Managing Truancy Together

Background to Truancy Schedule

- Education Act 1972
- Police General Orders (GOs) – Truants
- Ministerial Task Force For Absenteeism
- Government Attendance Improvement Plan

Program Outline:

- Identify the principles in managing Truancy
- Discuss police powers
- Discuss school role
- Discuss SAPOL role
- Discuss Student Attendance Counsellor role

Success in learning is strongly linked to regular attendance and appropriate participation in educational programs.

- It is crucial that children and students develop habits of regular attendance at an early age.
- Poor attendance put students at risk of not achieving their educational, social or psychological potential and are disadvantaged in the quality of choices in later life.
These learners may be:
- Socially isolated
- Place themselves at risk of harm during times of absence
- Be more likely to be involved in socially unacceptable and/or illegal activities
- Be more likely to leave school at an early age
- Have gaps in their knowledge/understanding of basic concepts
- Feel insecure in the preschool/school environment
- Be over-represented in the J.J. System
- Be victims of bullying/harassment

Attendance Statistics From Term 2, 2002
- The following data have been collected from DECS sites during term 2, 2002.
- The information highlights some of the characteristics of absenteeism.
- This may be helpful in guiding initial thinking about improving attendance in schools.

Attendance Statistics From Term 2, 2002 cont...
- The overall attendance rate was 91.1% in 2002.
- In term 2, 10.1% of students were absent for more than 10 days
- Student absence in years 2, 3, 4 and 5 were between 7% and 7.2%
- Student absence rates were lowest in years 3 and 4
- Reception students had the highest absence rate of all primary students at 9.1%
- Absentee rates for secondary school level are higher than for primary school
- The highest rate of absenteeism is in year 10
- Girls have a higher rate (9.0%) of absence than boys (8.8%)

Attendance Statistics From Term 2, 2002 cont...
- Aboriginal student absences are 17.2%
- School Card holders have a rate of absenteeism of 10.7%
- Absences increased from week 1 to week 5, were fairly consistent in weeks 6 to 8, and increased in weeks 9 and 10
- Absences were highest for all days in week 10
- Absences occurred most frequently on Fridays
- More boys were absent on Fridays than girls
- Almost 25% of Aboriginal student absences occurred on a Friday
- Country students and School Card holders had more absences on a Friday
- More students had unexplained absences in secondary school than primary
What does the law say about attending school?

- School is compulsory in SA for children aged between 6 & 16 years of age.
- Parents or guardians are responsible for making sure children go to school.
- Parents or guardians can be taken to court and fined if they do not fulfill their obligation to do so.

Truants-S80 Education Act 1972

- A Police Officer (“Authorised Officer”) observes a compulsory school age child (6 -16 years) in a public place during school times he/she can request their:
  - Name, Address, Age and Reason for non-attendance.
  - If no valid reason is given, can take into custody and return to:
    - someone in authority at school or
    - to a parent/guardian.

How can a police officer find the age of a young person?

- Ask the young person.
- Check appropriate identification.
- Telephone a school.
- Contact parents or guardians.

Can anyone take a truant into custody?

- Only police can take young people into custody and return to school or home.
- Family and Youth workers, student attendance counsellors and police can ask young people for their name and address.
- Only POLICE have the power to take a young person into custody during school hours.
General Orders - Truants

- Truancy is **NOT** a criminal offence for children.
- Police record information on Police Information Management System (PIMS).
- Refer details of ‘habitual truants’ to Principal or delegate.
- Police to give consideration to: time, location, circumstances, and the ability of parent/guardian to take child.
- Consider resources required to return child to parent/guardian/school.

What happens to young people 16 years and over?

Police do not have the power to collect young people who are 16 years or over.

Can police interview a student at school?

Yes, under certain conditions.

- Usually with the approval of a parent/guardian and with the parent, principal or a senior staff member present.
- Any student enrolled at a school can be interviewed, no matter what his or her age.

Principles in Managing Truancy

- Fundamental to improving outcomes for students.
- Establishing partnerships between DECS and SAPOL through Training and Development and local Protocols - ‘Guidelines for Police and Schools Working Together’.
- Systematic/problem-solving approach.
- Sharing responsibility/community issue.
Police Role

- Notify school in advance to prepare for re-entry as part of the ‘return process’.
- Ensure contact is made with the student’s parent/guardian.
- Ensure student’s return to school does not escalate the situation or cause humiliation - establish a ‘return process’ with the school.
- Notify school if student returned to parent/guardian.
- Ensure appropriate project management.

School’s Role

- Develop and implement attendance policy and action plan.
- Monitor instances of non-attendance and patterns for non-attendance.
- Develop a management process with SAPOL/students/staff/parents/guardian.
- Meet with students/parents/guardian.
- Contact police if, after returned the student leaves again without permission.

Student Attendance Counsellor Role

- Referral: the individual student’s situation should be considered when making a decision about referral.
- Instigate referral follow up processes.
- Develop priorities for action.
- Communication strategy between schools, their communities and the Police Local Service Area.

THE END