

July 2, 1996

MEMORANDUM

From: Dave Bonfili

To: Angus King,  
Rahm Emanuel

Subj: POTUS RECORD ON TRUANCY WHILE GOVERNOR OF ARKANSAS

1. The President's 1991 Personal Responsibility Agenda includes a bill which revokes drivers' licenses of students who do not attend school.
2. The 1990 DLC platform recommended holding parents accountable for their children's actions.
3. In the early 1980s, the state legislature passed a rule requiring each school district to have a set of discipline regulations. Students took the regulations to their parents, who had to sign them before they could be enforced. In 1989, POTUS appointed a state-wide committee on school discipline.
4. At a town-meeting in 1989, POTUS said that students with truancy problems should not be denied an education.
5. At that same meeting, he said he would like to see more districts develop alternative schools for "students who do not play by the rules."
6. **Under POTUS, Arkansas was the first state to fine parents for refusing to show up for parent-teacher conferences or allowing their children to be chronically truant. The effectiveness of district-level enforcement is uncertain.**

TO: Rahm

FROM: Michele

RE: Upcoming conference for release of truancy manual

*Crime-Truancy*

Upcoming Conferences

PTA

June 22-28

Washington, D.C.

Secretary Riley is speaking on Tuesday, June 25

NEA

July 1-6

Washington, D.C.

President Clinton is speaking, but we don't have a date yet

ALA (American Library Association)

July 6-10

New York City

Secretary on vacation; no plans for POTUS or other high officials to speak

AFT (American Federation of Teachers)

August 1-6

Cincinnati, Ohio

on plans for Secretary, POTUS, or other high officials to speak

National Urban League 1996 National Convention

August 11-14

New Orleans

In addition, Secretary Riley will speak July 10 to Future Homemakers in St. Louis; July 17 to the Hadassah Convention in Miami; July 25 (tentative) in Pittsburgh on the Condition of Education; and August 27 at the AFT/NEA Salute to American Education lunch in Chicago.

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## MANUAL ON TRUANCY AND YOUTH CRIME

### The Problem of Truancy in America's Communities

Truancy is the first sign of trouble; the first indicator that a young person is giving up hope and losing his or her way. When young people start skipping school, they are telling their parents, school officials and the community at large that they are in trouble and need our help if they are to keep moving forward in life.

Research data tells us that students who become truant and eventually drop out of school put themselves at a long term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens. High school dropouts, for example, are two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates. In 1995, high school dropouts were almost twice as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates. In addition, high school dropouts who are employed earn much lower salaries. Students who become truant and eventually drop out of high school too often set themselves up for a life of struggle.

Truancy is a gateway to crime. High rates of truancy are linked to high daytime burglary rates and high vandalism. According to the Los Angeles County Office of Education, truancy is the most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior. "I've never seen a gang member who wasn't a truant first," says a California District Attorney. Truancy prevention efforts should be a part of any community policing effort to prevent crime before it happens.

- During a recent sample period in Miami more than 71 percent of 13 to 16 year-olds prosecuted for criminal violations had been truant.
- In Minneapolis, daytime crime dropped 68 percent after police began citing truant students.
- In San Diego, 44 percent of violent juvenile crime occurs between 8:30a.m. and 1:30p.m.

While no national data on the extent of truancy exists, we know that in some cities unexcused absences can number in the thousands each day. In Pittsburgh, for example, 3,500 students or 12 percent of the pupil population, is absent and about 70 percent of these absences are unexcused. In Philadelphia, approximately 2,500 students a day are absent without an excuse. In Milwaukee, on any given school day, there are approximately 4000 unexcused absences.

Reducing truancy is one of the first ways that a community can reach out quickly to a disaffected young person and help families that may be struggling with a rebellious teenager. This guide seeks to offer parents, school officials, law enforcement and communities a set of principles to design their own strategies to combat truancy and describes successful models of how anti-truancy initiatives are working in communities across the nation.

## **Users' Guide to Deterring Truancy**

Each school and each community need to decide which steps to take to reduce truancy. These decisions should be made with the active involvement of parents, educators, law enforcement personnel, juvenile and family court judges, and representatives from social service, community, and religious organizations.

The communities that have had the most success in deterring truancy not only have focused on improving procedures - such as those that accurately track student attendance - but each also has implemented a comprehensive strategy that focuses on incentives and sanctions for truants and their parents. Below are five primary elements of a comprehensive community and educational strategy to combat truancy.

### **1. *Involve parents in all truancy prevention activities***

Parents play the fundamental role in the education of their children. This applies to every family regardless of the parents' station in life, their income, or their educational background. Nobody else commands greater influence in getting a young person to go to school every day and recognizing how a good education can define his or her future.

For families and schools to work together to solve problems like truancy, there must be mutual trust and communication. Many truancy programs contain components which provide intensive monitoring, counseling and other family-strengthening services to truants and their families. Schools can help by being "family-friendly" and encouraging teachers and parents to make regular contact before problems arise. Schools may want to consider arranging convenient times and neutral settings for parent meetings, starting homework hotlines, training teachers to work with parents, hiring or appointing a parent liaison, and giving parents a voice in school decisions.

### **2. *Ensure that students face firm sanctions for truancy***

School districts should communicate to their students that they have zero tolerance for truancy. State legislatures have found that linking truancy to such items as a student's grades or driver's license can help reduce the problem. Delaware, Connecticut, and several other states have daytime curfews during school hours that allow law enforcement officers to question youth to determine if their absence is legitimate. In a few states, including New York, a student with a certain number of unexcused absences will be failed in his or her courses. A Wisconsin judge may, among other options, order a truant to attend counseling or to attend an education program designed for him or her.

### **3. *Create meaningful incentives for parental responsibility***

It is critical that parents of truant children assume responsibility for truant behavior. It is up to each community to determine the best way to create meaningful incentives for such parents to ensure that their children go to school. In some states, parents of truant children are asked to

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participate in parenting education programs. Some other states have determined that parents who fail to prevent truancy can be subject to formal sanction or lose eligibility for certain public assistance. Communities can also provide positive incentives for responsible parents who ensure their child's regular school attendance. Such incentives can include increased eligibility to participate in publicly-funded programs. Local officials, educators and parents, working together, can make a shared commitment to assume responsibility for reducing truancy -- and can choose the incentives that make the most sense for their community.

#### 4. *Establish ongoing truancy prevention programs in school*

Truancy can be caused by or related to such factors as student drug use, violence at or near school, association with truant friends, lack of family support for regular attendance, emotional or mental health problems, lack of a clear path to more education or work, or inability to keep pace with academic requirements. Schools should address the unique needs of each child and consider developing initiatives to combat the root causes of truancy, including tutoring programs, added security measures, drug prevention initiatives, mentorship efforts through attendance, and referrals to social service agencies.

Schools should also find new ways to engage their students in learning, including such hands-on options as career academies, school-to-work opportunities, and community service. They should enlist the support of local business and community leaders to determine the best way to prevent and reduce truancy. Business and community leaders may lend support for example, by volunteering space to house temporary detention centers, establishing community service projects that lead to after school or weekend jobs, or developing software to track truant.

#### 5. *Involve local law enforcement in truancy reduction efforts*

In order to enforce school attendance policies, school officials should establish close linkages with local police, probation officers, and juvenile and family court officials. Police Departments report favorably on community-run temporary detention centers where they can drop off truant youth rather than bring them to local police stations for time-consuming processing. When part of a comprehensive anti-truancy initiative, police sweeps of neighborhoods in which truant youth are often found can prove dramatically effective.

### **Model Truancy Reduction Initiatives**

Each community needs to determine how it will reduce and deter truancy. Below are of truancy programs being used in communities around the country which employ some or all of the elements described above.

#### Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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*Program elements:* Parents, police, and the school system focus on the causes of truancy in the Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression (TABS) initiative in Milwaukee. Attendance is taken every period in all high schools. Local police officers pick up truant students and bring them to a Boys and Girls Club for counseling. Parents are called at home automatically every night if their child did not attend school that day. If the parent is not supportive of regular school attendance, then the district attorney is contacted.

*Results:* In a recent sample of students who went through the TABS process, 73 percent returned to school the next day, 66 percent remained in school on the 15th day, and 64 percent still are in school 30 days later. Since the TABS initiative began, daytime burglary in Milwaukee has decreased 33 percent, and daytime aggravated battery has decreased 29 percent. Aquine Jackson, Director of the Parent and Student Services Division of the Milwaukee Public Schools, says, "I think the TABS program is so effective because it is a collaboration among...the Milwaukee Public Schools, the Milwaukee Boys and Girls Clubs, the Milwaukee Police Department, and the County Sheriff, and because it is now a part of state statute that police officers can stop students on the street during school hours."

#### Rohnert Park, California

*Program elements:* The Stop, Cite and Return Program is designed to reduce truancy and juvenile crime in the community and to increase average daily attendance for the schools. Patrol officers issue citations to suspected truants contacted during school hours, and students are returned to school to meet with their parents and a vice principal. Two citations are issued without penalty; the third citation results in referral to appropriate support services.

*Results:* Due in large part to this initiative, the daytime burglary rate is 75 percent below what it was in 1979. Haynes Hunter, who has worked in different capacities on the issue of truancy in Rohnert Park for over 15 years, says the program is effective because it is a "high visibility" effort. "Being on the street, being in contact with the kids makes them aware of the fact that we care. We want them to get their education."

#### New Haven, Connecticut

*Program elements:* The Stay in School Program targets middle school students who have just begun to have problems. Targeted students go to truancy court, at which a panel of high school students question them trying to identify solutions. After court, youth and attorney mentors are assigned to each student for support. The student and the court sign a written agreement, and after two months, students return to the court to review their contract and report on their progress.

*Results:* Denise Keyes Page, who recruits and trains mentors for this initiative, says "This program works because it harnesses the power of peer pressure. Truants are judged and mentored by their peers, instead of just by adults who may seem distant and unconnected. Our program uses both the carrot and stick approaches, providing both supportive mentorship and

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real courtroom accountability to truant students. One of the evolving strengths of the program is that not only are we providing support to the truant, but we are serving as a resource to their parents."

#### Atlantic County, New Jersey

*Program elements:* The Atlantic County Project Helping Hand receives referrals from six Atlantic City and four Pleasantville elementary schools for youth in K through eighth grades who have five to 15 days of unexcused absences. A truancy worker meets with the youth and family to provide short-term family counseling, usually up to eight sessions. Referrals for additional social services are made on an as needed basis. If the family fails to keep appointments, home visits are made to encourage cooperation. Once a truancy problem is corrected, the case is closed and placed on an aftercare/monitoring status with contact made at 30, 60, and 90 day intervals to ensure that truancy does not persist.

*Results:* During the past school year, 84 percent of the students who participated in the Atlantic County program had no recurrence of truancy. Colleen Denelsback of project Helping Hand says that "our philosophy is one of early intervention, both at the age level and the number of unexcused absences. We stress that the earlier intervention takes place, the greater the chance for positive outcomes. Early intervention will prevent truancy and later delinquency."

#### Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

*Program elements:* The THRIVE (Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education) initiative is a comprehensive anti-truancy program spurred by an ongoing community partnership of law enforcement, education, and social service officials. Police bring a suspected truant to a community-run detention center where, within one hour of arrival, officials assess the youth's school status, release the youth to a parent or relative, and refer the family to any needed social service agencies. Parents are notified by the district attorney of potential consequences for repeat behavior. Parents who harbor youth with 15 days of consecutive unexcused absences are subject to misdemeanor charges.

*Results:* Since THRIVE's inception in 1989, the Oklahoma City Police Department reports a 33 percent drop in daytime burglary rates. Tom Steemen, the parent of a student who went through THRIVE, says, "The first I heard of the program was when my son was caught and taken to the center. I was real glad to know they had something like THRIVE." His son Ken, age 15, says, "THRIVE shook me up. I knew (while in the police car) just how wrong I was."

#### Norfolk, Virginia

*Program elements:* The Norfolk, Virginia school district uses software to collect data on students who are tardy, cut class, leave grounds without permission, are truant but brought back to school by police, or are absent without cause. Each school has a team composed of teachers, parents, and school staff that examines the data to analyze truancy trends. For example, a team may try to pinpoint particular locations where truant students are found during school hours and then place

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additional monitors in these locations. A team may also notice certain months when truancy is prevalent and then design special programs to curb truancy during those months.

*Results:* Ann Hall of the Norfolk Public Schools says, "Attendance has improved at all levels of schools since 1992 - two percent at the elementary and secondary levels. The overall district average is up one percent. This is significant in that legal attendance is at the 93rd percentile. Tighter attendance policies, grading practices, and teamwork have lead to this improvement...There are few, if any, teachers complaining that discipline and law violations are not being handled consistently throughout the district. This is a marked improvement over the report that was made in the teacher satisfaction survey conducted in 1988."

### Marion, Ohio

*Program elements:* The Community Service Early Intervention Program focuses on potential truants during freshman year. Referred students are required to attend tutoring sessions as directed, give their time to community service projects, and participate in a counseling program. In addition, students are required to give back to the Intervention initiative by sharing what they have learned with new students in the program and by recommending others who might benefit. Parental participation is required throughout the program. Upon completion of the six-week sequence, school records relative to truancy are nullified. If the student fails the program, formal court intervention is the next step.

*Results:* Of the 28 students who took part in the program this semester, 20 have improved attendance records and will pass freshman year. The eight who did not improve their attendance records either moved from the school district or were removed from the school for failure to meet attendance requirements. Misty Swanger, Community Educator for this initiative, saw a general improvement in the grades and behavior of the students. Executive Director Christine Haas says, "This program is a combination of early intervention and early attention. As long as the child knows that someone is watching out for them and taking an interest in them, they will not be truant. The attention factor is very important. It creates success." The intervention program has already identified 100 ninth grade students with truancy problems to work with in the coming year.

### Peoria, Arizona

*Program elements:* In Operation Save Kids, school officials contact the parents of students with three unexcused absences. Parents are expected to relay back to school officials steps they have taken to ensure their children regularly attend school. When students continue to be truant, cases are referred to the local district attorney. To avoid criminal penalty and a \$150 parent fine, youth are required to participate in an intensive counseling program, and parents must attend a parenting skills training program.

*Results:* Since Operation Save Kids began two years ago, daytime juvenile property crime rates have declined by 65 percent. Truancy citywide has been cut in half. "Look at today's

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truant, and you're looking at tomorrow's criminal," says Assistant City Attorney Terry Bays Smith.

### Bakersfield, California

*Program elements:* A consortium of school districts in Kern County, California has formed the Truancy Reduction Program. Local schools reach out to youth with a history of truancy through parent contact, peer tutoring, and mentoring services. Persistently truant youth are referred to the County Probation Office. Probation officers visit parents at home one-on-one, check on the youth at school weekly, and in the majority of cases, refer youth and their families to one or more needed social service agencies. The County Probation Office and local school continue to track the youth for a full year before making referral to the local District Attorney's Office.

*Results:* "The majority of graduates of the Truancy Reduction Program's first year no longer present a truancy problem," according to the Kern County Public Schools Coordinator, Steve Hageman. Over a fifth of that 1994 class had perfect school attendance records in the year following their participation.

### Resources

The U.S. Department of Justice provides federal funding to states to implement local delinquency prevention programs, including programs that address truancy. Many of these programs address risk and protective factors. A large portion of the funding has come from the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Formula Grants Program that is administered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs. For more information contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 1-800-638-8736.

Under a jointly-funded project, the Department of Justice and the Department of Education have developed a training and technical assistance project to help communities develop or enhance truancy prevention/intervention programs and programs that target related problems of youth out of the education mainstream. Training and technical assistance will be made available to 10 jurisdictions through a competitive application process in 1996. For more information contact Ron Stephens at the National School Safety Center, 805-373-9977.

For more information about the information presented in this guide, please call the U.S. Department of Education Safe and Drug Free Schools Office at 202-260-3954.

*Prepared by the U.S. Department of Education with input from the U.S. Department of Justice and in consultation with local communities and the National School Safety Center.*

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For additional copies, please call 1-800-624-0100

## **Families First Agenda: Fighting for America's Working Families**

Democrats are proud to announce the Families First Agenda -- a set of realistic proposals to encourage responsibility, promote personal and economic security and create greater opportunity. Americans have had their fill of empty promises and meaningless talk of revolution. They need the kind of change that makes a difference in their homes, in their neighborhoods, and in their children's schools. They're ready for moderation. That's what Democrats are offering -- moderate, modest and achievable changes that will help families that are struggling just to pay the bills, educate their children, and save for retirement.

### ***Why Families First?***

In today's economy, it's hard for families to get ahead. Parents are working harder and longer and too many work second or third jobs just to pay the bills. Instead of looking forward to the day when their child earns a college degree and gets a good-paying job, too many parents wonder if they will be able to afford college tuition at all. And after a lifetime of working hard and playing by the rules, their dreams of a secure retirement are clouded by shaky or non-existent pensions.

These families and their concerns need to come first for a change. Parents deserve help affording a good education for their kids, and they should know the pensions they've worked for are secure. Parents should be able to send kids to school knowing they'll be safe, and more children should have access to quality health care. This is the least we can do to help families who already face difficult challenges in an increasingly competitive economy.

### ***What's Different About the Families First Agenda***

The Families First Agenda is different because of what it does not do. It does not offer a new bureaucratic program for every problem we face. People don't want big government solutions and they don't want empty promises. They want a course that is reasonable, help that is realistic and solutions that can be delivered. The Families First Agenda does not propose massive spending programs or unrealistic goals. This is a moderate, achievable common-sense agenda that will improve people's daily lives, and not increase the size of government.

## ***What's in the Families First Agenda***

In the Families First Agenda, Democrats offer realistic, moderate and achievable ways to help every struggling family. They can be described in terms of three main principles: security, opportunity and responsibility.

### **Security**

- Paycheck security: helping families get the paycheck they deserve.
- Health care security: expanding access to quality health care for children.
- Retirement security: making pensions more available and portable.
- Personal security: making our neighborhoods, communities and schools safer places to live, work and learn.

### **Opportunity**

- Educational opportunity: making college and vocational school tax deductible and other ways to make it easier for parents to make sure their kids get better paying jobs.
- Economic opportunity: helping small businesses to prosper.

### **Responsibility**

- Government responsibility: balancing the federal budget, while protecting fundamental commitments like Medicare.
- Individual responsibility: real welfare reform and a crack-down on parents who won't support their children and efforts to prevent teen pregnancy.
- Corporate responsibility: hands off employee pensions, end tax breaks that encourage companies to move American jobs overseas and basic protection of our environment.

## ***Democrats: Ready to Lead***

Americans sent a powerful message in 1994: they were tired of a government that promised too much and delivered too little. But Americans didn't get the change they voted for. Republicans saw the 1994 election not as an opportunity to fix what's wrong with government, but as a license to destroy what's right -- like education, Medicare, and sensible protections to keep our air clean and our water safe.

Democrats heard America's outcry against the Republican "revolution" and fought the wrong-headed proposals. But it's not enough to say what we stand against -- we have responsibility to tell America what a Democratic Congress would stand for. That's what we've put together the Families First Agenda. As you read more about the proposals that the new Democratic Congress would work to accomplish, we hope you'll agree that this agenda is truly for families, for a change.

## **Paycheck Security**

Each month at kitchen tables across America, parents sit down with their checkbooks and a stack of bills. Exhausted from working too hard for a paycheck that disappears too fast, they wonder how they'll ever manage to provide the quality of life and good education they dream of for their children.

Just to keep up, parents are having to work longer hours and take second and third jobs. More women are joining the workforce, and bringing home a desperately needed second paycheck. Yet no matter how hard families work, their income never seems to keep up with the soaring costs of day-to-day living. Choices between providing a safe home or affording a college education are not choices parents should have to make.

Democrats believe that we can make families more secure by making sure they get the paycheck they deserve -- and that it's enough to pay the bills. That's why the Families First Agenda calls for paying women at the same level as men who do the same jobs. The whole family suffers if a woman isn't paid what she deserves. We also need to make child care more affordable for working families. And we need to make sure that American workers are competing in a fair market, so that their jobs aren't threatened by competition from illegal child labor abroad.

### **The Families First Agenda calls for:**

- **Paying Women What They Deserve.** By better enforcing the laws already on the books requiring equal pay for women and by offering voluntary "fair pay" guidelines for businesses, we can help make sure women get the pay they deserve.
- **Making Quality Child Care More Affordable.** Families shouldn't have to cut corners on child care, but with quality care priced at thousands of dollars a year, many families have no choice. That's why Democrats are proposing a bigger tax break to help parents afford quality child care.
- **Banning Imports Made with Child Labor.** American workers shouldn't have to compete with illegal child labor from abroad. Products manufactured in violation of a nation's child labor laws would be banned from entering the United States.

## Health Care Security

A parent's worst fear is a sick child. To see a child full of promise and dreams for the future held back by pain and suffering is heartbreaking. Many parents with sick children face the added agony of being unable to get the best possible care for their children -- to give them the greatest chance at a healthy, happy future -- because they simply don't have the money to pay for it.

For too many American families, quality health care is a luxury they can't afford. Even in families with both parents working, health care is often priced out of reach, because many employers don't offer health benefits and buying a family policy on their own is outrageously expensive. That means millions of kids don't have health care, and without health care, even a minor childhood illness can become a major catastrophe.

Democrats believe that our first obligation should be to our children. Putting families first means putting kids first -- fighting to keep them healthy and strong, without emptying their parents' wallets. Children are much less expensive to insure than whole families -- yet few insurance companies allow families to purchase "kids-only" health plans. Democrats want to change that, and make health care for America's children available, accessible, and affordable.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Kids-Only Health Plans.** We'll require private insurance companies to offer special "kids-only" health plans, with sound benefits to protect children. These health plans will follow a set of common-sense rules: that children can't be denied or dropped from health coverage if they get sick, or if their families move. We'll also offer assistance for working families to help make kids-only health policies affordable.

## Retirement Security

Many Americans can't afford to worry about a secure retirement until it's too late. Preoccupied with paying the bills and keeping their kids clothed, fed, and schooled, many parents don't realize the limits of their pension plans until they're ready to retire and there's nothing they can do.

Retirement security can also easily be thrown into jeopardy. Elderly couples get their fixed income pensions dramatically cut because of a company bankruptcy or merger. Middle-aged workers forced to change jobs lose years of equity in their pension plan. Widows learn after it's too late that their husbands have unwittingly signed away their survivor benefits.

Democrats want to make your pension more secure and more flexible. We want to give more people access to pensions -- including employees of small businesses. We want to let you take your pension with you if you change jobs. We want to give families the flexibility to use their IRA to buy a first home or pay for college tuition. We want to protect widows from unethical insurance companies who try to mislead them into signing away their survivor benefits. Most important, Democrats want to stop companies from raiding employee pensions.

### The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Pension Reform and Protection.** Stiffer penalties for abuse of pensions and a crack-down on companies that use the money you've earned and saved as their piggy bank.
- **Making Pensions Portable.** With so many people changing jobs in today's fast-paced economy, it's important that workers be allowed to take their pension with them from job to job.
- **Expanding Pension Coverage.** Democrats would make it easier for small businesses to offer pensions and expand IRAs to another 20 million families earning up to \$100,000 a year.
- **Protecting Women's Pension Benefits.** Protecting widows from losing pension benefits by developing standard easy-to-read consent forms which companies selling pensions must use.

## **Personal Security**

Our kids face enough challenges getting ahead in the world without having to cope with random violence. But all across America, violence from drugs and gangs is creeping into the halls of our schools and the streets of our neighborhoods. Children today don't have to look for trouble; it comes to them. And it's not a problem just in our inner cities. Parents across the nation -- in cities, suburbs and small towns alike -- are increasingly worried about their children's safety.

No one will ever come up with a single magic solution to the crime problem. But we can take a strong step in the fight against crime by giving our police and community leaders the tools they need to tackle violence and to combat the influence of drugs.

Democrats want to make sure we have enough police on our streets, and will work to keep the promise of 100,000 new police officers for our local communities. We need to make sure our kids are taught to avoid violence, and that means giving judges greater power to intervene with kids the first time they commit a crime -- before it's too late. Democrats will also help local community groups offer supervised places where kids can go after school to stay out of trouble.

### **The Families First Agenda calls for:**

- **Putting More Cops on the Beat.** Putting police on our streets who know our communities has proven very effective in fighting crime. Democrats would extend this popular program for two years, putting 125,000 police in our neighborhoods.
- **Keeping Kids off the Streets and out of Gangs.** Democrats want to give judges more flexibility in dealing with youth offenders, and offer incentives to get kids off the streets before they start causing trouble.
- **Cleaning Drugs out of Our Schools and Testing Drug Offenders.** Every schoolchild should understand the dangers of drugs, and every drug offender should be tested for drug use.

## **Educational Opportunity**

One of a parent's proudest moments is the day a son or daughter puts on a cap and gown and receives a college diploma. But for many parents that day never comes, often because college is priced out of reach for working families. For parents lucky enough to get their children through school, the most common graduation present is thousands of dollars in student loan debt.

Education is the key to opportunity, and giving every child the chance to succeed means giving every child access to higher education. But many families are struggling to pay their monthly bills, never mind afford the skyrocketing costs of college tuition for their children.

Democrats want to offer those families a helping hand -- a way to make sure their kids get to college, without busting the family budget. That's why the Families First Agenda includes new scholarships for kids who make good grades and stay away from drugs, and new tax deductions making college and vocational school tuition tax deductible to help families afford education and job training.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **\$10,000 Tax Deductions for College & Job Training.** Families will be able to deduct up to \$10,000 from their taxes for tuition at a college, graduate school, or certified training or technical program. The deduction will also be available to recent graduates paying off interest on student loans, to help them get going in the working world without drowning in debt.
- **Two Years of College for Kids with Good Grades.** For students who are prepared to work hard, keep a B average, and stay off drugs, Democrats are prepared to offer a helping hand. Through HOPE Scholarships, we'll provide a \$1,500 tax credit for the first two years of college, enough to pay the full tuition at most community colleges or get a good start on tuition at a four-year college.

Crime-Truancy

**6/7 DRAFT...PLEASE DO NOT DISTRIBUTE****MANUAL ON TRUANCY AND YOUTH CRIME****The Problem of Truancy in America's Communities**

Too many of America's young people attend school on an irregular basis, resulting in their failure to gain a solid foundation of basic academic skills. These young people have not yet officially dropped out of school, and they are not on an extended absence due to illness. They are truant - at risk of academic failure and dropping out of school at a young age and never obtaining the skills necessary to become contributing members of society.

Because of the negative impact and costs of truancy, the issue of reducing truancy has captured the attention of the nation. While all fifty states and the District of Columbia have compulsory attendance laws that require children of certain ages to attend school, enforcement of these laws varies greatly.

<On any given day in the classrooms of Chicago, over 35,000 students are truant. An additional 21,000 are truant at least 10% of the school year. In Philadelphia 81.6% of all absences are unexcused. 25% of Milwaukee students are habitually truant. (more to be added)>

Society pays a price for truants through increased demands on the social service and criminal justice systems. High rates of truancy are linked to high dropout rates, high daytime burglary rates, and high vandalism. School drop outs - many of whom were chronic truants before dropping out - are more likely to end up on welfare and in prison than students who complete high school or college.

- ▶ In Miami 80% of youths prosecuted for criminal violations had been truant.
- ▶ In Los Angeles daytime crime dropped 9.6% after police began citing truant students.
- ▶ In San Diego 44% of violent juvenile crime occurs between 8:30 am and 1:30 pm.

Truancy is not a problem restricted to the education and law enforcement agencies. It has an even more important impact on a truant's ability to learn, develop responsibility, and complete their education requirements for graduation in order to seek further career options.

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### Users' Guide to Detering Truancy

With the active involvement of parents, educators, law enforcement personnel, juvenile and family court judges, and representatives from social services, community, and religious organizations, each school and each community needs to decide which steps it may want to take to prevent and reduce truancy.

The communities that have had the most success in deterring truancy often will promote a comprehensive strategy addressing the root causes of truancy as well as a combination of incentives and sanctions for both students and their parents. Below are the five primary elements of a comprehensive community and educational strategy to combat truancy.

1. *Apply firm sanctions for truancy*

School districts should communicate to their students that they have zero tolerance for truancy. State legislatures have found that linking truancy to such items as a student's grades or driver's license can work to reduce the problem. Delaware, Connecticut, and several other states have daytime curfews during school hours that allow law enforcement officers to question youth to determine if their absence is legitimate. In a few states, including New York, a student with a certain number of unexcused absences will be failed in his or her courses. A school can suspend a student for truancy in such states as West Virginia. A Wisconsin judge may, among other options, order a truant to attend counseling or to attend an education program designed for him or her.

2. *Create meaningful incentives for parents to reduce truancy*

Many states have also begun sanctioning parents who do not support regular attendance. In some states parents who fail to see that their child attends school may be subject to fine or imprisonment or both. In addition, the fine amount can be increased for each period of truancy. A parent can also be sentenced to complete a parenting education program, or be ordered to perform six months of community service in the child's school district. In Oklahoma, a family may not receive public assistance if a child does not attend school 80% of the time without a valid excuse.

3. *Start initiatives at school that discourage truancy*

Truancy can be caused by such factors as student drug use, violence at or near school, association with truant friends, lack of family support for regular attendance, emotional or mental health problems, lack of a clear path to more education or work, or the inability to keep pace with academic requirements. Schools should consider developing initiatives to combat these root causes of truancy, including tutoring programs, added security measures, drug prevention initiatives, mentors through community and religious groups, a campaign for parental involvement in their

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children's school attendance, and referrals to social service agencies.

Schools should also find new ways to engage their students in learning including such hands-on options as career academies, school-to-work opportunities, and community service. In addition, school, community, and business leaders should help high school students find part-time jobs or work-study experiences and should connect these students to opportunities for higher education.

**4. *Involve local law enforcement in truancy reduction efforts***

In order to effectively enforce school attendance policies, school officials should establish close linkages with local police, probation officers, and juvenile and family court officials. These agencies have responsibility for assisting in the enforcement of these policies and in the adjudication of students who violate truancy laws. Many communities have found that police sweeps of neighborhoods in which truants are often found is one of the most effective parts of their comprehensive truancy strategy.

**5. *Involve parents in all truancy prevention activities***

For families and schools to work together to solve problems like truancy, there must be mutual trust and communication. Schools should be "family-friendly" by enabling teachers and a parent to stay in regular contact even before problems arise. Schools may want to consider arranging convenient times and neutral settings for parent meetings, starting homework hotlines, training teachers to work with parents, using a home-school liaison, and giving parents a voice in school decisions.

**Model Truancy Reduction Initiatives**

Each community needs to determine how it will reduce and deter truancy. Below are examples of some communities that have addressed truancy in a comprehensive manner, using some of the elements discussed above.

**Cincinnati, Ohio**

*Program elements:* Outside parties monitor attendance in the Cincinnati Public Schools. After two unexcused absences, the affected student, teacher, parents, and attendance monitor will begin to work on the problem. After five additional absences, a truancy complaint is filed in the Hamilton County Juvenile Court. At that point the court will detail a solution that combats the causes of the truancy. If the parents are enabling or causing the problem, then a complaint will be filed against them.

*Results:* <getting this info>

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**New Haven, Connecticut**

*Program elements:* The Youth Mentorship Program targets middle school students who have just begun to have problems. Targeted students go to truancy court, at which a panel of high school students question them, trying to identify solutions. After court, youth and attorney mentors are assigned to each student for support. The student and the court sign an agreement, and after two months, students return to the court to report on their progress.

*Results:* <preliminary outcomes show that referred students are attending school every day - more info to follow>

**Rohnert Park, California**

*Program elements:* The Stop and Cite Program was designed to reduce truancy and juvenile crime in the community and to increase average daily attendance for the schools. Patrolmen issue citations to suspected truants contacted during school hours. Two citations are issued without penalty, and students are returned to school to meet with their parents and a vice principal. The third citation results in referral to appropriate support services.

*Results:* During the program's first year in operation, daytime burglaries in Rohnert Park decreased 49 percent; during the second year, an additional 16 percent decrease was noted. Over the same two year period, vandalism decreased 35 percent, thefts decreased 12 percent and the savings to the community due to such improvement amounted to \$262,000. The program continues to have community support and to be effective in reducing truancy.

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

*Program elements:* Parents, police, and the school system focus on the causes of truancy in the Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression or TABS initiative in Milwaukee. Attendance is taken every period in high school. Local police officers pick up truant students and bring them to a Boy's and Girl's Club for counseling. Parents are called at home automatically every night if their child did not attend school. If the parent is not supportive of regular school attendance, then the district attorney is contacted.

*Results:* In a recent sample of students who went through the TABS process, 73% returned to school the next day, 66% remained in school on the 15th day, and 64% are in school 30 days later. Since the TABS initiative began, daytime burglary has decreased 33% and daytime aggravated batter has decreased 29%.

Atlantic County, New Jersey

*Program elements:* The Atlantic County Project Helping Hand receives referrals from six Atlantic City and four Pleasantville elementary schools for youth in K through eighth grades who have five to 15 days of unexcused absences. A truancy worker meets with the youth and family to provide short-term family counseling, usually up to eight sessions. Referrals for additional social services are made on an as needed basis. If the family fails to keep appointments, home visits are made to encourage cooperation. Once a truancy problem is corrected the case is closed and placed on an aftercare/monitoring status with contact made at 30, 60, and 90 day intervals to insure that no continued truancy has gone unreported.

*Results:* During 1995, the project served 293 youth. 262 cases were positively terminated.

Norfolk, Virginia

*Program elements:* The Norfolk, Virginia school district uses U.S. Department of Education software to collect data on students who either are tardy, cut class, leave grounds without permission, are truant but brought back to school by police, or are absent without cause. Each school has a team comprised of teachers, parents, and school staff that examines the data to understand truancy trends. For example, a team may try to pinpoint particular locations where truant students are found during school hours and then place additional monitors in these locations. A team might also notice certain months when truancy is prevalent and then design special programs to curb truancy during those months.

*Results:* "Attendance offenses" at Norfolk middle schools have dropped 23% since the 1991-92 school year. <currently researching high school info>

Marion, Ohio

*Program elements:* The Community Service Early Intervention Program focuses on potential truants during their freshman year. Referred students are required to attend tutoring sessions as directed, give their time to community service projects, and participate in a counseling program. In addition, students are required to give back to the Intervention initiative by sharing what they have learned with new students in the program and by recommending other who might benefit.

Parental participation is required throughout the program. Upon completion of the six-week sequence, school records relative to truancy are nullified. If the student fails the program, formal court intervention is the next step.

*Results:* Of the 28 students who took part in the program this semester, 20 have improved attendance records and will pass their freshman year. Misty Swanger, who works for the program,

notes a general improvement in the grades and behavior of the students. The eight who did not improve their attendance records either moved from the school district or were removed from the school for failure to meet attendance requirements.

Inglewood, California

*Program elements:* Designed for intervention with students in grades five through 12, Project HOPE provides schooling for students picked up in truancy sweeps and an alternative placement for students who have been suspended or expelled. The primary goal is to educate high-risk students in a small, success-oriented academic atmosphere. Since the inception of this initiative, police records show lowered daytime burglary rates.

*Results:* Dr. Joseph Willie Steele, coordinator of Project Hope, said the program "is very effective in reducing crime rates...through counseling and direct intervention."

For More Information

For more information, please call the U.S. Department of Education Safe and Drug Free Schools Office at 202-260-3954.

*Prepared by the U.S. Department of Education in consultation with local communities, the National School Safety Center, and the U.S. Department of Justice.*

## NYPD Truancy Statistics for First Two Years of Truancy Squad Initiative

*Crime-Truancy*

	School Yr. 1994-95	School Yr. 1995-96
Truants Returned to Schools	just under 42,000	just over 45,000
Runaways Located	595	726
Firearms Recovered	97	30
Other Weapons Recovered	530	325
Summons Issued	3,567	4,700
Juvenile Arrests	3,336	just under 3,000
Other Arrests of non-juveniles by Truancy Squad	1,933	1,200

**Some Highlights:**

- 107 guns have been confiscated from truants since the program's inception
- 1,321 runaways were found and returned to their families or referred to an appropriate social service intervention
- 855 other dangerous weapons were confiscated such as knives, box cutters, etc..
- The Board of Education estimates that every day, about 150,000 children, 15% of students, are absent from New York City Schools. While it is not known how many of these are truant, it is clear that a significant number of children are absent without cause are engaged in or become victims of criminal behavior.
- One third of all robbery suspects in 1992, who were described by their victims as 15 years of age or younger, committed their robberies during school hours, 9 a.m.- 3 p.m.