Bridging the Gap: Palm Beach County's Support-First Approach to Truancy Intervention

Keith Oswald
Chief of Student Health and Wellness

The School District of Palm Beach County

- 10th largest in the nation and the 5th largest in the State of Florida
- 22,801 employees, including more than 13,003 teachers, 583 school counselors, 185 school behavioral health professionals, 142 school psychologists, 105 co-located mental health clinicians
- More than 189,000 students
- 150 languages and dialects, 192 countries or territories
- Majority-minority school district, with a racial/ethnic composition of 35.9% Hispanic, 29.6% White, 27.7% Black, 3% Asian, 2.8% two or more races, and 0.8% American Indian
- Nearly two-thirds of District students are eligible for the federal lunch program and one in five children in the County live in poverty

2022-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

EDUCATE AFFIRM INSPIRE

Strategic Theme A
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE & GROWTH

OBJECTIVE A1

Ensure all students engage in teaching and learning that results in academic excellence

Initiative A.1a
Ensure consistent and effective literacy instruction in every PreK — 3rd grade classroom

Initiative A.1b
Strengthen career pathway opportunities and coordinate choice programs to ensure all students identify, understand, and prepare for careers aligned to their interests

OBJECTIVE A2

Accelerate student learning using innovative and differentiated approaches

Initiative A.2a
Implement innovative learning approaches including acceleration options in all four core subjects, project-based learning, and authentic assessment

OBJECTIVE A3

Improve equitable participation in programs and resources

Initiative A.3a
Define the essential characteristics of the future Palm Beach County Schools graduate in collaboration with our community, and align learning opportunities for all students

Strategic Theme B
STUDENT-FOCUSED CULTURE

OBJECTIVE B1

Increase student voice and choice in educational experiences

Initiative B.1a
Establish formal structures for students to influence decisions at each school and the District

OBJECTIVE B2

Increase family engagement in supporting student success

Initiative B.2a
Create a tailored hub to help students and families navigate District processes to achieve their educational goals

Strategic Theme C
MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

OBJECTIVE C1

Enhance a sense of belonging, safety, and acceptance for all students

Initiative C.1a
Implement a District-wide system to ensure every student has a positive relationship with at least one adult at school and is recognized for their achievements

OBJECTIVE C2

Increase comprehensive support for student and employee well-being

Initiative C.2a
Coordinate systems to assess needs for mental health and well-being, align resources, and deliver the intervention/support for those needs

Initiative C.2b
Implement practices to recognize and better support students who have experienced trauma in their lives

Initiative C.2c
Expand mental health and wellness peer support programs available to employees

Strategic Theme D
COMMITTED & IMPACTFUL EMPLOYEES

OBJECTIVE D1

Ensure all employees have the environment, support, skills, and resources for excellence

Initiative D.1a
Create employee-designed approaches to improve job satisfaction, loyalty, and retention

Initiative D.1b
Evaluate the alignment of job descriptions and actual role responsibilities, and adjust as needed to foster employee success and effective/efficient use of resources

OBJECTIVE D2

Ensure all employees are committed to effective practices and performance expectations centered on students

Initiative D.2a
Create a culture of customer service excellence among employees

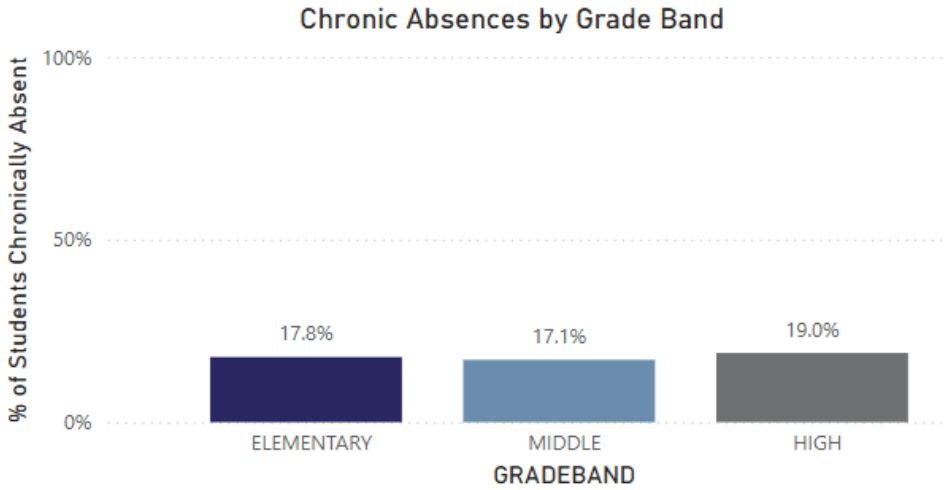
FY25 Chronic Absence Dashboard

Overall Number of Chronically Absent Students

30,563

Overall Rate of Chronically Absent Students

18.0%



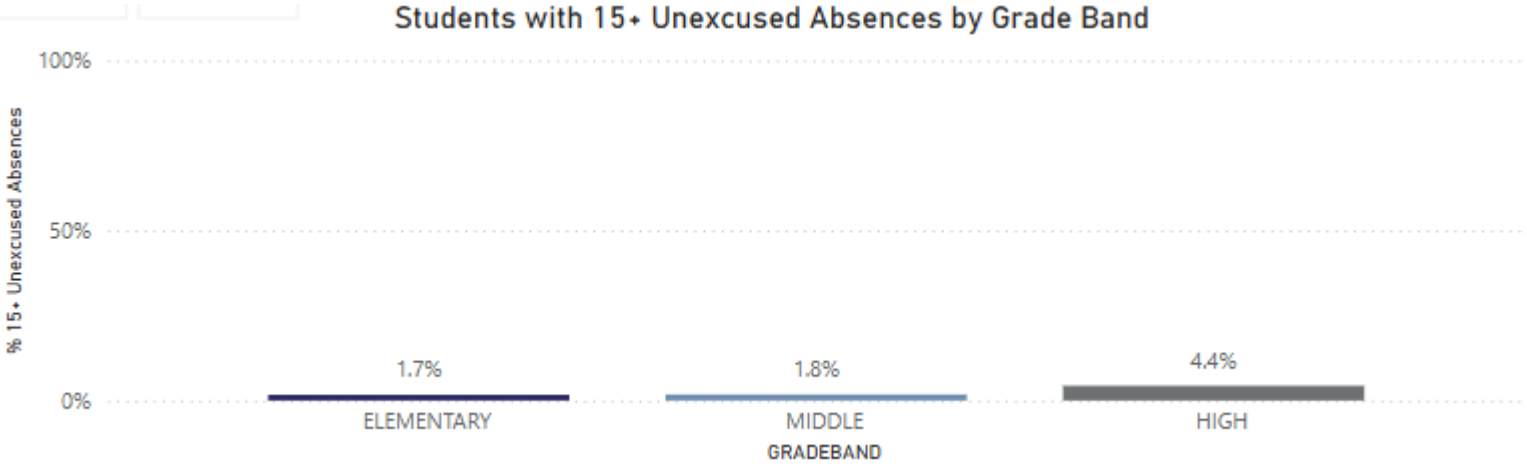
Absence Summary

% Chronically Absent	18.0%
% Absent 5+ Days	69.6%
% Absent 10+ Days	40.5%
% Absent 15+ Days	22.9%

Power BI Report

FY24 Chronic Absenteeism Rate = 20.5%
Difference of 4,773 students

Truancy Dashboard



Absence Summary

5+ Unexcused Absences
41,567

10+ Unexcused Absences
12,024

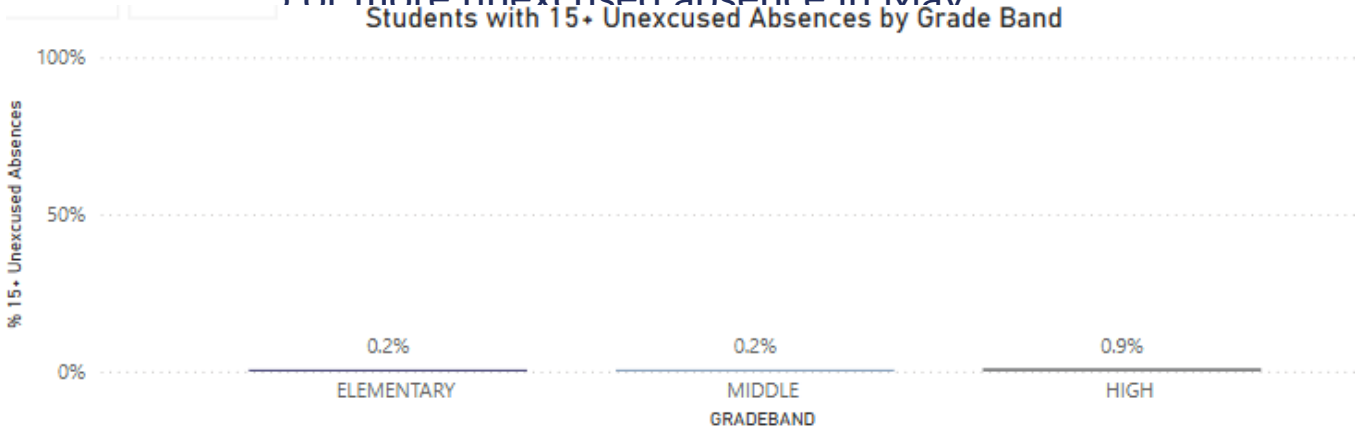
15+ Unexcused Absences
5,035

Parameters set to show the number of students with 15 or more unexcused absences in the previous 90 calendar days

[Power BI Report]

Truancy Dashboard

Parameters set to show the number of students with
5 or more unexcused absence in May



Absence Summary

5+ Unexcused Absences
13,334

10+ Unexcused Absences
2,510

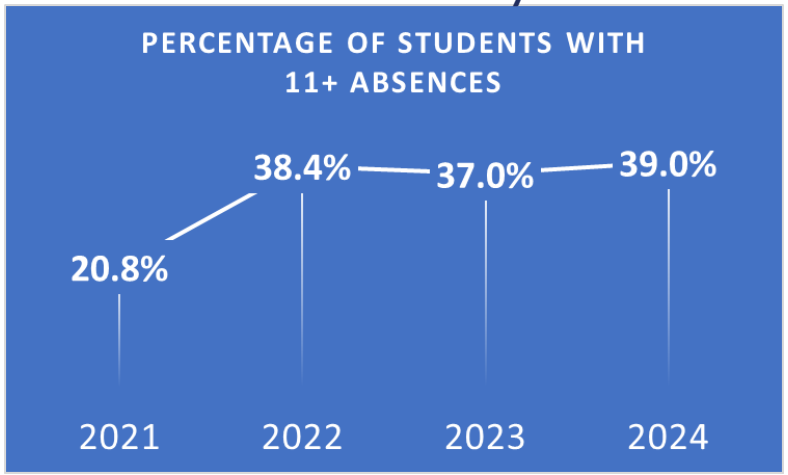
15+ Unexcused Absences
840

[Power BI Report]

How Our Attendance Initiative Began

- Pre-Covid-19 there were 8 million students chronically absent nationwide
- Most recent federal data shows that in FY21, the number nearly doubled to 14.7 million students

Palm Beach County Data



Post Pandemic Re-Engagement Efforts

ESSER money provided opportunity to hire case managers to provide personalized outreach and support to locate and re-engage students.

- Over 8,000 unaccounted students
- Extensive outreach (phone, email, text, home visits)
- Registration assistance
- Referrals to community agencies

Challenges:

- Mental health
- Economic and social factors (unemployment)
- Educational disruption
- Family dynamics (death of family member, housing, etc.)

Located students were re-enrolled, but keeping them engaged remained a challenge.

Transforming our Response to Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy

Developed a supportive progressive truancy intervention framework

- Designed to **reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy** through escalating levels of support
- **Interventions are based on the severity and persistence** of attendance issues
- Focuses on **early identification and timely action**
- Utilizes **tiered interventions** to address problems before they escalate
- Aims to **prevent chronic absenteeism and promote student success**

Progressive Truancy Intervention & Referral Process

August 2024

Each step in this process is hyperlinked to detailed instructions and required documentation. If at any time attendance improves and the student is no longer considered truant, the process may stop and the student continues to be monitored. Habitual truancy is defined as having 15 or more unexcused/unverified absences in 90 calendar days.

School Interventions

Step 1: For each unexcused absence, contact the guardian & document in SIS. Follow District guidelines for sending attendance letters & conferencing with the parent.

Step 2: At 5 unexcused absences in a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences in 90 calendar days (whichever comes first)Principal/designee reviews the student case. Is there a pattern of nonattendance?

- No → **Step 3a:** Continue to monitor attendance & if a pattern of nonattendance is determined, complete PBSD 2106 Problem Solving/SBT Referral & continue to Step 3b.
- Yes → **Step 3b:** Mandatory SBT Meeting #1 or Child Study Team meeting for SWD
  Develop progressive timeline of interventions to include, but not limited to:
  * Frequent communication home documented in Comments Log in SIS
  * Evaluation for alternative education services
  * Student Truancy Attendance Agreement and Success Plan (PBSD 2224)
  * Appropriate referrals to other agencies for family services

Step 4: Provide & monitor interventions for 2 weeks. Convene SBT Meeting #2
Has attendance improved?

- Yes → **Step 5a:** Continue to monitor attendance & if non-attendance patterns begin again, return to Step 4.
- No → **Step 5b:** Reconvene SBT & provide additional interventions or if the student has 15 unexcused absences in 90 calendar days, refer the student to the District's Truancy Intervention Program by completing a Truancy Referral in SIS.

District Interventions

Step 6: District Acknowledgement of Truancy Referral

- The status of submitted truancy referrals can be tracked using the Truancy Referral Checklist in SIS.
- Complete referrals will be accepted and the students scheduled for a District Attendance Review Committee meeting

Step 7: Truancy Intervention Program

- Case Manager assigned to work with student and family
- Notice of District Attendance Review Committee delivered to parent via certified mail or home visit
- Attendance meeting consists of problem-solving team of professionals to include school, district staff, and community agencies
- Committee recommends resources and additional interventions to be implemented
- District case manager will provide continued outreach to parent and assist with resources and interventions

Has attendance improved?

- Yes → **Step 8a:** District notifies school to continue monitoring student
- No → **Step 8b:** CINS/FINS Case Staffing requested. Next step determined by committee. If parent consents to services, CINS/FINS will work with family to improve attendance. If unsuccessful, the referral may proceed to Step 9
- No → **Step 8c:** Proceed to Step 9: Send file to Legal for Review

Legal Interventions

Step 9: Legal Review of Truancy Referral

- If referral meets legal sufficiency, proceed to step 10a or 10b.
- If referral does not meet legal sufficiency of if the student is no longer truant, the truancy referral returns to the district contact

Or

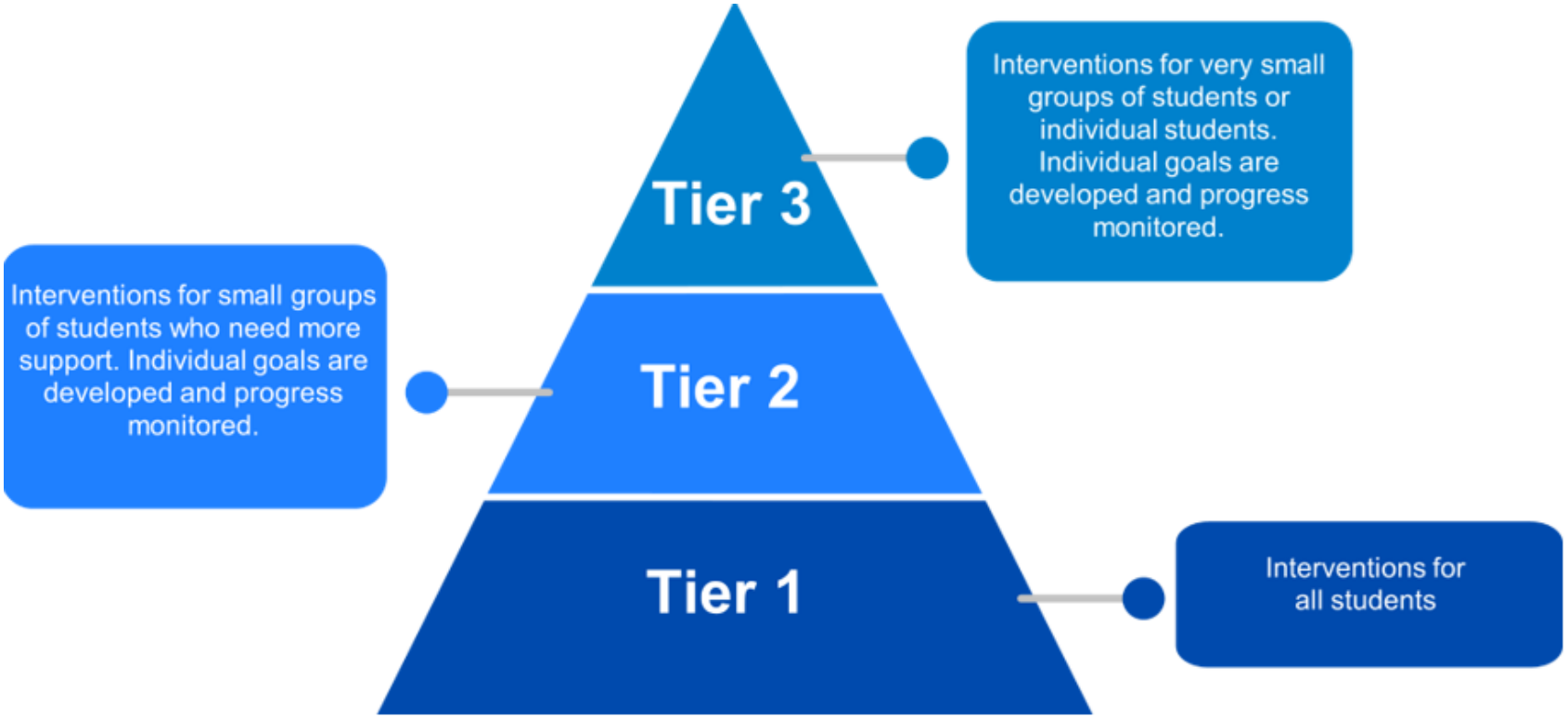
Step 10a: File Truancy Petition with the Court
The district school superintendent is authorized to file a truancy petition, as defined in s. 984.03, following the procedures outlined in s. 984.151.

Step 10b: File a CINS/FINS Petition with the Court
If the district school superintendent chooses not to file a truancy petition, procedures for filing a child-in-need-of-services petition shall commence.

Policies & Laws

- Policy 5.09 –Attendance, Absenteeism, & Truancy
- SBER 6A-1.09513 – Parent's Responsibility for School Attendance
- SBER 6A-1.044 – Pupil Attendance Records
- F.S. § 1003.02 – District school board operation & control of public K-12 education within the school district
- F.S. § 1003.21 – School attendance
- F.S. § 1003.24 – Parents responsible for attendance of children; attendance policy
- F.S. § 984.15 – Petition for a child in need of services
- F.S. § 984.151 – Truancy petition; prosecution; disposition
- F.S. § 1003.26 – Enforcement of school attendance
- F.S. § 1003.27 – Court procedure and penalties

Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Attendance



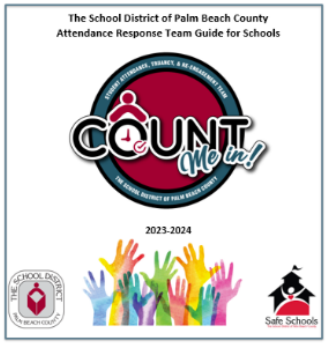
Building a Culture of Attendance through Tier 1 Interventions

- Attendance Campaigns
- Formal lessons about attendance
  - Teach students why attendance matters
  - How sick is too sick to go to school?
  - Emphasize healthy bedtime and morning routines
  - Highlight long-term impact; earning potential for dropouts vs. graduates
- Informal Attendance Reinforcement
  - Greet students by name and welcome students back after an absence
- Family Engagement and Education
  - Inform parents about the importance of consistent attendance
  - Define what regular attendance looks like
  - Share information about available community resources
  - Host Workshops on practical topics, such as
    - Parenting tips for use of technology and social media
    - Improving sleep habits and establishing routines
    - Supporting children with anxiety
    - Guidelines on when to keep child home due to illness

Process Automation & Tools for Schools

- SIS auto-generates attendance letters at 5, 10, 15, 20, and 20+ absences—emailed to parents or printed by schools if no email is available.
- ParentLink notifies parent/guardian of student absences via text and phone call

Flowchart: Progressive Truancy Intervention & Referral Process



Attendance Team Guide for Schools

Truancy Referral Checklist

Strategic Deep Dive: Strengthening School Based Team/Child Study Team Practices for Truancy Intervention

Rather than viewing attendance as the problem, use a holistic student profile to identify and address the underlying factors contributing to absenteeism.

- Parent participation is critical (in-person, virtual/phone)
- Student participation, as appropriate

Tier 2 and 3 Intervention Examples

- Modifications to any existing educational plans
- Changes in the learning environment
- Mentoring
- Check in/check out
- Individual/small group counseling
- Tutoring/homework assistance
- Change of class(es)
- Information about alternative education methods, such as virtual, home, or hospital homebound
- Frequent phone calls
- Attendance Agreement
- Daily attendance/tardy tracking
- Home Visit
- Incentives
- Special job
- Behavior plan
- Trusted Adult Initiative
- After school program/extracurriculars
- Bullying investigation
- Appropriate referrals to BHP, co-located therapist, or McKinney-Vento Program
- Agency referral (CINS/FINS, free/low-cost health care, food bank, therapy, housing and rent assistance, transportation, employment assistance)

District Truancy Intervention Program

Students who do not show improvement with school-based interventions are referred to the District for individualized Tier 3 support tailored to their needs.

- To provide targeted support, a District Case Manager—funded by Title IV and the Stronger Connections Grant—is assigned to the student and their family
- Written notice per F.S. 1003.26(2) provided to parent requiring immediate attendance within 3 days. The parent is also invited to participate in a District-level Child Study Team meeting, offering an additional opportunity to engage in interventions and support services.
- Meeting consists of problem-solving team of professionals to include school, district staff, and community agencies, to include CINS/FINS provider.
- Committee recommends resources, and additional interventions to be implemented
- District case manager provides outreach to parent and assists with resources, interventions, and appropriate referrals as needed. Phone calls home for every absence and home visit if absent two days in a row with no response from parent

CINS/FINS Route vs Truancy Petition Route

- CINS/FINS is leveraged throughout the process. Schools are required to refer all students to CINS/FINS for voluntary services prior to referring the student to the District's Truancy Intervention Program.
- Students may be referred to CINS/FINS again if recommended by the District Child Study Team or need determined
- Students demonstrating school refusal or ungovernable behavior are referred to CINS/FINS for case staffing.
- When parental non-compliance appears to be the primary barrier to attendance, a truancy petition may be filed.

The Difference in Palm Beach County's Approach to Address Truancy

- Collaborative, supportive, and court-integrated model that emphasizes addressing root causes over punitive measures.
- Truancy intervention in the earlier grades. Youngest student was 6 years old.
- Support provided to the whole family, including siblings and parent/guardian

District Recommended / Court Ordered Services

- CINS/FINS
- Parenting Class
- Career Source
- Hope Florida
- Mental Health Referrals
- Attend School Meetings
- Evaluations
- Tutoring
- Comply with Referrals to Various Agencies

Assistance Provided by Court Ordered Agencies or Referrals Made by District

- Financial assistance with utilities
- Stroller and booster seat
- Backpacks and school supplies
- Shoes
- Bicycles
- Free daycare
- Free summer camp
- Food and clothing
- Housing Assistance

Partnerships are Key to Success!

- The School District of Palm Beach County
- 15th Judicial Circuit of Florida
- DJJ CINS/FINS Providers
  - Children's Home Society
  - Urban League of Palm Beach County
- Florida Department of Children and Families, including Hope Florida
- Palm Beach County Youth Services
- Southeast Behavioral Health Network
- Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County
- ChildNet
- Legal Aide
- Others as needed and they are needed

Truancy Judge on the Pilot

Kathleen J. Kroll

THE 15TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

"Education is the key to better decision making, better lives, and better citizens. Palm Beach County's truancy court is a problem-solving court designed to address student absenteeism without punishment. With the aid of community partners and a supportive school system we identify the causes of behavior and connect people to services and programs that help produce a happier and more productive student who will be the foundation for a stronger and successful community. Keeping kids in school and out of court makes sense."

Truancy Petitions
Community Misperceptions v.s. Reality

Misperceptions about filing truancy petitions:

- Purpose is to punish the parents
- Unaware of the many interventions already implemented
- All cases are treated the same
- Blame is on the parents
- Ineffective
- Will result in immediate legal consequences

Reality:

- Supportive process that is individualized for each family
- Helps uncover additional underlying issues
- Mandated services
- Access to additional resources and summer camps at no cost
- Promotes parental engagement
- Leverage to obtain follow-through from parents, agencies, and schools to each do their part

What We Learned and Ongoing Challenges

- Parents need support (some lack necessary resiliency skills &/or parenting skills)
- Text messages are often more successful than phone calls
- Follow-up and “hand-holding” is often necessary
- Paper forms easier for parents for follow through
- Affordable housing and lack of resources to address the issue
- Food insecurity
- Mental health issues
- Need for additional targeted case management for families
- Unemployment of parent(s)
- Transportation
- Child care
- CINS/FINS -quality matters
- VOLUME OF CASES!- Resource Allocation
- Community agencies need to work together and hold each other accountable

NEW FOR FY 26! Early Warning System in SIS

- Suite of reports that help track academics, attendance, and discipline
- Provides roster of students who meet certain criteria
- FY26 update in progress to include additional attendance metrics

12 Records | Export | Filter: ON | Clear All Filters | Toggle Columns | Page Size: 20

	09	10	11	12	Total
Number of Students Enrolled	631	647	675	6	1959
Attendance below 90%	65	84	83	0	232
One or More Suspensions	38	42	30	1	111
Course Failure in ELA	16	64	60	1	141
Course Failure in Math	4	23	32	1	60
ELA Level 1 on State Assessment	88	62	96	2	248
Math Level 1 on State Assessment	69	53	84	2	208
Substantial Reading Deficiency	8	7	33	0	48
Substantial Math Deficiency	0	0	0	0	0
Two or More Indicators	49	74	81	2	206
Retained Current Year	0	0	1	0	1
Retained Two or More Times	6	1	2	0	9

Retained Two or More Times — Current Year Discipline & Attendance Timeframe:

6 Records | Export | Filter: ON | Clear All Filters | Toggle Columns | Page Size: 20

MTSS	Student	Student ID	Grade	Num Indicators	Attendance Indicator	Suspensions Indicator	Failing ELA Grades Indicator	Failing Math Grades Indicator	ELA Level 1 Indicator	Math Level 1 Indicator	Substantial Reading Deficiency	Substantial Math Deficiency	Retained Current Year	Num Retained Years	ELA Teacher	Math Teacher	ESE FEFP	ELL
MTSS	Backman, Maria Angel	28815280	09	2			1		1	0				2	Pichardo, Epicuro	Carver, Crispo	113	
MTSS	Casares, Baldovin	28606184	09	0					0	0				2	Solano, Joyce	Broadway, Salvino		
MTSS	Ramirez, Pearl	28772283	09	3	46.15%	1			1	0				2	Pichardo, Epicuro	Hastings, Uziel	113	
MTSS	Saldivar, Magali Xavier	28358588	09	4	15.43%	1	2		1	1	Y			2	Arreola, Ursulina	Hastings, Uziel	113	
MTSS	Torrez, Mary M	28627362	09	2	14.29%				1	0				2	Arreola, Ursulina	Hastings, Uziel	113	LA
MTSS	Wilkins, Voncile	28350247	09	1					1	0				2	Pichardo, Epicuro	Davis, Alice		

Questions?