



Combating Truancy with Court Support

**Jennie Ponder
Tirzah N. Smith
Judge Gail Grover**



Combating Truancy with Court Support

February 25, 2025

Agenda

- I. Introduction, Agenda and Objectives
- II. Overview: Impact of Truancy and Root Cause
- III. East Baton Rouge Parish Historical Response to Truancy – Judge Grover
- IV. Truancy Assessment & Service Center (TASC) Overview – Jennie Ponder
- V. Child Welfare & Attendance – Tirzah N. Smith
- VI. East Baton Rouge Juvenile Court – Strategic Steps to Reduce Truancy and Community Stakeholders - Judge Grover
- VII. Questions & Answers

Presentation Objectives

Objective One: to provide information to attendees on the historical response by East Baton Rouge Parish schools to increase attendance by implementing a community based collaborative approach

Objective Two: to provide information to attendees on the specific actions taken by the East Baton Rouge Public School System/Child Welfare & Attendance and the legislatively mandated Truancy Assessment & Service Center Program Model to reduce truancy and chronic absenteeism

Objective Three: to provide information to attendees on the efforts implemented by the East Baton Rouge Juvenile Court to reduce truancy and provide support to children, youth, and families to reach educational goals

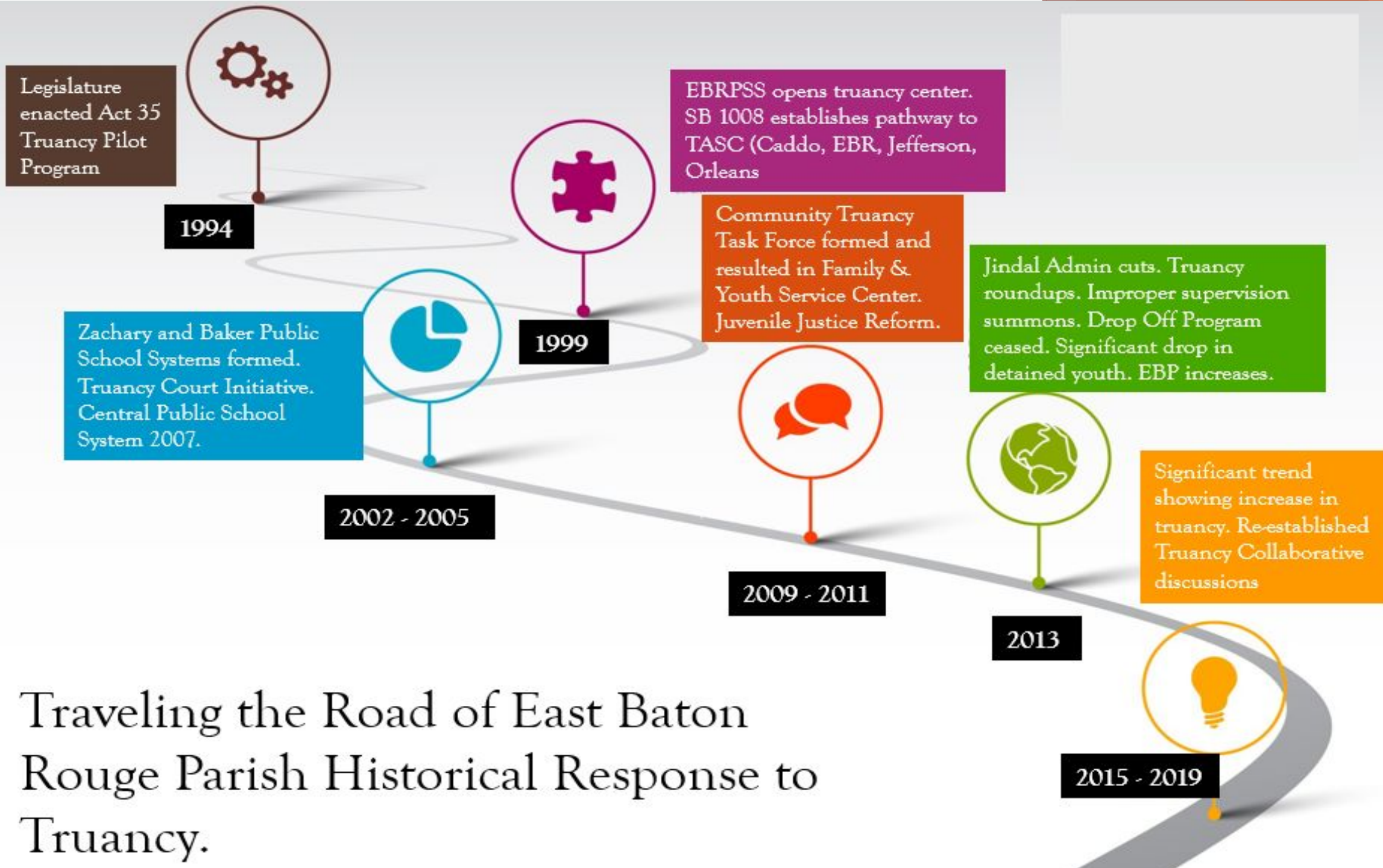


Research supports that high school graduation is a key predictive indicator of later success. Truancy is not only a barrier to graduation, oftentimes it is the intersection of youth involvement in the juvenile justice system. Intentional and collaborative efforts to reduce truancy can be the detour from juvenile justice to lead youth back to school and on the road to success.

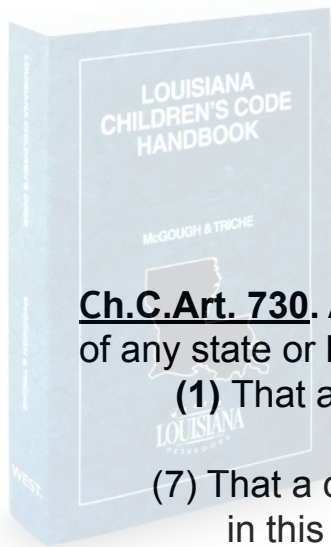
MOST COMMON ROOT CAUSE

“LIFE”





Traveling the Road of East Baton Rouge Parish Historical Response to Truancy.



School Attendance Laws

Ch.C.Art. 730. Allegations that a family is in need of services must assert whether the child is currently under the supervision of any state or local entity including, but not limited to, DCFS or DPSC/OJJ, and assert one or more of the following grounds:

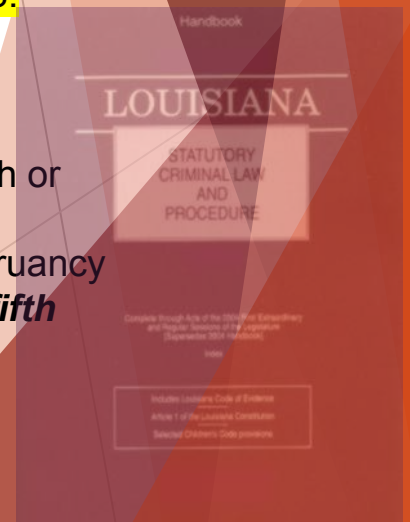
(1) That a child is truant or has willfully and repeatedly violated lawful school rules.

(7) That a caretaker has caused, encouraged, or contributed to the child's behaviors enumerated in this Article or to the commission of delinquent acts.

Ch.C. Art. 728(5). "Truant" means the repeated or habitual unauthorized absence or tardiness of a child from school pursuant to the provisions of **R.S. 17:233** by a child who is subject to the compulsory attendance laws of this state.

R.S. 14:92.2(A)(2)(c). Improper supervision of a minor by a parent or legal custodian through criminal negligence, or knowingly or willfully, permitting the minor to habitually be absent or tardy from school pursuant to the provisions of **R.S. 17:233** without valid excuse.

R.S. 17:233(A). Any student who is a juvenile and who is habitually absent from school or is habitually tardy shall be reported by visiting teachers and supervisors of child welfare and attendance to the family or juvenile court of the parish or city as a truant child, pursuant to Chapter 2 or Title VII of the Children's Code...(B)(1)(a) A student shall be considered habitually absent or habitually tardy when wither conditions exist after all reasonable efforts by any school personnel, truancy officer, or other law enforcement personnel have failed to correct the condition after the ***fifth unexcused absence or fifth unexcused occurrence of being tardy within any school semester.***



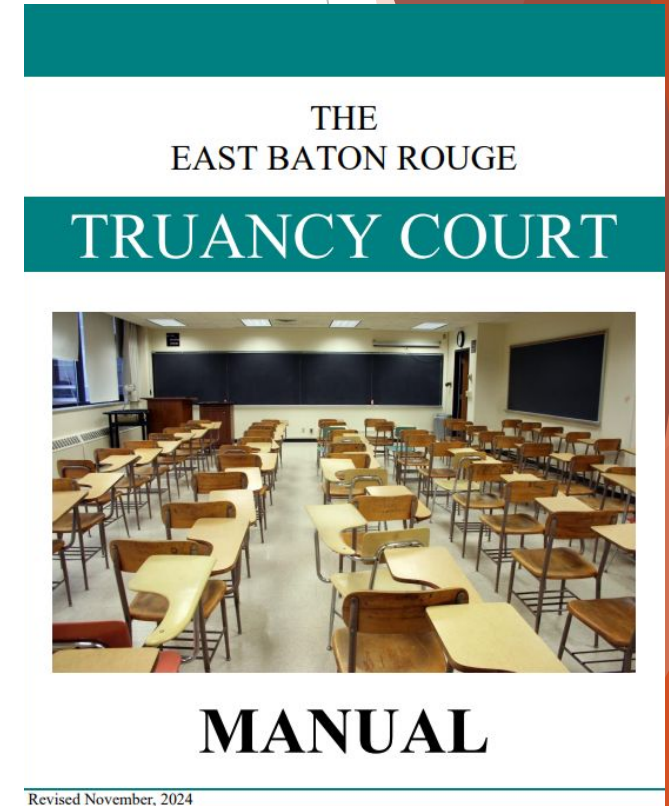


Truancy Assessment & Service Center

BACKGROUND

In the fall of 2004, the Truancy Assessment Service Center (TASC), the East Baton Rouge Parish Public School System (EBRPSS), and Juvenile Court worked together to form the East Baton Rouge Parish Truancy Court. This diversionary strategy takes a comprehensive approach to resolve truancy problems through coordination and collaboration from agencies and programs to provide wraparound services to the families referred to Truancy Court. Truancy Court is a pretrial diversionary program that uses a “mediation process” to seek solutions for egregious attendance problems.

When Truancy Court expanded to hear Middle and High School cases in 2019, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System’s Office of Child Welfare and Attendance (CW&A) began making referrals.



TASC

Truancy Assessment & Service Center

Monitored and Evaluated by Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement

TASC . . . "helping to change children at risk to children at promise"

What is TASC?

TASC provides prompt delivery of coordinated interventions to truant children and their families in order to prevent continued absences from school.

- Focuses on grades K-5
- Based on Office of Juvenile Justice Best Practice and Principles

When Did TASC Begin?

- LA Legislature began 2 pilot TASC programs in 1999

Where is TASC Today?

- 14 Sites-serving 22 parishes
- Currently serves more than 300 Louisiana Public Schools



"The first step of every child's educational journey is BEING THERE"

How/Why TASC Works?

- Early identification
- Rapid assessment
- Attention to family environmental factors
- Targeted service response
- Consistent & timely monitoring
- Proper use of FINS process
- Collaboration between school, family, law enforcement, court, and other community partners

East Baton Rouge Truancy Court

In 2005, EBR TASC worked with the EBRPSS and the East Baton Rouge Juvenile Court to develop and implement a diversionary mediation model to address egregious non-compliant cases referred to TASC and CWA. The model has shown significant outcomes for improving attendance, building positive school attachment, and improving parental involvement. Court is typically held twice a month at the EBR Juvenile Court.

Expected Long-Term Outcomes with TASC

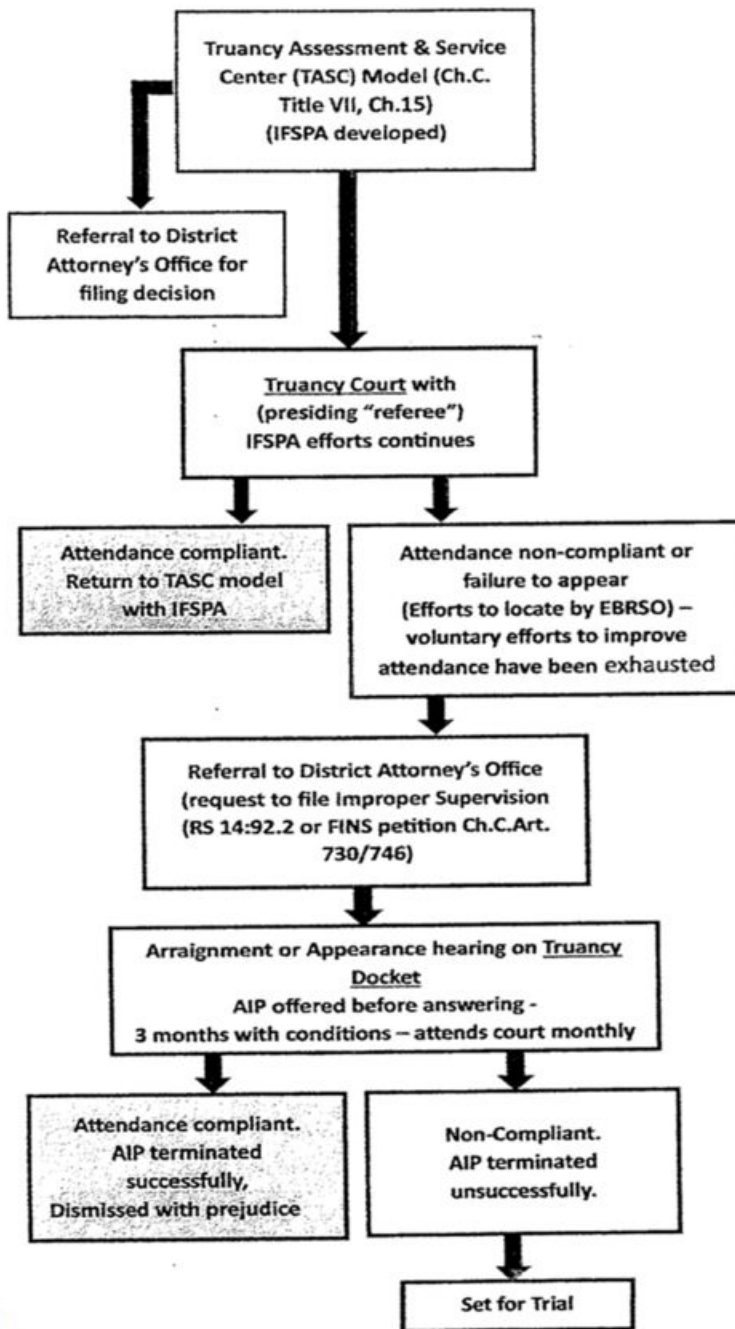
Improvement in school attendance
Improvement in academic achievement
Improvement in school behavior & conduct
Decrease in drop-out rate
Decrease in juvenile delinquency
Decrease in substance abuse
Decrease in teen pregnancy

Research Support: TASC significantly Reduces Unexcused Absences

"East Baton Rouge Parish has found an invaluable ally in TASC. We have benefited from their expertise in operations. East Baton Rouge TASC is a successful intervention program, and we are actively engaging key community stake holders to collaborate on truancy prevention initiatives. The reduction of truancy is a top priority for curbing crime and improving community safety. We believe that the TASC model of early identification, assessment and intervention is the right model to implement across our entire school system to reduce juvenile crime."

Hillar C. Moore, III, District Attorney 19th Judicial District, 2009-Present





TASC Truancy Protocol Flow Chart

"East Baton Rouge Parish has found an invaluable ally in TASC. We have benefited from their expertise in operations. East Baton Rouge TASC is a successful intervention program, and we are actively engaging key community stake holders to collaborate on truancy prevention initiatives. The reduction of truancy is a top priority for curbing crime and improving community safety. We believe that the TASC model of early identification, assessment and intervention is the right model to implement across our entire school system to reduce juvenile crime."

Hillar C. Moore, III, District Attorney 19th Judicial District, 2009 - Present





What is CWA?

The Office of Child Welfare & Attendance provides districtwide specialized support services to schools, students, and families of EBRPSS. These services include but are not limited to the following:

ATTENDANCE

- Student enrollment (for special circumstance custody cases and students entering our district who have been expelled from the sending district)
- Monitoring student attendance/truancy
- Address verifications (out of district investigations)
- Home visits as requested by the school or deemed necessary by CWA
- Vetting extenuating circumstances, student attendance plans and resource options
- Conducting district wide and school level Truancy Workshops
- Referring parents of appropriate elementary, middle and high school truancy cases to court.
- Court petitions & appearances (status, trial)
- Liaise with Counselors, ESS, 504, ESL personnel and district student support programs
- Meetings with attendance clerks, parents, teachers, school personnel, administrators, court personnel and Juvenile Judges
- Issuing Minor Work Permits

HEARINGS

- Expulsion hearings with assignment to the appropriate re-engagement center (if applicable)
- Short term suspension appeals
- School level discipline and intervention support

ATTENDANCE -IT'S THE LAW!

COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LAW

LA R.S. 17:221

SUBPART C. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

§221. School attendance; compulsory ages; duty of parents; excessive absences; consent to withdraw.

(1) Every parent, tutor, or other person residing within the state of Louisiana, having control or charge of any child from that child's **fifth birthday until his eighteenth birthday**, shall send such child to a public or private day school, unless the child graduates from high school prior to his eighteenth birthday. Any child below the age of five who legally enrolls in school shall also be subject to the provisions of this Subpart. Every parent, tutor, or other person responsible for sending a child to a public or private day school under provisions of this Subpart shall also assure the attendance of such child in regularly assigned classes during regular school hours established by the school board.

(2) Whoever violates the provisions of this Subsection or R.S. 17:234 shall be fined not more than two hundred and fifty dollars or imprisoned not more than thirty days, or both.

(3) Whoever violates any other provision of this Subpart or any other provision of law which provides for the penalty provided for in R.S. 17:221 shall be fined not more than fifteen dollars, and, for such violations, each day the violation continues shall constitute a separate offense.

(4) Visiting teachers or Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance, with the approval of the parish or city Superintendents of schools, shall file proceedings in court to enforce the provisions of this Subpart.

ATTENDANCE -IT'S THE LAW!

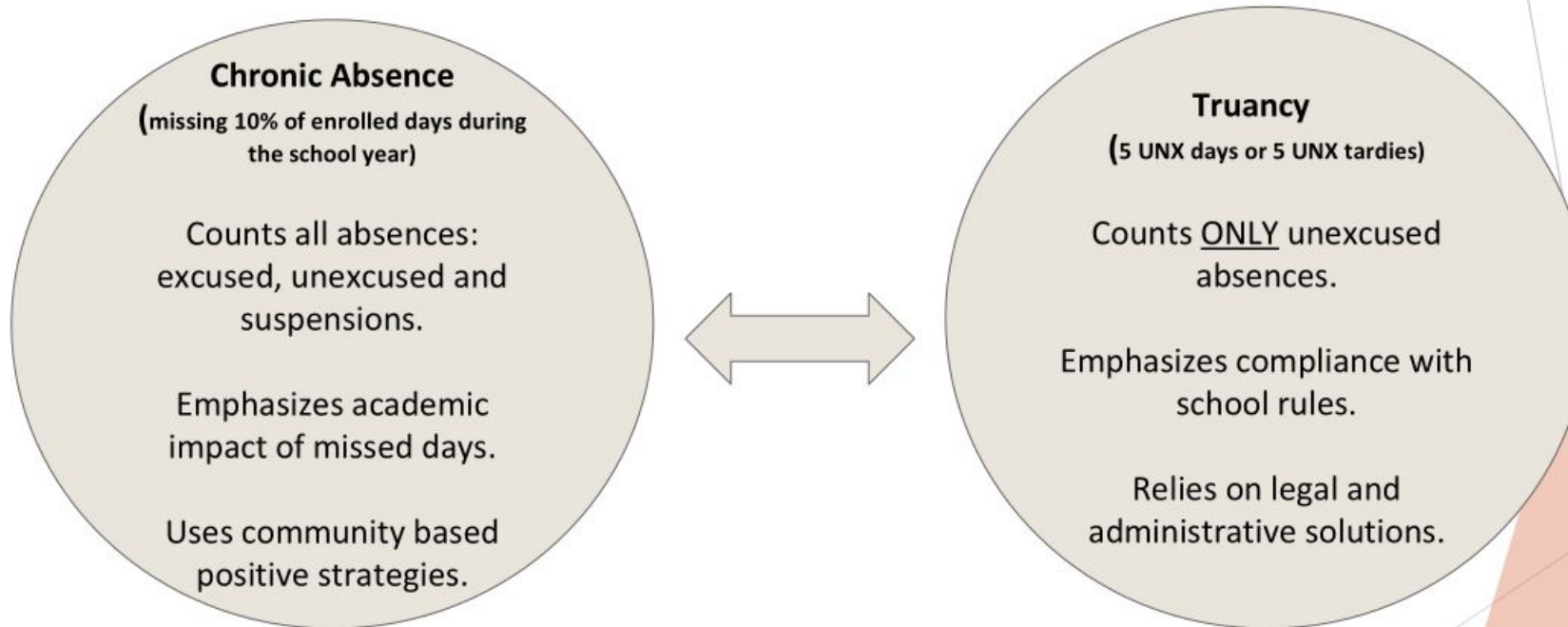
TRUANCY

LA R.S. 17:233 - A student is considered truant in Louisiana when they have accumulated five unexcused absences or five unexcused tardies.

- school is required to notify the parent of students truancy status and parental responsibility.
- Consequences of truancy
 - lower grades and standardized test scores
 - contributes to high school dropouts
 - poor outcomes later in life
 - social impacts
 - Court referral (parent)

ATTENDANCE -IT'S THE LAW!

CHRONIC ABSENCE vs TRUANCY



IN A NUTSHELL - ACTION STEPS

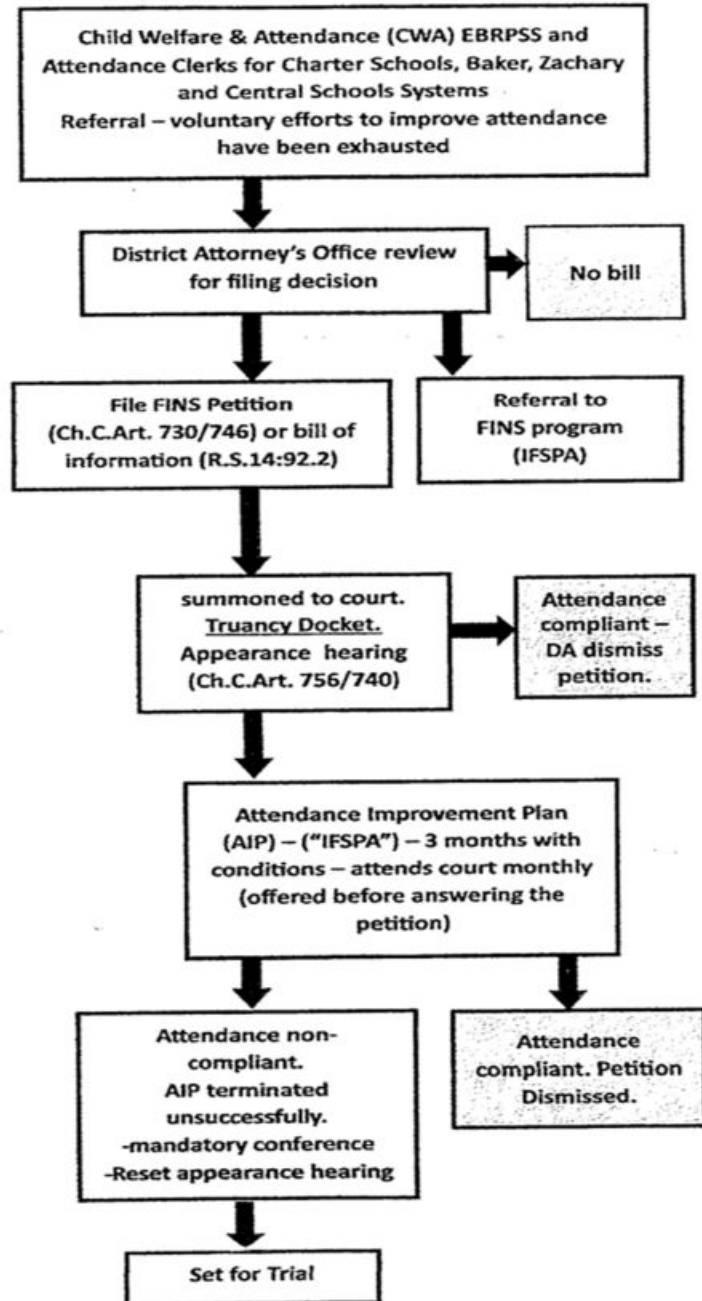


The following strategies are being implemented to address attendance and truancy for the district.


- CWA Supervisors/TASC personnel assigned to each schools to monitor and address attendance.
- School Based Attendance Teams (SBAT) are designated at every school. SBAT meetings are held monthly at a minimum to review attendance/truancy data, provide student supports (Attendance Intervention Meetings) to mitigate barriers and review discipline data for continued support.
- Designated Attendance Clerks have been placed at all high schools. Attendance Points of Contacts have been designated for middle and elementary schools to address attendance matters and protocols.
- Attendance thresholds and responses are monitored at the 3,5,,10 and 20 day marks to include Robo Calls, phone calls, home visits, school visits, ongoing review of JCampus reports, school level student meetings, truancy workshops and court referrals (after all efforts have been exhausted with no improvement).
- Resource options are provided to remove identified barriers to regular school attendance. Referral to internal supports are made (Counselors, ICare, Nurse) where appropriate and Student Attendance Plans are generated for identified students.
- Quarterly Districtwide Truancy Workshops - to support parents of truant students as a pre-trial diversion intervention..
- EveryDay Labs - Text and mail nudges according to attendance thresholds.

NOTE: ongoing vetting to determine root causes of truancy and chronic absenteeism.

CWA Truancy Protocol Flow Chart



Referral Form to DA TASC and/or CWA

 **HILLAR C. MOORE, III**
DISTRICT ATTORNEY, 19TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
EAST BATON ROUGE PARESH

DISTRICT ATTORNEY REFERRAL FORM

STUDENT: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ 2009

CURRENT ADDRESS: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN: Mother-_____ Father-_____

PARENT/GUARDIAN DATE OF BIRTH: _____ Unknown

CURRENT SCHOOL: _____ Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet School

INTERPRETER REQUIRED: ☐ SPANISH? ☐ OTHER? ☐

REQUIREMENTS

The items below are necessary for a referral to the District Attorney.

☒ District Attorney Referral Form

☒ JCampus Court Report

☒ Additional record of contacts (if any)

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE CLERK: _____ Cindy Varnado

CWA/TASC SUPERVISOR: _____ Erica Wells

DATE OF REFERRAL: _____ January 26, 2022

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
JUVENILE ANNEX
8333 VETERANS MEMORIAL BLVD. • BATON ROUGE, LA 70807
WWW.EBRDA.ORG • PHONE: 225-389-3404 • FAX: 225-389-8350

Truancy Docket - Court Process



- Petition is filed alleging a child is truant pursuant to Ch.C.Art. 730(1), (7) or improper supervision against parent/caretaker pursuant to RS 14:92.2
- Child and caregiver are served notice to appear in Juvenile Court on the truancy docket held on 1st or 2nd Tuesday of each month
- Attorney is appointed to represent child and indigent parent, if applicable
- Prior to answering the petition, DA offers intervention of informal probation
- If probation is accepted, an Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP) is implemented for a term of 3 months with conditions
- Probation reviews are scheduled monthly to receive attendance updates and to problem-solve any barriers to attendance. Parents, students, CWA/TASC and providers attend court monthly

Public
Defender's
Office

NOTE: Ch.C.Art. 740(B) – If a petition seeking a formal adjudication is filed, the court shall appoint independent legal counsel for the child, or refer the child for representation by the public defender. Neither the child nor anyone purporting to act on his behalf may be permitted to waive this right.



Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP)

THE JUVENILE COURT

PETITION NUMBER _____

DIV _____

PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE

IN THE INTEREST OF

STATE OF LOUISIANA

ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The above named child and family have been referred to the Juvenile Court for the following:

FAMILY IN NEED OF SERVICES - TRUANCY/IMPROPER SUPERVISION OF A MINOR

The court finds that an Attendance Improvement Plan rather than an adjudication would be in the best interest of the child, family and the state. This voluntary agreement shall include the following terms, conditions and understandings.

1. That this court has jurisdiction to consider this matter.
2. That the child and parents have been fully advised of their rights.
3. That the petition, if filed, may remain pending during the effect of this agreement.
4. That a petition may be filed and further proceedings initiated if this agreement is not fulfilled or is violated.
5. This agreement shall be subject to termination and docketing for trial at the discretion of the district attorney in the event that the child has other offenses unknown to the district attorney at the time of the signing of this agreement. It shall be the obligation of the child to advise the district attorney of any and all offenses he has been charged with by law enforcement officials, including offenses outside of East Baton Rouge Parish.
6. That this agreement shall not exceed _____

THE FOLLOWING CIRCLED SPECIAL CONDITIONS OF THE ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN ARE AGREED UPON:

1. The child and family shall report to a probation officer as required.
2. The child shall obey rules and regulations set by his/her parents and probation officer.
3. The child shall attend _____ school regularly and promptly, or any school to which he/she may be transferred, and shall not be suspended or expelled from such school.
4. The Parent/Guardian shall make sure the child attends _____ school regularly and promptly, or any school to which he/she may be transferred.
5. The child and family shall participate with services provided by IMPACT Team.
6. The child and family shall participate with services provided by TRUCE.
7. The child and family shall participate with the Mentoring Program assigned by the Court/State.
8. The child and family shall participate with services provided by Capital Area Human Services.
9. The child and family shall _____

JUVENILE

PARENT

PROBATION OFFICER

PARENT

ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

ATTORNEY

DATE

JUDGE, THE JUVENILE COURT

The core theories of the collaborative work consist of:

- ▶ System partners, community-based agencies and individuals working collaboratively with students and caregivers **to improve school attendance and educational outcomes** for students. The truancy model utilizes best practices and core principles found in mentoring and positive youth development programs.
 - ▶ Truancy Court provides for swift and highly personal intervention. It relies on the procedures and operations of TASC and CWA to bring appropriate referrals to the court process to address all compulsory attendance legislation.
 - ▶ The collaborative meets monthly to discuss the truancy process, organizational updates, and community resources.
- Individual Plans: Goals are tailored to each youth and families' unique educational strengths and challenges
 - Teamwork: Team of individuals will help youth and families reach their goals
 - Parent Partners: Parents are treated as valuable partners of their child's attendance plan
 - Community/Neighborhood-Based Partners and Mentors: Organized effort to bring individuals from the youth's community and neighborhood to guide and support youth and families in addressing truancy and fostering positive education experiences
 - Strength Based: Focus on youth's strengths and a positive narrative in addressing truant behaviors
 - Unconditional Caring: Commitment to maintain positive interaction with families despite resistance and non-compliance
 - Program Integrity: Commitment to maintain consistent professional relationships and ethical practices with youth, families, professional and community partners

Truancy: By-the-Numbers**

School Year	Parish*	Number of Truants	Percentage of truants
2015 - 2016	EBRP	22,526	47.37%
2016 - 2017	EBRP	25,491	54.0%
2017 - 2018	EBRP	25,358	54.28%
2018 - 2019	EBRP	21,922	48.12%
2019 - 2020	EBRP	19,033	41.75%
2020 - 2021	EBRP	24,604	55.97%
2021 - 2022	EBRP	28,220	60.70%
2022 - 2023	EBRP	26,189	57.59%
2023 - 2024	EBRP	24,875	55.20%

*data does not include Recovery School Districts, Zachary, Baker or Central School Districts, Special School Districts, Charter or Laboratory Schools

**Data as reported from Louisiana Department of Education

East Baton Rouge Parish School
System (EBRPSS) N=260 (2021)

Female	143	
Male	117	
Black	224	
White	7	
Hispanic	25	
Other	4	
Filing Decisions:		
FINS	203	78%
Improper Supervision	45	17.00%
Other	11	4%
Outcomes:		
Successful AIP	101	39%
Unsuccessful AIP	17	7%
BW	49	19%
UTL	57	22%
Other	36	14.00%
Age Range		13-19
Unexcused Range		3-118
Grade Range		6th-12th

Non-EBRPSS N=15 (2021)

Female	8	
Male	7	
Black	7	
White	8	
Hispanic	0	
Other	0	
Filing Decision:		
FINS	9	60%
Improper Supervision	5	33%
Other	1	6%
Outcome:		
Successful AIP	5	33%
Unsuccessful AIP	2	13%
BW	2	13%
UTL	4	27%
Other	2	13%
Age Range		11y-19y
Unexcused Range		17-60 days
Grade Range		6th-11th

2021 Juvenile Court
Truancy Docket
Data & Outcomes



Questions or Comments

The Truancy Court program relies on the partnership and ongoing cooperation of all of its partners, which include Juvenile Court, TASC, CW&A, City/Parish Department of Juvenile Services, the East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office, and law enforcement agencies. This is an evolving program and will continually be revised and improved as the need presents.

Presenters:

Jennie Ponder	<u>Jponder@ebrschools.org</u>
Tirzah N. Smith	<u>TSmith5@ebrschools.org</u>
Judge Gail Grover	<u>Gail.Grover@brla.gov</u>

**Thank
You**