

Improving Attendance, Grades and Behavior

WITH CFCC'S EVIDENCED-BASED TRUANCY COURT PROGRAM



SCHOOL OF LAW

Center for Families,
Children and the Courts (CFCC)

Why does a child start skipping school?

If you work with truant students, you know that substance abuse and alcohol addiction in the family often are underlying causes. There also can be many other reasons, such as bullying, an undiagnosed learning impairment, a parent losing a job, sexual abuse, illness of the child or a parent, and more. At CFCC, we know that solving the problem of truancy starts with asking the question,

“Why?”

When you learn the answer, you can restore a child’s love of accomplishment.



CFCC’s Truancy Court Program re-engages children in school, making a difference in each child’s life.

CFCC's Truancy Court Program takes a therapeutic and holistic approach to truant behavior that addresses the root causes of truancy. Early intervention, family involvement and an incentive system also are key elements.

Dedicated to Four Guiding Principles

Therapeutic and Holistic. CFCC's Truancy Court Program centers on a therapeutic, non-adversarial and holistic model designed to build connections among the child, parents/caregivers, school administrators, teachers, a judge, mentors and service providers. Through a series of intensive, confidential interactions that are tailored to the needs of each child, a strong relationship develops among the student, his or her family and CFCC's Truancy Court Program team. These bonds support the child and foster his or her re-engagement in and recommitment to school.

Early Intervention. CFCC's Truancy Court Program typically includes students with 5 to 20 unexcused absences and/or tardies in the prior two marking periods. By intervening quickly and early, the team can rebuild and strengthen the academic, social and emotional connections to school that students still have.

Family Involvement. Truancy is a problem for the entire family. It often occurs as a result of familial conditions, such as health issues, poverty and neighborhood violence. Every family member must be involved to resolve the issues underlying truancy. CFCC's Truancy Court Program empowers the family to support school attendance and success.

Rewarding Progress. Continually rewarding improvement keeps students motivated and builds self-esteem. In CFCC's Truancy Court Program, students receive weekly incentives for meeting short-term attendance, academic and behavioral goals. Incentives are matched to the students' interests and include book bags, sports balls and caps, games, puzzles and discount coupons. Many incentives are donated by local individuals and businesses.

How the Program Works

CFCC's Truancy Court Program brings the power and authority of the judge to school without the punitive approach. Participation is strictly voluntary for students and their families.

CFCC's Truancy Court Program consists of 10 weekly in-school meetings with the student, the parent/caregiver and the Truancy Court Program team. The team includes teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, principals, CFCC staff, University of Baltimore law students and a Maryland judge or master who volunteers as the Truancy Court Program judge. The program is designed to work primarily with children who have five to 20 unexcused tardies and absences, but children with higher absentee rates also can benefit.

The team identifies and addresses why the child is late for school or is not attending regularly. Once the causes of a student's truant behavior are uncovered, the team connects the student and family with resources to help address the issues underlying truancy and to support the student's regular school attendance. Sometimes the solution is as simple and specific as providing an alarm clock. Often, more sweeping changes are needed, such as educating a family about medicating and managing a child's asthma. The consistent and structured oversight fosters an environment where major changes can take place in a manageable, incremental way.

The judges, masters and attorneys who volunteer in CFCC's program are passionate about helping young people. Their stature is powerful. When they explain the immediate and long-term consequences of truancy, children and their parents listen. Perhaps even more rewarding, by the end of the 10-week session, the family has had the unforgettable experience of a judge who respects and advocates for them.





Measuring Success

The final element of CFCC's Truancy Court Program is measuring, assessing and analyzing data. CFCC tracks student attendance, grades and behavior throughout the 10-week session.

The majority of participating students — 7 in 10 typically — graduate from the program, achieving a 65% or better reduction in absences and tardies. Students who participate in CFCC's Truancy Court Program maintain their improved performance, spend more time on homework and receive more parental help with school. In surveys completed after the program, students say that they feel more connected to their school and families. They recognize the importance of attending school every day, and they believe that they can succeed in school and in life.

In addition, there often is a positive ripple effect for the entire school due to the presence of CFCC's Truancy Court Program. The involvement of the judge, mentors, volunteers and CFCC team in the school, week after week, sends a clear message to all students that the school takes attendance seriously.

In addition to the weekly meetings, CFCC's Truancy Court Program is enriched by a number of initiatives designed to engage and excite students about learning and school participation.

Mentors and Volunteers. Professional CFCC mentors conduct weekly character-building sessions for students, engage parents in weekly phone conversations and provide one-on-one help when needed. Volunteers, many from the University of Baltimore community, are also available for tutoring and life-skills coaching.

Resources. CFCC's Truancy Court Program team cultivates partnerships with resource providers and offers referrals to students and parents.

Arts Education. Ancillary programs, such as *Kids and Theater* and *Kids and Cameras*, enable students to explore their interests in arts while increasing their school engagement, self-esteem and personal responsibility.

Family Fun Events and Field Trips. CFCC's Truancy Court Program includes at least one family-centered event per session for each school. Examples of these events are a pizza luncheon at school or a sports outing.

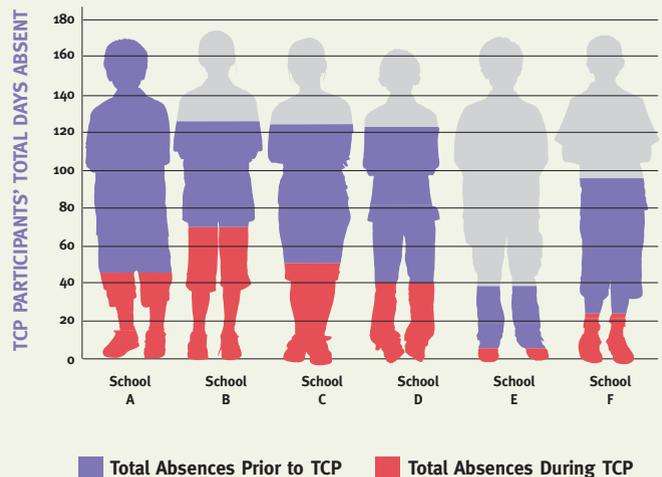
Graduation. At the end of 10 weeks, students who have demonstrated a minimum 65% decrease in unexcused absences, improved behavior and improved academic performance graduate from CFCC's Truancy Court Program. Graduates and their families are invited to a celebration at the Governor's House, are awarded a certificate by Maryland's First Lady and receive a special graduation gift.

Judge Catherine Curran O'Malley (left) encourages a young student to get to school on time. CFCC staff and volunteers (above) track each child's attendance, grades and behavior during the 10-week session. Successful graduates (right) are honored at a special event.



CFCC's Truancy Court Program keeps children in school, strengthens families and builds the foundation every child needs to be successful throughout life.

REDUCTIONS IN ABSENCES



Year 2011-2012

“Thank you for your support. Last year we had 141 students who missed five or more days. This year, we have 38. That’s progress and improvement.”

ETTA JOHNSON, PRINCIPAL,
The Collington Square School, Baltimore, MD

“I would like to express a heartfelt thank you! The Truancy Court Program has been a great asset to Highlandtown Elementary/Middle School, improving attendance and student self-esteem, as well as the academic performance of many students.”

WENDY HARRIS,
SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR,
Highlandtown Elementary/Middle School,
Baltimore, MD

“What this program really shows is that when you have a one-on-one relationship with an adult in school, it is so extraordinarily important to these young people. We know that this program is successful because of that.”

VALERIE ERVIN,
COUNCILMEMBER AND CHAIRPERSON
OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Montgomery County, MD

“I thoroughly enjoyed working with the truancy court team this year. Everyone was selflessly committed to improving the children’s personal and educational progress and the children responded positively to all of the input they received.”

HON. YVETTE BRYANT, VOLUNTEER TCP JUDGE,
Judge in Charge, Family Division of the
Circuit Court for Baltimore City, MD

“This program allows parents to address issues they may not be able to tackle by themselves, and it enlightens parents about things that they may not know. The program helps the child become more responsible.”

TCP PARENT, Baltimore, MD

CFCC’s Truancy Court Program Track Record

The University of Baltimore School of Law Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) started the Truancy Court Program in 2005. The program operates in collaboration with local schools, their respective jurisdictions—such as Baltimore City Public Schools and Baltimore City—and District and Circuit Courts.

CFCC’s Truancy Court Program has

- Operated in 28 Baltimore City Public Schools,
- Served more than 1,200 students and their families, and
- Expanded to three additional Maryland counties, serving an additional 250 students.

The results are very effective:

- Typically, 7 in 10 students successfully complete the program.
- Each graduate of the program reduces unexcused absences by 65% or more.
- Post-participation surveys show that students in the program spend more time on homework and have more parental assistance in doing so.

This evidence-based program is ready for replication in your jurisdiction.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Professor Barbara Babb, CFCC Director
410-837-5661; bbabb@ubalt.edu

Gloria Danziger, CFCC Senior Fellow
410-837-5613; gdanziger@ubalt.edu

law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc





CFCC's Truancy Court Program was recognized in 2012 by the Ash Center for Democratic Governance at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, as a 'Bright Idea'. Bright Ideas recognizes and shares innovative government programs and partnerships.



About CFCC

The University of Baltimore School of Law Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) is a national leader in the movement to reform the family justice system. CFCC works to integrate communities, families and the justice system to improve the lives of families and the health of the community.

CFCC is dedicated to resolving family problems in a therapeutic, ecological and service-based manner. Led by Barbara A. Babb, Director and Associate Professor of Law, and Gloria Danziger, Senior Fellow, CFCC uses a holistic approach to solve real-world problems by considering all the different systems affecting the lives of families and children.



Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) Truancy Court Program

1420 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21201
Tel: 410.837.5750 Fax: 410.837.5737
Web: law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc
Email: cfcc@ubalt.edu