



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Joint State Government Commission
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Short Summary in Response to Act 138 of 2016
The Truancy Process: The Challenge of Improving Attendance in Pennsylvania Schools
A Report of the Advisory Committee

Act 138 of 2016 directed the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study of the procedures for how a school handles children who are truant and habitually truant and evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures in improving school attendance and whether the procedures should be revised. As directed in the Act, the Joint State Government Commission formed an Advisory Committee, which included representatives from schools throughout the Commonwealth, the court system, the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Department of Human Services.

The report details the statutory process and discusses some procedural changes made through Act 138 of 2016. Three surveys, one to schools, one to magisterial district judges and one to county children and youth, capture current practices for those involved in working with truant students.

Several areas of ambiguity are highlighted. The report contains truancy data provided from schools, through the courts and also general protective service concerns.

The Advisory Committee recommends investigating a graduated response to truancy that matches responses to its severity and allows schools more flexibility to evaluate efficacy of School Attendance Improvement Plans. It also recommends that schools receive funding to allow a dedicated truancy staff person.

Further, the existing Student Assistance Program should be promoted as a response to truancy when appropriate. Finally, the report highlights and recommends the need for ongoing training on truancy processes for both schools, through the Intermediate Units, and for magisterial district judges.

The report contains descriptions of some best practices to highlight current procedures that have been effective under existing law, including attendance notification systems, targeted staffing, uniquely tailored student engagement practices, concrete School Attendance Improvement Plan processes, and Youth Courts. Additionally, magisterial district judges with a strong community presence, and family engagement and coordination of systems, including children and youth services, can be effective in reducing truancy.

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