

Kansas Department of

Social and Rehabilitation Services

Janet Schalansky, Secretary

House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee
February 11, 2004

Truancy Program Update

Integrated Service Delivery

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Representative Loyd and members of the committee, I am Candy Shively, Deputy Secretary with SRS. I appear today to provide information on SRS policies regarding children not attending school and truancy programs in the state of Kansas.

The Kansas Code for Care of Children [K.S.A. 38-1502(6)] as currently written, includes children who are not attending school as required by law (commonly referred to as "truancy") in its definition of "child in need of care". The statutes on compulsory school attendance [K.S.A 72 -1113] place responsibility with the schools for determining the validity of excuses for absences and require the schools to designate one or more employees as responsible for notifying SRS or the county/district attorney of un-excused non-attendance.

For a child 7 through 12 years of age, a report of non-school attendance requires a family based assessment by SRS to determine what intervention or services are necessary to ameliorate the contributing factors causing the truancy. Complaints of non-school attendance by an individual other than the person designated by the school to make such reports shall be accepted for assessment if the report contains information alleging the children may be in need of care for reasons in addition to school non-attendance. For non-attendance only, the reporter should contact the school directly.

Reports of non-school attendance of children age 13 through 17 years of age are reported directly to the county or district attorney. If a report is made to SRS for reasons of non-attendance only (there is no other allegation or suspicion that the child may be in need of care), the reporter may be asked to make the report to the county or district attorney or SRS may take the information and forward it to the county or district attorney. Such reports will not be assigned for investigation as SRS does not have authority to investigate these reports.

Kansas communities have responded to truancy concerns with a variety of programs. Some counties have used family or mental health services while other counties have used the legal system to address truancy.

One of the unique programs in Kansas is the Riley County *Get Smart Program*, developed by the Riley County attorney's office in partnership with the local SRS office. The voluntary intervention program for youth age 7 through 17 years, consists of an orientation meeting with the youth and their parents, home visits, one on one meetings with the youth, verification of attendance, and access to community based services. If no improvement is seen through the use of the program, a Child in Need of Care (CINC) petition may be filed by the county attorney's office. This program has been successful in preventing out of home placement in Riley county.

In Shawnee County a community planning team has been developed to address school attendance and truancy. Shawnee County projects include:

- School Liaison who serves as the point of contact for school districts, parents, and community service providers to receive information about truancy, school attendance policies and available community resources for at-risk students.
- Community Care Case Management services which provides clothing, drug/alcohol screenings and treatment, lice eradication, medical and mental health services, connections to financial aid, support services, including wake up calls to parents and transportation.
- School-Based Community Care Coalition which provides intensive case management services. The Coalition utilizes an incentive model and has targeted 120 at risk students with the purpose of increasing school attendance.
- Community Service Program for Suspended and Expelled Students which is beginning a pilot project this year to provide an alternative option for students who have long-term suspensions or are expelled from school. This program also includes a public awareness campaign about the importance of school attendance and the benefits of mentoring.

SRS has been active in supporting communities as they work with older youth who fall outside of SRS responsibility. An example of a program for older youth is offered in both Bourbon and Linn Counties. These counties have truancy court programs which are voluntary programs offered as an alternative to filing a CINC petition. These programs are based on teen courts in which the truant youth appears before a jury of their peers. All participants are required to complete community services. The jury may assign the youth to a drug and alcohol awareness group or require the youth to complete a written report, view videos or other tasks. Participants have 90 days to complete their assigned sentence. Upon successful completion of the program, the case is dismissed and a CINC hearing in district court is avoided. Youth who serve as the jury bailiffs and clerks are solicited from the community and have to meet academic and other criteria to serve.

Truancy programs viewed as successful in other states have similar components to the programs in Kansas. One of the essential elements of a successful program includes maintaining student/parent involvement in all stages of truancy prevention activities. Other essential elements include involvement of school officials, social service agencies, volunteers and mentors, law enforcement and court systems.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information on truancy programs. I will be happy to respond to questions.