**WHAT IS TRUANCY?**

- An unexcused absence from school
- States enact school attendance laws which determine:
  - the age at which a child is required to begin attending school
  - the age at which a child may legally drop out of school
  - the number of unexcused absences which make a student legally truant
- In many states, youth missing more than 10 days of school are required to repeat the entire school year.
- Truancy is a major problem nationwide, yet states do little to prevent it and little to re-engage truant youth

**IS TRUANCY A CRIME?**

- Truancy is a status offense—an act that is an offense only because of the offender’s age, meaning the same conduct by an adult would not be an offense or involve law enforcement and the courts.
- Status offenses including truancy, running away from home, failure to obey parents and curfew violations, are generally understood to reflect family problems.
- Federal law forbids locking up youth charged with status offenses.
  - In some states, when youth violate probation orders requiring school attendance, judges can order youth be locked up.
  - Some states charge parents for failing to ensure their children’s school attendance.

**PREVALENCE OF TRUANCY**

- There are no national statistics about truancy.
- Boys are only slightly more likely than girls to be sent to court for truancy.

**WHY SHOULD POLICE BE CONCERNED WITH TRUANCY?**

- Police are most effective in reducing truancy when they recognize that truancy is not a crime. It is a symptom of a youth’s troubled adjustment to school for educational or social reasons.
- Police participation in community responses to truancy are most effective when police:
  - Communicate with schools and parents
  - Do not criminalize truancy
  - Intervene immediately when youth under the age of 12 are truant
  - Work with schools to promote re-engagement of truant youth

**CAUSES OF TRUANCY**

- Truancy has evolved from Mark Twain’s description in Huckleberry Finn: “a joyous rebellion against authority and responsibility.” Today, truancy of youth under 14 is viewed less as failure by youth to do well in school, and more as a failure by a school to meet a student’s needs.
- Common causes include:
  - Undiagnosed or mistreated learning disabilities
  - Victimization by school bullies, teachers, or school staff
  - Fear of school
  - Family issues, like abuse and neglect, or obligations to care for parents or younger siblings
  - Mental health issues, like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which are sometimes punished instead of treated, and can force youth to leave school
  - Failure of schools to tell parents of students’ absences: some school systems tell parents after one absence, others wait 30 to 40 days