



# PARTICIPANT GUIDE

## *Community Responses to Truancy: Engaging Students in School*

A Live National Satellite Broadcast

*Produced by the*  
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
U.S. Department of Justice

*And the*  
Juvenile Justice Telecommunications Assistance Project  
Eastern Kentucky University—Training Resource Center

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# **AGENDA**

## **Community Responses to Truancy: Engaging Students in School**

**April 30, 2003**

\*All times listed are EDT and approximate

- 1:00-1:30 PM Pre-conference Site Activities; Test Slate
- 1:30-1:37 PM Overview Videotape and Welcome
- 1:37-1:47 PM Panel Discussion-The National Perspective
- 1:47-1:52 PM Video-Collaboration
- 1:52-2:05 PM Panel Discussion-Participant Call-in
- 2:05-2:10PM Video-Strategies
- 2:10-2:25 PM Panel Discussion/Participant Call-in
- 2:25-2:30 PM Video – Public Awareness
- 2:30-2:45 PM Panel Discussion/Participant Call-in
- 2:45-2:50 PM Resource Presentation
- 2:50-3:00 PM Closing Comments
- 3:00 PM Sign-off

## **Broadcast Overview**

### **Community Responses to Truancy: Engaging Students in School**

Every day, hundreds of thousands of youth are absent from school, many with no valid reason. Truancy is the first sign of trouble; the first indicator that a child is giving up and losing his or her way. When young people start skipping school, it is a signal to 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 indicates that students who are truant are more likely to drop out of school, putting themselves at a long-term disadvantage of becoming productive citizens. Truancy has also been found to be associated with substance abuse, gang activity, and involvement in criminal activities such as burglary, auto theft, shoplifting and vandalism.

The causes of chronic truancy are varied and may be unique to each youth and family. Research indicates that in many cases there is a combination of factors that impact the student's absenteeism, including family challenges, school climate, economic conditions, language barriers, health matters, and individual student needs.

The critical first step in preventing truancy is for schools to have a clear attendance policy, and to ensure that all students and parents are made aware of their responsibilities and the sanctions that will be imposed if they are absent. The attendance policy should explain why regular attendance is important and also identify the steps that schools will take to intervene with students who are absent. Schools and other partners should find effective ways to publicize the policy, taking into account language barriers and different cultural practices.

Within the school's attendance policy, it is important to recognize that unexcused absences are only part of the problem. Many students have long patterns of absenteeism, but are not considered truant because those absences were excused. However, if students are not in school, regardless of the reason, they miss out on a valuable education and are at risk of the same negative outcomes. This means that alternatives need to be available for students who are unable to attend school, but are excused due to health problems or other reasons.

Another key component to truancy prevention is to involve schools, students and parents in identifying the absenteeism as soon as possible. Many schools have put into place an efficient attendance-tracking system, which enables the schools to identify students that need intervention before their truant behavior becomes chronic.

An important part of preventing truancy means incorporating incentives for students to attend school on a regular basis. In many cases, recognizing good or improved school attendance can be a stronger motivator than punishment for poor school attendance.

For any prevention effort, but especially when it comes to truancy prevention, a collaborative approach is needed that engages schools and a comprehensive array of community resources such as social services, mental health organizations, community based organizations, probation, law enforcement, the courts, the business community, parents and faith-based organizations. These partnerships are critical to ensuring that students and families are able to access the resources needed, and reinforces the fact that truancy is a community-wide problem.

Truancy prevention and intervention efforts should work to increase students' attachment to school and help them overcome the personal, family and community impediments to school attendance. The program should be designed to individually address the varied and complex root causes of an individual student's absenteeism. These issues might include drug use, lack of direction in school, violence in the student's family or community, chronic health issues, academic difficulties, or lack of connectedness to adults at school. In addition to addressing individual student factors, it is important to take a wider look at school and community policies and practices that could be established or changed to support the truancy reduction goals. A comprehensive approach to the problem helps insure that the unique needs of each child can be met, while also offering a greater community-wide change regarding the issue of truancy.

Addressing truancy is one of the first ways that a community can reach out to help a troubled young person or a family in crisis. During today's videoconference, you will learn about many of the underlying reasons for truant behavior and about some strategies that have been successful in preventing and intervening with truant youth.

## **Featured Programs**

### **King County Superior Court, Seattle, Washington**

The King County Superior Court truancy reduction project consists of a multi-tiered approach to families involved in the truancy petition process of the Juvenile Court.

- **Attendance Workshops:** Offered as an alternative to the formal court process, this 2-1/2 hour intervention covers the rights and responsibilities for schools, Washington State truancy law, small group discussion about different intervention efforts, and contract development by the parent and youth. Students may be ordered to appear in court if attendance does not improve.
- Case Managers may be assigned to work with families to identify and access community-based and school-based programs such as family counseling (including a dedicated Functional Family Therapy program), wrap-around services, individual counseling, mentoring and advocacy services.
- **Community Truancy Boards:** Consultation and training services are offered to schools and school districts in King County to develop community-based, volunteer-staffed truancy boards which may take the place of the first, formal truancy hearing in Juvenile Court. Community members act as mediators and facilitators in the creation of an agreement between the youth, parent and school in an effort to address the underlying reasons for the truant behavior.
- **Contracted Services:** King County Superior Court contracts for truancy intervention services with community agencies in an effort to improve community and school response to truancy.

For more information contact:

At-Risk Youth Program King County Superior Court 1401 East Jefferson, #506 Seattle, WA

98122 Phone: 206-205-9335 Fax: 206-296-1493

Kaki Dimock, At-Risk Youth Programs Manager

[kaki.dimock@metrokc.gov](mailto:kaki.dimock@metrokc.gov)

Web address: <http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/KingCountyPage.html>

### **State Attorney's Office, Jacksonville, Florida**

The State Attorney's office has provided a pre-court diversion program for several years for truant youth and their families. When families are referred to the program, a meeting takes place with the parent, youth, school attendance social worker, and a hearing officer. A contract is made

that includes plans for reducing truancy, services, and community supports. A case manager makes home visits and monitors the family and compliance with the plan. Two case managers have been added to monitor attendance at 30 schools and make sure that statute driven interventions take place at the school level.

For more information contact:

State Attorney's Office

Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida

330 E. Bay Street

Jacksonville, FL 32202

Phone: 904-630-2075

Fax: 904-630-1848

Shelley Grant-Program Coordinator

Shelleyg@coj.net

Web address: <http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/JacksonVillePage.html>

Additional link: [www.jaxtruancy.com](http://www.jaxtruancy.com)

## **Louisville Truancy Program, Louisville, KY**

The Louisville Truancy Program and model is a strength-based, family focused intervention program created to address the root causes of truancy. This program, initiated by interested leaders within the community, often Judges, rallies the support of all community agencies that may or should have impact on the child's life, both social and academic. The Community team consisting of Judicial officers, school personnel, social service providers, mental health and chemical dependency providers identify families where implementation of intensive services would effectively assist in the identification and resolution of family barriers to school attendance.

The uniqueness of this program is that it takes place at the school, with the "team" making weekly school visits and the case manager for the family providing regular contact with the family during the week. The resulting interventions are timely and are directly suited to the family as opposed to a "one size fits all" mentality. *This program is easily reproducible within communities as evidenced by the nearly three dozen sites up and running across the country.*

Judge Joan Byer

Jefferson County Family Court

Judicial Center

700 W. Jefferson St Ste 220

Louisville, KY 40202-4730

[joanb@mail.aoc.state.ky.us](mailto:joanb@mail.aoc.state.ky.us)

## **Suffolk County Probation Department, Yaphank, NY**

The mission of the Truancy Reduction Project in the South Country Middle School is to significantly reduce and prevent truancy using a multi-agency approach. A probation officer housed in the school acts as a truancy case manager who assesses and addresses the underlying causes of chronic truancy. In addition to case management for the chronically truancy youth, there are currently two school-wide interventions in place. The first is BEST (Be Educated Stop Truancy), which uses rewards and positive peer reinforcement rather than sanctions to improve attendance and school engagement. The three components focus equally on the individual and the school community. Teams of five in each homeroom compete monthly for incentives for the group with best attendance. This forges alliances among students, encouraging them to support each other. In addition, each individual student with perfect attendance enters a drawing for prizes. Youth with perfect attendance for 3 months are invited to watch a movie during school. Students with marked improvement are recognized along with their parents at an informal breakfast with school staff. Finally, a VIP lunchroom has been established for students with perfect attendance the previous month. Youth are able to listen to music and receive additional incentives.

The second school-wide program is the Truancy Homeroom, where students with five absences are placed for two weeks. During that time, an informational letter is sent to parents, and students attend a truancy workshop and view a video about truancy. If attendance improves the student returns to homeroom. If not, the student stays with the probation officer and an intervention plan is created. If there continues to be a problem, the student is placed in the truancy reduction program and the family receives case management.

For more information contact:

South Country Truancy Reduction Project

P.O. Box 205, Yaphank Avenue Yaphank, New York 11980 Phone: 516-852-5100

Fax: 516-852-5103

Joe Borenstein, Project Coordinator

vincent.iaria@suffolk.ny.us

Linda Caldwell, Truancy Probation Officer

Phone: 631-286-4419

Web address: <http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/NewYork.html>

## **Mayor's Anti-Gang Office, Houston, Texas**

The Gulfton Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project works to reduce the incidence of truancy and associated juvenile delinquency among high-risk, ninth grade youth who reside in Houston's Gulfton community and attend Robert E. Lee High School. The program's overriding purpose is to educate the community about truancy and the need to prevent truant behavior, provide early identification, assessment and intervention with truant youth and their families, and improve juvenile and parental accountability for truancy by providing immediate and meaningful consequences. As part of the program, Houston community police officers work with the case manager to inform parents and



students about the legal obligation to attend school, and conduct short interviews and assessments with families to determine possible causes for the youth's truancy. Youth and families needing further intervention work with the case manager to access area services and assistance.

For more information contact:

Gulfton Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project

P.O. Box 1562

Houston, Texas 77251

Phone: 713-247-1576

Fax: 713-437-6510

Cenaiyda Carranza, Project Coordinator

[Cenaiyda.Carranza@cityofhouston.net](mailto:Cenaiyda.Carranza@cityofhouston.net)

Adrian Garcia, Director, Mayor's Anti-Gang Office

[Adrian.Garcia@cityofhouston.net](mailto:Adrian.Garcia@cityofhouston.net)

Web address: <http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/HoustonPage.html>

## **Stop Truancy Outreach Program (STOP), Providence, Rhode Island**

This is a statewide collaboration among the Rhode Island Family Court, the Rhode Island Department of Education, colleges and universities, various state agencies involved with children's issues, members of the corporate, law enforcement, educational, faith communities, treatment providers, and mental health agencies. This project established school-based Truancy Courts (presided by a Magistrate), which intervene early with chronic truants (youth with 10 or more unexcused absences). The Truancy Court is physically present in the schools, and, upon referral, caseworkers or truant officers complete a thorough assessment of the youth and family. The assessment assists the court in determining the causes of school absence, and provides guidance in determining next steps (e.g., individual or family counseling, educational testing, parenting classes, linkage to resources or social services). School administrators provide in-kind assistance through a truant officer, guidance counselor(s), social workers and interpreters to assist the Court. Court sessions are held weekly, and parents must accompany students to Court until the truant child attends school regularly.

For more information contact:

Truancy Court Program

J. Joseph Garrahy Judicial Complex

One Dorrance Plaza

Providence, RI 02903

Phone: 401-458-5300

Fax: 401-458-5311

Chief Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah, Jr.

[jeremiah@courts.state.ri.us](mailto:jeremiah@courts.state.ri.us)

## **Information about the National Truancy Listserv**

The OJJDP Truancy listserv is a discussion list where individuals can talk with others in the fields of Juvenile Justice, Education, and Human Services about issues regarding out-of-school youth. This is an opportunity to converse via email with others who have had similar successes and challenges in implementing truancy reduction efforts, to ask questions and share effective strategies.

If you are interested in becoming a member of this list, you can subscribe at the National Truancy Website.

Listserves: <http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/listservePage.html>

To subscribe, go to the Listserv link on the home page. From there click on the "subscribe" link and send the e-mail that appears. You will automatically be added to the list.

To be removed from the listserv, click on the "unsubscribe" link and send the e-mail that appears. You will automatically be removed from the list.

## *Truancy Resource Guide*

Below is a selection of pertinent articles and fact sheets on the topic of truancy reduction.

Baker, M. L., J. N. Sigmon, and M. E. Nugent, Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School, OJJDP, September 2001.

Blyth, E., and Milner, J. (Eds.) (1999). *Improving School Attendance*. London: Routledge

Cantelon, S., and D. LeBoeuf, "Keeping Young People in School: Community Programs that Work," Juvenile Justice Bulletin, OJJDP, June 1997. <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>

Collins, D. (1998). *Managing Truancy in Schools*. In R. Ribbins and J. Sayer (eds.). *Management and Leadership in Education Series*. New York, NY: Cassell.

Colorado Foundation for families and Children, (2002) *Youth out of school: Linking absence to delinquency*. Funded through the Donner Foundation.  
<http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/relevantpubPage.html>

Colorado Foundation for families and Children, (2002) *Costs and Benefits of truancy reduction efforts in Colorado*.  
<http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/relevantpubPage.html>

Colorado Foundation for families and Children, (2000) *Ten things a school can do to improve attendance*.  
<http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/relevantpubPage.html>

Epstein, Joyce L., and Steven B. Sheldon, "Present and Accounted For: Improving Student Attendance through Family and Community," Journal of Education Research, 5-6/2002, v. 95, i. 5, p. 308-320.

ERIC Clearinghouse On Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, "Urban Policies and Programs To Reduce Truancy," ERIC/CUE Digest, November 1997, n. 129.  
<http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/>

Garry, E.M. (1996). *Truancy; First Step to a Lifetime of Problems*. OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>

Hibbit, Angelika, Fogelman, Ken, & Manor, Orly. (1990). *Occupational Outcomes of Truancy*. The British Journal of Educational Psychology. Vol 60(1) pp. 23-36.

National School Safety Center News Service, (November 1996). *Truancy reduction in America's communities*, 1-5.

Reid, K. (2000). *Tackling Truancy in Schools: A practical manual for primary and secondary schools*. New York, NY: Routledge.

## *Useful Websites*

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children ([www.coloradofoundation.org](http://www.coloradofoundation.org)) has a link to the OJJDP National Truancy Reduction Website. Choose the *Truancy Website* link. The website includes descriptions of the seven national truancy reduction demonstration sites, as well as references to relevant articles on out of school youth and tools for combating truancy.

The International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention ([www.iatdp.org](http://www.iatdp.org)). IATDP's website is a resource for school administrators, teachers, and parents seeking school truancy and dropout prevention methods. It includes information about upcoming conferences, copies of articles from the IATDP journal and useful links to other publications and resources.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (<http://www.dropoutprevention.org>). NDPCN has a Model Programs Database (available through their website) that provides examples of successful truancy prevention programs. The NDPCN website also includes information about upcoming meetings and conferences, and other resources for professionals working with youth at risk of dropping out.

The National School Safety Center ([www.nsscl.org](http://www.nsscl.org)) provides viewers with products and resources that focus on school safety. They also provide training, technical assistance and school safety assessments.

Safe and Drug Free Schools Office, US Dept of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS/index.html>). This website describes the types of grants funded through this office and provides a publications link and a link to related sites.

The National Teen Court Center (<http://www.youthcourt.net/default.htm>) is a clearinghouse for information on teen courts across the country. Readers will find a national listing of teen courts with contact information, resources, publications, on-line training courses, and technical assistance around implementing a teen court.

Communities in Schools ([www.cisnet.org](http://www.cisnet.org)) is a community-based organization that connects schools with vital community resources. The website describes the five basics for school success, and provides on line training for developing communities in schools at the local level.

The National Association of School Psychologists ([www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)) provides a wealth of information, resources and publications on the emotional well-being of youth at school, at home, and in life.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>) is the official website for juvenile justice, through the U.S. Department of Justice. This website has hundreds of publications regarding juvenile justice, and provides information on funding opportunities.

# Program Panelists

## **Hon. Joan L. Byer, Judge**

**Family Court, Judicial Center 700 W. Jefferson St, Ste 220, Louisville, KY 40202-4730**

Since 1996, Judge Joan L. Byer has presided over one of the nine divisions of the Jefferson County Family Court located in Louisville, Kentucky. As a Family Court Judge, she hears cases involving divorce, custody, domestic violence, and abuse and neglect of children. Judge Byer also hears juvenile status offender cases where children come before her with truancy problems, habitual runaway problems, or whose behavior is beyond their parents' control. A 1981 graduate of Loyola Law School, Los Angeles; Judge Byer was admitted to the California Bar in 1982. She moved east to the home of the Kentucky Derby and was admitted to Kentucky's Bar in 1983. Prior to her 1996 judicial appointment, Judge Byer practiced as a civil trial attorney in the areas of domestic relations, personal injury and criminal law. As a member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Substance Abuse, Judge Byer has lectured extensively on truancy alternatives and Jefferson County's Truancy Court Diversion Project. When not in the Courthouse, Judge Byer and her husband, attorney Larry Simon, stay busy and broke with their two children, ages 10 and 13.

## **Kaki Dimock**

**At-Risk Youth Programs Manager, King County Superior Court, 1401 East Jefferson, #506  
Seattle, WA 98122 Phone: 206-205-9335 Fax: 206-296-1493**

Kaki Dimock is the At-Risk Youth Programs Manager with King County Superior Court in Seattle, Washington. She manages an OJJDP Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project, truancy and at-risk youth case managers, a Functional Family Therapy project, and the development of truancy intervention programs at the 19 school districts in King County. Prior to this, she worked to create a specialized domestic violence and sexual assault unit in Juvenile Court, developed a treatment program for juvenile domestic violence and worked in Family Court. She has an MSW from Columbia University in New York City and a BA from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

## **J. Robert Flores, Administrator**

**Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 810 7<sup>th</sup> St. NW, Washington, DC 20531**

J. Robert Flores was confirmed by the Senate on April 12, 2002, and was sworn in on April 17, 2002, as the Administrator of OJJDP, at the Office of Justice Programs of the U.S. Department of Justice. As Administrator, Bob Flores provides executive direction to the agency responsible for leading the Nation in addressing juvenile delinquency, crime, and victimization. Bob directs activities that support States and local communities in their efforts to develop and implement effective prevention and intervention programs and improve the juvenile justice system so that it protects the public safety, holds offenders accountable, and provides treatment and rehabilitative services tailored to the needs of families and each individual juvenile. Prior to his OJJDP appointment, Bob was Vice President and Senior Counsel for the National Law Center for Children and Families. Prior to that, he was Senior Trial Attorney and Acting Deputy Chief in the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Criminal Division, of the U.S. Department of Justice; he has also served as an Assistant District Attorney in Manhattan; and has acted as consultant to federal and state legislators and government officials.

**Dr. Ken Seeley, President**

**The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 303 East 17<sup>th</sup> Ave., Suite 400, Denver, CO 80203, 303-837-8466**

Dr. Seeley is the President of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children and Director of Research and Evaluation. He has served in a variety of roles related to children and families over the past 25 years in Colorado and nationally. He served as principal of the Laboratory School at the University of Northern Colorado and was a professor of education at the University of Denver. More recently he was Director of Programs at the Clayton Foundation operating direct services to high-risk families and children. He has spent the last five years investigating out of school youth and developing state level public policy to respond to the needs of suspended, expelled and truant youth. Ken is currently the principal investigator on the evaluation of the National Truancy Reduction Demonstration programs of OJJDP.

**Mindy Shannon Phelps, Moderator**

Ms. Phelps has moderated numerous national satellite videoconferences produced by OJJDP. Her Professional experience includes serving as a co-anchor of WLEX-TV's evening newscast. WLEX is an NBC affiliate located in Lexington, Kentucky. Ms. Phelps has served as Press Secretary for the Governor's Office in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

## Previous Satellite Videoconferences

Produced by the

### Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

*Conditions of Confinement in Juvenile Corrections  
and Detention Facilities*

September 1993

*Community Collaboration*

June 1995

*Effective Programs for Serious, Violent, and  
Chronic Juvenile Offenders*

October 1995

*Youth-Oriented Community Policing*

December 1995

*Juvenile Boot Camps*

February 1996

*Conflict Resolution for Youth*

May 1996

*Reducing Youth Gun Violence*

August 1996

*Youth Out of the Education Mainstream*

October 1996

*Has the Juvenile Court Outlived Its Usefulness?*

December 1996

*Youth Gangs in America*

March 1997

*Preventing Drug Abuse Among Youth*

June 1997

*Mentoring for Youth in Schools and Communities*

September 1997

*Juvenile Offenders and Drug Treatment:  
Promising Approaches*

December 1997

*Comprehensive Juvenile Justice in State  
Legislatures*

February 1998

*Protecting Children Online*

March 1998

*Youth Courts: A National Movement*

May 1998

*Risk Factors and Successful Interventions for  
Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders*

September 1998

*White House Conference on School Safety:  
Causes and Prevention of Youth Violence*

October 1998

*Juveniles and the Criminal Justice System*

December 1998

*Females and the Juvenile Justice System*

May 1999

*Promising Practices for Safe and Effective Schools*

September 1999

*Online Safety for Children: A Primer for Parents  
and Teachers*

November 1999

*Model Court Practices in Abuse and Neglect Cases*

February 2000

*Crowding in Juvenile Detention: A Problem Solving  
Approach*

April 2000

*“How Shall We Respond to the Dreams of Youth?”*

*A National Juvenile Justice Summit*

June 2000

*Combating Underage Drinking*

September 2000

*Child Delinquency: Early Intervention and  
Prevention*

November, 2000

*Employment and Training for Court-Involved  
Youth*

February, 2001

*Mental Health Issues and Juvenile Justice*

April, 2001

*Restorative Justice: Repairing Harm, Reducing  
Risk and Building Community*

June, 2001

*Going Home: Serious and Violent Offender Reentry  
Initiative*

February, 2002

*OJJDP Report: A Discussion with J. Robert Flores*

December, 2002

*Mentoring Matters*

February, 2003

### For Further Information

For videos of previous OJJDP videoconferences, please contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000; call 800-638-8736; fax 301-251-5212; or email [askncjrs@ncjrs.org](mailto:askncjrs@ncjrs.org).

For information on future OJJDP videoconferences, contact Jenny McWilliams, Juvenile Justice Telecommunications Assistance Project, Eastern Kentucky University, 301 Perkins Bldg., 521 Lancaster Ave., Richmond, KY 40475-3102; call 859-622-6671; Fax 859-622-4397; or email [ekujtjtap@aol.com](mailto:ekujtjtap@aol.com).