



Empowering Communities.
Changing Lives.

The Illinois State Council
on Re-Enrolling Students
Who Dropped Out of School



Alternative Schools Network



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PRESS RELEASE

TRUANCY RATES SKYROCKET WHILE DROPOUT RATES DECLINE

New Data Frames State & Local Leader Discussions To Address High School Dropout Issue

CHICAGO – New data on truancy, chronic truancy and high school dropouts in Chicago and Illinois was released at a high-level policy briefing, “*Hope & Opportunity: Creating Futures for Out-of-School Youth*,” with state legislators and Chicago Public Schools to frame discussions regarding future plans and opportunities for out-of-school youth.

The collection of data released at the *Hope & Opportunity* briefing highlights comparative trends between truancy and dropouts and shows **dropout rates in Chicago and Illinois ostensibly declining by nearly half between 2006 and 2012, while truancy and chronic truancy appear to have doubled between 2006 and 2009 and then after falling, shot up almost threefold in 2012.**

“The new collection of data reveals that while dropout rates appear to be declining, truancy and chronic truancy in Chicago and Illinois appear to be dramatically escalating. While this data presents a hopeful sign for declining dropouts, the seeming rise in truancy and chronic truancy is troubling and warrants further analysis,” said **Jack Wuest, Executive Director at the Alternative Schools Network in Chicago.**

The data framed discussions for re-enrolling out-of-school youth at policy forum held today at The Union League Club of Chicago. Convening co-sponsors for the briefing included the **Chicago Urban League, Illinois State Council on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School, Youth Connection Charter School, and the Alternative Schools Network.**

Speakers at the briefing included: **Jesse Ruiz**, chair, IL State Council on Re-Enrolling Student Who Dropped Out of School & Chicago Board of Education member; **Andrea Zopp**, president & CEO, Chicago Urban League & Chicago Board of Education member; **Jennifer Vidis**, executive director, Office of Education Options, Chicago Public Schools; **Dr. Sheila Venson**, executive director, Youth Connection Charter School; **Jack Wuest**, executive director, Alternative Schools Network; and **Alejandro Molina and Linda Hannah**, board members of Youth Connection Charter School. Additionally, a diverse group of youth testified on their experiences and the opportunities that education and employment programs provide.

State legislative budget perspectives on options to expand programs to re-enroll youth who have dropped out of school were shared during a panel discussion moderated by Catalyst Chicago’s Editor-in-Chief **Lorraine Forte**. Panelists included: Illinois State Senator and Assistant Majority Leader **Kimberly Lightford**, Illinois State Senator and Chair of Appropriations II Committee **Dan Kotowski**, Illinois State Representative and Chair of Elementary & Secondary Appropriations Committee **William Davis**, Illinois State Representative and Elementary & Secondary Education Committee Member **Camille Lilly**.

POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS FOR DIVERGENT TRUANCY & DROPOUT RATES

The comparative truancy, chronic truancy and dropout data was compiled by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) on Dropouts and Truants in Chicago and Illinois and up until 2012 was annually published on the ISBE website.

In reviewing the data at different points in the period from 2006 to 2012, wide variations can be seen in the number of truants, chronic truants and dropouts in Chicago and Illinois. The wide variations may be attributed to several key changes in how the Chicago Public School (CPS) district and ISBE classified truancy and defined “dropouts” including:

Stricter Measurement System For Attendance

In 2009, the CPS district moved to a new attendance information system that resulted in a more sensitive measure, taking attendance in high school from once a day to taking attendance every period and reporting attendance based on minutes. Students in attendance for less than 150 minutes of the school day were considered absent for a full day and those in attendance between 150 and 300 minutes were given a half-day absence. As a result, more students were classified as truant.

Change In Number Of Absences To Be Classified As Truant

A spike in chronic truancy between 2011 and 2012 may have resulted from a change in classification of chronic truancy. ISBE changed the classification of chronic truancy to equate to nine unexcused absences instead of the previous 18 unexcused absences.

Change In Definition Of “Dropout”

ISBE changed its definition of “dropout” to only include students who dropped out of ninth through 12th grade rather than those in kindergarten through 12th grade. The change in the grade levels considered in dropout rates would have resulted in a decrease in reported dropouts.

DATA TO SUPPORT TASK FORCE ON TRUANCY IN CHICAGO

In light of the escalating truancy rates, the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force was established by the Illinois House Joint Resolution (HJR1) during the 2013 spring legislative session. The Task Force will convene on Friday, December 6, 2013 and is expected to report its findings to the General Assembly.

The Task Force is charged with:

- **Identifying strategies and approaches to help educators and the City of Chicago School District 299 administration address the truancy and excessive absences epidemic in the City of Chicago.**
- **Promote ongoing professional development to equip school personnel with the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce contributing factors to truancy and excessive absences.**
- **Support community-based organizations and parents in their ongoing efforts to encourage youths to adopt and practice positive social behaviors that will allow them to be successful in school and in their communities.**

“It is our hope that this comparative data on truancy, chronic truancy and dropouts and our discussions at this policy briefing today will support and inform the work of the Truancy in the Chicago Public Schools Task Force as they convene this week,” said **Wuest**.

ABOUT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS NETWORK

The Alternative Schools Network (ASN) is a not-for-profit organization in Chicago working to provide quality education with a specific emphasis on inner-city children, youth and adults. Since 1973, ASN has been supporting community based and community-run programs to develop and expand training and other educational services in Chicago’s inner-city neighborhoods. In addition to supporting direct services, ASN has been a consistent and effective advocate for community-based services whereby the people involved are active participants in developing and running programs – not passive recipients of services. To shape policies and programs, ASN has built an impressive track record of operating successful education, employment and support service programs. For more information please visit www.asnchicago.org.

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