

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 735

Approved November 14, 1994

RESOLVED, That the Providence City Council is requested to support the Providence Truancy Initiative Program being drafted by the School Department.

IN CITY COUNCIL
NOV 3 1994
READ AND PASSED
James A. Starnelli
PRES.
Michael R. Clement
CLERK

APPROVED
NOV 14 1994
Vincent A. Cianci
MAYOR

Providence Truancy Initiative
Date of Implementation: September 1994

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Overview

Providence has the highest school absentee rate in the state, according to the State Department of Education. The number of habitual truants has been on the increase over the past few years and is projected to be in excess of 700 this year. As of April 1st, 43 truancy cases in the 6th grade, and 100 truancy cases in the 7th grade were investigated. The Chief of Police, Bernard Gannon, believes that there is a direct correlation between truancy and day-time crime. Evidence from successful programs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, supports this assumption: as truancy rates dropped, day-time burglary rates fell by as much as one-third.

One successful element of the Milwaukee program involves police pick up of truants. Without new legislation, using the police to pick up truants is not legally prudent. Until the next legislative session, when such legislation can be pursued, reform efforts should focus on administrative changes that will address the majority of the truancy cases.

The current process for identifying truants and notifying parents often takes at least 40 days, by which time students are at risk for failing the school quarter. Those students who fail the quarter are at risk for failing the school year, being held back, and ultimately dropping out. Priority needs to be given to identifying and referring truants early in the school year. October 1st is recommended as the start-up date: by then registration data will be 90% accurate.

The Revised Program

Speedy identification of truants, and prompt notification of parents are key elements to the success of a revised program. Absence patterns should be identified faster through better use of the school department's Osiris computer system. Clerical staff at each school would enter absence data from scantron sheets under new categories: either 1) "absent with an excuse," or 2) "absent without an excuse."

The computer would track the second category, and print out names of students on an "A-8" form who are absent for three consecutive days, or for four cumulative days within three weeks. Upon receipt of the student's name, the truant officer would make personal contact with the parent or guardian within five days, and conduct an interview at the home.

The truant officers would be able to focus on finding the parent or guardian within five days, by adding one full-time clerical position to assist with

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registration, and by extending the work day by 5 additional hours per week. A current vacant position in the Student Relations Office can be terminated to pay for the additional hours. A 2/5ths guidance counselor position can be utilized to track and assess the status and success of referrals.

An informal report would be completed at the first home visit, by the truant officer, identifying family history and situation, prior or present contacts with social services, school status, social status, and medical information. An immediate determination would be made by the truant officer whether to file against the parent, to file a wayward petition to the Family Court, or to refer the student to an alternative educational program.

A contract setting the terms of any special conditions or programs would be signed by the parent and child; breach of the contract would result in an immediate filing against the parent or child. Those students that had a legitimate reason to be absent, or do not have significant problems and were simply skipping school, can be easily screened out of the process at this stage.

Completion of an informal hearing at the home would speed the process by eliminating the need for administrative hearings at the school department, and in the case of a wayward petition or filing against the parent, information from the completed interview form would be forwarded directly to the Intake or Diversion Units of the Family Court.

The second element, in addition to accelerating the identification process, is to streamline the referral process. For those habitual truants who would benefit from either counseling or an alternative educational program, a recommendation for placement should be made at the initial home visit.

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The success of this initiative depends on the speed and accuracy with which the attendance data is entered into the Osiris computer system, the speed with which truant officers make contact with parents, and the degree to which more alternative programs for habitual truants can be developed. For example, the time it takes for the data base to "identify" the placement of each student within the system at the beginning of the school year takes four to six weeks. By that time, a "no show" is out long enough to be on the track to failure. *This process needs to be cut down to two weeks at the most.*

Finally, since students tend to move more often now than in the past, teachers need to accurately update addresses, phone numbers, and dates of transfer on a planned, regular basis. This should be done each month, or at least quarterly, for all students.

Necessary administrative and policy changes should be made during the summer, so that a pilot program targeting the sixth and seventh grades can be implemented this fall.

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16-19-3.1 Definition of truancy. -- (A) Truancy means any absence of part or all of one or more days from school during which the school attendance officer, principal, or teacher has not been notified of the legal cause of such absence by the parent or guardian of the absent pupil.

(B) Habitual truant means a pupil who is absent from school without an acceptable excuse for either of the following:

(i). Part or all of five or more days out of 10 consecutive days on which school is held during a school semester.

(ii). Part or all of twenty school days on which school is held during a school semester.

16-19-3.2 Implementation. -- (A) School districts whose attendance rate is below the state average attendance rate as determined by the Rhode Island State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, at the discretion of the school committee, may implement a plan to reduce truancy.

(B) Once it is determined by the Rhode Island State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that a particular school district has an attendance rate below the state average attendance rate, the school board or committee for that district may implement a plan to reduce truancy as set forth below.

(i) The primary duty of truant officers or other authorized persons is to enforce the compulsory education law allegedly violated and to protect the safety and well being of minors not in the care of an adult pursuant to this chapter.

(ii) The truant officer, or a police officer employed by a police department within the school district, or any school administrator or designee of the school administrator who is employed by the school, may, except for children who attend for the required period of time a private day school approved by the commissioner of elementary and secondary education pursuant to 16-60-6(10), or attend a course of at-home instruction approved by the school committee of the town or city wherein the child resides, temporarily detain and assume custody of any child subject to full-time compulsory education. The truant officer may assume temporary custody of truants during hours in which school is actually in session, who is found away from the home of such child and who is absent from school without lawful excuse within the school district that such truant officer, police officer, or school official serves.

(iii) Any person temporarily detaining and assuming temporary custody of a child pursuant to this section shall immediately deliver the child either to an administrator at the child's school, or to the parent, guardian, or other person

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having control or custody of the child, or to a non-secure youth service or community center designated by the school or school district.

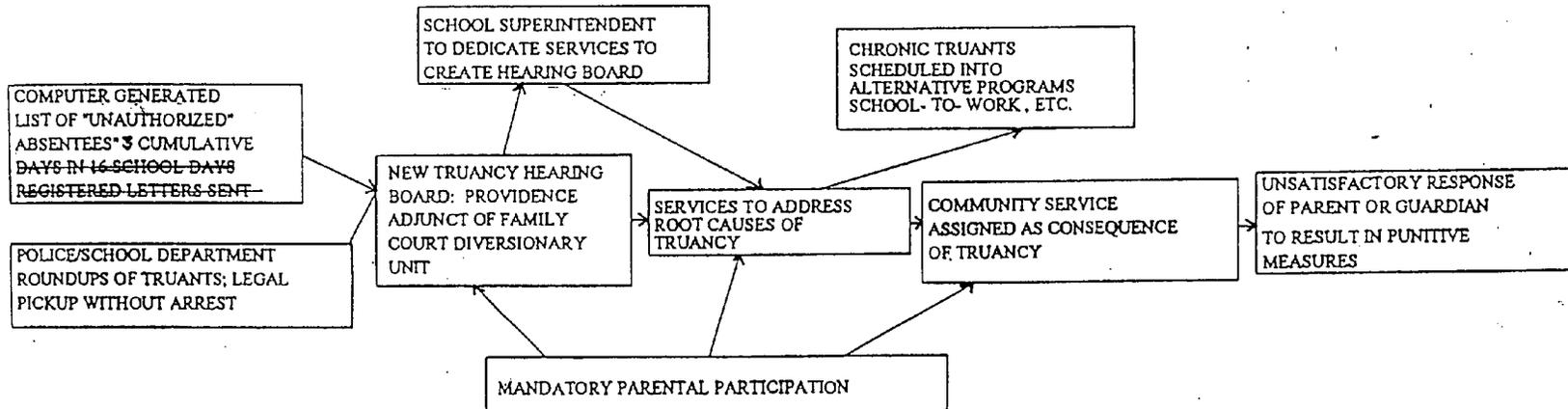
(iv) No arrest record is to be retained by the department to which the custodial officer is assigned. The temporary custody or detention herein provided is a severely limited type of detention and is not justified unless there are specific facts causing a truant officer or other authorized person to reasonably suspect that a truancy violation is occurring.

(v) A truant officer, or police officer, or school administrator, or designee of the school administrator, shall not be held liable for actions based on probable cause.

16-19 3.3 Training. – Effective with the class beginning after [March 14, 1994], and for each class thereafter, the curriculum for new law enforcement officers presented at the Providence police academy, and the municipal police academies, shall include at least eight (8) hours of training on truancy issues. Said training shall stress the enforcement of the compulsory education law in truancy cases and shall include (i) the nature, extent, and causes of truancy, (ii) legal rights of truants, (iii) services available to truants, (iv) techniques for handling incidents of truancy that promote the safety and well being of the truant.

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TRUANCY MATRIX



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WHAT IS TABS?

TABS, the Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Program begins in Milwaukee on November 29, 1993.

The new \$1 million dollar state-funded, two-year pilot program is designed to reduce the number of truants (kids who skip school) and reduce daytime crime. Law enforcement officers have the authority to pick up truants in the city of Milwaukee under the TABS law. The program is a collaboration of the Milwaukee Police Department, Milwaukee County Sheriff's Department, Milwaukee Public Schools, and the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee. Milwaukee is the third city in the nation to implement such a program.

DOES THE LAW AFFECT ALL STUDENTS?

No. The law affects only students who reside in the city of Milwaukee - no matter what school they attend. This

includes all Milwaukee Public Schools, parochial, and private schools. It also affects students participating in the Chapter 220 program. The law does not affect students who reside in suburban communities.

HOW DOES THE PROGRAM WORK?

Under the TABS program, police and sheriff's officers will have the authority to question students who are not in school during regular school hours. Students who do not have a valid reason to be out of school will then be transported to one of two TABS Centers. The truants will not be arrested, and there will be no record filed by the Police Department or Sheriff's Department.

(All truants will be screened before being transported to a TABS Center. Officers will check for illegal items, and verify that there are no outstanding warrants. If either of the above is found, the truant will be processed through the Police or Sheriff's

Department. (She will not be taken to a TABS Center.)

Once at the Center, the truants' parents will be called to pick them up. The truants will receive counseling, and other follow-up will be done to get them back into school. Part of the follow-up will be an attempt to change the truants' at-risk behavior by introducing them to positive alternative behaviors, including services offered by the Boys & Girls Club.

HOW WILL TABS BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY?

Similar programs in San Jose, CA, and Oklahoma City, OK reduced truancy by 48% and daytime burglaries by 33%.

TABS will benefit Milwaukee by encouraging youth to play by the rules, stay in school, and stay away from crime.