion for truancy. Most interviewees agreed that out-of-school suspension was not a desired intervention. One parent said, *"Kids were ditching school and getting in trouble and then they'd suspend them and I thought that was really, really dumb"*. A teacher agreed saying, *"Sometimes, they ditch and get suspended and thinking, whoa, what is up with that?"* Most agreed that when students skip school, out-of-school suspension only reinforces this behavior. As discussed earlier, administrative withdrawal is not uncommon for some students. Finally, we were not able to assess how commonly students were expelled for truancy. The DPS report on out-of-school suspensions and expulsions does not provide truancy as a reason for suspension or expulsion,

Denver Juvenile Court – Truancy Court. Truancy cases are heard at the City and County Building in downtown Denver. The truancy docket is a subset of the juvenile court docket. According to court personnel, the typical time between the filing of a truancy petition and the actual court hearing is 9 months. Although nine months may be the typical time, the month in

which the petition is filed makes a difference in how soon a truancy case is here. Cases filed in the first semester are typically heard within 6 weeks from the date it was filed. First semester truancy hearing requests fill the docket through March and April, and the available hearings that remain are filled by requests received shortly after the second semester. Given the possible number of truancy petitions and contempt citations that could be filed, there will always be more requested truancy cases than available dates for court hearings. At the beginning of the next school year, those cases that were not heard are returned to the school attendance officer who is asked to confirm if the student is still enrolled in DPS. If so, the attendance officer may re-submit a request to file a truancy petition.

Juvenile court data was obtained from the Planning and Analysis department of the State Court Administrator’s Office. These data are provided by the state fiscal year which runs from July 1 to June 30. The state fiscal years which correspond to the school years that are described in this data are FY03, FY04 and FY05. These data do not match directly with DPS’s truancy petition data. There could be a number of reasons for the discrepancy. The state fiscal year and the school year may not match exactly. Different systems inevitably will not produce identical data. Additionally, Denver may file truancy petitions that do not result in a truancy case. Table 15 shows that the total number of truancy cases filed in Denver court was 762 in FY03, 665 in FY04, and 444 in FY05. These judicial data mirror the decreases of truancy filings reported by DPS. However, Denver judicial data indicate that 665 cases were heard in FY03 while DPS indicates 760 petitions were filed. One reason for the discrepancy is that the court administrator’s office counts cases whereas DPS counts court appearances. Table 16 also indicates that Denver has a much higher percentage of truancy court cases in the juvenile court than the state total. For example, approximately 6% of Colorado’s juvenile cases are truancy cases but in Denver, 17% in FY03, 12% in FY04, and 9% in FY05 were truancy cases.

**Table 16: Denver Truancy Cases Compared to Colorado Truancy Cases**

State Fiscal Year	Truancy Cases	Juvenile Cases	% of Juvenile Cases that are Truancy
<b>Denver</b>			
<b>2003</b>	762	4,567	17%
<b>2004</b>	665	5,665	12%
<b>2005</b>	444	4,958	9%
<b>Colorado</b>			
<b>2003</b>	2,090	36,362	6%
<b>2004</b>	2,062	36,075	6%
<b>2005</b>	2,080	34,851	6%

Table 17 indicates that Denver also represents a large proportion of the state’s truancy cases. Denver Juvenile Court heard 36% in FY 02, 32% in FY 03, and 21% in FY 04 of the truancy cases in the entire state of Colorado.

**Table 17: Percent of Colorado Truancy Cases in Denver Juvenile Court**

State Fiscal Year	Percent
2003	36%
2004	32%
2005	21%

Using these data from the State Court Administrator’s Office, the outcome of truancy contempt hearings can be assessed. Table 17 shows there were 250 truancy contempt filings in FY 03 and in FY 04 and only 43 in FY 05. Again, this drop in FY 2005 is not easily explained. The drop of over 20% less contempt hearings to total truancy cases is remarkable. It may be that DPS legal department was more selective in this year than other years by filing on students that they believe would have success in court. On the other hand, this could also be because the legal hours were not available to pursue students who did not abide by the court order to attend school. Interviewees felt that many cuts have been made to both the court time allocated to truancy and DPS’s legal department hours. Two interviewees agreed that the legal assistant in DPS was very effective but “*they (DPS) are always cutting her hours dedicated to this*”. Another person was hesitant to admit, “*I’m not convinced that this court’s administration is as supportive as I’d like to see it.*” Another person concurred saying,

*“You just don’t have the court time right now. The time in court is more or less a gift from the magistrate’s heart... she spoke up and said I’ll squeeze it in, literally, I’ll squeeze it in because it’s that important.”*

The teachers in the high school focus group agreed that court was backlogged and that the lag time between chronic truancy and a court appearance was far too long. One teacher said,

*“It’s overwhelmed. It doesn’t even work. With teenage students it has to be an immediate consequence and the court, that’s way too late... even if they are still below 16, it’s still too late. They’ve developed a habit.”*

The effectiveness of court is unclear. As shown in Table 18, the majority of contempt hearings result in a case being held or held and continued. One school-based interviewee said that, “*I always felt that basically courts were pretty ineffective. That to me, they were always the last resort... because they’re not going to be effective anyway.*”

**Table 18: Contempt of Court Hearing Status by State Fiscal Year**

Contempt Hearing Status	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005
Continued by Court	4	8	1
Continued by Parties	4	4	0
Held and Continued	43	38	7
Held	176	169	17
Party Failed to Appear	15	17	3
Vacated	6	2	1
no status	2	16	14
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>% Contempt Status of Total Truancy Cases</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>10%</b>

Effectiveness may also be restricted by the limited sanctions that courts can use. Over half of the interviewees felt that courts did not have a full continuum of supports and punishments available to them. Detention for a contempt of court on a truancy case was reported as a sanction that is

no longer available to judges and magistrates because of state cutbacks to bed space in detention facilities. Students are aware that detention is a possibility. One middle school student remarked, *“They (the judge) tries to scare you, saying you will go to juvie (juvenile detention) but that doesn’t scare me.”* Alternative deep end sanctions for adolescents include electronic monitoring or community service. However, interviewees complained that community service is not always available on the weekends and may mean pulling the student out of school. For parents of young children, 4 interviewees felt that the sanctions should be more severe for parents than currently exist. One person said,

*“They (courts) say they don’t fine parents because they (parents) don’t have any money in the first place. Well, I’ve really got a problem with that one because I’m feeling like they (parents) pay for other things.”*

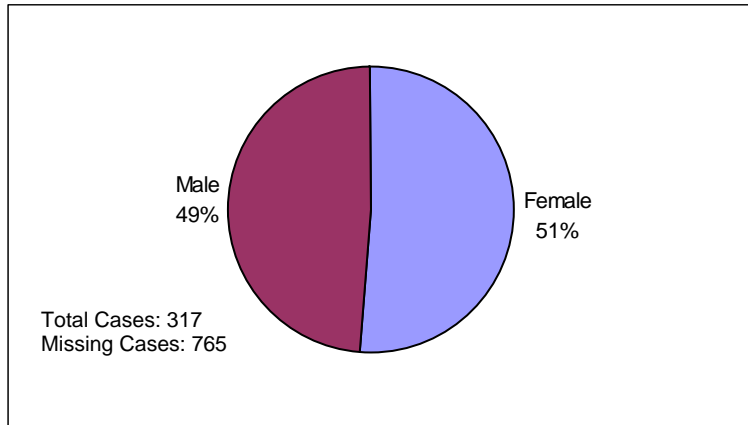
Another court-based interviewee said *“The jail piece and the fining piece (for parents) has never been tried in Denver.”* Detaining students and parents for truancy was controversial in group discussions at the Creative Options monthly meeting and at each of the summits. Some people feel like this sanction is needed, especially for parents of elementary students, in order to set the standard early that school attendance is mandatory. Others felt that this is waste of important bed space and does not address the underlying problems that result in truancy. One person felt that court was a great option to get the services that some students need but cannot get from the school. He said,

*“Her lack of attendance is sign of other issues and other problems that have gone on for years actually. If she were to get into court, and we were able to get a court date, the judge could order mental health treatment and special programming but you have to get into court.”*

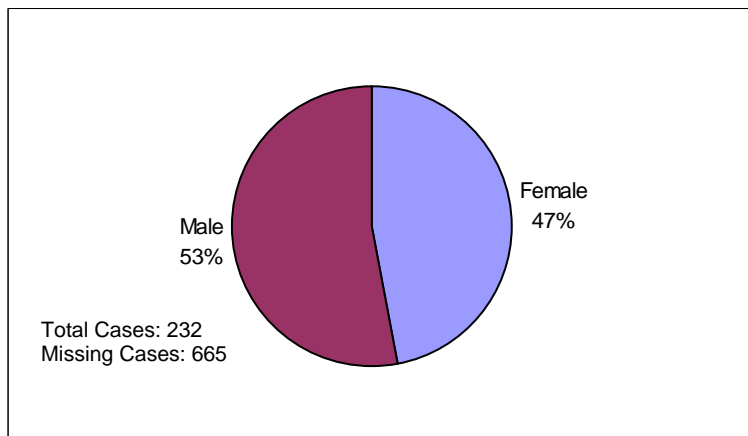
It is unfortunate that students cannot get the supports they need without being court mandated. The point is that if a service is court mandated, it is paid for by the state and the family is required to get that service for their child (instead of an optional referral from the school). The frequency of mental health issues for students who are petitioned to truancy court is currently unknown. This data is not collected in an easily aggregated format. However, we do know the demographics of these students.

The State Court Administrators Office collects demographic data for all juvenile court cases. Using these data, a profile emerges about the students seen in truancy court. Unfortunately, there are a lot of missing data in this data set. However, it is important to look at these demographics since the DPS truancy data indicate that ethnicity and grade play a significant role in unexcused absence. Detailed data were provided that include the gender, age and ethnicity of each student with a truancy case in juvenile court. For the purpose of this report, data was aggregated into gender, age and ethnicity; however the detailed data is available in Appendix C. In Figures 19, 20, and 21, the gender of students who had truancy cases in Denver courts has been evenly split during fiscal years 2003- 2005, which is consistent with the DPS data that girls and boys are equally represented in the chronic truancy numbers. However, it must be noted that approximately 30% - 35% of the truancy cases did not indicate the gender of the student.

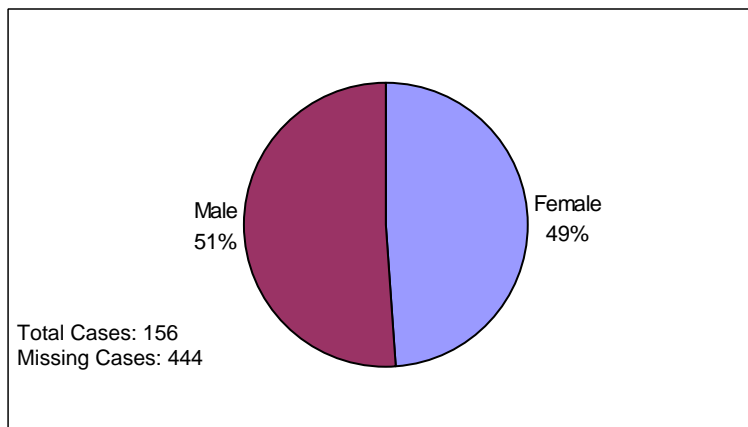
**Figure 19: Gender of Student in Truancy Case Fiscal Year 2003**



**Figure 20: Gender of Student in Truancy Case Fiscal Year 2004**

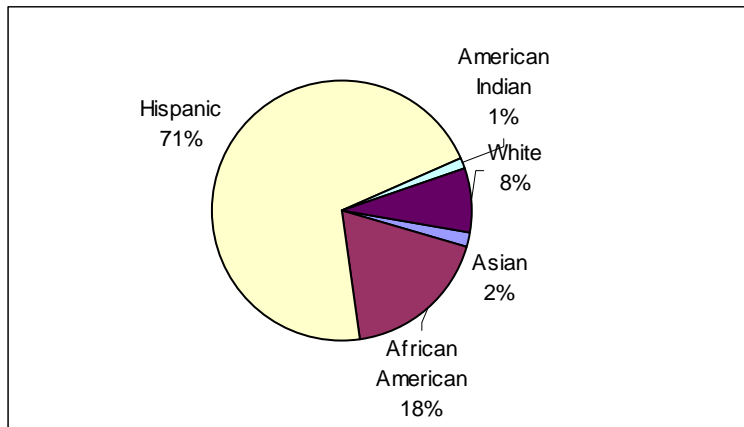


**Figure 21: Gender of Student in Truancy Case Fiscal Year 2005**

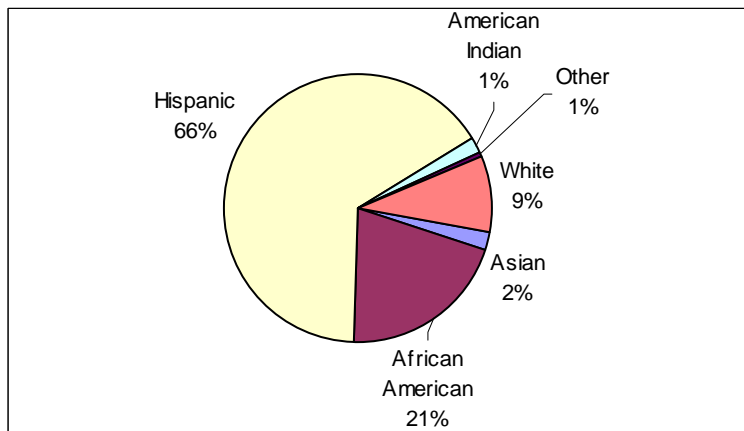


Consistently, Hispanic students are predominately represented in truancy court, followed by African Americans, Whites, Asians and American Indians (See Figure 22, 23 and 24). It must be noted that as with the gender, approximately 40% of the truancy case files did not include ethnicity of the student.

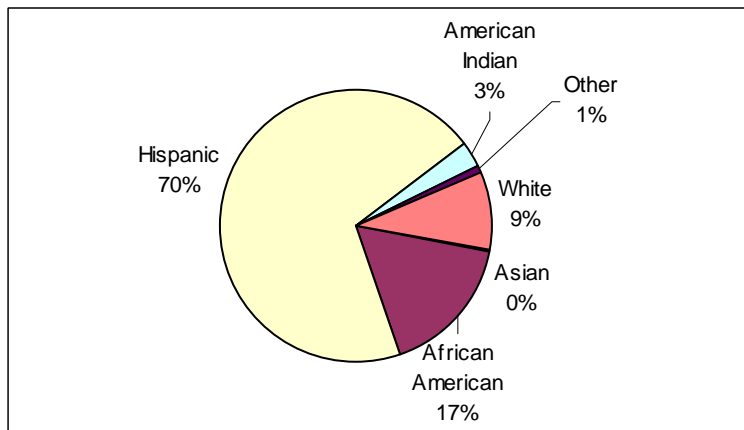
**Figure 22: Ethnicity of Student in Truancy Case FY 2003**



**Figure 23: Gender of Student in Truancy Case Fiscal Year 2004**



**Figure 24: Ethnicity of Student in Truancy Case Fiscal Year 2005**



Using the DPS attendance data, we can determine if there is an overrepresentation of minority students who are considered chronically truant and who have a truancy case in juvenile court. Table 19 shows the ethnicity of the population of students who have ever been enrolled in a DPS school for each school year, compared to the ethnicity proportions of students who are

chronically truant, and compared to the ethnicity proportions of students who had a truancy court case. From these data we know that Hispanic students are overrepresented in chronic truants and are even more overrepresented in truancy court. As seen in SY02-03, 56% of students ever enrolled in DPS were Hispanic. However, 64% of chronic truants are Hispanic and 71% of students with truancy court hearings are Hispanic. For African American students, the relationship is slightly different. Nineteen percent of students ever enrolled in DPS during SY02-03 students were African American. Twenty-three percent of chronic truants are African American thus they are overrepresented compared to the whole population. However, African Americans are slightly underrepresented in the students who have truancy court cases (18%). Although these differences are small, the pattern holds across all three school/fiscal years. Asian students are slightly underrepresented in both chronically truant students and students in truancy court. On the other hand, White students are grossly underrepresented in both chronic truants and students in truancy court. For each school year, the proportion of chronic truants and students in truancy court are less than half of the percent of all white DPS students.

Interpreting these data can be tricky. Keep in mind that school staff at the building level code absences as excused, unexcused or unverified. Is there “racial profiling” when it comes to coding absences and sending students to truancy court? Is it possible that the school and family communication is less effective with Hispanic families, therefore more absences are unverified by parental consent? In any case, we know that these data parallel much of the juvenile justice data which shows overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system and in juvenile detention. However, with juvenile delinquency data, the disparities for African American juveniles tend to be closer to what we see for Hispanic youth. This pattern is not repeated in these truancy data. We need to question whether using truancy court for Hispanic students creates a well worn pathway to the juvenile justice system.

**Table 19: Ethnicity of All Students, Chronic Truants and Truancy Court Attendees**

	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>DPS Ethnicity %</b>	<b>Student %</b>	<b>% Chronically Truant</b>	<b>% in Truancy Court</b>
<b>SY2002-2003 / FY2003</b>	<b>American Indian</b>	1%		2%	1%
	<b>African American</b>	19%		23%	18%
	<b>Asian</b>	3%		2%	2%
	<b>Hispanic</b>	56%		64%	71%
	<b>White</b>	20%		10%	8%
	<b>Other</b>	0%		0%	0%
	<b>Missing</b>	0%		0%	*not included
	<b>Total</b>	100%		100%	100%
<b>SY2003-2004 / FY2004</b>	<b>American Indian</b>	1%		2%	1%
	<b>African American</b>	19%		22%	21%
	<b>Asian</b>	3%		2%	2%
	<b>Hispanic</b>	57%		65%	66%
	<b>White</b>	20%		9%	9%
	<b>Other</b>	0%		0%	1%
	<b>Missing</b>	0%		0%	*not included
	<b>Total</b>	100%		100%	100%

	Ethnicity	DPS Ethnicity %	Student %	% Chronically Truant	% in Truancy Court
<b>SY2004-2005 / FY2005</b>	<b>American Indian</b>	1%		2%	3%
	<b>African American</b>	19%		22%	17%
	<b>Asian</b>	3%		2%	0%
	<b>Hispanic</b>	57%		65%	70%
	<b>White</b>	20%		9%	9%
	<b>Other</b>	0%		0%	1%
	<b>Missing</b>	0%		0%	*not included
	<b>Total</b>	100%		100%	100%

\* 35% to 40% of these data are missing the ethnicity. To better show the proportions, missing data were not included.

The last demographic factor to consider from the truancy court data is student age. Table 20 specifies the age of students who had a truancy court case. The age of students in truancy court ranges from five to 16. Keep in mind that the compulsory age law in Colorado at the time of this report is seven – 16. This age was recently increased from 16 to 17 with the passing of Senate Bill 73. It will be interesting to see if this change in compulsory attendance shifts the age of students in truancy court. Currently, the bulk of the truancy cases involve 14 and 15 year old students. Considering a typical nine-month lag time, it may be that many of these students are filed on when they are 13 and 14 years old. One interviewee said that *“We can’t even file in court once they are 15 because by the time we get a court date, they’d be over 16 years old (the compulsory education age)”*. Since the highest percentage of chronic truants are in ninth grade, we might also expect more students of that age (14-15) to be in truancy court. Unfortunately, if a ninth grader is overage for grade and is chronically truant, s/he may never get a truancy intervention, including court. Notice that there are some 16 year olds in truancy court. It is unclear why there are students who are five and six years old and therefore under the compulsory age in truancy court. Sixteen year old students may have turned 16 after the petition was filed.

**Table 20: Age of Students who are in Truancy Court**

<b>FY 2003</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>5</b>	2	0.3%
<b>6</b>	3	0.4%
<b>7</b>	41	5.4%
<b>8</b>	32	4.2%
<b>9</b>	24	3.2%
<b>10</b>	24	3.2%
<b>11</b>	29	3.8%
<b>12</b>	40	5.2%
<b>13</b>	95	12.5%
<b>14</b>	128	16.8%
<b>15</b>	256	33.6%
<b>16</b>	89	11.7%
<b>Missing</b>	2	not included
<b>Total</b>	765	100%

<b>FY 2004</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
5	0	0.0%
6	5	0.7%
7	25	3.8%
8	23	3.5%
9	25	3.8%
10	21	3.2%
11	27	4.1%
12	50	7.6%
13	87	13.3%
14	156	23.8%
15	187	28.6%
16	49	7.5%
<b>Missing</b>	10	not included
<b>Total</b>	665	100.00%
<b>FY 2005</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
5	0	%
6	3	0.7%
7	17	3.9%
8	21	4.8%
9	9	2.1%
10	12	2.7%
11	16	3.6%
12	22	5.0%
13	44	10.0%
14	98	22.3%
15	144	32.7%
16	54	12.27%
<b>Missing</b>	4	not included
<b>Total</b>	444	100.%

In order to get feedback from parents/guardians about the court process and the effects of court, a questionnaire was given to parents immediately following their court appearance. Parents/guardians were solicited by a court representative and informed that their responses were confidential and would be only reported in aggregate. The questionnaire asked parents/guardians to respond to a rating scale and to open-ended questions regarding:

- helpfulness of Truancy Court in improving your child's attendance
- helpfulness of the school in improving your child's attendance
- what could the school do to improve your child's attendance
- who else helps you with your child's attendance
- what could the court do to improve your child's attendance
- what else would help your child's attendance
- how important is it to you that your child graduate from high school

The survey also gathered demographic information about the parent/guardian and the child including parent/guardian relationship to child, gender, ethnicity, child's age, and child's grade in school.

The survey was given to 42 parents/guardians following a court appearance during the time frame of December 2005 to March 2006; however, the respondents were not representative of all families who participated in truancy court. This is in part because the survey was voluntary and some families may have opted out of participation. This was especially true when there was a particularly adversarial court case. In these situations, the court representative often did not ask the family to participate in the study.

Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents were female parent/guardians while only 12% were male parent/guardian. The majority of those females were self-identified as the mother. As described by the parent/guardian, the child they accompanied to court was between the ages of seven and 16, with the average age being 12 years old. All parent/guardians (100%) indicated that they thought it was "very important" for their child to finish high school.

Sixty-four percent of respondents said truancy court was "very" helpful, 33% said it was "somewhat" helpful, and 3% said it was "not at all" helpful. When asked what else the courts could do to improve attendance, three themes emerged which are consistent with what we heard in the focus group and interview data: timely and consistent consequences; a clear message about the importance of school attendance and education; and supportive interventions for students. Overall, respondents reported a positive experience with truancy court.

Denver Department of Human Services. Truancy court cases may be referred to the child welfare system. This is typically the case for neglected children and adolescents who are beyond the control of the parent. In rare circumstances, a truancy case may result in a dependency and neglect petition (D&N). Data was provided by the Truancy Court Liaison from the Denver Department of Human Services (DDHS). Unfortunately, DDHS did not have data for SY02-03 and SY03-04. However, there are data dating back to 1997. Since one year of data provides a very limited picture, these historical data are included in Table 21 of this report. Again, these data come from yet another system and we therefore do not necessarily expect numbers to match. As shown in Table 21, DDHS reported 855 cases heard in SY04-05. This is much more than the number reported by the State Court Administrator's Office, which reported 444. The court administrator's data does not represent a duplicate count of students who are heard multiple times in court, however DDHS data does. This would account for the almost double number of cases documented by DDHS. Additionally, the number of cases reported by DDHS includes cases that were vacated or where parties failed to appear. Cases heard in truancy court may be opened to DDHS, referred to DDHS, referred to community resources and have a D&N order filed. Approximately 17% – 20% of cases have been opened by DDHS. Between 4% and 8% of truancy cases are referred to DDHS by the truancy court magistrate or judge. Of these cases, many more are being referred to community resources than in past years (increasing from 3.8% in 1997-1998 to 20.5% in 2004-2005). According to the DDHS social worker, this is due to the fact that more severe cases of truancy are being referred to the courts from DPS. Finally, a very small percentage of truancy cases result in a D&N petition. However, it should be noted that D&N petitions are costly and labor intensive.

**Table 21: DDHS 1997-2005 School Year Statistics**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Cases Heard</b>	<b>Open to DDHS</b>	<b>Cases referred to DDHS</b>	<b>Cases Referred to Community Resources</b>
1997-98	1,395	18.5% (259)	8.3 (116)	3.8% (53)
98-99	1,641	21.3% (350)	6.1% (100)	7.9% (129)
99-00	1,796	20% (360)	4.6% (83)	9.2% (165)
2000-01	1,365	14% (193)	4.6% (62)	14% (194)
01-02 (Fall)	583	19.5% (114)	8.2% (48)	20% (119)
02-03	Missing information due to administrative changes			
03-04	Missing information due to administrative changes			
04-05	855	17.4% (149)	9.6% (82)	20.5% (176)

According to a few interviewees, DDHS became very interested in truancy court because many families were ending up with D&N petitions. One person said, “*Human services may have switched people over from other places to staff the court.*” The DDHS court liaison provides an initial assessment on truancy cases involving families that are not currently served by human services. In this way, truancy may be an indicator of abuse or neglect in the home. In general DDHS was considered by most interviewees as a very supportive agency. DDHS staff meets with DPS staff and the Safe City case manager each week to review the names of children listed on the court docket before the court hearing. This activity provides an opportunity for cross systems assessments with comprehensive information being provided to the court.

City and County of Denver Safe City Office. The Safe City Office Truancy Diversion Program collaborates with Truancy Court, Denver Public Schools, and the Department of Human Services. The goal of this partnership is to reduce the number of youth appearing in truancy court, improve attendance and identify a-risk youth. Youth are eligible for the program if they don’t have prior court involvement and do not have an open case with DDHS. Youth and their parent/guardian meet with a Diversion Counselor to complete an assessment. Diversion requirements are set at this meeting. Diversion requirements are strength-based and can range from monitoring school attendance, progress reports, community service, counseling and/or research projects. If youth successfully complete the program they will not have to return to court or a report will be made to the courts to support closing a truancy case.

The Safe City Truancy Diversion Program has been in place since November 2005. Unfortunately, this is not reflective of the students for school years 2002 to 2004 which is the focus of this report. During the 2005-2006 school year, Safe City has received 90 referrals. Below is a breakdown of compliance for youth referred to diversion:

- 14 successfully completed
- 13 have refused to comply
- 44 have failed to complete

- 19 are currently enrolled

Over half of the youth referred to the program have not completed diversion. These youth are not held responsible for noncompliance. Out of the 57 youth that haven't successfully completed, 38 youth/families have not returned to court to address noncompliance issues. The fail/refuse rate could improve dramatically if youth were given a return court date. The return court date gives truancy diversion more leverage with the families and responsibility would be put on the youth to comply.

Collaboration. Another form of intervention is the collaborative efforts of the stakeholders at the table and, more importantly, the leadership that they bring with them. Creative Options has brought together representatives from Denver Public Schools, Denver Human Services, judges, magistrates, and city and county government including law enforcement and juvenile probation. All of whom have agreed to join forces to make a difference in reducing truancy.

The Geraldine Thompson Family Project (GTFP) made enormous contributions to truancy reduction efforts and was successful for many years largely due to leadership. As stated earlier, Creative Options was born out of the Geraldine Thompson Family Project (GTFP). The success that GTFP enjoyed was due, in large part, to an attorney from DDHS. In an interview with this attorney, he stated, *"I don't even know how I came to do this...but you need someone who can tolerate a lot of uncertainty, to make sure these meetings occur, and to keep people coming back."* Additionally, Mayor Webb (Denver's Mayor from 1991-2003) supported truancy reduction efforts during his three terms by providing financial resources to support interventions. Federal grants such as Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative also funded truancy reduction. This time period generated leadership from others as well, such as the District Attorney's office and judicial division. These years were described by one interviewee as the "golden years". According to most interviewees, since these leaders moved on, leadership has floundered. As one stakeholder comments, *"As time went on and other people got in charge of DPS and the mayor was off some other place, we began to lose some support."* Another stakeholder said, *"And again I think it was because of leadership. I know it was because of leadership that it didn't do well."* Services and support seemed to vanish into a vacuum along with leadership. The general theme about leadership from the professional interviews was that too often leadership around truancy reduction is superficial. It could be one's political platform to be elected into office or a position of power, then it's only important as long as the position lasts, and when the position is gone so is the money.

Current leadership around truancy issues is unclear. It is clear, however, that the DPS superintendent does have truancy reduction on his radar screen. This is evidenced by Goal 3 of the Denver Plan. Both DPS superintendent and Mayor of Denver were in attendance for the kick-off of the Creative Options full-day summit. The Mayor was quoted by the Rocky Mountain News as saying, *"We are committed to being an active partner with you."*

An important theme that emerged from the qualitative data is that of sustainable leadership. What happens when a good leader is in place? What happens when they leave? Stakeholders felt that leadership around truancy is having consistent, key players with some level of power around the table. Key players are critical as they have the ability to allocate resources, primarily financial. These key players would also cut across all systems: legislation, city government, school administration, judicial, etc.... One interview said, *"courageous leadership"* is needed. Another professional interviewee said that leaders need *"Firm conviction and determination that every child can be academically successful."*

Current Interventions are of No Consequence.

Other than parents, all stakeholders agree that there are no or very few consequences for truant students. The students did not feel like there were consequences from school or home. One student said, *“My mom don’t really do nothing because my brother just does the same thing.”* When asked about her attendance contract one student replied, *“I just throw it away, nobody checks.”* In both focus groups, the majority of teachers agreed that there were few consequences for truancy. One teacher said, *“Other than the grades which we control and the phone call, we don’t have much in the way of consequences.”* Consequences are not just about having the potential sanctions in place but also enforcing those sanctions. One student said, *“They (the school) don’t enforce anything. They just don’t enforce it. Like it’s way too easy to ditch.”* Social workers agreed saying,

*“We have two or three long-term social workers who say to me, the kids just laugh at me because they say, ‘you can’t do anything to me, you can’t throw me in jail.’ What am I supposed to say to them?”*

Many interviewees stressed the need for immediate consequences, like being picked up by a truancy officer or closing the school campus. A judiciary interviewee said,

*“There’s no point in our being involved unless somebody else was going to be doing something. That child was going to lose a full year or more before there was any leverage applied to get that kid back to school”.*

It seems at this point, it is not just about having consequences or enforcing these consequences, it is also about creating a community expectation that students will attend school. As one teacher stated,

*“The other problem with that is that it’s not just a matter of being enforced, it’s a matter of changing culture. Because you have so many students involved with that category, the manpower alone to enforce it is difficult.”*

Tables 22, 23 and 24 describe the percentage of students who are chronically truant compared to the number of students who actually get an intervention. These numbers support the qualitative data gathered in the interviews and focus groups. It becomes clear that for the large majority of students, there are no consequences. Only 4-6% of elementary truants receive an intervention beyond a letter or phone call. This increases significantly for middle school students with the range being 12% to 17%. Unfortunately, this drops again for high school students to 6% to 9%. It should be noted that these percentages are based on all students who had ten or more full day unexcused absences regardless of age. Children under seven or over 16 can not legally be defined as truant. It is expected that if we only looked at students of compulsory age, the percentages would decrease for elementary and high school students. Nonetheless, the effects of high numbers of unexcused absences occur for the student, school, family and community regardless of the student’s age.

**Table 22: Percent of Elementary School Truants Who Receive an Intervention**

<b>School Year</b>	<b># of Attendance Plans*</b>	<b># Truancy Court Petitions</b>	<b>Total #</b>	<b>Approximate % of Chronically Truant Students who get an intervention beyond a phone call or letter*</b>
02-03	135	139	274	5%
03-04	162	204	366	6%
04-05	153	89	242	4%

**Table 23: Percent of Middle School Truants Who Receive an Intervention**

School Year	# of Attendance Plans*	# Truancy Court Petitions	# Family Group Conferencing/Mediation	Total #	Approximate % of Chronically Truant Students who get an intervention beyond a phone call or letter*
02-03	103	339	N/A	442	12%
03-04	154	381	2	537	17%
04-05	316	193	35	544	16%

**Table 24: Percent of High School Truants Who Receive an Intervention**

School Year	# of Attendance Plans*	# Truancy Court Petitions	Total #	Approximate % of Chronically Truant Students who get an intervention beyond a phone call or letter*
02-03	347	251	598	9%
03-04	400	137	537	7%
04-05	350	113	463	6%

\* The number of attendance plans may be an underestimate since only 36 of the 74 social workers responded to the DPS request to document the number of attendance plans.

Another theme emerging from the interviews which concurs with the lack of consequences is the fact that most truancy interventions have been cut severely since the late 1990's. Truancy officers have been cut. Catch-up classrooms have been cut. The number of SARB's has decreased. Court time has been cut. It is therefore not surprising that most of the stakeholders feel like there are no consequences because indeed most interventions have been cut. Most interviewees communicated that these interventions need to be re-funded and re-instated. Additionally, interviewees recommended other interventions that are not currently in place. These recommendations are discussed in the next section. Added to these recommendations are recommendations based on the quantitative data.

### **Suggested Solutions from Stakeholders**

There are four primary targets of these recommendations; schools, parents, courts and the larger community. It is important to see these interventions creating a full continuum of possibilities. Two interviewees conveyed the importance of having a full continuum because the reason for truancy varies and, therefore, so should the solutions. Furthermore, sometimes it takes more than one intervention to create a positive change. As one interviewee said,

*“We tried to figure out which intervention made a difference. That’s when we really learned that it was not one intervention but a bunch. You have to have at least 3 or more interventions in order for our efforts to be effective. That is what we have learned.”*

Contrary to this opinion, one interviewee thought that there were too many levels of intervention resulting in only empty threats. Nonetheless, we describe a myriad of recommendations based on suggestions from the interviews, focus groups, the quantitative data and the two summits that were held.

The first response to truancy must come from the schools. Parents, teachers and school social workers agreed that rewards and incentives for attendance are critical. Programs that recognize perfect attendance must also reward improved attendance. Social workers indicated that students that have been chronically truant also need incentives to reward good behavior. One social worker said,

*“A lot of people don’t agree with rewards. They say it has to be intrinsic, but you’re talking about kids that don’t have a lot. The kind of rewards I got were paper, pencils, notebooks, things for school, and bottles of nail polish, a comb. Simple things!”*

Another person talked about taking a student out for ice cream. One teacher did not agree with providing rewards. He said, *“They shouldn’t get a reward for doing what they’re supposed to be doing... like coming to class and doing class work.”*

Other interviewees furthered the concepts of rewards and incentives by saying the philosophy and approach should be more positive and strengths-based. Half of the interviewees felt that all of the current interventions were only punitive. One person said,

*“We are not focusing on the strengths of these youth. A lot of these kids are leaders. We need to ignite a passion within them... Nobody responds well to always being labeled a trouble maker.”*

This was confirmed in our high school focus group. These students enthusiastically participated in discussions about solutions to truancy. One student in particular, eloquently articulated serious problems with school spirit and building maintenance. Another student called her school a “ghetto school” that needed serious improvement. Both students expressed a desire to take action but felt that there was little opportunity. Keep in mind that these students were identified as chronically truant and many were court involved.

Another person was concerned about the role of the judiciary in truancy prevention saying,

*“Historically, we come out of a punitive, hang ‘em or kill ‘em’ approach. We need to explore, consider, and evolve into more humanistic approaches.”*

Another interviewee concurred saying that schools and community members need to look around for strengths-based resources to apply to the problem. This became particularly important when we consider how many interviewees told us that often schools want to push problem students to other schools or into the community.

In fact both the high school and middle school teachers agreed that one of their primary recommendations was to create more alternative settings or education options for truant students. One teacher said,

*“The educational system that we have in place for the majority of the kids is not working for these kids. We need to think of an alternative way for them to be educated. You can’t keep forcing them back into this.”*

Teachers at the middle school level talked about different educational options such as Outward Bound or other nontraditional schools. High school teachers talked about other educational settings outside of the school entirely. However, these teachers were concerned that most alternative schools are only for students who are suspended or expelled. Some felt that DPS needed to increase the number of alternative schools and open up enrollment to other at-risk students. In reaction to the superintendent’s mandate to prepare all students for college, the high school teachers were especially concerned that many hands-on, vocational programs would be eliminated. Teachers felt like this would further alienate truant youth.

Other suggestions for the school included closing the school campus at lunch time. However, teachers felt like they just didn't have the resources, such as space or people to run a closed campus. Another structural recommendation was to start school later for adolescent students. A few interviews and many non-school participants at the summits felt that a 7:30 a.m. start time was too early for most teenagers. People communicated that tardies turn into trancies so starting school later might reduce this phenomenon. Unfortunately, we did not gather tardies from DPS to determine if tardies do indeed predict more unexcused absences.

Many interviewees stressed the need for different strategies for each of the school levels. In order to communicate the expectation for school attendance, early intervention with non-attending elementary students was strongly supported. This recommendation is supported by the DPS data that indicates high unexcused absences for kindergarten students. It is vital to send the message to families that enrollment means attendance even in the early school years.

Additionally interviewees and summit participants wanted to see more interventions in the transition years. Transition years are considered kindergarten, sixth grade and ninth grade. These are the grades when students are starting in a new school environment. The quantitative data confirm a serious need for intervention in the ninth grade. This is where truancy peaks and also where we lose high numbers of students. At the same time, many high school teachers told us that often ninth graders are socially promoted through middle school and therefore flounder and fail in the ninth grade. This would result in a ninth grade retention bulge which would also account for the high percentage of chronic truants.

Recommendations were also made for changes to the court process. Over half of the interviewees suggested that truancy court should be based at the school. This was also supported by participants in the all day summit. As one teacher said,

*"But the other thing that I would like to see put in place is the kind of court system that goes to schools... a court that travels and goes on site with a real judge."*

The rationale for placing court at school was to reduce the time between behavior and consequence. Keeping truants out of court may reduce future criminality.

The limited sanctions available to the court were lamented by many interviewees and summit participants. Since detention is no longer an option, many people wanted an alternative to detention. Many people suggested some form of weekend detention or community service. A few interviewees suggested a weekend or summer camp as an alternative to detention. Using this option truant youth would not be detained with other more violent offenders. Also the 'camp' could focus on how to re-engage these students with school.

At the elementary level, many interviewees and summit participants suggested both supports and sanctions for parents. Supports including increasing parent involvement in schools and providing clear attendance expectations at the beginning of the school year. Teachers, social workers and human service workers agreed that truancy starts early and once that habit is established it is difficult to change. One interviewee felt strongly about this saying, *"We need to start dealing with elementary schools; we need to nail the parents."*

Finally, both judicial interviewees and the school social workers suggested that some probations officers should be located at the high schools to help adjudicated students re-engage with school. Attending school is often a stipulation of probation. We do not know how many truants are also in the juvenile and city courts for other reasons but it is suspected that at the middle and high school level, these are the same kids.

Recommendations were also directed to parents. Many interviewees talked about the necessity to educate parents in compulsory education laws. One person said, *"I bet some parents*

*don't even know that going to school is required by law.*" Additionally, a few interviewees stressed the importance of helping parents to see the value of educating their child. One person said, *"If the parents aren't committed to a culture of education, there's no reason to believe the kid's going to be."* However, according to parents in the focus groups and those who responded to the truancy court surveys, parents highly valued school and felt it was critical that their child complete high school. Keep in mind that these are parents of chronic truants. As one interviewee suggested, parents need training to help engage their child in school. Another interviewee said,

*"We discover that the parent is not able to help the kid because they aren't well educated so let's make required adult education for them so that they can learn the same material right along with the kid."*

There were many recommendations for the broader community as well. The most recommended action was a public awareness campaign. This was suggested to combat the current climate of no consequences and low expectations. Interviewees and summit participants felt that a clear message needs to come from the city's leadership, including the mayor, the superintendent and the juvenile courts. One teacher said, *"The police also need to send a message about school attendance."* Many people felt that businesses also have a stake in good attendance, saying that good school 'attenders' turn into good employees. One person suggested that businesses be discouraged from serving students during school hours. Despite the loss in revenue, he suspected that store may recoup costs due to shoplifting and loitering.

Finally, summit participants and interviewees suggested more partnership with community-based organizations. Local non-profits were considered critical to providing mental health counseling and substance abuse counseling for truants and their families. Additionally, many students and teachers felt that more after-school and in-school activities were needed to engage students with the school. Youth-serving organizations would be the ideal stakeholder to coordinate these events and ongoing programs. Another suggestion was to create a speaker's bureau of students who had dropped out but later turned their circumstances around. One interviewee argued that a strong message could be sent to stay in school if it comes from former dropouts not just teachers or other adults. Many interviewees recommended peer to peer or adult mentoring programs as a vehicle to re-engage truant youth in school.

These recommendations clearly communicate that truancy is a problem that needs to be addressed by many different systems and organizations. Schools, courts, families, and the community need to come together to address this issue. The final recommendation that emerged from this process and the qualitative data was the need for clear leadership. Leaders need to have the power to maintain and sustain attention and action in order to reduce the prevalence of truancy in DPS.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

A great deal of information, data and suggested solutions has been shared in this report. So much so, that the reader may be confused about the primary message. The primary message is this:

Truancy is very prevalent in DPS (20% overall and over 30% in high schools). Most stakeholders feel there aren't meaningful consequences or those consequences aren't enforced. This feeling is validated by the low numbers of chronic truants who actually receive an intervention. Interventions such as

truancy officers, catch up class rooms, SARB's, truancy petitions and court time have all been cut drastically in the past three to five years. These things have been cut because of a vacuum of leadership to advocate and trumpet this issue.

Based on these findings, the National Center for School Engagement recommends the following;

- Create and implement a comprehensive public awareness campaign that promotes school attendance and sanctions truancy. This message should be reinforced by all city leaders including the superintendent, the mayor, the presiding juvenile court judge, the district attorney, the chief of police and the manager of human services. This message must be echoed at the school level by principals, teachers and other school staff.
- A full continuum of supports and sanctions must be realized. It begins with the school and ends with the juvenile court. Students need to have immediate consequences for truant behavior. To this end, the juvenile court and the school should explore whether holding truancy court at local schools would be more effective.
- Court is not the only or the best solution for truancy, however, the number of truancy petitions being filed is very low compared to the prevalence. The DPS policy of filing truancy court petitions of students with 30 or more full-day unexcused absences must be enforced.
- Truancy interventions should include the means to monitor chronically truant students and implement programs that would provide academic services designed to help them re-enter and remain in school.
- Truancy interventions that have been cut such as the use of truancy officers catch up classrooms, and SARB's must be evaluated for effectiveness. If found effective, these intervention should be reinstated.
- Programs must be targeted to support American Indian, African American and Hispanic students to attend school. This is especially important for Hispanic high school students. Culturally responsive services and educational opportunities must be more pervasive across the district. Since Hispanic students are overrepresented in punitive sanctions (truancy court), more supportive programs should be in place for Hispanic students. Research based mentoring programs are highly recommended for minority students.
- Truancy in the ninth grade is disturbing. The drop in enrollment between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade is equally disturbing. More research is needed to understand what happens to these ninth graders. The schools need to develop a culture that would help DPS retain and embrace all ninth graders as they transition into high school. This could be done by implementing critical engagement programs designed specifically for 'at risk' ninth grade students. Pushing out problem ninth graders must end. Changes should include ensuring that there are enough seats and books for all students enrolled in a class. Providing intense case management to 8th graders identified as detaching from school. This case management should continue through to ninth grade.
- An exploration of early withdrawal from school for students under the age of 7 is warranted. It is important to determine why families are withdrawing their young children from school after enrollment. Additionally, it would be wise to know if these children return to school and what effect early withdrawal has on school readiness and regular school attendance.
- The fiscal note attached to SB73 (increasing the compulsory education age to 17) should be explored to determine if a portion of the juvenile court FTE could be designated to the

Denver Juvenile truancy court. Although this is a statewide bill, we know that historically Denver hears over 30% of all truancy cases. For this reason, a large portion of these resources should be allocated directly to Denver.

- Where it exists, stop the expulsion and out-of-school suspension for truancy. In-school suspension and detention should be utilized. Furthermore, do not allow schools to withdraw students regardless of the student's age. Attempt to retrieve "dropouts" or "no shows". Resources must be allocated to these activities in order to maintain school enrollment.
- The feasibility of allocating school budgets based on attendance rates and truancy rates should be explored. This will provide the incentive necessary for school administrators to retain and track down truant students.
- In addition to attendance reports by school, DPS's Planning and Assessment Department should include truancy rates at the school level and by key demographics. Additionally, DPS's suspension and expulsion report should include the number of expulsions and out of school suspensions due to truancy.
- Additional research should be conducted to assess the cross over between delinquency court and truancy court. In particular, we need to know if truants have other juvenile court cases or 191J cases. It would be important to know if truancy court acts as a gateway to these other courts or if appearances are simultaneous.
- Prevention of truancy is crucial. Attendance promotion strategies should be instituted at all schools, especially elementary schools to establish expectations early.
- Creative Options must review and prioritize these recommendations. Each collaborator in this group should select the recommendation(s) that are feasible for them to implement. In this way, a comprehensive strategic plan will be developed for the Denver community.

Finally, we need to increase awareness that truancy has effects beyond the school campus and classroom. School administrators, teachers, and school social workers need to remember that truancy can lead to delinquent behavior. Law enforcement could play a larger role in preventing truancy. Most importantly, all residents in the city need to have an active role in encouraging school attendance. As one summit participant said, "*whenever anyone sees a school-aged child in the community during school hours, why not ask, 'Shouldn't you be in school today?'*"

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***Appendix A: Interview and Focus Group  
Protocols***

## Focus Group and Interview Core Questions

### *Teachers:*

1. How much time do you spend taking attendance each day?
  - a. Probe: Is this a worthwhile activity?
  - b. Probe: Are there other attendance activities you do?
2. How does it affect you when YOUR students miss school?
  - a. Probe: Personally?
  - b. Probe: Professionally?
3. What do you do when YOUR students miss a full day of school (ditching)?
  - a. Probe: What happens if they have an unexcused absence? What is the difference between excused and unexcused?
  - b. Probe: What happens if they miss a class period?
4. How do you feel when your students and their parents are summoned to court regarding their unexcused absences?
  - a. Probe: What do you think about parents who have to go to court because of their child's school attendance problems?
5. What do you think would help students go to school regularly?
6. What can teachers do to help students have good attendance and succeed in school?
7. What can parents and families do to help students have good attendance and succeed in school?
8. What else should I know about school attendance problems?

### *Students:*

1. To begin, please tell us your name (first name only), the grade you are in, and how long you have been at \_\_\_\_\_ School?  
Probe: Is this your first year here?
2. Do you have to attend school?  
Probe: Why?
3. How do you feel about going to school?  
Probe: Are there other reasons why you go to school? Like to hang with friends? Or because you like a particular class?
4. Do you have to attend all of your classes?  
Probe: Why?

5. What happens if you are not in school and you are not sick?  
 Probe: What happens if you have an “unexcused absence”?  
 Probe: What does your school do?  
 Probe: Do you have to meet with the school counselor or principal?
6. What do kids do when they are not in school?
7. Did you know that in some school districts students who miss school have to go to Truancy Court?  
 Probe: What do you think about that?  
 Probe: What do you think about students who have to wear an ankle monitor because they miss so much school?
8. What do you think would help students go to school regularly?
9. What can schools do to help students have good attendance and succeed in school?
10. What can parents and families do to help students have good attendance and succeed in school?
11. What else should I know about school attendance problems?

***Parents:***

To begin, please tell us your first name and how many children you have that attend this school.

1. How does your child feel about going to school?  
 • Probe: How does that affect you?
2. How easy or difficult is it to get them to go to school in the morning?  
 • Probe: Do you have trouble getting your child to go to school?  
 • Probe: What kind of trouble?
3. How do you know if your child is in school?  
 • Probe: How would you know if they aren't'?
4. What happens to your child if they miss a full day of school due to reasons other than sickness?  
 • Probe: What happens if they have an unexcused absence?  
 • Probe: What happens if they miss a class period?

5. What happens to you if your child misses a day of school?  
Probe: Or many unexcused days of school?
6. What do students do when they are not in school?
7. Are you aware of the school attendance policies at your child's school?  
Probe: What does the school do?
8. How would you feel if your child were summoned to court regarding their unexcused absences?  
Probe: What do you think about parents who have to go to court because of their child's school attendance problems?
9. What do you think would help students go to school regularly?
10. What can schools do to help students have good attendance and succeed in school?
11. What can parents and families do to help students have good attendance and succeed in school?

***Professional Interviews:***

1. What has been your role in truancy prevention in Denver?
2. Can you tell me a little history about how Denver has addressed truancy in the past? ?
3. What worked?
  - a. Facilitating factors.
4. What didn't?
  - a. Barriers
5. What do you think needs to happen in Denver to reduce or prevent truancy?
6. Anything else that you think I should know about truancy prevention for Denver?
7. What do you think needs to happen in Denver to reduce or prevent truancy?

## ***Appendix B: Absences by School Data***

**Percent of Students with 10 or More Unexcused Absences in the School Year**

**SY2002 - 2003**

**SY2003 - 2004**

**SY2004 - 2005**

School Name	#	Not Chronically		Not Chronically		Not Chronically	
		Truant	Truant	Truant	Truant	Truant	Truant
Omar D Blair	196					91.00%	9.00%
NO SCHOOL FOUND	198	99.70%	0.30%	99.80%	0.20%	99.90%	0.10%
Archuleta	199	79.40%	20.60%	88.60%	11.40%	89.90%	10.10%
Sandoval Montessori	201	72.10%	27.90%	78.90%	21.10%	81.60%	18.40%
NO SCHOOL FOUND	202	99.90%	0.10%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Asbury	203	98.60%	1.40%	99.60%	0.40%	99.20%	0.80%
Valdez	205	96.50%	3.50%	96.70%	3.30%	85.20%	14.80%
Ashley	206	79.90%	20.10%	87.20%	12.80%	85.50%	14.50%
Barnum	207	92.50%	7.50%	91.80%	8.20%	93.20%	6.80%
Barrett	208	85.50%	14.50%	84.10%	15.90%	82.50%	17.50%
Beach Court	209	94.20%	5.80%	93.10%	6.90%	95.80%	4.20%
Lowry	210	96.50%	3.50%	92.60%	7.40%	88.40%	11.60%
Odyssey	211	98.70%	1.30%	100.00%	0.00%	99.60%	0.40%
Wyatt-Edison	212	51.30%	48.70%	66.60%	33.40%	67.70%	32.30%
Bradley	213	92.70%	7.30%	94.50%	5.50%	91.00%	9.00%
Bromwell	214	100.00%	0.00%	99.50%	0.50%	100.00%	0.00%
Brown	215	74.00%	26.00%	66.00%	34.00%	67.10%	32.90%
Brant-Webster	216	70.30%	29.70%	64.80%	35.20%	66.70%	33.30%
Carson	217	99.00%	1.00%	99.70%	0.30%	99.70%	0.30%
Cheltenham	218	84.00%	16.00%	63.80%	36.20%	65.30%	34.70%
Colfax	219	77.80%	22.20%	88.90%	11.10%	87.10%	12.90%
College View	220	89.50%	10.50%	87.90%	12.10%	86.30%	13.70%
Columbian	221	72.00%	28.00%	80.40%	19.60%	73.20%	26.80%
Columbine	222	52.00%	48.00%	54.50%	45.50%	72.30%	27.70%
Cory	223	96.20%	3.80%	97.10%	2.90%	97.30%	2.70%
Cowell	224	89.90%	10.10%	90.20%	9.80%	89.60%	10.40%
Polaris at Ebert	225	100.00%	0.00%	99.50%	0.50%	100.00%	0.00%
Denison Montessori	226	83.80%	16.20%	86.00%	14.00%	92.10%	7.90%

**Percent of Students with 10 or More Unexcused Absences in the School Year**

**SY2002 - 2003**

**SY2003 - 2004**

**SY2004 - 2005**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Not Chronically</b>		<b>Not Chronically</b>		<b>Not Chronically</b>	
		<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>
Doull	227	95.20%	4.80%	94.20%	5.80%	96.50%	3.50%
Eagleton	228	80.20%	19.80%	88.60%	11.40%	88.30%	11.70%
Ebert	229	77.70%	22.30%	81.50%	18.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Edison	230	82.70%	17.30%	84.10%	15.90%	91.60%	8.40%
Ellis	231	85.90%	14.10%	77.70%	22.30%	77.50%	22.50%
Del Pueblo	233	88.10%	11.90%	82.20%	17.80%	87.00%	13.00%
Grant Ranch	235	96.00%	4.00%	97.80%	2.20%	98.00%	2.00%
Marrama	236	95.20%	4.80%	89.00%	11.00%	82.20%	17.80%
Fairmont	237	96.70%	3.30%	92.60%	7.40%	93.30%	6.70%
Fairview	238	59.10%	40.90%	59.30%	40.70%	59.60%	40.40%
Fallis	239	90.50%	9.50%	91.80%	8.20%	86.80%	13.20%
Force	240	93.50%	6.50%	90.30%	9.70%	86.60%	13.40%
Garden Place	241	73.00%	27.00%	76.30%	23.70%	72.40%	27.60%
Gilpin	242	78.50%	21.50%	71.80%	28.20%	77.50%	22.50%
Godsman	243	74.10%	25.90%	71.90%	28.10%	74.90%	25.10%
Goldrick	244	87.70%	12.30%	85.00%	15.00%	80.90%	19.10%
Greenlee	245	80.60%	19.40%	76.70%	23.30%	78.10%	21.90%
Gust	246	85.20%	14.80%	87.90%	12.10%	78.80%	21.20%
Hallett	247	80.20%	19.80%	80.50%	19.50%	63.60%	36.40%
Harrington	248	79.70%	20.30%	85.50%	14.50%	80.10%	19.90%
Johnson	249	91.00%	9.00%	91.80%	8.20%	84.90%	15.10%
Knapp	250	85.90%	14.10%	81.10%	18.90%	87.80%	12.20%
Knight	251	98.90%	1.10%	98.20%	1.80%	96.50%	3.50%
Lincoln	252	94.40%	5.60%	95.40%	4.60%	93.40%	6.60%
Westerly Creek	253	0.00%	0.00%	83.70%	16.30%	98.30%	1.70%
McMeen	254	82.20%	17.80%	89.80%	10.20%	88.60%	11.40%
Mitchell	255	69.00%	31.00%	74.50%	25.50%	75.70%	24.30%
Oakland	256	84.40%	15.60%	91.50%	8.50%	90.10%	9.90%
Montclair	257	94.50%	5.50%	95.90%	4.10%	93.60%	6.40%

**Percent of Students with 10 or More Unexcused Absences in the School Year**

**SY2002 - 2003**

**SY2003 - 2004**

**SY2004 - 2005**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>Chronically</b>
		<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Truant</b>
Greenwood	258	91.90%	8.10%	85.50%	14.50%	83.50%	16.50%
Moore	259	86.60%	13.40%	88.10%	11.90%	91.90%	8.10%
Munroe	260	86.10%	13.90%	82.30%	17.70%	78.60%	21.40%
Newlon	261	86.80%	13.20%	91.00%	9.00%	90.60%	9.40%
Palmer	262	75.20%	24.80%	67.60%	32.40%	67.80%	32.20%
Park Hill	263	91.40%	8.60%	95.40%	4.60%	97.40%	2.60%
McKinley-Thatcher	264	97.60%	2.40%	97.30%	2.70%	100.00%	0.00%
Phillips	265	97.50%	2.50%	95.80%	4.20%	91.10%	8.90%
Pioneer	266	89.80%	10.20%	87.20%	12.80%	92.40%	7.60%
Remington	267	70.80%	29.20%	80.50%	19.50%	71.00%	29.00%
Rosedale	268	90.40%	9.60%	93.10%	6.90%	85.80%	14.20%
Sabin	269	96.10%	3.90%	93.80%	6.20%	86.60%	13.40%
Schenck	270	87.60%	12.40%	82.00%	18.00%	84.80%	15.20%
Schmitt	271	77.40%	22.60%	77.70%	22.30%	70.40%	29.60%
Smedley	274	60.40%	39.60%	74.00%	26.00%	76.70%	23.30%
Smith	275	69.30%	30.70%	71.20%	28.80%	77.60%	22.40%
Steck	276	94.10%	5.90%	93.80%	6.20%	94.60%	5.40%
Stedman	277	68.60%	31.40%	60.10%	39.90%	69.10%	30.90%
Steele	278	95.10%	4.90%	94.50%	5.50%	97.90%	2.10%
Slavens	279	99.80%	0.20%	99.40%	0.60%	99.80%	0.20%
Swansea	280	89.60%	10.40%	87.90%	12.10%	87.60%	12.40%
Teller	281	93.10%	6.90%	85.50%	14.50%	91.90%	8.10%
Green Valley	282	92.00%	8.00%	92.50%	7.50%	91.30%	8.70%
Traylor	283	97.80%	2.20%	97.60%	2.40%	96.50%	3.50%
University Park	284	98.10%	1.90%	98.70%	1.30%	99.10%	0.90%
Valverde	285	73.00%	27.00%	74.00%	26.00%	72.60%	27.40%
Denver Arts & Tech Academy	286	93.60%	6.40%	74.80%	25.20%	96.70%	3.30%
Castro	287	77.90%	22.10%	73.80%	26.20%	74.30%	25.70%
Whiteman	288	86.30%	13.70%	77.70%	22.30%	70.60%	29.40%

**Percent of Students with 10 or More Unexcused Absences in the School Year**

**SY2002 - 2003**

**SY2003 - 2004**

**SY2004 - 2005**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>Chronically</b>
		<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Chronically</b>	<b>Truant</b>
Whittier	289	83.10%	16.90%	83.00%	17.00%	84.70%	15.30%
Maxwell	290	91.70%	8.30%	88.70%	11.30%	90.60%	9.40%
Wyman	291	63.40%	36.60%	60.90%	39.10%	66.10%	33.90%
Amesse	292	80.20%	19.80%	75.00%	25.00%	88.50%	11.50%
Ford	293	75.00%	25.00%	86.80%	13.20%	79.30%	20.70%
Holm	294	86.20%	13.80%	90.10%	9.90%	91.00%	9.00%
Kaiser	295	96.80%	3.20%	96.60%	3.40%	94.70%	5.30%
Samuels	296	93.60%	6.40%	90.80%	9.20%	88.70%	11.30%
Cenntennial	297	95.40%	4.60%	95.60%	4.40%	91.10%	8.90%
Southmoor	298	99.80%	0.20%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
McGlone	299	85.50%	14.50%	90.00%	10.00%	73.60%	26.40%
Challenges, Choices & Images	325	78.70%	21.30%	96.80%	3.20%	83.90%	16.10%
Connections Academy	326	99.30%	0.70%	99.70%	0.30%	100.00%	0.00%
Northeast Academy	327					96.50%	3.50%
Highline Academy	328					95.10%	4.90%
Baker	401	79.70%	20.30%	80.60%	19.40%	78.50%	21.50%
Cole	403	65.40%	34.60%	66.80%	33.20%	64.40%	35.60%
Gove	404	68.50%	31.50%	60.80%	39.20%	69.80%	30.20%
Grant	405	88.20%	11.80%	93.00%	7.00%	85.90%	14.10%
Hamilton	406	98.20%	1.80%	97.30%	2.70%	92.70%	7.30%
Hill	407	84.10%	15.90%	83.50%	16.50%	86.70%	13.30%
Kepner	408	76.80%	23.20%	89.90%	10.10%	82.50%	17.50%
Kunsmiller	409	79.40%	20.60%	82.20%	17.80%	77.30%	22.70%
Lake	410	75.20%	24.80%	82.30%	17.70%	70.70%	29.30%
Mann	411	71.60%	28.40%	72.00%	28.00%	73.70%	26.30%
Merrill	412	84.80%	15.20%	83.10%	16.90%	78.80%	21.20%
Morey	413	89.30%	10.70%	87.50%	12.50%	90.50%	9.50%
Place	414	87.70%	12.30%	92.00%	8.00%	83.70%	16.30%
Rishel	415	81.00%	19.00%	77.90%	22.10%	75.30%	24.70%

**Percent of Students with 10 or More Unexcused Absences in the School Year**

**SY2002 - 2003**

**SY2003 - 2004**

**SY2004 - 2005**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Not Chronically</b>		<b>Not Chronically</b>		<b>Not Chronically</b>	
		<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>	<b>Truant</b>
Skinner	416	73.00%	27.00%	79.90%	20.10%	97.20%	2.80%
Smiley	417	75.60%	24.40%	59.10%	40.90%	82.80%	17.20%
Henry	418	86.30%	13.70%	87.90%	12.10%	84.90%	15.10%
Martin Luther King	419	79.50%	20.50%	89.40%	10.60%	68.30%	31.70%
NO SCHOOL FOUND	422	88.90%	11.10%	100.00%	0.00%	93.80%	6.30%
Randolph	423	63.20%	36.80%	63.40%	36.60%	66.10%	33.90%
Noel	424	84.90%	15.10%	79.00%	21.00%	86.20%	13.80%
NO SCHOOL FOUND	425	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Kipp Sunshine Academy	426	96.60%	3.40%	98.70%	1.30%	98.30%	1.70%
Abraham Lincoln	450	63.40%	36.60%	54.60%	45.40%	49.20%	50.80%
East	451	79.80%	20.20%	87.60%	12.40%	82.80%	17.20%
George Washington	452	73.00%	27.00%	80.30%	19.70%	70.40%	29.60%
John F. Kennedy	453	80.10%	19.90%	81.50%	18.50%	78.20%	21.80%
North	455	48.70%	51.30%	45.80%	54.20%	69.10%	30.90%
South	456	60.80%	39.20%	50.70%	49.30%	59.00%	41.00%
Thomas Jefferson	457	82.30%	17.70%	78.40%	21.60%	77.70%	22.30%
West	458	51.90%	48.10%	51.40%	48.60%	47.40%	52.60%
Montbello	459	66.70%	33.30%	59.20%	40.80%	65.10%	34.90%
TPEN	473	17.90%	82.10%	20.40%	79.60%	24.00%	76.00%
School of the Arts	475	100.00%	0.00%	99.30%	0.70%	100.00%	0.00%
GED	476	90.20%	9.80%	92.90%	7.10%	95.40%	4.60%
Prep Assessment	477	38.60%	61.40%	44.40%	55.60%	31.10%	68.90%
Ridge View Academy	478	96.70%	3.30%	98.20%	1.80%	98.10%	1.90%
Colorado High	479	82.30%	17.70%	44.60%	55.40%	33.90%	66.10%
Denver School of Science & Technology	481			0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Skyland Community HS	482			74.60%	25.40%	83.70%	16.30%
Life Skills Center of Denver	483			85.10%	14.90%	95.80%	4.20%
Online High School	484			100.00%	0.00%	89.50%	10.50%
SW Early College	485					76.90%	23.10%

Percent of Students with 10 or More Unexcused Absences in the School Year							
		SY2002 - 2003		SY2003 - 2004		SY2004 - 2005	
School Name	#	Not Chronically Truant	Chronically Truant	Not Chronically Truant	Chronically Truant	Not Chronically Truant	Chronically Truant
New America School	486					98.40%	1.60%
Esculea	487					84.30%	15.70%
Millennium Quest	491	48.80%	51.20%	28.80%	71.20%	35.90%	64.10%
Leadership Academy	492	63.20%	36.80%	89.70%	10.30%	64.80%	35.20%
Arts & Culture Studies	493	86.60%	13.40%	91.10%	8.90%	65.20%	34.80%
NO SCHOOL FOUND	601	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	97.90%	2.10%
Opportunity School	602	67.10%	32.90%	58.80%	41.20%	42.40%	57.60%
DPS Night HS	603	61.10%	38.90%	25.90%	74.10%	45.00%	55.00%
Career Education Center	605	76.40%	23.60%	70.70%	29.30%	76.10%	23.90%
NO SCHOOL FOUND	670	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Emerson Street	671	38.80%	61.20%	33.00%	67.00%	26.00%	74.00%
P.S. 1	672	72.90%	27.10%	71.50%	28.50%	67.10%	32.90%
Gilliam	673	80.10%	19.90%	84.10%	15.90%	87.70%	12.30%
Contemporary Learning Academy	682	35.20%	64.80%	31.00%	69.00%	27.50%	72.50%
Community Challenge	707	32.90%	67.10%	40.50%	59.50%	41.30%	58.70%
Rocky Mtn. School of Expeditionary Learning	750	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%

## ***Appendix C: Detailed Truancy Court Data***

**FY2003 Denver Juvenile Truancy Cases**

		Race						
Sex	Age	Asian	African American	Hispanic	American Indian	White	Missing	Grand Total
Female	3			1				1
	6			1				1
	7	1	1	5			1	8
	8		1	5				6
	9		1	4	1	1		7
	10			5				5
	11			7				7
	12	1	2	8				11
	13	2	4	22	2	3		33
	14	1	9	34	1	3	2	50
	15			11	59		7	4
16			5	13		1		19
<b>Female Total</b>		5	34	164	4	15	7	229
Male	6			1				1
	7			5			3	8
	8		1	1		1		3
	9			1				1
	10		4	2			1	7
	11		1	4				5
	12			11		3	1	15
	13		8	19	1	3		31
	14	1	9	31	1	3	2	47
	15	1	16	52		10	1	80
	16		7	13			1	21
<b>Male Total</b>		2	46	140	2	20	9	219
Missing	5						2	2
	6						1	1
	7						25	25
	8						23	23
	9						16	16
	10						12	12
	11						17	17
	12						14	14
	13						31	31
	14						31	31
	15			1			94	95
16						49	49	
<b>Missing</b>							1	1
<b>Missing Total</b>				1			316	317
<b>Grand Total</b>		7	80	305	6	35	332	765

**FY2004 Denver Juvenile Truancy Cases**

		Race								
Sex	Age	Asian	African American	Hispanic	American Indian	Other	White	Missing	Grand Total	
<b>Female</b>	6			1					1	
	7		3	5		1		2	11	
	8			3				1	4	
	9		3	3		1	3	1	11	
	10		1	2			1		4	
	11		2	5			1		8	
	12	1	4	11					16	
	13		4	19		2	1		26	
	14			12	34	1	6	1	54	
	15	2	8	38			1	3	54	
	16			4	8				12	
	<b>Missing</b>				2				2	
	<b>Female Total</b>		3	41	131	4	2	15	7	203
	<b>Male</b>	6		1	1			1		3
		7			3					3
		8			8			1		9
		9			4					4
10		1	1	6		1	1	2	12	
11		1	1	11			1		14	
12			6	10			1	1	18	
13			8	18			1	1	28	
14		1	6	41			5		53	
15		2	17	36		1	13	3	72	
16		1	4	3				3	11	
<b>Missing</b>					3				3	
<b>Male Total</b>		6	44	144	2	1	23	10	230	
<b>Missing</b>		6							1	1
		7							11	11
		8							10	10
		9							10	10
	10							5	5	
	11							5	5	
	12							16	16	
	13							33	33	
	14							49	49	
	15							61	61	
	16		1					25	26	
	<b>Missing</b>							5	5	
	<b>Missing Total</b>			1					231	232
	<b>Grand Total</b>		9	86	275	6	3	38	248	665

**FY20005 Denver Juvenile Truancy Cases**

		Race								
Sex	Age	Asian	African American	Hispanic	American Indian	Other	White	Missing	Grand Total	
Female	6		1	2					3	
	7			4		1	1		6	
	8		2	4					6	
	9		1	3	1			1	6	
	10		1	3					4	
	11		1	4					5	
	12		3	5					8	
	13		1	12		1		2	16	
	14			6	15			2	2	25
	15			6	26	3		5	10	50
	16		2	6			2		10	
	Missing			2					2	
<b>Female Total</b>			24	86	5	1	12	13	141	
Male	7		1	4			1		6	
	8		1	8			2		11	
	9			1					1	
	10			6					6	
	11		3	3			1		7	
	12		4	5					9	
	13	1	4	5		1	2	1	14	
	14		5	30			2		37	
	15		3	33	3		4	3	46	
	16			6			1	1	8	
	Missing			2					2	
<b>Male Total</b>		1	21	103	3	1	13	5	147	
Missing	7							5	5	
	8							4	4	
	9							2	2	
	10							2	2	
	11							4	4	
	12							5	5	
	13							14	14	
	14							36	36	
	15							48	48	
16							36	36		
<b>Missing Total</b>								156	156	
<b>Grand Total</b>		1	45	189	8	2	25	174	444	

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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