

Chronic Absenteeism

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Introductions

- Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner, Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division (DCF-FSD)
- Lindy Boudreau, Adolescent Services Director, DCF-FSD

Statutory Authority – Educational Neglect

- Title 33, Chapters 49 and 51 grant the Department the authority to conduct assessments regarding the welfare of a child. The focus of Chapter 49 is child abuse and neglect.

Educational Neglect

- A report of educational neglect is considered for acceptance when it is alleged that a parent or person responsible for a child's care knowingly fails to enroll a child in school or to provide education in accordance with 16 V.S.A. § 1121. Through the parent or caretaker's action or inaction, the child regularly fails to attend school.
- Educational neglect is considered for children beginning at **age six** until the completion of the **sixth grade**.

Educational Neglect Assessments

When a report of educational neglect is accepted, the Family Services Worker (FSW) conducts a, “CHINS B” Assessment. The steps in an assessment include:

- Contact with the child and household members, the reporter, school staff, and other service providers.
- A visit to the child’s home.
- Collateral fact gathering and interviews as needed.

Additional steps often include:

- A Coordinated Service Planning Meeting (CSP)
- Additional home visits
- Referrals to community providers (Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS) the designated agency (DA), and others.

Truancy

- Per [FSD Policy 60](#), truancy occurs when a child who has completed the sixth grade has accumulated 20 unexcused absences from school as a result of their own action or inaction.
- Truancy applies to youth **from grade 7 to up to age 16** who are registered for school and not attending.
- The Department may also conduct an assessment under the authority of 33 V.S.A. § 5106. The focus of this assessment is on whether a child may be in need of care and supervision. This statute includes assessments for educational neglect.

When Does DCF-FSD Get Involved for Truancy?

DCF-FSD will conduct a youth assessment when a case is accepted due to CHINS (D) concerns, when a child is between grade 7 and age 16, and under the following circumstances:

- An Emergency Care Order (ECO) has been issued;
- A Conditional Custody Order (CCO) has been issued; and/or
- Post-Merits finding of truancy with an open court case.

Youth assessment is a collaborative process involving the youth, family members, community supports and DCF.

Strengths and challenges are identified; develop a comprehensive outline of their needs and build upon their protective factors.

Current Challenges

We have found significant variation from school district to school district regarding how absences are counted and defined. Examples include:

- What “excused” vs. “unexcused” mean varies depending on the school.
- Some schools no longer differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. This varies by district.
- Outreach to the family varies (letters after 5, 10, 15, or 20 absences; calling parents rather than letter))
- Some schools employ a home visit as part of their efforts. This varies based on the school's capacity and whether or not they have a designated staff to oversee attendance.
- Some schools unenroll students after 10 consecutive absences when the reason for the absences is deemed insufficient.

26-0777 – A Shift to Chronic Absenteeism

- FSD remains statutorily mandated to investigate concerns about "lack of parental capacity," which includes educational neglect.
- FSD supports a consistent statewide approach to categorizing absences as excused or unexcused.
- FSD supports addressing chronic absenteeism and finds that the enactment of district policies to prevent and respond to chronic absenteeism, would be especially helpful for serving children and youth.
- FSD supports expanding the reasons for excused absences and supports the proposal for mandatory data collection.

Questions?