

Preventing Truancy

Truancy is a problem that has long-term effects on children, families and the community. There is a strong connection between poor school attendance and delinquent behavior. Keeping children in school is critical to helping children stay out of trouble and increasing the likelihood of their successful transition to adulthood.

We know that for chronic truants or drop-outs:

- Serious assault crimes are twelve times more likely to occur;
- Marijuana use is sixteen times more likely to occur;
- Full-time employment is less likely to occur, with only one-half holding full-time jobs; and,
- Projected earnings are about \$35,000 LESS than someone with a bachelor's degree.

SIWIA was created from a variety of successful programs implemented throughout the United States. Our program was developed, in 1999, to meet the particular needs of the Northwestern District, serving Franklin and Hampshire counties and the town of Athol.

**For more information about SIWIA
please call the
Northwestern District Attorney's Office
at (413) 586-9225**

A Summary of the Massachusetts Truancy Laws

- ☆ All children between the ages of 6-16 years must attend school. (*G.L. c.76, sec. 1*)
- ☆ Parents/guardians must notify the school of their child's absence in a manner prescribed by school policy. (*G.L. c.76, sec. 1A*)
- ☆ It is the parent's/guardian's duty to ensure that their child attends school. If a child misses 7 full days or 14 half days in any 6 month period, parents/guardians may be taken to court. (*G.L. c.76, sec. 2*)
- ☆ Every school system must have a supervisor of attendance. Several school committees may employ the same person. (*G.L. c.76, sec. 19*)
- ☆ The truant officer or supervisor of attendance has the power to apprehend and take to school without a warrant, any truant found wandering

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School Is Where It's At

*A Program to Improve
School Attendance*

NorthwesternDA.org

School Is Where It's At (SIWIA)

An Effective Program of the Northwestern District Attorney's Office To Improve School Attendance

Phase I

SIWIA begins when a school notifies the Northwestern District Attorney's (NWDA) Office that a number of unexcused absences or tardies have become a concern. A letter, along with this brochure, are then sent to the parent(s) or guardian and their child explaining this program, including some of the laws and facts about school attendance. Alternatively, a school may request a group informational meeting held at the school to address attendance concerns. These meetings are designed to be informative, not confrontational.

The primary goal of the Phase I is to provide information to parents and guardians and increase communication between parents and their child's school.

After a Phase I information letter or meeting, the school continues to moni-

Phase II

If attendance problems persist, the parent(s) or guardian and their child will be sent a second letter from the Northwestern District Attorney's Office directing them to attend an individual meeting at the school to review their child's attendance record. A school attendance liaison and a NWDA staff member are at this meeting with the family. Other interested individuals, such as a school administrator, school counselor, special education liaison or teacher, may be invited to attend this meeting.

At this individual meeting, the student's school attendance problem is addressed. The meeting results in the creation of an attendance contract between the parent(s) or guardian, their child and the school.

The contract will list the responsibilities of the parent(s) or guardian, and their child regarding school attendance. If there are issues causing poor attendance, each will be addressed. Issues related to poor attendance may include: serious health issues; learning disabilities; drug or alcohol dependency; and family conflicts

Phase III

If attendance fails to improve after a Phase II meeting, a C.H.I.N.S. (Child in Need of Services) petition for the student or a criminal complaint against the parent(s) or guardian may be filed in juvenile court by the school and scheduled with an expedited hearing date.

A critical aspect of SIWIA is the effective collaboration between the school, parent(s) or guardian and NWDA staff. One of the results of this collaboration is the development of creative problem solving methods for improving the student's attendance. Collaboration also keeps all parties informed of the child's

