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## An Historic Analysis of the Operation of a Truancy Court Conducted in an Urban Middle School

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An Historic Analysis of the Operation of a Truancy Court  
Conducted in an Urban Middle School

by

Lisa Gray

A Dissertation Submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

An Historic Analysis of the Operation of a Truancy Court  
Conducted in an Urban Middle School

by  
Lisa Gray

This dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the  
degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

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## Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Signature:  Date: 03/17/2023

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This has been by far the hardest journey I've ever taken in my lifetime. I began this journey in 2007 when the EdD program first started. I anticipated defending and graduating within three years; but with every obstacle standing in my way, this was going to be a long road to the finish line. I never thought this moment would ever come, but by the grace of God it has arrived. During the longest road travelled I've lost two important people; but, with God in my favor they can now rejoice with me. I would like to express a heart-filled thank you to my chair and advisor, Dr. Sherrie Wisdom, for everything you've done to help me to get through to this day. There were many times I just wanted to quit, but you continued to push me to the finish line. You understood that many of my obstacles were no fault of my own. I would like to thank my committee members, my sister Dr. Tina Hamilton for always being there through the good and bad times, and Dr. DaMaris White for your commitment in helping to see a vision throughout this process. My husband and children, Ryan and Kyle, for believing and standing behind me through all the sweat, tears, and now joy. My grandmother (deceased) for telling me to continue and "don't let anyone or anything stand in your way." Then, saying "save the best" for last, I want to thank my mother, who was pushing me to finish.

## **Abstract**

Truancy is a concern that most school districts around the country are familiar with. This study was to examine the development of a truancy court established in an effort to conquer this problem. There were several school districts, from inner city to rural, that believed truancy courts helped to reduce attendance issues. Data were collected and assessed from the observations of the existing truancy courts. It was determined from the data that truancy courts were only productive if the judge had the support from the parents. Some were repeat offenders, whereas some just needed a little guidance to get back on track. The number of repeat offenders dropped after their attendance of one or two times in truancy court.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction of the Study**

### **Background of the Study**

School truancy is a chronic challenge that has complicated the efforts of school systems across the nation to prepare and equip our youth for success in their future endeavors. As Doug Reeves (2008) quoted Yogi Berra, "School success is 90 percent showing up; the other half is mental." In 2008, Normandy Middle School's average daily attendance was less than 90% and the attendance goal was 95% or better. On a daily basis, the school averaged around 40 students who were tardy (Normandy School District, 2009). The students arrived from anywhere between 10 minutes late, and two hours late (Normandy School District, 2009). When asked the reason for their tardiness, they usually did not have a legitimate one. According to Baker et. al (2001), "Each school day, hundreds of thousands of students are missing from their classrooms—many without a bona fide excuse" (p. 1). This study focused on the operation of a Truancy Court program at the middle school level and its impact on student attendance. The Truancy Court incorporated attendance referrals from teachers, counselors, and the social worker (Normandy Middle School Staff, 2009). These students were referred to the court after three tardies or three unexcused absences, which resulted in their appearance before a judge, located at the school (Normandy Schools Collaborative Attendance Procedure Manual, 2021). The students referred to the court were middle-school-aged students. Baker et. al (2001) argued that "truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and/or educational failure" (p. 2). This research may contribute potential solutions that

address the attendance challenges that school systems throughout the nation are plagued with. Per [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org), of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2022),

Chronic absenteeism affects as many as 6.5 million students nationwide... At least 10% of kindergarten and first-grade students miss a month or more of the school year. Chronic absenteeism becomes more common in middle school, and about 19% of all high school students are chronically absent. (p. 4)

It takes the school-level support team (counselors, social workers, and administrators) to tackle the attendance issue. It was the responsibility of the school social worker to take the lead in organizing meetings with parents and guardians, regarding attendance. In situations of chronic absenteeism, a hotline referral to the Missouri Division of Family Services was necessary (Normandy Schools Collaborative Attendance Procedure Manual, 2021). At the time of this writing, there was a growing phenomenon of students who came to school tardy or did not attend at all (United States Department of Education, 2021).

In order to address the attendance issue in the Normandy School District, the district implemented a truancy policy for students of the 24 Saint Louis County municipalities it served. Each municipality identified the consequences that parents would have if they did not stress to their student that attending school is important. The Missouri Compulsory Attendance Law stated that

any parent, guardian or other person having custody or control of a child between the ages of seven (7) and the compulsory attendance age for the district, must ensure that the child is enrolled in and regularly attends public, private, parochial,

home school or a combination of schools for the full term of the school year.

(Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022, p. 1)

The district had seen the number of truant students increase over the years, with the highest two years increasing by 15% to 20% (Normandy School District, 2009). In previous years, the attendance at the middle school was averaging around 80%. Low average daily attendance prompted a desire for a solution to this prevalent problem.

American University's School of Education argued in 2022 that, "School attendance is a powerful predictor of student outcomes. In fact, irregular attendance can be a better predictor of whether students will drop out of school before graduation than test scores" (p. 1). Typically, the truant students had poor grades, disciplinary issues, and socialization problems, which in many cases created serious problems, not just in the school, but in the community, as well. The U.S. Department of Justice found that Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and/or educational failure (2001). The implementation of a Truancy Court program was one way to potentially improve the attendance at the middle school level. Certainly, support from the school and parents would help to reduce the number of students attending school late, or not at all. The truant students had many excuses for why they were tardy or not in attendance. Some of the reasons the students attributed to their tardiness consisted of: waking up late, missing the bus, taking a younger sibling to school, or a sick parent/guardian, etc. (Normandy Schools Collaborative Attendance Procedure Manual, 2021). The fact that students were either tardy or not in attendance impacted their grades tremendously. Many of the students were failing their classes, and the parents did not realize that some

of the work could not be made up. It is important for parents to be proactive and be knowledgeable of school system policies on attendance. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Justice stated, “[The] parent’s role in addressing truancy involves being familiar with truancy laws and school guidelines for attendance, as well as monitoring children’s behavior and class preparation at home” (p. 9). Strong parental involvement can possibly improve student attendance.

According to the St. Louis County, Missouri, Family Court, truant students must attend school on a regular basis until the age of 17 (St. Louis County, MO, Truancy Court Manual, 2002-2003). Any student not abiding by the law would result in referral to the Juvenile Detention Center. There is a difference between the processing of students who resided in St. Louis City and St. Louis County. The students appeared before the judge, not only in the schools’ Truancy Court, but also in the courts of the City of St. Louis (City of St. Louis, 2019). In some instances, the judges did not show leniency towards the students. The reason for this was so students would come to grips with what was important and realize, without their education, it is difficult to pursue any type of job or skill.

The judge assigned community service, court appearances, or whatever consequence was necessary to gain the attention of the truant student. If the student did not adhere to the judge’s decision, a student may be detained in the juvenile detention center.

### **The Problem Statement**

The purpose of this study was to investigate a way for truant students to come to school on a regular basis and on time. The students did not understand the value of their

education; but instilling in them the sense of responsibility and consequences could help students to value the importance of attending school. Since truancy was a problem and needed to be addressed, the researcher hoped the Truancy Court would explore ways for the students to gain control of themselves and arrive to school in a timely manner. This would help students to become more responsible, develop a reason for their purpose, and make getting an education a key factor in their lives.

The study conducted may become a catalyst for educational reform for teachers across the country who teach students who are considerably truant. The truant students usually encounter several issues from absenteeism and disciplinary issues to poor grades; all of which are indicators that correlate closely with the likelihood of dropping out of school. Many of the students tended to have major issues that affected their behaviors, which kept them from attending school daily. Since the truant students did not attend school regularly, they tended to engage in illegal activity, such as burglary, vandalism, and destruction of property, etc. (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2022, p. 4).

Development of specific instructional strategies and methodologies for students who are chronically truant may help them to remain in school and maintain focus about school. The benefit of a program, such as Truancy Court, is that students would be able to see the pros and cons of being in a courtroom setting and the consequences that would occur if they did not attend school. The purpose of this study was to provide schools, such as Normandy School District, with pertinent information to help transform district policies regarding truancy and assist other districts throughout the country in implementing a program to conquer truancy. This study may help to improve the daily attendance at school and instructional processes to meet the needs of the students. The Truancy Court

may also contribute to building relationships within the community to assist the parents of truant students and provide support for the students to get back on track.

Urban schools were facing an overwhelming number of students not attending school on a regular basis. Many students affected were those in urban school systems and those from single parent families with little or no educational background. There was a need to improve attendance so that students could have hopes, dreams, and aspirations of one day becoming productive citizens in their communities. Normandy Middle School was a school considered urban, with a high population of students who came from single parent families.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the processes followed in Truancy Court?
- 2) What are challenges for students going into the truant court system?
- 3) What are challenges for parents when they discovered their children were truant?
- 4) What types of involvement do parents have in their children's education?
- 5) What are some programs that are in place for students who are truant prior to their attendance of truancy court?
- 6) What are some goals that students can develop to assist them with truancy?
- 7) What is the expected outcome that the student would attend future truancy court sessions?
- 8) What are the perceptions of the truancy court process by parents and students who participate in the process?

- 9) What are the absence patterns found in the school records with regard to students who are assigned to truancy court?
- 10) What are the school disciplinary patterns among the students who are assigned to truancy court?
- 11) Historically, how many students were coming to school late or not at all?

The students' access to education was based upon these three descriptive quantitative questions:

1. Do students from a single-parent family with little or no education attend school less than those from a single-parent family with post-secondary education?
2. Are students attending school at a lower percentage based upon socioeconomic status?
3. Are students attending school at a lower percentage due to negative environmental issues?

The students' attendance will improve as a result of attending the truancy court.

### **Academics**

Students with chronic attendance issues usually have poor or unacceptable grades. This problem stems from the students not attending school on a regular basis. When the student does not attend school, this affects their grades; causing them to fail. Sometimes, the students then identify the teacher(s) as the cause for their not passing the classes, for many different reasons. The fact remains, when a student is not at school, the parent or guardian should be the one contacting the school to report the student's absence. In the district studied, there were less than 5% of the parents contacting the school when the



students were out of school (Normandy Middle School Attendance Data, 2009). When the students are truant, this becomes a nightmare for the teachers, as well as the students. Teachers are then constantly going back and re-teaching lessons, because of students' lack of attendance. This becomes a difficult matter if the subject is math or science. The students often used their absences, or the fact that they were tardy to school, as an excuse to not complete the assignments, especially if it was a subject they did not like.

The targeted students considerably tardy to school and or class, as well as being absent on a weekly basis, were not realizing the importance of their education. They believed arriving to school on a daily basis with a tardy justified them to not complete their school work. The truant students took advantage of the situation, and when told they were jeopardizing their education, an 'I don't care' was their response.

### **Discipline**

The students who were truant had a number of disciplinary issues. Some of the problems developed from being truant. Often times, many of the students created more problems, which led to issues and situations in their neighborhoods, while some seemed to think handling their issues in their communities only led the problem back to the school. There were students who were familiar with the Juvenile system; they had Deputy Juvenile Officers assigned to them, because of their discipline behaviors. The truant students were suspended on a regular basis for the same repeated behaviors (Normandy Middle School Discipline Data, 2009). Upon the students' return to school from a suspension, the students and their parents met with the grade-level administrator to develop a plan and signed a contract. In some instances, the students did not follow through on the plan in place. This resulted in students being placed on homebound notice

and some being sent to the alternative school. Being sent to alternative school did not mean the student could not return to the building. This was just temporary, until the student served the remaining out-of-school suspension days (Normandy Middle School Discipline Data, 2009).

Some students stated being referred to the alternative school was a way to be with some of their same-age peers. In order to address their disciplinary issues, the district contracted Previous School Resource Officers, a group of retired police officers who came into the school and spoke with the students about their disciplinary issues at least once a week. The students were identified by their disciplinary records, previous suspensions, and other related problems to address the growing number of students resulting in this type of behavior. With the help of the parents, counselors, social workers, administrators, and outside support, some of the students managed to improve their behaviors. The students were able to begin tracking their own behaviors. In doing so, students were able to find what was making them trigger (Normandy Middle School Discipline Data, 2009).

### **Socialization**

The Truancy Court for the students was a way for them to interact with the judge and deputy juvenile officers, etc. It was difficult for students to accept responsibility; especially, having to socialize with law officials. The students had preconceived notions about law officials and it was hard for them to communicate. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2018),

While most researchers agree that age and race are factors that consistently influence youth attitudes toward police, there is also no consensus on other factors

(e.g., gender, social class) that influence youth attitudes toward the police or when such factors begin to influence police–youth interactions” (as cited in Brown & Benedict, 2002, p. 1)

The socialization warned the students to develop a barrier against law officials and shut down completely. The students were not always willing to share their thoughts, because of the issues other family members had with law officials. In 2018, the U.S Department of Justice reasoned that, “the relevance of examining youth attitudes toward police has been established in the literature” (as cited in Stewart et al., 2014), and studies that have explored youth–police relations have found that youths’ attitudes toward law enforcement directly influence their willingness to engage with the police” (Forman 2004; Solis et al. 2009; Murphy 2015). The main goal was for the students to be able to discuss their issues, once they appeared before the judge or court officials to see what steps were needed to handle the problem and how it was going to be resolved. Although the communication between students involved in the truancy court program and law enforcement appeared to be strained, an open line of communication was needed in the courts in order for students to willingly share the challenges they faced and the reasons for their truancy. Many times, this may help to ease some of the emptiness that some of the students tended to feel in a place that may be comforting to them.

### **Definitions**

*Attendance Policy:* A policy regarding attendance within a school system.

*Absenteeism:* Absence from school beyond what is considered reasonable or customary.

*Average Daily Attendance (ADA):* The total days of student attendance divided by the total days of instruction.

*Delinquency:* Criminal behavior committed by juveniles under the legal age of adulthood.

*Deputy Juvenile Officer:* Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO) deals must be knowledgeable with the state's authority to oversee children under the age of 17. They must take charge of the children's welfare as recorded by the courts. The DJO must determine what's best for the children and keep accurate records of all meetings with the student, school, parent, and court.

*Truancy:* Truancy is the absence from school/class without the knowledge and consent of parent/guardian and the school administration.

*Truancy Court:* Truancy Court is to ensure all children ages 7 through 17 are in school, as mandated by the law.

*Truant:* A student who stays away from school without permission.

### **Summary:**

The researcher responded to the chronic truancy concerns that were plaguing many school systems across the nation by observing the operations of a Truancy Court program as an option to help tackle this national problem. Chapter Two, the review of literature highlights several school districts throughout the country and how they are establishing programs to decrease truancy in schools. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and design of study. Chapter Four includes the observational data of the monthly truancy court. Chapter Five, provides a summary of the study and future recommendations to support truancy courts in school systems.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Pandemic Reflection

#### *Historically*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared the United States was officially hit with a national health concern on September 30, 2014 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). The CDC discovered Ebola had made its way to California and soon after to a few other states; however, not before Ebola infected nine people and killed two. Following the two years that Ebola took over the country and had everyone on edge, it soon vanished as though it never happened.

#### *Currently: During This Study (March 2020 - 2021)*

Fast forward six years later; who would have thought that the country would be dealing with another unknown health scare that many of us know as COVID-19. COVID-19 made its way through the United States, beginning in Fall of 2020. This scare was so deadly that it infected millions of men, women, and children (National Public Radio, 2021). Many of the cases were bad enough for schools across the United States to be closed and sanitized until further notice.

What do you do when there aren't any teachers to greet the children each day? This event put many school superintendents to the test. The biggest question was, how were students going to be educated? Students were transitioned from synchronous learning, which means in person, to asynchronous learning, which means independent, without any face-to-face instruction. For many students, this was very unnerving; especially for students who received special education services. This was not going to be an easy transition. There were some school districts that never used technology as part of

the instructional process, and some districts were about 50% online with instruction. How was a district going to handle a crisis, such as not being able to educate students? Superintendents met virtually to decide how students were going to get the necessary materials to continue their learning.

According to the article, “COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime” (McKinsey, 2020), the title was also true for Education. Would this be the end of synchronous learning in U.S. education? This situation not only put pressure on school districts, but on parents as well. Parents were not ready for what seemed to be a downhill spiral. Education was at its all-time low and educating children was going to be hard (Bookman et al., 2021).

McKinsey (2020) stated not all students would be getting instruction; some would receive very little instruction, if any at all, while some students would eventually lose hope and drop out of school. His remarks related to what the country, with regard to education, came to during these unprecedented times. Virtual became more difficult every day and affected the majority of African American and Hispanic students the most; due to the lack of resources, with technology being key (Gallagher & Spievack, 2021). There was some conversation among teachers, principals, and district office officials regarding how teachers would be able to deliver instruction 100% virtually (Mehlville School District, 2021). These conversations continued to change each day as the number of COVID-19 cases increased. In some instances, school districts planned to begin the academic year in person; but, had to change to virtual/remote at the last minute. This caused many to wonder, would this become what one would consider the new normal?

According to Sawchuk (2020), if students were left to being educated virtually, they will lose at least 11 months of learning. To lose 11 months of learning would be definitely a huge loss for low-income, African American and Hispanic students.

How will school districts be able to recover from this pandemic? Superintendents were continuously communicating every day to find ways to ensure that students were able to continue their learning. Many students needed the synchronous learning. Students should not have to feel that, if they live in particular areas, they will not receive the same instruction given to students in fluent areas.

### **Literature Review**

In today's society, the dynamics of education were changing. Truancy was identified as a social and juvenile issue that schools faced each day. Truant students were linked to many problems our nation was facing daily. Many of these problems were identified as school failures, juvenile delinquency, and behavioral issues, just to name a few that affected our students (National Center for School Engagement, 2005).

#### ***New York City***

In 2002, New York City was faced with hundreds of students, at least one-fifth of their student population, that missed school during the first few weeks of school (NYI, 2002). Numbers exceeding and as high as New York City's were a cause for immediate attention to address this nationwide epidemic. According to Johnson (2000), students with good attendance improved their grades. Often students felt their attendance did not play a part in their education, but it was strictly up to the school districts to find a way to help improve attendance. One way to help with increasing student attendance was to

have quarterly incentives for students who attended regularly. Incentives would encourage students to rethink before they missed school, or fell into the truancy category.

### *Minnesota*

In 2006, the Minnetonka School District #276 in Minnesota had to change the district's attendance policy numerous times to find one that was a suitable fit. Dennis Peterson (2006), the superintendent, believed the policy had to be changed multiple times, because the students were not taking attendance seriously. There were times, while in the process of finding a solution, school districts were going to come in contact with students who believed there would not be consequences for their actions. To prevent these measures, schools must put in place a plan regarding truancy, so that the students will be able to determine what is expected from them. This would, hopefully, put a stop to students failing the system (Reeves, 2008).

In order to help students understand that attendance would only increase grades, the Minnetonka school district implemented a policy stating, for every unexcused absence the students had to stay after school for detention. Of course, there were some students who were accustomed to staying after school; but, for most it affected their social lives. That meant the after-school program would be beneficial for a lot of students, because staying after school was not the life they wanted to live. According to Superintendent Peterson (2006), this dropped the unexcused absences by 42% and disciplinary referrals by 64%. The Minnetonka School District did not give up on their students until they found a policy that the students would adhere to.



### *Missouri*

The Ripley County and Butler County School Districts, located in Missouri, took a new approach in reducing the number of truant students in their areas. Judge Robert Smith began his Truancy Court during the school year, 2010-2011 (Farley, 2010). According to Judge Smith, it would be the first time Missouri would have Truancy Court effective for the entire judicial system. He stated that, not only were the courts eager about the implementation, but the surrounding communities helped to play an extraordinary part in keeping students in school. Since the first session of Truancy Court took place at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, changes were made throughout the year, as needed, to encourage the students to remain in school. To allow students and parents to be able to attend the court sessions, the court provided two sessions, in order to accommodate the school district, parents, and of course the students (Farley, 2010). Judge Smith believed that the court would begin to reduce the number of students coming to school late or not at all. He also believed that parents were not being held accountable for their students' actions.

### *Truancy*

President Obama was quoted as saying students “cannot just drop into a good job” (Obama, 2009, p. 1). By hearing the President stress his opinion about education, students should want to do something so that they do not become one of the national statistics, a drop out (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

When students became truant and did not attend school on a regular basis, dropping out was what usually happened. It became very difficult for the drop out students to gain employment and live a normal life. Often times, students thought that

truancy did not affect their education, but actually it did. Attendance is the key factor to a good education (Coffee County Schools, 2021). When a student attends school, then he/she is able to grasp the concepts that are taught, which will eventually lead to good grades. The young people of America must understand that receiving and getting an education is very important, and without a good education, children will be lost. There were many instances where the students believed that being truant or not attending school on a regular basis was acceptable behavior. In actuality, it just created more obstacles for them to overcome.

### ***Students' Upbringing and Backgrounds***

Students were being reared by a host of individuals whose backgrounds were both related and unrelated. There were a number of variables positive and negative playing an important role in the development of a child. In the article, "Consumerism and Gender in an Era of School Choice," author Stambach (2001), described the parents as the consumer, and the education of the student the product. She further commented that parents had to think more like entrepreneurs looking to model a product that others would buy. Parents must understand that their focus should be making sure that their student attended school; but instead, many parents were finding it hard to maintain their homes, due to economic inflation.

Educating the child becomes difficult for teachers when faced with this variable; truancy. Parents want to see their children succeed, but the real question of the matter is that the parents were not upholding their part. According to author Chang (2008), it was important to address chronic absences in early grades. Often times, students who were chronically absent in kindergarten tended to show a lower performance during the first

grade and continued in a downward cycle from there, if attendance was not addressed. Chang (2008) believed that a school with 90% average attendance could possibly have 60 or more students not showing up for at least two months, and it would go unnoticed. Usually, schools only tracked the unexcused absences, leaving the tardiness or late arrivals unnoticed. This left the school districts open to a lot of students not caring about their attendance, especially if there were schools that did not have attendance officers. Depending on the school district, if a student was tardy more than three times, it usually constituted an unexcused absence. Students tended to forget that being tardy would affect not only attendance; but other factors were added, as well.

Students were expected to attend school on a regular basis, unless there was an illness, suspension, or some other type of legitimate excuse preventing them from attending. In essence, when students tell a parent that they are ill or not able to attend school, it is the responsibility of the parent to report their absence. This was not always the case in many urban school districts. In the urban schools, many of the students were from single parent families with little or no education, so reporting an absence was just out of the ordinary. According to Robins and Ratcliff (1980), African-American males were the ones that had the attendance considered truant. Most of the male students missed about 24% of school during the first semester (Robins & Ratcliff, 1980). However, there were very few of these male students who missed due to illness. These students were the ones wandering the city streets looking for something to get into, which majority of the time turned out to be negative activity.

*Normandy*

Although the majority of male students at Normandy Middle School exceeded the 24%, based on Robins and Ratcliff's (1980) research, there were many of the female students who competed with the male students. The counselors went to individual classrooms, speaking on topics referring to the students' education, and truancy was a topic that was often covered (Normandy Middle School Manual, 2009). Sometimes the counselors involved the school social worker into many of the sessions; so, the students were familiar with what was expected and the consequences that may come thereafter. Of course, the students were not always eager to hear a speaker, especially on a subject, such as truancy.

Many of the students who were truant tended to wander, get into trouble, and display unacceptable behavior, which normally led to a life of crime (Garry, 1996). This was up to the parents, with the help of the school district to turn these students' lives into something positive. Parents were advised that allowing their students to not attend school was not an option and school districts were taking truancy seriously. If referring parents to the court system would alleviate the situation, then school districts would do what was necessary to reduce the truancy problem. Chronic absenteeism only caused negative outcomes to follow. Students who chose a life of negative actions would result in them becoming truant. Sometimes parents were to blame for some of the attendance problems that the districts had to deal with (Garry, 1996). Often times, the parents were truant or had chronic absenteeism and refused to attend school themselves, so not only did this negative behavior play a part in their education, but it was keeping the cycle on-going. Parents were to blame, as well as the students, when it came to chronic absences. There

were some cases where parents made excuses when the student did not want to attend school. They would come up with any excuse necessary in order for the student to stay home if necessary (ncmOnline, n.d.).

Accountability is the key, and parents needed to be reprimanded when their students did not attend school on a daily basis (National Crime Prevention Council, 2022). Wilkerson, a Deputy Juvenile Officer of the St. Louis City Initiative Truancy Project, stated that parents were summoned to court, based upon the number of days their student had missed. Whether they were excused or unexcused, the number of days out of school would determine the parent's fate in court. The judge was always willing to hear the parent's version why the student over-exceeded the number of days in a quarter, semester, and even the school year. Parents were given many options by the judge, depending on if the student had a history of missing school (National Crime Prevention Council, 2022). The consequences for the parents ranged from community service, fines, and even jail time. She stated there had been instances where the parent was arrested when they showed up in court, because of outstanding warrants. Wilkerson stated that every case was different and the circumstance mainly depended on the judge. If necessary, the judge had a conference with the student, without the parent being present, to gain an understanding of why the student missed so many days. Wilkerson stated that many times the students took the blame, because the parent was not home when the student left for school, so in essence they did not go (National Crime Prevention Council, 2022).

***St. Louis City Initiative Program***

As part of the St. Louis City Initiative Program, the St. Louis Public Schools opened a school for troubled students. Most of these students were behavioral problems, and low academics and truancy issues, just to name a few. Judge Edwards of the St. Louis City Courts was tired of the same students coming to his courtroom for the same offenses, so he decided to open a school that would encourage the students to stay in school and get a good education (Cambria, 2011). So, he decided to open Innovative Concept Academy in 2009. Judge Edwards' school was appointed by the courts and had a partnership with MERS Goodwill. Some of the students who attended the school were truant, involved in gangs, and were violent offenders. In order for the students to get back on track to getting an education, he worked closely with the students, so they would not fail the system again (Cambria, 2011).

***Deputy Juvenile Officers***

In most school districts, truant students were assigned to deputy juvenile officers, who were commonly known as DJOs (City of St. Louis Family Court Administration, 2019). Their responsibility was to make sure that the student was attending school on a regular basis. A DJO may call or come by the student's school as often as necessary, especially if there was probable cause that the student was not attending school. However, there were cases where the student was sent to the detention center, because they refused to attend school. The deputy juvenile officer worked in collaboration with the school and district in order to prevent other students from falling into the category, known to all as truancy.

There were times when the DJOs were the sole contact for the schools, because of parental neglect. This happened when the parents were warned several times that the student must maintain adequate attendance, and their rights were then given to the courts. It was hard when the DJO tried to build trust in the students, where they were comfortable with dialoguing about why they did not attend school (City of St. Louis Family Court Administration, 2019).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2001) reported that most truant school-aged students were involved in serious crimes. These crimes were usually committed by students considered as truant students. Truancy was a sign that something was severely wrong and must be addressed before it became more than anyone could handle. When a student begins to display some of the warning signs of depression, changes in behavior or other related signs signify the student is in need of some type of help. This behavior tends to start affecting the student's health, which can lead to mental health issues or worse (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2001).

Some studies showed that truancy could lead to a life of crime. Therefore, students who failed to attend school and became truant or displayed truancy issues deterred to crimes that could cost them to serve out their adolescence in a detention facility (Garry, 1996). Many local police departments scoped the city streets looking for students who were truant. In 1995, Wellston Police Department randomly picked up 31 or more students who were supposed to be in school, but instead were walking throughout the neighborhoods. When asked if they were supposed to be in school, it was found that many were suspended from school. The parents were called to pick their students up from the police station, and the school was notified, as well (Garry, 1996).

Let the question be asked, why any student that should be in school would be walking around the neighborhood, unless they were up to no-good. Although many cities throughout the country dealt with truant students, each city may have an ordinance pertaining to truancy. The ordinance is for the safety of all students and residents in that particular city.

### ***Philadelphia***

The city of Philadelphia had to find a way to get truant students off the streets, so they started a program called, Truancy Sweeps (Hinds, 1994). This program paid parents to call and report truant students who should be in school. With the help of the police department, truancy officers, and school officials, students were picked up off the streets daily and taken to truancy centers until parents could be contacted. Philadelphia School District had the fourth highest truancy rate in the nation (Hinds, 1994). The district had almost 200,000 students and more than 20,000 students were truant on an average day, which meant 10% of their students were truant (Hinds, 1994). This says a lot, and indicated a need for action from parents to help reduce the number of students who were not attending school on a regular basis (Hinds, 1994). The district reported that 80% of their students were composed of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians.

### ***Boston***

The United States Department of Education reported that Boston incorporated cell phones for locating the truant students throughout the city (Trotter, 2002, p. 1). The truancy officers in Boston were given cell phones connected to the school districts, which allowed them to determine whether a particular student was in school. The cell phone was connected to the school's database. Once the student was located, he or she was



asked to verify their name, and if a bogus name was used, the student must try again. The system would send a message to the truancy officer that the student was using a bogus name. The truancy officer then searched for the student throughout the city (Trotter, 2022). By using this technique, it was almost mandated that the student attend school.

### ***East Baton Rouge School District***

The East Baton Rouge School District was using a 17-year-old male truant as an example (WAFB 9, 2010). He was currently facing murder charges and had been in this cycle since the second grade. The judge decided that in order to help students, they needed to help them understand that they must attend school on a regular basis; otherwise, they may end in the same position. The school district reported there were about 2,000 more students who showed up to school during the current year, than in the year prior (WAFB 9, 2010).

While students were becoming truant across the county, East Baton Rouge was in the process of implementing a truancy center, which allowed parents to keep their students in school (WAFB9, 2010). This program would provide parenting workshops and other techniques that would encourage students to remain in school. The students demonstrated one of the characteristics of being truant; not attending school on a regular basis. Based upon information presented in the article from the district, school officials believed it was best that a truancy center be opened, due to the alarming number of truant students (WAFB9, 2010). The district felt as though this would eliminate some of the guilt and shame that many parents tended to feel about their student not attending school. Implementing a truancy center would help to reduce the number of truant students. So, in

fact, many students' attitudes may begin to change after parents are held accountable for their student's actions (WAFB 9, 2010).

### *Memphis City Schools*

According to the Memphis City Schools, there was a growing problem of truant students. Apparently, students were leaving school and committing crimes resulting in violence, when in fact they should be in school. District officials reported that parents and the local police department needed to find a solution to end this growing problem. The parents needed to work in collaboration to prevent the students from committing such crimes. Students appeared to be congregating in vacant and dilapidated houses, which were not safe to live in, to commit some of their crimes (Channel 3 News, WREG-Memphis, n.d.). Memphis was steering the way to keep students in school; so, they decided to begin a mentoring program to strive to keep students on track. Instead of referring them to court, the school district decided to partner the students with mentors that will follow up on their progress in school. Incorporating this program would help to deter students from becoming truant and living a life that would end in jail time or even worse. The school district was working in collaboration with the District Attorney General's Office to oversee that the students remained in school. Parents that violated the Compulsory Attendance Act for the local school district were fined and were subject to a Class C misdemeanor with a possible jail sentence and fine. District Attorney Gibbons stated it was the law and parents would be punished, as well as the students who did not adhere to the Attendance Act set in place by the state (Commercial Appeal, 2009).

However, the Memphis Police Department believed that the school district was not reporting the students who were truant. In an effort to reduce the number of truancy issues, the school district did not report truancy cases. According to the Memphis Police Department, it was up to the school district to report each case and it was up to the police department to follow up. But when the districts were not cooperative, it made the police department's job a little difficult. Each case was handled differently and it was up to the police department, the school district, and the truancy courts to determine the consequences for the students (Police Chief Magazine, 2004).

According to Luttrell (2003), the struggles that many of these parents faced began by having children at such a young age. Many of the parents supporting the truant students were African-American, single mothers struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis. Most of the mothers worked low-end jobs and had little or no education. The fathers of these students were not around, because of some of the same behaviors that the students were now faced with (Luttrell, 2003). Since the truant students saw that their parents were not interested in trying to improve their education, it was a bit difficult to instill the value of attending school to their students. Some of the values that the parents were lacking were not important as they were growing up. The students endured the trials and tribulation that their parents had now impacted upon them, by not stressing the import of attending school and getting an education. The students had not developed a sense that getting a good education resulted from attending school on a regular basis. For many truant students, it became a way of life; not attending school.

***New York State***

One state that would not tolerate truant students roaming was New York. According to *The New York Times* (2002), the local truancy officers were mothers and fathers of students who wanted to end the truancy problem. Paul Vallas, Chief Executive of Schools, made the truancy issue personal. Vallas hired 250 parents to track down truant students wandering in their community. He believed this would help to reduce the number of students truant to school, and sending parents into the community would be a way to gain their trust (*The New York Times*, 2002). Many times, parents-built relationships with other students in an effort to support their educational needs, due to the fact their own parents may not be around. There were a number of students who sought out assistance from parents, teachers, and other adult role models; but often times went unnoticed. Vallas saw an opportunity for parents to encourage other parents to get involved in their student's education. This could also be a way for the parent truancy officers to determine whether this was any reflection of their own parenting styles. This could also become a difficult task for parents that have to work one or more jobs to provide a stable environment for their students, which left little or no time to tend to their educational needs.

***Broward County, Florida***

Another region that addressed the growing number of truancy students throughout was Broward County, Florida. Broward had the fifth largest school district in the county. Their population was well over 250,000 students. In an effort to reduce the number of truant students, the Broward established the Broward Truancy Intervention Program (BTIP) that began in 1997 school (Broward Truancy Intervention Program Status Report,

2000). With the number of students in Broward, they needed a strategic plan to attack this national problem that was continuously occurring. The BTIP was a partnership between the school board and the state attorney's office. Broward's parents were notified through phone contact, certified mail, and conferences designated by the student services coordinator. The coordinator was the liaison between the parents and the school district. The coordinator's job was to work collaboratively with the parents to keep the students in school (Broward Truancy Intervention Program Status Report, 2000). The BTIP was funded by the state of Florida through the Education's Safe and Drug Free School program. The program staff was appointed by the state attorney's office depending on the money allocate from the state.

The Butler County Truancy Court saw an alarming number of truant students. In 2008, after being in school for three months, the court had been referred 484 cases and school had not been in session a full semester (Pack, 2012). This said a lot for the parents who were lacking parenting classes, workshops, and group meetings to help reduce the number of truancy court cases. According to Judge Craft, of Butler County Juvenile Court, the many times the students skip school, they ended up committing crimes, such as burglarizing homes, and vandalizing property, or much worse (Pack, 2012). The key to reducing truancy cases was to find a way to keep the students in school. Apparently, that was not an easy task for some, because often times the same students continued to show up in Truancy Court. Judge Craft stated that there was a difference between habitual truant and chronic truant. The habitual truant student was one that was absent without a legitimate excuse for five or more days; whereas, a chronic truant student missed seven or more days without a legitimate excuse in any given month. Students who had to report

to Truancy Court could end up with severe consequences, depending upon the judge (Pack, 2012).

### ***Truancy Court***

Participation in Truancy Court can help to decrease the alarming number of students who fall into the category of being truant. This gives the school districts the opportunity to find alternative methods to keep the students in school. Teachers can form support groups amongst themselves in order to meet the challenges they must face when teaching truant students. The support systems can be formed within their school district, and within districts that have an alarming number of students being truant. Many of the teachers can share their ideas, strategies, and their reflections about what may or may not work in the best interest of the students. Sharing helps others to gain a clear understanding how to help the students. It also builds relationships between the teachers and students, as well as the parent.

### ***The Hancock Project***

The Hancock Project (Legat, 2022) was initiated for the school year 2009-2010, due to the alarming number of students coming to school tardy or not at all. Superintendent of Schools, Clark, stated that the goal for attendance in the Hancock Place School District was 95% (Legat, 2022). If students do not attend school on a regular basis, the district has developed consequences based upon the number of absences the students missed. The consequences stem from contacting the parent to being referred to the Family Courts. According to Jackson, supervisor of Deputy Juvenile Officers St. Louis Family Courts, the school district contacted the courts, because it was becoming difficult for students to remain in school, so the district wanted to develop a plan of

action to keep the students in school and not on the streets (Legat, 2022). He stated the district was determined to keep finding an alternative way to encourage the students to come to school.

The district developed a process now known as the Hancock Project (Legat, 2022). The project was based upon students' attendance and outlined in the school district's policy. Superintendent Clark and a committee designed the project based upon the district, school, and students' needs. Once the project was approved by the district there was a meeting to inform the students, as well as the parents. Although there were challenges, the district was able to make sure the students abided by the state law and continued to attend school.

### **Summary**

The goal for the students to succeed and become successful at Normandy Middle School, such as the one in Hancock Place School District, was to have the students to be able to make short- and long-term goals for them to achieve. Creating goals would address the students' needs and would be easily attainable. The students should be able to have guest speakers to come in and work with the students on their goals. This would help the students to make connections to others that have had to attend a truancy court hearing regarding their attendance. Certainly, by allowing speakers to speak to the students based on their experiences, from people that have demonstrated some of the same if not similar experiences, would become a more realistic approach to conquering the problem. The students may have a different attitude about their education, because knowing that someone else has or had prior knowledge about their situation of being

truant may begin a long journey to the healing process for the student, parents, and the school district.

In order to equip teachers at Normandy Middle School with the tools needed to be successful in the classroom and to gain the attention of the truant students to keep them in school, teachers needed consistent high-quality professional development in instructional strategies and ways to motivate students to come to school. The training should be on-going and a well-thought-out plan should be implemented into the curriculum and be accessible for all teachers on an as-needed basis, when conquering the most problematic students.

Programs similar to the one in Hancock have the potential to become a model of success for other school districts nationwide. Also, having a committee identifying changes needed for the program would be helpful. The committee should be comprised of teachers, principals, counselors, social workers, deputy juvenile officers, policemen, parents, and community leaders. However, this would encourage the students to become accountable, as well as parents for their students' education and help them become productive citizens throughout the community.

The most effective way for the students was to have an on-going support system from everyone involved in educating truant students; from the parents, as well as the community leaders. These students needed constant reminders that there was hope for them, and no one should stand in the way of making sure the students receive a quality education. The only way for the students was to first recognize that their education was a full-time job with benefits. If the students see that there are programs, workshops, and



mentors willing to work with them, this may help to reduce the number of students who opt to become truant or drop out of school.

Certainly, having a program, such as the one in Hancock School District would benefit the students with uplifting their spirits about attending school on a regular basis. By implementing programs that would decrease the truancy issues may help students strive throughout the country. The truancy rate was on the rise and having a program that would stimulate their minds and motivate the students to attend school could reduce some of the decisions that lead students to involvement in a life of crime. Many of these students faced challenges in their lives, such as caring for younger siblings and providing assistance to ill parents, etc. However, encouraging the students gives, them an opportunity instead of referral to the Truancy Court for not attending school.

With having to make such difficult decisions based upon their education, the students in the truancy court program may have one thing on their mind, and that is many of them may not want to be referred after the first time (Dallas Fort Worth News, 2010). According to the literature (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2001), there were different school districts that offered the same program, such as the one implemented at Normandy Middle School. In some instances, the entire school should be accountable for helping to support the students at the school in an effort to not be referred based upon their attendance. A look at Philadelphia, a city that tried to find alternative ways to get the students to attend school showed incorporating the “Truancy Sweeps” was a great effort. It involved not only the school districts but the local police department, as well. They used collaboration to ensure that the students attended school and did not result in students committing crime or even worse. Often times, many of the

students did not agree with the program, but some were looking for a way to be noticed.

In essence, it was more like a cry for help from their parents, teachers, and the school.

The truant students were not always low-performing student; some were high achievers

looking for a way to be accepted by their same-age peers.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### **Overview**

There are very few school districts that have implemented a truancy court or truancy-related programs geared to improving student attendance. One of those, the Hancock School District, located in South St. Louis County on the border of St. Louis City, was home of the Hancock Project (Legat, 2022). There are a number of districts in Missouri and throughout the country that recognize truancy issues on the rise (Belsha, 2022). Since the number of students who have been truant is on the rise; programs, such as the Truancy Court, should be highly considered as an alternate method to assisting students and providing support to the parents to keep their students in school. A school district must analyze the number of truant students and make an executive decision to seek the proper support to assist the students in remaining in school. This can be a way to motivate them to continue the pursuit of an education, in order to be equipped with the necessary skills to lead to a fulfilling life in our dynamic global society.

#### **Research Setting**

This research study took place at Normandy Middle School during the regular school day. Normandy Middle School is located in Normandy, Missouri, on the outskirts of Wellston and St. Louis City. It was the only middle school in the Normandy School District (Normandy School District, 2009). It serviced students in the seventh and eighth grades and the incoming Wellston Students. The Wellston School District was dissolved, and those students became a part of the Normandy School District, as of January 2010. At the time of this study, Normandy Middle School had a student body population of 765 in which 99% was African-American (Normandy School District Data, 2009). In 2004,

Normandy Middle School enrollment was at a district high of 944. However, the enrollment steadily decreased every year, due to residency rules, and decline in neighboring populations. Normandy Middle School had 60 certified staff members and the majority of the teaching staff either held a life-time teaching certificate or Career CPC, and about 50% of the teaching staff earned advanced degrees (Normandy School District, 2009).

The participants involved in this research study consisted of 20 truant students, 10 male and 10 female students in grades seven and eight; five teachers, five parents, and five court staff. Most of the participants had chronic truancy problems that affected their attendance and academics. Occasionally the students were not problematic, but some appeared to have other problems unrelated to their truancy problem. The teachers included in this research were core subject area teachers and those that were considered ancillary teachers; Gym, Speech & Drama, READ 180, Choir, Band, Art, and Orchestra.

The teachers were hesitant at first, but graciously agreed to take part in this research with the students' best interest at heart, because Normandy was seeing an increase in the number of students falling into the truancy category (Normandy School District, 2009). The teachers were selected based upon the number of times the social worker and counselor intervened in determining why the student was late to school, tardy to class/school, or did not come to school at all. There are times when ancillary teachers are overlooked, due to their subject area of expertise, but later they find out that the students had not performed well in any of their classes. Sometimes the truant students excelled in the classes beyond what was expected. Certainly, this helped to motivate the student display skills that usually go unnoticed by the teachers, as well as the parents.

The teachers' teaching experience averaged from two years to 20-or-more years. The majority of the teachers were African-Americans and females. There was less than 1% of males and Caucasians represented in the group (Normandy School District, 2009).

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the processes followed in Truancy Court?
- 2) What are challenges for students going into the truant court system?
- 3) What are challenges for parents when they discovered their children were truant?
- 4) What types of involvement do parents have in their children's education?
- 5) What are some programs that are in place for students who are truant prior to their attendance of truancy court?
- 6) What are some goals that students can develop to assist them with truancy?
- 7) What is the expected outcome that the student would attend future truancy court sessions?
- 8) What are the perceptions of the truancy court process by parents and students who participate in the process?
- 9) What are the absence patterns found in the school records with regard to students who are assigned to truancy court?
- 10) What are the school disciplinary patterns among the students who are assigned to truancy court?
- 11) Historically, how many students were coming to school late or not at all?

The students' access will be based upon these three descriptive quantitative questions:

1. Do students from a single-parent family with little or no education attend school less than those from a single-parent family with post-secondary education?

2. Are students attending school at a lower percentage based upon socioeconomic status?
3. Are students attending school at a lower percentage due to negative environmental issues? The students' attendance will improve as a result of attending the truancy court.

Information for this analysis is based upon attendance records, discipline records, and academics.

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were middle school age students, identified as having attendance concerns according to their school district's attendance policy. A student is recommended for the school-based Truancy Court program, because there has not been any improvement in attendance after parent/guardian attendance meeting with the school team. The majority of the research involves students from an inner-city middle school in St. Louis, Missouri. The identity of students participating in the study will not be shared; but instead referred to as a letter. Adult participants (judge, social worker, DJO, etc.) in the study will be identified by pseudonyms.

### **Study Setting**

This study focused on the operation of the Truancy Court program at the middle school level and its impact on student attendance. This study was conducted at two middle schools in the St. Louis metropolitan area. One of middle schools in the study was in St. Louis County and the other middle school was located in the City of St. Louis. The St. Louis County study site implemented the Truancy Court program for one month and dismantled it shortly thereafter due to funding and lack of school district central

office support. The study site located in the City of St. Louis includes observational data for seven months. Both study sites' enrollment populations were predominantly African-American middle school age students. However, the study site in the City of St. Louis was unaccredited while the study site in St. Louis County was deemed accredited.

### **Significance of the Study**

There was a growing phenomenon of truancy among students across the nation (United States Department of Education, 2021). In order to address this issue, the Normandy School District mandated a truancy policy, which was distributed for use to the surrounding 24 municipalities the district served. In support of the program, its importance was stressed to the students, as well as their parents, along with the fact that it was the law for students to attend school on a regular basis, under the age of 17 (Compulsory Attendance Law, n.d.; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022). Normandy Middle School was also implementing the Truancy Court to increase student attendance. During the 2016-2017 school year, the Truancy Court was not implemented; due to a lack of funding from the state the court was dissolved in 2007. The students in the program all had one or more unexcused absences and/or tardies.

### **Methodology**

Data gathering for the studies partially consisted of the researcher's journal entries, based upon truancy court referrals, attendance records, and report cards. The teachers completed truancy referrals, depending on the number of times the student was tardy or not in attendance, as documented. This allowed the teachers to identify the students who were chronically tardy to school on a regular basis. It assisted the teachers

in devising a plan to help students stay on target and continue to come to school on a daily basis. The students completed several surveys about chronic absences that helped the school and district determine what strategies could be used to improve the students' attendance. The researcher attended and observed Truancy Court in action throughout the seven-month duration of the data-gathering phase of this study.

### **Summary**

The focus of this data analysis may assist in developing a plan of action to encourage and motivate truant students to continue their education. The Truancy Court's purpose was to identify support systems and strategies to encourage the students to come to school; but to also equip them with the knowledge needed to continue their education. The data were collected over a period of several months, kept in a secure place, and reviewed only by researcher and those deemed necessary by the researcher. The data were organized by monthly observational journal entries by the researcher. The data were analyzed and compiled into observational summaries, in order to readily identify any possible trends. Indicators from the charts and graphs may help in identifying trends in determining whether Truancy Court would benefit truant students.



## **Chapter Four: Results**

Chapter Four provides a report of processes followed in truancy court, as well as results from data gathered throughout this research study. Data represent entries in the researcher's journal, researcher's personal knowledge and experiences as a long-term educator, conversations with truancy court personnel, and observations of student interactions and parent interactions with truancy court proceedings and personnel.

### **The Truancy Court Process**

Students start the school year with attempts at not falling into the category of being truant. Most of the students know if they miss over a certain number of days the school considers them a truant. The number of days missed during a 10-week period could cause alarm to the school, and furthermore to the students and parents. Often, when a student did not attend school on a regular basis, the school social worker, along with counselors and other administrators, got involved to determine the justification for why the student was not in school, by contacting the parent.

The initial contact with the parents was usually by phone and after that the social worker assigned the student to the truant officer who made a referral to the Truancy Court. The parents were sent a letter indicating the number of days the student missed and indicating the date the student was to be present at the next truancy court hearing. Each month court was held on Tuesdays; students attended during the regular school hours in front of a judge and the truant officer. The number of students who went before the judge usually depended on the number of days missed. Sometimes, the same student could see the judge each month; whereas a few may be dropped from the dockets, based on their attendance. The attendance was reviewed each week by the truant officer, along

with the students' discipline records. The grades were only reviewed every five weeks; or weekly, if determined necessary by the judge for weekly progress.

The truant officer had a copy of the student's attendance, disciplinary record, and grades present at each court hearing. The judge then reviewed the student's records and proceeded with asking the student and parent(s) a series of questions regarding the student's attendance history. Usually, the judge could determine if this was a behavior that had continued on from elementary school; many times, it was. There were times when some parents were repeat offenders, because they had multiple students who did not attend school.

During the hearing, the judge may require students to complete individual assignments and mentoring sessions, etc. The judge recorded all information given to each individual student on their file, which was reviewed for the next court session. In many instances, the judge may require that the parent work closely with the truant officer in special cases, which may require assistance to the parent on why the student had not been in school.

The truant officer also visited the home to ensure that the student lived at the residence, because there were times in which the parent had moved and had not notified the school, which then led to the student being zoned for another school. There was one case where the truant officer had discovered that the parent needed special transportation for the student, but was unaware that the student was not coming to school, due to transportation issues.

**Research Questions**

Q1. What are the processes followed in Truancy Court?

One of the processes followed in the Truancy court is sending a notification that a student and their parent(s) must attend a court hearing, due to the excessive unexcused missed school days. During this time, the parents are given an opportunity to explain why their student has been in school. In addition, the judge can ask the parent for documentation if the student has been hospitalized to justify the missed days. Often, the judge may request that the student and their parents return to court for a follow-up. In many cases, parents can be charged a fee for the number of days a student has missed. In addition, judges can order that parents to serve jail time for educational neglect.

Q2. What are the challenges for students going into the truant court system?

One challenge for any student going into the truancy court system is entry into the system can lead to crimes such as burglary, dropping out of school, or worse.

Q3. What are the challenges for parents when they discover their children are truant?

A challenge for parents can include constant visits from the Deputy Juvenile Officers checking in with the parents on a weekly or monthly basis. In addition, parents can be assigned to community services, fines, and sometimes suffer the loss of their children to the court system for neglect.

Q4. What types of involvement do parents have in their children's education?

Parental involvement is so crucial in a child's education. Parents have the right to work with the school to ensure their student is being educated. One way to do this is to be involved in school activities by volunteering.

Q5. What are the early-intervention programs that are in place for students who are truant before recommending them for truancy court?

A few programs that students can attend prior to going to truancy court would be getting involved in a mentoring program, afterschool activities, and volunteering in their community. This helps the student to build up their self-esteem and hopefully get them back on the right track.

Q6. What goals can schools develop to assist them with truant students?

Some of the goals that can help with truancy include building rapport by knowing each student attending the school and their families. This supports school officials in understanding the needs of the students and any issues that would keep them from attending school on a regular basis. In addition, the school can provide support to families that may be struggling to keep the family together.

Q7. What are the expected outcomes for students attending future truancy court sessions?

The expected outcome for students to attend truancy court would be if the judge recommends or feels the need, the student would benefit from coming for several more meetings.

Q8. What are the perceptions of the truancy court process by parents and students who participate in the process? No data available for this question.

Q9. What are the absence patterns found in the school records with regard to students who are assigned to truancy court?

The absence pattern found in students assigned to truancy court indicated that most of the students missing school stayed home to take care of younger siblings. In

several scenarios, the parents were working or did not get off in time to get home to take care of the younger children, so the older child then became the caregiver. There were a few students whose illnesses resulted in them not being able to attend school regularly. The parent did not contact the school regularly to report their absence. Some students out because of illness did have documentation but did not submit it to the school. Some of the students indicated that they did not want to attend school.

Q10. What are the school disciplinary patterns among the students who are assigned to truancy court?

The school's patterns consisted of many students did not have a legitimate excuse as to their absence from school, which would include doctor's statements and having to stay at home and babysit for a younger sibling or family member.

Q11. Historically, how many students were coming to school late or not at all?

The number of students coming to school late or not at all depended on the school's data tracker. Typically, on a daily basis the average number of students were anywhere from five to ten students daily, if not more.

## **Observations**

### **Truancy Court**

#### ***Month 1: October (Truancy Court)***

I began my journey this month by attending the truancy court hearings regarding attendance for the students at Fanning Middle School. As I sat eagerly waiting for the court to begin, there were many students coming into the library, along with a few parents; so far, the students were African American males. This was an indicator that many of the students who violated the attendance policy were males. Many of the

parents were confused about why they had to attend and appeared to be nervous about going before the judge. There was a parent that had attend Truancy Court prior, because of one of her other students who did not attend Fanning. One parent spoke with Mrs. Nunley and stated that she had to go to work. Usually, the parent was required to stay until the student was called to see the judge. Mrs. Nunley noted that on the student's file that she was in attendance, but had to leave. Before the court began, the truant officer came into the library and explained to the students why they were there. Many of the students did not understand why they had to see the judge about their attendance. One conversation that I overheard was, "They didn't miss a lot of days of school and the school had their attendance wrong in the system." The time had finally come and the judge entered the library and set her belonging down on the table. Mrs. Nunley introduced Judge Barger and she gave a brief history about herself and the Truancy Court. She stated that the truancy court began at Roosevelt High School about 15 years previous to this date, because students were having a difficult time coming and staying in school. Judge Barger also stated that many of those students were seen in her courtroom in sessions in which some were sentenced to jail time. She also stated that she had been retired for three years, so she could dedicate more time in assisting parents and school administrators in keeping students in school. Judge Barger stated that truancy started to become a critical problem and there needed to be a solution to the problem of students not getting their education. A few years had passed and Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley (truant officer) decided to implement the program at the middle school level. Judge Barger also explained that she used reward systems for the students who improved in discipline, grades, or their attendance. She stated that this helped the students to strive

towards a goal that could be fulfilled within a timely manner. Judge Barger was speaking and late students strolled in and sat down. As I glanced around the room, there were students not paying attention, while others had their heads down on the tables. Judge Barger stated to the students not paying attention that they needed to get focused and sit up at the table.

Judge Barger sat down and asked Mrs. Nunley who was the first student on the docket. Judge Barger called for Student A to come up to the table. Student A did not have his parent with him and stated to the judge that his mother had to work. Student A had missed 11 days of school and had failing grades.

Judge Barger stated to Student A, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Student A did not have an answer and just shrugged his shoulders as though he did not care. Mrs. Nunley also explained the consequences of how his attendance was affecting him. Mrs. Nunley gave his disciplinary records, grades, and attendance to the judge for her to look over. Judge Barger began to ask Student A about his behavior towards adults. Student A stated that "he did not like the teachers, so that's why he disrespects them." Judge Barger stated to him that the teachers are not there for him to like them and he needed to adjust his attitude.

As the Judge was still talking to Student A, I observed a parent texting. I quickly thought to myself, if this was in a real courtroom this would not be allowed. Judge Barger assigned Student A an assignment to be completed before the next court hearing. Student A promised Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley that he would improve at least two of his grades and his behavior towards adults. Judge Barger wrote down the information in his file about what they had agreed upon. It was now time for the next student to be

called up to the front table where the judge was sitting. Student B was called up to the table to see the judge.

Student B's mother was also in attendance and appeared to be a little nervous. Mrs. Nunley informed Judge Barger that Student B had missed nine days. Student B's mother seemed to have a lot of answers about why her daughter had not been in school. According to the mother, the daughter was very sickly and must see the doctor on a regular basis. Judge Barger asked the mother if this information was given to the school nurse and documented in her school file. The mother did not have an answer. The judge stated to Student B's mother, "If she is sick, she must have a doctor's statement on file." Judge Barger then stated to Student B,

The reason why she was failing was because she was not in school.

If you do not attend school, then it is very hard for you to do your work. You need to understand that you will be seeing me on a monthly basis if you continue to miss school.

Student B said she would try to come to school every day. The judge stated that if she saw some improvement that she would receive some type of incentive. While the judge and Mrs. Nunley were discussing the case of the next student, one of the Assistant Principals at the school came into the court with a student. Apparently, the student did not want to attend the court hearing and so, had to be escorted by the principal. Mrs. Nunley called the next student to the table.

As Student C was walking to the table all could see his under garments. The first thing that the judge said was, "Pull up your pants." Judge Barger told him that it was not appropriate for him to be wearing his pants sagging and she then gave a brief reason why.



Student C sat down and Mrs. Nunley gave background information about him. Student C was failing, disrespectful to adults, as well as the other students, and missed 14 days. Judge Barger asked Student C to give her an explanation of why he was not coming to school. Of course, a few minutes had passed and he could not come up with one.

Mrs. Nunley informed Judge Barger that the student continued to get suspended and the school had requested many conferences with his parent, but his mom stated that she had to work and it would be difficult for her to take off. Judge Barger stated to Student C, as well as Mrs. Nunley, that she wanted him in some type of mentoring program. Mrs. Nunley stated to Judge Barger that she suggested that to his mother, and according to Mom, she did not want him in the program. Judge Barger noted that in the student's file and suggested that maybe seeing an outside counselor would help him with some of his behavior issues. Judge Barger also suggested to Student C that he at least try to improve in two classes, so that he felt that he would be successful. The judge, Mrs. Nunley, and Student C decided upon the classes and Student C promised he was going to bring those grades up. Judge Barger asked Student C to "strive for at least a C." He agreed, but then stated that he was going to get an "A."

It was time for Student D's turn with the judge. He made his way up to the table. Mrs. Nunley introduced Judge Barger to him and asked him, did he understand that his attendance was not acceptable. Student D's response was he didn't think it was bad, because he sometimes had to stay home and babysit. Judge Barger stated, that she understood; however, it wasn't his responsibility to miss school in order to babysit. "You must attend school or else your parent will have to go before a judge and explain why

you continue to miss school.” According to the expression on Student D’s face, he did not want his parent to get into trouble. Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger began to discuss his grades. The first thing out of Student D’s mouth was, “The teacher doesn’t like me so that why I’m not passing.” Mrs. Nunley stated to Student D, “The teachers are not here to like you and the only thing you should be concerned about is completing the work.” Student D began to rub his hands together as though he was nervous and looked down. Judge Barger told him to look at them while they are talking to him, because it’s a sign of being rude. So, he raised his head up as the Judge continued talking with him. Judge Barger asked him, “What is your favorite subject?” Student D responded by saying, “math.” Mrs. Nunley then interrupted and stated that if math is your favorite subject, then that’s the course you should be passing. Student D then stated that the teacher does not let them make up the work when they miss school. Judge then stated that Mrs. Nunley will speak to the math teacher on your behalf and see if it’s possible to make up some of the work. Judge Barger stated that she wanted to see that “F” come up to at least a “D,” because it would indicate some improvement. Student D shook hands with the Judge and said he would see her next month and left the library.

I glanced at the clock and noted that the time was moving swiftly. The clock read 8:50 and I estimated that the court would take about two hours. Since there were only six students who appeared in court, the time was moving right along. The judge was calling her next truant student up to the table. Student E did not appear to be moving, but when I looked around, it had to be one of the two students left in the room. Neither one was moving; so of course, the judge had to ask the student to come up. He finally got up from his seat and proceeded up to the table. Student E sat down, in manner in which the judge

felt was not the correct way to sit down. He was not sitting up correctly and his body language made a statement as though he did not care about being in court. Judge Barger had to ask the student to sit up again and he honored her request. She stated to him that if he does not want to be here [in court] then he must come to school. Mrs. Nunley interjected and said, “attendance was the cause of you being in truancy court.” Student E did not make eye contact with Judge Barger nor Mrs. Nunley. He continued to look around the room as if the Judge was not talking to him. Judge Barger stated to Mrs. Nunley that she wanted him in the mentoring program and the after-school program at the school. Student E stated, “I ain’t staying after school, because I have other things to do when I get out of school.” Mrs. Nunley told Judge Barger that she would contact his mother to inform her of what was suggested for him. Judge Barger told him that she did not want to see him back in court “with a behavior like the one you displayed today.” He did not respond and just left.

It was now time for the last student of the day. Judge Barger said, “Come on up; I know who you are, you’re the only one left on my docket for today.” Student F walked up and greeted Judge Barger like a true gentleman. Judge Barger said to Mrs. Nunley, “He is a true gentleman.” Mrs. Nunley gave a brief background on Student F and stated that she had spoken with his mother, but Mom stated that “he is constantly sick.” Judge Barger asked, “When you miss school does your mother take you to the doctor?” Student F said, “She never takes me to the doctor, but gives me medicine.” Judge Barger stated, “What type of job do you expect to get without your education?” Student F said he wanted to become a lawyer. Judge Barger stated that you cannot become a lawyer if you do not attend school; “Do you realize how much schooling you will need to go into this

type of occupation?" "No," replied the student. "There is a lot of time you must put into this. You first have to finish middle and then graduate from high school. After high school you go on to college and from there to law school." Student F responded by saying that is a lot of school. Judge Barger stated, "Yes, it is; so, that's why you must come to school every day or your mother will have to explain to a judge why you are not attending now." "Is this what you want to happen to your mother?" He answered, No. She said, "Well what are you going to do about getting yourself to school every day on time." He said, "When I hear my clock go off, I'm going to get up and come to school." "Now what are you going to do about all of the failing grades that I see on your report card," replied Judge Barger. "I'm going to bring them up by next month," Student F replied. Mrs. Nunley stated that she would check on him each week to see if there has been any process. "I'm going to assign you a one-page report on how important is your education and what happens without one?" replied Judge Barger. Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger both stated that they would see him next month.

Looking at my watch, the time was just 9:15. I was excited that the court was over, because I initially had a lot of questions for both of them; but Judge Barger volunteered at an Alternative High School after her court hearing and she did not have much time. Mrs. Nunley was able to stay around for about 10 to 15 minutes to answer questions for me.

For me, it was unbelievable to see so many students uninterested in attending school and the lack of parental support for the student, as well as the school. Mrs. Nunley stated that this was common; and usually, when she makes her home visits, they have the same attitude about their students, as well. It appeared that, not only did the

students need to be attending a mentoring program, the parents may need help in that category, too. Truly, this court process may improve the lack that many of the parents have in their students' education. It was an indicator that the parents may benefit from having a parent mentor or someone to work closely with them, as well as Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. Mrs. Nunley had offered to assist some of the parents in need, but stated that many of the parents were not willing to follow through.

***Month 2: November (Truancy Court)***

Judge Barger had informed Mrs. Nunley that she would be a few minutes late. As I was waiting for court to begin, a former colleague, Ms. Ring, who is the Teaching and Learning Facilitator, came into the library to make sure that all of the students who were to be in court were in attendance. Of course, I was excited to see her, because it had been almost seven years since I had last seen her. We were able to catch up, but not for long before Judge Barger came into the library. Mrs. Nunley was still following up with the office to make sure that the three missing students were at school. Judge Barger quickly got started, because she wanted to close out a few students on her docket that were showing improvement.

Mrs. Nunley called Student A up to the table in the front of the room where Judge Barger was waiting. Student A appeared to have some rehearsed phrase on why he was not attending school, because it sounded as though it was from a movie. Mrs. Nunley commented about his attendance and stated that she had spoken with his mother multiple times about not coming to school. According to Student A's mother, he was not feeling well and had several doctor's appointments, but never brought in the proper documents to justify that he was seen by the doctor. Judge Barger stated that it was mandatory for him

to attend school, because it is the law until you reach the age of 17. Student A commented that he thought that the age was 16. Judge Barger was very upset and stated it did not matter if the age was 16 or 17. The law states that you must attend school on a regular basis, and unless you are very sick and need to be in a hospital you will be in school daily. Mrs. Nunley interjected and stated that she would inform his mother that he must be in school and make it necessary for his mother to attend a parenting class. Judge Barger documented the information in Student A's file, and he agreed that he would try to make it to school for an entire week. Student A then shook Judge Barger's hand and stated that he would see her next month.

Judge Barger called for Student B, but was informed that her case was closed. Mrs. Nunley discussed all of the positive things that the student had done in regards to her grades, discipline, and attendance. Judge Barger was glad to hear such exciting news about Student B. Apparently, Student B had improved tremendously, so, perhaps she should have a discussion with the remaining students who were continuously seeing the Judge on a regular basis. As I was sitting, waiting for the next student to be called, I glanced at my watch to check the time and noticed that the time read 8:25 a.m. Student C's name was then called, but the court was later notified by the office that he was not at school. The office had called to the library to inform the Judge and Mrs. Nunley. Student C came walking in with his parent. Judge Barger immediately pulled out the student's file and began discussing his attendance along with his grades and discipline. By now Judge Barger was very firm and the students were beginning to notice a change in her voice and body language. It was time for Judge Barger to get down to some serious business with Student C. Student C had missed 17 days of school. The parent appeared

to have an excuse for the student that he was sick. Judge Barger stated, "Sick. How sick was he? Ma'am, did you take him to a doctor?" "No," replied the parent. "So how do you know that he was sick," replied Judge Barger. "Well, he is always complaining of severe pains in his body." "Ma'am, you have to take him to a doctor and the doctor will determine the cause of his illness. He cannot miss school just because he states that he is sick," stated Mrs. Nunley. "I do understand, but sometimes I cannot get to the doctor because of transportation issues," replied Student C's parent. "The next time he is sick I will take him to the doctor," explained the parent. "Alright," said Judge Barger, "Because as long as he is missing school one and two days a week, he will continue to come to truancy court and you may even be referred to City Court for neglect." Student C's parent agreed that she would make sure that he attended school and Mrs. Nunley stated that when he was going to be out of school that she must receive a call as well. "Okay," said the parent. Judge Barger stated to the parent that his attendance was the reason why he was not passing his classes. The longer he stayed out of school the less he was learning. According to Mom, she would make sure that he attended school on a regular basis.

It was not long before Student D and his parent were called up to see Judge Barger. Student D did not think that his attendance was correct, when Mrs. Nunley stated that he had missed more than 10 days of school. The mother stated that there was no way that her son had missed that many days of school, because he leaves the house each morning and catches the bus. Judge Barger stated, that just because he leaves the house does not mean that he is coming to school. It was apparent that Student D was not coming to school, because of the number of days he had missed. His mother stated that

she was not aware of this and then turned to look at him and asked why he'd missed so many days of school. Student D stated that he was coming to school, but not every day, because he was hanging out with his friends. The mother looked at her son in disgust and stated, "What friends are you hanging out with that don't attend school?" Judge Barger stated that the friends that he was hanging out with apparently were not ones that attended school. Later, Student D stated that his friends were older, and Mrs. Nunley interjected and stated, "If they are older, they should be telling you to go to school and not hang in the streets."

Judge Barger agreed with Mrs. Nunley and stated that the streets were not safe for the student to be in, because usually bad things happen. There was a pause by Student D before he responded and stated that he would try to come to school on a regular basis, because he did not want anything to happen to him. Judge Barger stated that she would have something for him next time if he would keep his end of the bargain. Student D's mother stated, "I will make sure he comes to school if I have to get him there myself."

Before Judge Barger called up the next student, she and Mrs. Nunley had a brief discussion about some of the reasons that the students gave them about why they were not attending school. By the look on Judge Barger's face, she was not very happy about what she was hearing from the students and the parents. It almost seemed as though the parents were condoning the fact that their students were not attending school. A few of the parents had many excuses, and it was not benefiting the student by hearing the parents' excuses. Mrs. Nunley stated that she made frequent calls and home visits to see the parents, but with her calls and visits it did not appear to be making a difference with the parent or student. As I was sitting, waiting until the next student to be called, the



social worker came into the court. Apparently, she was getting similar excuses from the parents, as well as the students. Judge Barger stated that they would continue their discussion after the court, so the next student was called up to see the judge.

Student E's name had to be called a few times, only because he was asleep. As he approached the table where Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were sitting, Judge Barger informed him that he was not allowed to be sleeping at school or during her court session. Student E stated that he "didn't get enough sleep last night, because he went to bed very late." Judge Barger asked, "What time did you go to sleep?" He exclaimed, "I went to bed around 1:00 this morning." Mrs. Nunley stated, "Why did you go to bed so late?" Student E stated that he could not sleep and he watched TV until he went to sleep. She also told Student E that he should try to get in bed early so that he would not be so tired when he came to school. Of course, by the look on Student E's face it was not anything he wanted to hear at that time. He was laid back in the chair and not really paying attention to Judge Barger or Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger then told him to sit up while she talked to him. He rose up in the chair at attention, but his body appeared to be leaning to one side. Judge Barger went over his attendance and saw that he had missed 12 days of school. "So, Student E, what is your excuse for missing school?" stated Judge Barger. "I don't have an excuse," said Student E, "I just don't come to school when I miss the bus." Mrs. Nunley stated, "Why are you missing the bus?" "Well, I wake up late so I don't have a way to school, so I just don't come," exclaimed Student E. "Does your mother know that you are not waking up in time to catch the bus on time?" said Judge Barger. "No, because she is at work," said Student E. "Okay, Student E, you cannot miss any more days, or else your parent will be referred to City court," Mrs. Nunley replied and

stated that she would be contacting Mom to inform her of the situation and told Judge Barger that she will see if Mom will attend the next court session. Judge Barger continued to reinforce the importance of attending school regularly. Mrs. Nunley interjected and asked if Student E had an alarm clock. When he responded with “yes,” Judge Barger asked him why he does not use it. He said that he hears it when it goes off, but he turns it off, and instead of getting up he goes back to sleep. Judge Barger gave Student E a scenario; if she turned off her alarm clock every time it went off, she would have been fired. She stated to him, “It’s called being responsible for your own actions.”

The students whom already appeared before Judge Barger were making things a little more difficult for some. I looked around the room and saw there were only two students left to see the Judge. It appeared that it was not going to get any easier for them. Mrs. Nunley, along with Judge Barger, was not tolerating a lot of excuses. A few of the students seemed to get a shock when they had to appear before the judge. It was not all what it seemed, because Judge Barger was not in the mood to be accepting the excuses that she was hearing this morning. Well, Mrs. Nunley called the office to see if Student F had checked into the office, because he had not shown up for court. After a few minutes, Student F walked in late. Judge Barger was ready to hear his excuse for not coming to school on time, or court. As he walked up to where Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were seated, what caught my eye was his sagging pants, shirt was not uniform, and his hair looked as though it had not been combed in months. One thing was for sure, he had on enough cologne that he could be smelled from miles away. Before taking his seat Student F, had to pull up his pants. Judge Barger stated to him that he needed to wear a

belt or get some type of string to hold his pants up, because it is not polite to walk around with your pants hanging halfway off your body.

Mrs. Nunley explained to Judge Barger that Student F had missed 14 days and was not passing any of his classes. Judge Barger asked Student F, “What do you have to say for yourself? Do you realize that you will not be able to graduate from high school with these grades or get a decent job?” Student F sat silent. Mrs. Nunley intervened and said to Student F, “Do you understand what Judge Barger is saying?” “Yes, I understand, but I don’t like the teachers,” stated Student F. Mrs. Nunley replied by saying that the teachers were not here for him to like them. They were here for him to learn. “Yeah, I know, but when I get mad, I don’t want to do any work, so I don’t,” Student F replied. “Well, if you do not get your grades up do you know what will happen to you at the end of the year?” exclaimed Mrs. Nunley. “Do you want to repeat the same grade next year while your friends move onto the next grade?” said Judge Barger. “No,” replied Student F. When asked “do you think you could talk with your teachers about doing some extra credit to get your grades up?” Student F replied, “Yeah, but some of my teachers don’t give extra credit, because they said you shouldn’t have a bad grade.” He was told, “Well even if you have a bad grade, try to talk with the teachers anyway, so you can at least [improve] two of your grades by the next court date. Do you think this will be possible for you?” “Yes, I’m telling you now that ain’t going to get me any,” Student F exclaimed, “Judge Barger, I’m going to try to get my grades up so I don’t have to come back to court.” “Well Student F remember you’re not here just for your grades, but attendance and discipline too. So, if you get all three to good standing, then you will not have to come back,” stated Judge Barger, “Does that sound like a deal to you?” “Um,

yea,” said Student F. Judge Barger said, “So, I will see you next month and do not forget to talk to your teachers.” “Okay. Bye.”

Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley took a minute or two to debrief about Student F. “Okay, Judge Barger you have one more student to see on your docket,” said Mrs. Nunley, “Student G please come on up.” “Hello, Student G, my name is Judge Joan Barger and how are you doing today?” Mrs. Nunley informed Judge Barger that he was a new student referred to the courts by his teachers and the social worker. Student G had missed 13 days of school and had a seriousness of being tardy, as well. “Student G could you explain to me what is going on with you?” stated Judge Barger. “Well, I don’t like school so that’s why I don’t come.” he said. “Why are you having problems with school? Is there something or someone that’s bothering you to the fact that you do not want to come to school?” Judge Barger asked. “No,” Student G stated.

Student G there must be something going on with you, because by looking at your grades you’re failing almost every subject and not to mention that you’re very disrespectful to teachers and adults. Tell me, Student G, how were your grades and behavior last year?

He shrugged his shoulders and said “I don’t remember.” Mrs. Nunley stated that he was a student here last year and his grades were not as bad, but he missed less days and was passing more classes than this year. “Student G, what do you think is causing you to not come to school regularly or be attentive in school?” the Judge asked. “I don’t know,” he said. “Okay Student G let’s try to see if you can improve in one of your classes,” stated Judge Barger.

“What is your favorite subject?” Mrs. Nunley stated. “I don’t really have one,” Student G mumbled. “How about you look at your report card and see which one you think you can bring up to at least a ‘D’ by the next court,” exclaimed Judge Barger, “If not, I will pick one for you and we will go there for a moment.” Student G then realized that he could do it. “I can bring my math grade up, because I sort of like math,” Student G replied. “Alright,” said Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger stated to Student G. “I will write this down in your file, so when I see you next month, we can see how much you have improved.” “Okay,” said Student G. Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger both said, “See you next month.”

### ***Month 3: December (Truancy Court)***

This was the third month of Truancy Court and it appeared that some students were trying to do the right thing by attending school regularly, controlling their discipline issues, and improving their grades. I tried to arrive at least 15 minutes early, so that I could have enough time to sit and observe the students as they wait for the judge. As I sat in the library waiting for the court to go into session, I saw a few more students who were referred. According to Mrs. Nunley, two students were referred to City Court, due to their parents not following through with the advice from Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger. There were a few more parents than usual, but one of them appeared to be in denial about their student’s academic progress, attendance, and behavior. All you could hear was the parent fussing about how she had to come to court and that she had somewhere to be right now.

The parent totally seemed so out of control. During the entire time I was sitting in the library she was looking around at the other students, getting up from her seat walking

out of the library, and doing everything but waiting patiently. It had become very clear that the student apparently had the same issues as the parent, because the female student was very loud and did not seem the least bit interested in being in court. I had to realize that this was not like the previous court sessions. Most of the time, it was somewhat quiet, but today just seemed like it was going to be one of those days.

It was five minutes before eight and Mrs. Nunley arrived with a few more students in tow; so, I knew that this court session was going to be a little longer, because of the number of students present. Obviously, it was the end of the semester and the ones that were not in attendance at the previous court sessions were now present. One parent that walked in looked as though she just rolled out of bed and came to the school. Judge Barger walked in right about eight o'clock. Mrs. Nunley explained that she checked in at the office to see if the other students on the docket were present at school. Today's docket consisted of 10 students, but four were out on suspension. Now it was time for the first student to be called up to see the judge.

Student G slowly walked up to see Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger asked if he had kept his promise about improving his grade in one subject. Student G replied, "I brought my grade up to a D." As Judge Barger reviewed his grades, she noticed not only did he bring up one grade, but he improved in two other areas. Mrs. Nunley stated that she was working with Student G with his behavior issues and briefly checking on him in his classes. She stated that her presence had a lot to do with it. Judge Barger was overjoyed and told him it only took him less than three weeks to get a head start on improving his grades.

Student G stated that he asked his teachers for extra credit in all of his classes, but only a few were willing to give it to him. According to Mrs. Nunley, he was very determined to bring his grades up. He told Mrs. Nunley that he did not want to repeat the seventh grade. Judge Barger then replied by saying, "I'm glad that you improved your grades; however, you were in In-School Suspension for two days, due to an altercation with another student."

Student G explained the situation that occurred and Mrs. Nunley stated that he tried to walk away from the other student, but the other student was very forceful in pursuing a fight. Judge Barger commended Student G for his attempt to not fight and he was rewarded a gift card to a neighborhood restaurant. This put a smile on his face and made him want to do better than what he had originally done. Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley decided that a mentoring program and after school program would assist him in his academic areas, as well as build self-esteem. Student G stated that he could not be in any after school programs, because his mother works late, but Mrs. Nunley stated that she would speak to his mother and inform her of the programs that are available to help him. Judge Barger told him to have a nice holiday and continue to keep up the good work. Mrs. Nunley stated that she would continue to follow up with Student G.

The next student that was called up to see Judge Barger had to turn in an assignment that was given at the previous court session. "Student F, please come to the front to see Judge Barger?" I distinctly remembering that Student F was the one that Judge Barger was a bit upset with because of his sagging pants. But I noticed that his pants were not sagging. Apparently, he remembered what Judge Barger stated about his

pants. He sat down and Mrs. Nunley stated that he had shown some improvement until a few days ago.

The assignment that Student F gave to Judge Barger to read was very well written. Judge Barger asked, "Who helped you with this assignment?" "No one helped me. I wrote it on my own." Judge Barger stated, "You did a wonderful job on this essay and you seem to have put some of your own personal feelings into it." "Naw, I just wrote what I thought I should be doing in school," he said. "Well, Student F, maybe you should share this with your teachers," Judge Barger stated. Mrs. Nunley stated that the teachers would be proud of him too, so maybe he should consider it. Student F responded by saying that he did not want to share his thoughts with his teachers. It was obvious that Student F had potential in completing the assignment for Judge Barger, but was not willing to show it and his progress showed by his grades. He replied that he would try to get more of his work done by next semester. Judge Barger also stated that she wanted to see his semester grades improve and was not concerned in physical education or art. "I'm only concerned with core subjects." Student F replied, "Yes, ma'am, I will work a little harder to improve them, because I don't like coming to court," Student F replied. "It only seems like court is only for bad kids," he stated. "No, that's not the case. Truancy Court is for students [who] fail to come to school on a regular basis," Judge Barger stated. "Okay, I understand you just want to help me so I don't flunk," he said. "That's right. You have to be in school a certain number of days and if you miss more than the number allowed then you will continue to come to court," Mrs. Nunley stated. "You have to be in school in order to get good grades and the more you



miss school the less chance that you will have descent grades,” Judge Barger replied. Judge Barger gave Student F a gift card to Jack In the Box for a well written essay.

Student B was back to see Judge Barger, but she was not impressed with her behavior. Student B had missed six days of school for fighting, refusing to wear her uniform, and being disrespectful to adults. Judge Barger stated, “I see you’ve been very busy doing the wrong thing.” Judge Barger asked, “What is going on with you?” “Nothing,” she replied. “There must be something because you are fighting, not wearing your uniform, and being disrespectful to adults,” Judge Barger exclaimed. Student B became a bit defensive and said that the other student wanted to fight her so she fought her. Mrs. Nunley stated, “You could’ve walked away from the situation.” Judge Barger agreed with Mrs. Nunley. “Well yea, but I didn’t,” she replied. Judge Barger stated that she had to learn how to control her behavior. “The girl was talking about me so I had to do something about it,” she stated. Mrs. Nunley said, “There will be people talking about you now and when you get older, but you just do not go around wanting to fight them.” Judge Barger stated, “That is correct.”

The newest student was called up to see Judge Barger; as he was walking up to the table his mother came in and introduced herself to Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. I heard Mrs. Nunley state that she was glad that she was able to make it. Judge Barger noticed that Student AA was not very pleased to be sitting in court. She asked him. “What is wrong?” “Nothing,” he claimed. Judge Barger continued to talk with him, because she wanted him to open up so that she was not the one leading the conversation. Student AA’s mother turned and looked at him, “Student AA, open your mouth when people are talking to you.” Student AA finally answered the question that was initially

asked, "There is nothing wrong with me." Judge Barger stated that something must be wrong if you continue to miss days and your behavior is unacceptable at school. "I think the teachers at this school don't like me, so they find some way to get me into trouble," he said. "How can the teachers get you into trouble," stated Judge Barger. "Some of them lie on me saying that I did certain things and I didn't do it and that's how I get sent to the office." "Surely the teachers do not want to see you in trouble; you must make better choices in order not to be sent to the office," exclaimed Mrs. Nunley. "I guess, but I think the teachers just like getting me into trouble," he said.

"Let's discuss why you are here," said Judge Barger. Looking at his file Judge Barger said, "Student AA, you've missed a total of 11 days of school. Mom, do you have a reason why Student AA has missed 11 days of school?" said Judge Barger. "I know he has missed school because he was sick and has missed the bus a few times," said Student AA's mother. "Have you ever called the school to inform them that Student AA was sick or missed the bus?" said Judge Barger. Mrs. Nunley explained to Student AA's mother that if your student misses a certain number of days the teachers and administrators refer the student to the Truancy Court. Once you are referred, the parent must attend court and the judge will determine if other services are needed for the student. "Well, I didn't know that he missed all of those days and why didn't anyone call me to let me know?" the mother replied. "Do you get his progress reports and report cards, because that is usually indicated on it?" said Mrs. Nunley. "I haven't gotten his report card since last year," said Mom.

"I think maybe you should see the secretary to make sure that the school has the correct information, so there's no discrepancies next time," replied Mrs. Nunley. "I will

stop by the office to make sure that the information is updated and by the way, what is your current phone number?" stated Judge Barger. "I don't have a house phone and my cell phone is not on at this time, so I use my neighbor's phone if there is an emergency," she said. "Student AA has failing grades because of his attendance and until his attendance improves, he will continue to keep getting grades like the ones on his report card," said Judge Barger. "I'm going to get my grades up by the next report card," said Student AA. "Okay, I'm writing this down in your file so that when we meet next month, I will be able to see how much you've improved," replied Judge Barger. "See you are at the next meeting, and, Mom, thank you for taking time out to come," said Mrs. Nunley.

It was time for Student D to be called up to see Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger. Student D just came back this morning from a two-day suspension for classroom disruptions. "So, Student D, I understand that you are just reporting to school from being suspended for two days for disrupting the class," said Judge Barger. "Yea this girl was bothering me and I was bothering her and another boy while we were doing our work," he said. "If you were supposed to be working, why were you bothering another student?" "I don't know," he explained. "By looking at your attendance and your grades you cannot afford to do anything but get your work completed," said Mrs. Nunley. Student D was very adamant about making sure that he got his point across by adding his reason for causing the classroom disruption. Judge Barger stated to Student D that he must learn how to control his actions, because all of your actions result in consequences. Mrs. Nunley intervened and agreed with Judge Barger. She said that you are in school to learn and not to have arguments that can lead to you being suspended. "If the girl was bothering, you as you said, why didn't you tell the teacher?" Mrs. Nunley asked.

“Because I wanted to handle it, so I did,” Student D stated. “Do you think that next time you are having problems with another student that you can inform the teacher, so they can handle it before it gets you into trouble?” “I guess,” Student D said. Judge Barger stated that she wanted Student D to join the after-school program, as well as continue in the mentoring program. Mrs. Nunley stated that she would contact his mother to see if he could participate in the mentoring program and to give her pertinent information regarding the program. Student D left, but before leaving, Judge Barger told him to have a nice holiday and she would see him next month.

The time was going by very fast and there were only two more students who needed to see the judge. Usually, after the judge sees the student, she and Mrs. Nunley had a few minutes to discuss anything necessary or relevant to the next student to be called.

As I sat waiting until the next student was called; I noticed that there was a parent that came in to see Judge Barger. She apparently missed the court, because she did not have transportation until now. Mrs. Nunley asked if she was Student F’s mother and she stated yes. Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley and Student F’s mother took a few minutes to briefly discuss his attendance. The mother was very apologetic about not showing up on time, and Mrs. Nunley explained that she appreciated her being able to come. It looked as though it made Student F’s mother feel a bit more at ease about the situation. Judge Barger stated that she wanted to know if there was something going on that Student F was not attending school on a regular basis. Mom stated, “No he stays sick a lot, so I just let him stay home when he is not feeling well.” Mrs. Nunley replied, “Is he being seen by the doctor when he doesn’t come to school? Mom replied, “I don’t have

transportation so I can't take him to the doctor every time he is sick, so he just stays home and I give him medicine." Judge Barger interjected and stated that if he stays sick often, he may need to be seen by a physician, so they can determine why he is sick. While Judge Barger was discussing Student F with his mother, Mrs. Nunley stated that she would have to set up a meeting with her or do a home visit, so she could assist her with getting Student F to the doctor. Mrs. Nunley also gave Student F's mother her card and told her that she would be receiving a call from her later that day, and she left.

Judge Barger stated to Mrs. Nunley that she had an appointment with some students at a nearby high school where she volunteers three days a week tutoring and wanted to know how many more students were on the docket for today. Mrs. Nunley glanced over the docket and saw that there were two more students to be seen. Judge Barger called for the new student, and of course, he was absent. During the court session someone from the office came in and stated that he would not be at school today. So, the next student was then called. Student H was called up to see Judge Barger. The student and parent seemed very nervous about seeing the judge and didn't talk very loudly. It was a bit hard to understand what the student was saying about her grades. According to Mrs. Nunley, Student H was a very respectful student, but the reason why she had to see the judge was she had 10 days of school absence. Student H's mother stated that her daughter had asthma and it caused her to miss a lot of school. Judge Barger asked if Student H was on an inhaler. The Mom replied that she was, but often times she had to go into the doctor's office to receive breathing treatments. Judge Barger wanted to know if the nurse was aware of Student H's asthma. Yes, she was, but she did not have an inhaler that she could leave at school in case of emergencies. Student H only had one

inhaler and she brought that to school when she comes, but could not leave it with the nurse. “I have all of her doctor’s statements with me if you would like to see them, Student H’s Mom handed Judge Barger the doctor’s statements and she glanced over them. “Does the school have a copy of the statements when she misses school?” asked Judge Barger. “I think so,” Mom replied. “Mrs. Nunley, make sure that the nurse gets a copy of all of the doctor’s statements today,” said Judge Barger. “I will take it to the office after court and then I will give a copy of it to the nurse, too,” said Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger stated that Student H’s grades were not too bad but they could be better. “Her grades were better last year,” said Student H’s mother, “Her asthma wasn’t as bad so she didn’t miss a lot of school like she has this year.” “I appreciate you having the necessary documentation about Student H’s absences,” stated Judge Barger.

Student H said she was going to do her best not to miss as much school next semester as she did this semester and would try to improve at least two of her favorite subjects; communication arts and math. “I took math, and I think I could get at least an ‘A’ if I keep up with the class,” Student H stated. Student H’s mother stated that in previous years her grades had been average and she didn’t want them to get so low that it would be hard for her to make them up. Mrs. Nunley, shaking her head agreed with Student H’s mother and also stated that she would speak with her teachers about getting extra time to turn in her missing assignments. Judge Barger replied that would help Student H’s grades to improve. “We’ll see you next month and hopefully you will have shown some improvement with your attendance and grades,” said Mrs. Nunley. Student H concluded the end of the court for this month.

***Month 4: January (Truancy Court)***

When I arrived for Truancy Court, there were two parents and a few students patiently waiting. Mrs. Nunley came in to make sure that all students on the docket were present. I had a chance to see the docket and it was full, but as I scoped the room it looked as though a few were missing; so, Mrs. Nunley went to the office to have the students paged to come to the library for court. The secretary called a total of 10 students over the intercom, but only three came in. Judge Barger came in, greeted everyone, and told them that she would be ready in a few minutes. Mrs. Nunley came into the library to notify Judge Barger that she was waiting for the other students to show up. Judge Barger stated that she would like to get started and the other students would just have to come in when they arrived.

Judge Barger called for the first student to come up, but she was a no show. It was on to the next student. "Student AA," Judge Barger called, "Please come up." Student AA walked swiftly up to see Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. "Good morning," Judge Barger stated to Student AA. "Good morning to you ma'am," he replied. "How was your holiday?" Mrs. Nunley replied. "I hope you are well rested and ready to finish up this semester without missing any days," Judge Barger exclaimed. "Yes, I feel okay today," Student AA stated. Mrs. Nunley started off by informing Judge Barger about Student AA's suspension from the last court day. Student AA was being disrespectful and did not believe his actions would end up serving an in-school suspension. As Judge Barger continued reviewing Student AA's file, she noticed that his grades were average, so some improvement had taken place. Judge Barger stated that he still needed to continue to work a little harder in a few of his classes but overall, she was impressed with

his progress. Mrs. Nunley stated to Student AA, “Do you see what you can do when you put your mind to it? Yes, now just think if you were a little more focused, what type of progress you could’ve made,” she stated.

Student AA’s mother walked in as Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were talking to him. Judge Barger wanted to commend his mother for getting him to school on time and having a lot to do with the progress he had made since the last court. Judge Barger recommended Student AA and his mother go to the library so that he could get a library card and research a country he would like to visit. She also stated that she wanted him to write a one-page report about the country and bring it to the next court. Student AA’s mother stated that he would have the assignment when he came back next month. Judge Barger also stated that she had a gift certificate to a restaurant for him, for doing such a great job by improving his grades. Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger told him to keep up the good work. Student AA stated that he would try, but sometimes it’s hard. “See you next month,” Judge Barger replied, “with your assignment on your country?” “Ok, bye and thank you for coming,” said Mrs. Nunley.

Student D was called, so he proceeded to the table in the front of the room where Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were waiting. Judge Barger asked if he had his assignment that he was given. “No. I didn’t have time to do it,” he said. “Why, you had four weeks to get it done?” said Mrs. Nunley “Yeah, I know but I just didn’t finish it.” “So, do you have any of it with you?” “No,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. Judge Barger said,



His behavior since the last court date has been totally unacceptable. He was sent to the office because he refused to stop talking in class and became very irate with the teacher. Do you have anything to say for yourself?

“No,” he replied. “The behavior that you’re displaying will get you into a lot of trouble before you reach the age of 16. Do you realize that?” Judge Barger stated. Student D just sat there as though he was not interested in what Judge Barger was telling him.

When he did not respond, Judge Barger stated, “Okay, well I guess we’ll continue to see you month after month.” Mrs. Nunley replied, “See you next month,” and he was asked to leave. After Student D left, Mrs. Nunley stated to Judge Barger, that she would get in contact with his mother to see if she could attend the next court session and maybe she could explain if there was anything going on in the home.

Mrs. Nunley called for Student B. Student B walked up and sat down at the table. Mrs. Nunley asked if he was doing okay this morning. “Yes, I’m doing well,” he stated. Judge Barger read over his file and noticed that his behavior had improved and his grades were improving, too.

She had given him an assignment and asked if he had a chance to complete it. “Yes, I have it,” he said; he then got up and walked to the back of the room where he was sitting and retrieved it from the table. “Here you go,” he stated. “Student B, this sounds very good. Did you write this by yourself or did you have help?” “I wrote this by myself,” he replied. “This is such a nicely written paper,” stated Judge Barger. “Thank you,” Student B said. “I’m proud of you,” said Mrs. Nunley. “Let’s discuss the three days that you’ve missed since the last court session,” said Judge Barger. “I was sick one day and I’m not sure about the other two days,” he said. Judge Barger reviewed the

attendance report for Student B, and it indicated that there was a total of three days that were missed. “You indicated that you were sick on one of those days and you can’t remember about the two other days,” said Mrs. Nunley. “Yeah, I think I was here.” “Well, I will speak to the secretary and have her to review your attendance,” said Mrs. Nunley.

In the meantime, you need to get those grades up, because this is the last semester, and depending on your final grades, you will have to attend summer school. Do you want to spend your summer going to school?

said Judge Barger. “No. I like to sleep late and play my games.” “Well, that will not happen unless you get it together,” said Judge Barger, “Now I expect to see you next court with your mother.” “I will send out reminder letters to the parents,” said Mrs. Nunley.

Next, it was Student H’s time to see Judge Barger. She and her mother walked up together to see the judge and Mrs. Nunley. “How are you today?” said Judge Barger to Student H’s mother. “Fine,” she said. “Mrs. Nunley, do you have Student H’s file ready?” “Yes, here it is,” said Mrs. Nunley. “Student H,” said Judge Barger, “You’ve done such a fantastic job of improving your grades and have only missed one day of school since the last court.” Student H’s mother interjected and said she had a follow up doctor’s appointment for her asthma, and so she missed school. “I turned in a doctor’s statement,” said her mother. Mrs. Nunley stated that she wanted to close out her case, because she has improved tremendously and there was not a need to continue to keep her case opened. Judge Barger agreed with Mrs. Nunley and rewarded Student H for her hard work and dedication in improving her attendance and grades. She was given a

restaurant gift certificate for her hard work and dedication in improving her grades and attendance. Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were also proud of her for doing such a great job and wanted her to try to motivate her peers to do the same thing. Judge Barger told Student H good luck and, Mom, thank you for continued support with our program.

The next student was a new referral. She was referred to court because of an older sibling whose attendance was adequate. Student X and her mother reported to the table to see Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. Mrs. Nunley informed Judge Barger about the case and why she was referred. Apparently, Student X's older sister, who did attend school regularly, prompted the school to refer her to court. Mom stated that she was not old enough to drop out of school; however, she has a hard time getting her to go to school.

Judge Barger stated, "Why doesn't she want to go to school?" "I'm not sure what's going on with her, but I cannot be concerned with her behavior. I just don't want to lose focus of Student X." "I understand, but as long as your older daughter is under the age of 17, she has to attend school; otherwise, you will find yourself in city court," said Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger stated the attendance code and explained to Student X's mother that the age limit had been raised from 16 to 17; so, once the student reached that age, then he or she has the option to withdraw from school. Mrs. Nunley stated that the student must complete paperwork indicating that they have withdrawn from school. "Okay, I didn't know that," said the mother. "So, until your daughter withdraws you are responsible for paying 25 dollars a day for every day that she has missed and court cost, or otherwise you may have to serve jail time," said Judge Barger. "I will make sure that I take care of the situation, because I can't afford to be paying for her mistakes."

Mrs. Nunley stated that Student X's grades were average, but her attendance needed to improve. "How many days has she missed?" said Student X's mother. "She has missed a total of seven days and most of those days were at the beginning of the school year," said Mrs. Nunley, "So, if those days were at the beginning of the year, why are meeting now said Student X's mother?" "The reason why we're meeting now is that the court just received her referral. There is a process that each case goes through before it reaches the court," said Mrs. Nunley, "I still think that Student X only missing seven days is good." "Yes, it is and we do not doubt that isn't however it's January and she still has several months to go before school is out," said Judge Barger. Student X replied, "I will try not to miss any more school, because I don't want my mother to have to go to court." "That's an excellent choice that you've decided that you will try to come to school regularly," said Mrs. Nunley. "Judge Barger I will make sure that Student X is at school, if I have to bring her," said Student X's mother.

After attending all of the court sessions since October, I knew this next case was going to be a bit interesting, since the student missed 26 and a half days since August. Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger took about a brief minute to discuss what they were about to encounter. It was apparent neither the student nor the parent had any remorse about not attending school. After Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley finished talking, they called for Student Y to come up. As he walked up to the table, his pants were sagging, and he just looked as though he rolled out of bed and came to school. Judge Barger had a very upsetting look on her face and just could not believe that a student missed 26 days and was not hospitalized. Her comments were very straight forward, and she did not waste any time with Student Y. "I hope you really have a very good explanation for missing so

many days.” Mrs. Nunley reviewed his attendance report and saw that most of his days were on Mondays and Fridays, beginning in August. Judge Barger asked, “Do you have a problem with coming to school on certain days?” “No,” he replied. “Are you sure, because from the looks of your report you must?” Judge Barger replied. “Mrs. Nunley, what do his grades look like?” said Judge Barger. “Judge Barger, his grades are not any better than his attendance,” said Mrs. Nunley. “Student Y, what is going with you?” said Judge Barger. “What do you mean?” Student Y responded.

“Mom, could you please explain why Student Y has missed so many days of school?” replied Mrs. Nunley. “I’m not sure why he has missed so many days of school, because he leaves the house every morning like he is coming to school,” replied Student Y’s mother. “I sometimes have to go to work before he leaves the house, and if he doesn’t come to school no one calls me to let me know,” said his mother. “I can’t take off from work every time he doesn’t come to school,” Student Y’s mother stated as she was shaking her head. Student Y’s mother turned and looked at her son in disgust as he was sliding down in his seat.

Mrs. Nunley stated to Student Y’s mother that she would do a home visit and that way they could talk more privately, if that’s okay. “That’s fine with me just let me know what is convenient for you,” said Mrs. Nunley. “I will give you a call sometime tomorrow to let you know about the time,” replied Mrs. Nunley. “Judge Barger, is there something you would like to add about the home visit that I will be doing?” exclaimed Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger replied by stating that she wanted Student Y to participate in the mentoring program as soon as possible and also help Mom to find family counseling.

“I believe that she needs support for Student Y, as well as for herself,” stated Judge Barger.

“Student Y do you see the seriousness of your attendance at school and how it’s affecting your grades; that means you need to get yourself together?” said Judge Barger. “Yeah, I see now,” stated Student Y. “So, next month we should see some improvement in your grades and attendance,” said Mrs. Nunley. “Uum, I guess,” he replied. “Mom, take care and we will be in touch very soon,” replied Mrs. Nunley.

The time was nearing almost 10 and finally it was to the last student to see Judge Barger. The last student seemed to have taken much of the Judge’s time because of his attitude towards not caring that he missed 26 days and he was failing the eighth grade. It was much to my dismay that his mother appeared that she was making some type of excuse for him, but later changed and agreed to seek help from Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger.

Judge Barger called for her last and final student on the docket. Student P swiftly moved up to the table after having his head down during the entire court. Judge Barger asked Student P, “Do you think it’s polite to have your head down in court?” she asked. “No,” he exclaimed. “Then the next time you come to court please do not put your head down, because that’s very rude and disrespectful to me and Mrs. Nunley,” Judge Barger replied. Student P got off to the wrong start with Judge Barger and now it was time for her to review his file, since he was a new referral. I knew it was going to be similar to the case with Student Y, because of the number of days that he missed and the fact that he was failing too. For some reason the students did not seem to think Judge Barger’s

time was valuable, but it was. She volunteered two hours a month to do the court and some of the students took it to their advantage, but it was going to work today.

“Student P, I’m going to get right to the point, because I have wasted enough time with students [who] do not care about their attendance or the fact that they’re failing, for today,” said Judge Barger, “Mrs. Nunley and I are here to help you and some of you do not seem the least bit interested in improving so I will get right to the point. Please, explain the 15 days that you’ve missed,” she said in her stern tone of voice. Judge Barger told Mrs. Nunley that she wanted his mother to attend court next session and she gave him a writing assignment on the importance of a good education. Judge Barger also told him to ask his mother to take him to the library to get a library card and check out a book on Dr. Martin Luther King. “Why on Dr. King?” stated Student P. Because I want you to see how Dr. King valued his education and the struggles that he went through as a child growing up,” stated Judge Barger. “So, when do you want me to bring in the assignment?” Student P asked. Mrs. Nunley stated, “Bring it to the next court session and do not forget to remind your mother to come with you.” “Okay, I will see you next court,” said Judge Barger. “See you later; bye,” replied Student P. “Good bye, and have a good rest of the day,” said Judge Barger.

#### ***Month 5: February (Truancy Court)***

I arrived around 7:30 in order to prepare for court. After a few minutes of talking with the Teaching and Learning Facilitator, Ms. Ring, I walked into the library and sat down. As I was waiting for court to begin, Judge Barger rushed into the library a few minutes prior to court. It appeared that she was in a hurry and by her looks she was. “Mrs. Nunley, how many students are on the docket for today?” she stated. “Well, I’m

trying to see how many of the students are here as we speak,” Mrs. Nunley stated.

“Okay, because I have an appointment with my high school students that I’m tutoring. I promised them that I would get there a little early today,” Judge Barger responded. Mrs. Nunley went to the office to have the students who had not shown up paged over the intercom to come to the library. Mrs. Nunley came back into the library and informed Judge Barger that there were only going to be five students on the docket, because the others were either suspended or not at school.

Judge Barger called Student B to come up. “Student B, I noticed that you just returned from a five-day suspension for fighting,” said Judge Barger. “Yeah,” he stated, “I was fighting because the dude wanted to fight me.” “Just because someone states that they want to fight you does not mean that you have to fight,” exclaimed Judge Barger. “Well, I gave him what he wanted, so I couldn’t let him think he was going to win,” Student B replied. “Do you think you won?” asked Mrs. Nunley. “Yeah,” he replied. “Well, you didn’t,” said Judge Barger. “The only thing you won was five days at home,” she stated.

“Now, let’s move on to your grades and attendance, because we’re not going to debate the reason you had to fight,” Judge Barger responded. “Do you have your assignment that I gave you last during the last court?” asked Judge Barger. “No,” he replied, “I forgot to do it.” “Well, I tell you what you are going to do,” said Mrs. Nunley. “You’re going to get a sheet of paper and go and sit in the back of the room and start writing it. The topic that you were writing on is ‘how would you solve violence?’” she said. “I want to see how much you have done by the end of court, stated Mrs. Nunley. “Judge Barger, I hope you don’t mind, but I’m tired of the excuses that they are giving us



about their assignments.” “No, Mrs. Nunley that’s perfectly fine. They have to have some type of consequence for their actions, so maybe this will teach them to bring their assignments,” replied Judge Barger.

Student P’s name was called and he went up to see Judge Barger. Judge Barger was not very happy with Student P’s behavior, because he was suspended for having disrespectful behavior towards his teacher. The teacher’s report indicated that he jumped into the teacher’s face after being reprimanded for something he’d done in the classroom. The suspension he was given was for five days; however, after his five days were up, he did not return to school for another three days.

Mrs. Nunley asked Student P, “Were you sick the three extra days that you were at home?” “No, I had to stay home and watch my little brother, because my mother didn’t have anyone to watch him while she went to work” he responded. “Who watches him the other days when your mother has to work?” Judge Barger interjected. “He goes to a babysitter, but she told my mom that she couldn’t watch him, because she had something to do that day, so I had to stay home,” Student P replied.

“Mrs. Nunley will you call the mother about this situation, because he cannot stay home to care for his little brother,” stated Judge Barger. “Yes,” Mrs. Nunley stated as she was taking down notes about the situation. “Do you have your assignment with you?” stated Mrs. Nunley? “What assignment?” Student P replied. “The assignment that Judge Barger gave to you last month,” she stated. “Do you see Student B sitting in the back of the room?” “Yeah, he’s working on the assignment that he didn’t have when Judge Barger called his name.” Mrs. Nunley replied, “So, this is what you’re going to be doing. Here is a sheet of paper. I want you to go to the back of the room and get busy on

your assignment. You're going to turn it in after court is over. Do you understand?"

"Yes," he replied. "Judge Barger and I are very tired of all of the excuses that you guys are giving us. We cannot give excuses when we're asked to do something so I'm not allowing it." Student P got up and went to the back of the library and began working on his assignment.

Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley had a few minutes to debrief before calling for the next student. It was apparent that the students were used to getting by with all of their excuses, but Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger were not putting up with it. Mrs. Nunley called up the next student. Student Q was a new referral. Student Q came up, Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley introduced themselves, and Judge Barger asked Student Q her age, grade, and something that she likes to do. Student Q responded by stating that she was 13 years old, in the seventh grade, and she likes going places. Mrs. Nunley asked Student Q, "What are some places that you like to go?" Student Q responded by saying it did not matter, as long as she was able to go somewhere. Judge Barger asked Student Q if she knew why she was in Truancy Court and she responded by saying, "Not really."

Mrs. Nunley stated that you're in Truancy Court because you've missed eight days of school and once you've missed at least five days, the teachers fill out a referral regarding your attendance, and once I receive it your name is put on the Truancy Court docket for that month.

Judge Barger explained the process that she takes once the students are referred to court.

Student Q asked if she had to attend court each month and Judge Barger stated that it depended on how well she improved with her grades, behavior/discipline, and attendance.

"Okay," she said, "So, then I don't have to come back." "That's correct," stated Mrs.

Nunley, “But, remember it depends on all of the criteria that Judge Barger just went over.” “Student Q, I’m reviewing your attendance record and I see that you’ve missed eight days of school. The days that you didn’t come to school, were you sick?” stated Judge Barger. “Not all of the time. I missed the bus and the other days I was sick. If I miss the bus, I don’t have a way to get to school,” Student Q responded. Mrs. Nunley asked, “The days that you were sick did you go to the doctor.” “No, my mom just gave me some medicine and told me to go back to bed,” student Q replied. “Well, Student Q, I understand that sometimes you do not feel well, but if you do not go to the doctor or your mother doesn’t call the school, these absences become unexcused absences,” stated Mrs. Nunley.

Unexcused absences are absences in which your mother did not call the school to inform them that you were not going to be at school or not having documentation that states you were sick. So, the next time you’re not at school because of illness or you miss the bus your mother should call to notify the school.

Judge Barger stated that she wanted Mrs. Nunley to call the mother regarding Student Q’s attendance.

“How are you doing in school stated Judge Barger?” “I think I’m doing good,” Student Q replied. “What is good?” asked Mrs. Nunley. “I’m passing all of my classes,” she replied. Judge Barger showed Student Q her grades and then asked her again did her grades reflect someone that was passing all of their classes. “No, but I do all of my work for all of my classes and I don’t know why I’m not passing.” Mrs. Nunley stated, “Your attendance has an effect on your grades [and] that’s why it’s important that you come to school daily. Do you understand what I’m explaining to you?” “Yes,” she replied.

“Now you’re going to make sure you try to come to school on a regular basis; otherwise, your mother will be the one that will be attending city court. Do you want that to happen?” Mrs. Nunley stated. “No, I don’t want my mother to have to go to court because of me,” she replied. “Since you have a clear understanding about your attendance, we need to discuss your behavior and grades,” stated Judge Barger, “I want you to go and talk to your teachers about completing extra credit, but remember you want to ask them nicely,” Judge Barger said. “Okay,” she exclaimed, “I will ask them today. What happens if they say I can’t get any?” “Then, Mrs. Nunley will speak to them, but I want you to try to do this on your own,” Judge Barger warned.

Mrs. Nunley assured Student Q that the teachers would cooperate only if she asks them politely. Judge Barger noted the information into Student Q’s file and said that she would see her next month with positive results. Student Q stood up from her seat and walked to the back to get her belongings that she brought into court. “See you next month,” Mrs. Nunley stated, as she walked out the door.

Student AA was back to see the judge and Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger called him up, and so he walked swiftly up to see her. He was very excited; not sure why, but he had news for Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger. Mrs. Nunley gave his file to Judge Barger. Judge Barger glanced at Student AA’s file for a few minutes and noticed that he had made tremendous progress regarding his grades, behavior, and attendance. Judge Barger stated, “Student AA, you’ve been very busy I see.” “Yes, ma’am, I had to get my grades up, because I don’t want to come back to court. You said that if I get my grades up and come to school, I may not have to come back,” he replied. “That’s correct,” Judge Barger stated. Mrs. Nunley explained to Judge Barger that she had been working with

his mother and that she was doing weekly home visits and believed this had a lot to do with his grades and attendance. But it was the fact that his mother was very supportive. “She called me weekly to make sure that Student AA was at school and he was completing his work.” Judge Barger stated to Student AA that she had a gift certificate for Jack In the box for all of his hard work that has finally paid off. Mrs. Nunley stated to Student AA, “You should be proud of yourself.” “Yeah, I guess,” he replied. It appeared that it was not big deal to him, but it apparently was enough to get his mother involved in the process. “I want to see you next month and that will be the last time, because Mrs. Nunley will be closing out your case,” Judge Barger replied. “[I will] continue to keep up the good work.” he said. “Okay, I will see you next month,” said Judge Barger, and he shook her hand and walked out of the room.

Judge Barger was preparing herself for the next student eagerly waiting to be called. “Mrs. Nunley, call the next student,” she asked. Mrs. Nunley called for Student EE to come up to see the judge. “Good morning.” said Judge Barger, “How are you doing this morning?” “I’m doing good,” said Student EE. “That’s great. Do you know why you’re here today?” asked Judge Barger. “Yes, I think so,” she replied. “We’re here today because of your attendance.” “What about my attendance?” Student EE replied. “According to the attendance report, you’ve missed nine days of school,” exclaimed Judge Barger. “I didn’t miss nine days,” Student EE stated. “These days were accumulated from August until now,” Mrs. Nunley replied,

Since the beginning of school, you’ve missed nine days and teachers completed a packet for you to refer to Truancy Court. Unless the days are documented into the

system as being excused with a doctor's statement, you're then referred to the court to see Judge Barger.

Judge Barger stated to Student EE that it was her attendance that she was especially concerned with at this time. "Your grades aren't too bad, but I will be checking them periodically," said Mrs. Nunley. "Student EE could you explain your absence to us," Judge Barger stated. "Well, um, I don't really know what to say," Student EE exclaimed. "Do you acknowledge that you've missed the nine days?" "Yes," she said, "But, I don't remember missing nine days." "I have a print out of all of the days that you've missed," replied Judge Barger. Judge Barger gave Student EE the report that showed all of the days that she'd missed since the beginning of August.

As Judge Barger was showing Student EE the report, her mother walked in. "I apologize for being late," she stated, "I have a sick child at home and I have to take care of other family members at home, too." "Thank you for coming," exclaimed Judge Barger, "I was just going over the attendance report with Student EE and she is having a difficult time with her attendance. She doesn't remember being absences nine times this school year." "You should remember if you were not at school," said Mrs. Nunley, "But since your mom is here, maybe she can help with the days." Judge Barger asked Student EE's mother, if she was sick could she get a doctor's statement stating that so that the school can put it into her file. "I'm not sure if I can get one, because she goes to a clinic and she doesn't see the same the doctor," her mother stated. "It shouldn't matter if she sees the same doctor or not, they have record that she has been seen in the office," replied Judge Barger.

“Mom, I want Student EE to participate in the mentoring program and afterschool program. Mrs. Nunley will give you all of the information regarding the programs. It is important that she participates in the program because it will help her to develop responsibility for her actions,” stated Judge Barger. “The afterschool program will help Student EE to keep up with her school work and if she needs extra help one of the teachers in the program can assist her,” exclaimed Mrs. Nunley. “I will make sure that Student EE gets to school every day and hopefully this will have some impact on her academics, as well as her attendance,” said her mother. “Mom, we really appreciate you getting involved, and maybe this will change Student EE’s attitude about her education,” stated Judge Barger. “I will keep in touch with Mrs. Nunley, and if anything else changes I will be sure to let you know.” replied Student EE’s mother. “Thank you again for coming and have a good day,” said Mrs. Nunley.

I had a brief moment to glance at the clock and realized that time was moving quickly. It was time for Judge Barger to call her final student of the day to the table. Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were talking about the next student. Mrs. Nunley was giving Judge Barger some information regarding Student FF. Student FF had missed two court appearances with Judge Barger, along with six days since the last court session. By the look on Judge Barger’s face, Student FF better have a good explanation for missing two court sessions and missing school six days. So, Student FF strolled up to the table as though she didn’t have a care in the world. She sat down and Judge Barger asked, “So, where have you been? You’ve missed two court dates and now you’ve missed six days. Do you realize that this is affecting your attendance?” Student FF shrugged her shoulders

and stated that she did not know. Mrs. Nunley interjected and stated that we could not help her if she continued to not attend school on a regular basis.

Judge Barger stated, “I’m going to give you a writing assignment about how education is important to you.” “Why do I need a writing assignment,” Student FF stated? “I want to know your thoughts and how you think education is important to you,” stated Judge Barger. “Mrs. Nunley, please jot down in your book for Student FF; so, she will know that this assignment is due next month.” Mrs. Nunley asked Judge Barger if there anything else that she needed to jot down for Student FF. “No, she replied, “Just have her to complete the assignment and she is free to leave. Have a good day,” Judge Barger exclaimed. Mrs. Nunley stated to Student FF that she would come by her class to check on her later in the day. “Okay, she stated.” Student FF walked out of the library.

#### ***Month 6: March (Truancy Court)***

Truancy Court was now into its sixth month and students were still being referred and not adhering to Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley’s requests. The explanations of the students were now getting ridiculous and some of the excuses appeared to be rehearsed. The few parents that had attended the court showed support for Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley when it came to their student’s grades, behavior/discipline, and attendance. The parents that were concerned, came in and asked questions, and were willing to do what was necessary for their student.

So, Student FF was back to see the judge. She strolled up to the table and flopped down in the chair. Judge Barger asked her to sit down correctly and not flopped. Mrs. Nunley handed Judge Barger her file and as she was reviewing it, Student FF’s mother explained to Judge Barger that she had been out of school for a funeral. Judge Barger



asked Mrs. Nunley, "Do they give you five days for a funeral?" "I'm not sure," stated Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger asked if the funeral was for her father. "No, it was her cousin and she was very close to her cousin." "I understand that she may have been very close to her cousin; however, she has missed five days of school and this is affecting her grades," stated Judge Barger. Mrs. Nunley glanced over Student FF's attendance record that she retrieved from the office and stated that she missed school the day prior, due to transportation. "Mom, Student FF's attendance is unacceptable and is causing her grades to suffer. If she is not in school regularly, the teachers cannot be the blamed for her failing grades," stated Mrs. Nunley.

Student FF's mother seemed to have an answer for every question Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley asked her. Judge Barger appeared to be frustrated with Student FF's mother. Her mother continued to give excuses, not giving Student FF a chance to answer the questions. Judge Barger explained to her mother that if she continued to miss school that she was going to refer her to city court. Then, it would be up to the judge in city court to hear the case. The mother said to Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger that she had the obituary that confirmed that it was her relative that died. Mrs. Nunley stated that it was not the matter of it being her relative, but it was the fact that Student FF continued to keep missing school. Judge Barger asked if she had the writing assignment that was given to her during the last time she attended court. "No, she doesn't have it," said Student FF's mother. She did not have time to finish it. "But she had more than a month to complete it," said Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger then showed Student FF and her mother her grades. Student FF's mother responded by saying that her grades usually do not look like this. Student FF interjected and told Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley that it was the

teacher's fault that she was failing, because she completes all of her assignments. Judge Barger stated that was impossible, since she had an assignment for more than two months and came to court and the assignment was not finished. It was very obvious that Student FF's mother was making several excuses for her and that was not working for Judge Barger nor Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger informed Student FF and her mother that she must take responsibility for her actions and stop blaming others for her mistakes. Judge Barger stated to Student FF's mother that she wanted to see her in court next month with Student FF. Mom stated that she was in the process of looking for a job and not sure if she would be working by then, but she would try to make it, she exclaimed. "Try to have a good day," said Judge Barger to Student FF and her mother as they were leaving the library.

Student A came in while his name was being called. He walked over and greeted Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley and sat down at the table. "Well thank you for coming to court," said Judge Barger. "No problem," he stated. Mrs. Nunley asked Student A if he was going to tell Judge Barger that he was suspended for two days. "Um, yeah, I was suspended from school for not having on the right uniform," he said. Judge Barger asked "Why didn't you wear the correct uniform if you knew you could get suspended from school?" she said. "Because I don't like wearing them, so if I don't wear the right one then I know I'll get suspended," Student A responded. Student A's attitude was he just wanted to do whatever he wanted and not have any consequences behind it.

Mrs. Nunley also asked about the fight that he had and was suspended for, too, for five days, making his total days missed seven days. Judge Barger was furious about the fact that he had missed so many days and was still failing in a few of his classes.

Although he had a few classes that he managed to pass, this still was not good enough for Judge Barger nor Mrs. Nunley. “Student A, did your mother ever complete the paper work necessary for you to participate in the mentoring program,” asked Mrs. Nunley? “No,” he replied. “I believe this program would’ve been very beneficial for you,” said Judge Barger, “The mentors work with you on academics, behavior, and so many other things,” she exclaimed. “Maybe next year you can get into the program,” stated Mrs. Nunley. “Before you go, I want you to try to make the last two months of school the best that you can by coming to school every day and improving your grades,” replied Judge Barger. “Do you think that you can do that by the next court,” she said? “Yes,” he replied. “Well, I’m going to hold you to that and not only that, I’m writing it down in your file,” Judge Barger stated. Student A got up and shook Judge Barger’s hand and left the library.

Mrs. Nunley excused herself while she went to the office to see if Student C had reported to school, while Judge Barger was left to look over her file. Mrs. Nunley came back into the library with Student C and her mother. Student C and her mother walked up and sat down at the table where Judge Barger was sitting. “I apologize for being late,” said Student C’s mother, “She wasn’t feeling well this morning, but I told her that she had to come to school.” Student C did not know that Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were going to close her case out today, because she had shown improvement in her academics and attendance. Mrs. Nunley stated to Judge Barger that her case had been open for over a year and she had shown progress and there was not a need to continue to keep it open. Judge Barger smiled and said, “Do you see the progress you’ve made over a year’s time?” She shook her head yes and her mother said that she was doing everything that

she could for her. Judge Barger commented on the fact that she handed in two reports that she was given and that is more than anyone else had done. “You deserve a special treat for that,” Judge Barger implied. Here are two gift certificates for doing the right thing.” “Thank you,” she responded. “This is for completing the truancy court program.” Student C had a very big smile on her face, as did her mother, and she was very grateful for everything that Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley had done for them. “Student C, good luck and I wish the best for you,” stated Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. “Do not hesitate to come and talk to me if you’re having problems,” commented Mrs. Nunley. “I won’t,” she exclaimed, as she and her mother were leaving.

Student B was back with the same unacceptable attitude that he had previously. This time, the expressions on Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley’s faces were not good. Student B walked up to the [table to] talk to the Judge and Mrs. Nunley, with his pants sagging and not in proper uniform. He then sat down and Mrs. Nunley began by asking him a series of questions regarding the incidents that had occurred prior to the last court. Student B was suspended for his disrespectful behavior to his teachers.

While sitting at the table with Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley, Student B sat with his arms crossed, and Judge Barger informed him that was a sign of disrespect. She asked him to uncross his arms; but it took several times of her asking him before he did it. Judge Barger was not pleased with his behavior. “I volunteer my time each month to work with Mrs. Nunley, so please do not disrespect me,” exclaimed Judge Barger. “The reason why I come is so that my presence could make a difference for you,” she suggested. Mrs. Nunley added that a lot of Student B’s behavior concerns could have been avoided if he only took the initiative to join the mentoring program. “I believe

you're right," commented Judge Barger. Mrs. Nunley suggested that his mother be at the next court, so maybe she could explain his unacceptable behavior. "That sounds like a wonderful idea," said Judge Barger.

Judge Barger implied there was no need to continue to give him an assignment, because he appeared that he was not going to complete it. "You're right," commented Mrs. Nunley. "You may be excused," said Mrs. Nunley to Student B; so, he got up and left. "There isn't anyone to blame but himself for his misbehavior," expressed Mrs. Nunley; "I've tried several times to get him to do the right thing, but he refuses," she said. "Mrs. Nunley, I know you've tried, so all we can do is continue to talk to him, and hopefully he will listen to us before it's too late," Judge Barger stated, "How many students are left on today's docket?" "There are two more students that need to see you today," Mrs. Nunley added.

Student P was back in court to see Judge Barger for the third time this year. Since the last court date, she had given him two assignments, of which neither one had been turned in. "Student P had missed two days because his mother thought that he had a doctor's appointment," said Mrs. Nunley. "Apparently, she had the appointment days confused so that's why he missed the two days," she added. "Okay Student P, that sounds like a reasonable mistake; but you still did not complete the assignments that you were given several months ago." "The reason why I forgot to finish it was I didn't have a computer," he said. "You didn't need a computer to complete the assignment Student P," commented Mrs. Nunley. "The assignment could've been written out on paper," she said. Surely this is just another excuse not to complete the assignment. Judge Barger added, "Student P, I'm not sure what you want us to do, because we've suggested many

things and you're not very cooperative," implied Judge Barger. "The fact is Student P, you need to improve your grades and come to school. The more days you miss of school, [the more it] will affect your grades, and as you can see, you're falling further behind in school," said Mrs. Nunley.

"Student P, I sent your mother a letter to appear in court today. Do you know if she received the letter?" "Yes, she got it, but she had to work so she couldn't come," he said. "Okay," said Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger suggested to Mrs. Nunley to call her or do a home visit. "Student P, I will see you again next month, but with your mother," replied Judge Barger. "Next month when you come, I expect for you to show some improvement," said Judge Barger. "I'm going to try," Student P stated.

As Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were finishing their conversation with Student P, Student Q and her mother were sitting towards the back of the room talking and texting on their phones. I realized that this was why Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley have so many excuses from the students; because of their parents. Neither Student Q nor her mother were paying attention to what the judge was saying to the other students prior.

Student Q was called to see Judge Barger and she was not prepared to see the judge. Mrs. Nunley first addressed the issue that Student Q was not in proper uniform and her grades were not passing. "Would you like to say anything before we proceed?" exclaimed Judge Barger. "No," she replied. "Alright, well it looks as though you've been very busy with being suspended from school," commented Judge Barger, "Your attendance report indicates that you've been suspended multiple times, apparently for the same violations: uniform, unacceptable behavior, and fighting." Student Q's mother interjected and stated that she did not have any clean uniforms, so she was put into In-

School. “What about her behavior and fighting?” added Mrs. Nunley. “This girl said she wanted to fight me so we had a fight,” she replied. “You cannot go around just fighting because someone said something to you,” suggested Judge Barger. “Well, she told someone that she wanted to fight me and that person came and told me, so we had a fight.” “Did it ever occur to you that the same person that told you that may have been telling you a lie?” replied Mrs. Nunley? “No,” she said. “We cannot react to everything that some tells us, because sometimes it will get you into trouble,” exclaimed Judge Barger, “Mom, do you understand what we’re telling Student Q?” “Yes,” she uttered. “Do you think you can get your behavior under control?” Judge Barger replied. “Yes,” Student Q responded.

“Are you passing any of your classes?” replied Mrs. Nunley “I don’t know,” she replied. “What do you mean you don’t know?” said Judge Barger in a firm voice. “By looking at your progress grades you’re not completing any work, because your grades indicate that you’re not passing,” said Mrs. Nunley. “Mom, do you have anything to say regarding Student Q’s grades?” uttered Judge Barger. “I’ve called the school a few times to talk with her teachers, but they never called me back,” implied Student Q’s mother. “Have you tried coming to the school and scheduling a conference with her teachers?” said Judge Barger. “No, because I work and sometimes it’s hard for me to take off,” Mom added. Student Q’s mother stated that she would make sure that she came to school regularly and complete her class work. “That sounds good,” said Mrs. Nunley. “Student Q, if you need help, please come by my office and let me know,” Mrs. Nunley replied. “See you next month,” uttered Judge Barger.

*Month 7: April (Truancy Court)*

With less than a month and a half left, the student's excuses were becoming a thing of the past. The students coming to court were just that; coming and not trying to adhere to what Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were discussing with them. The parents were much to blame because their attitudes were just as bad as the students'.

As I was arriving to the school, I noticed that there were a few other parents walking into the building with me. One parent's expression was that she was not enthused about coming to court, while the other parent appeared to be somewhat concerned about their student. We all walked into the library and the parents, along with their students sat at different tables. One parent and their student sat at the table where I was sitting, and the conversation between the parent and student was very interesting. The parent was upset that she had to appear in court and discussed with her student that she needed to get herself together. I thought that maybe it wasn't just the student's fault that she had to appear in court, but the parents had a little to do with it, too. The student told her mother that she was passing all of her classes but apparently the parent did not believe the student.

After about 10 minutes, Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger both walked into the library and set their belongings down on the table. Mrs. Nunley informed Judge Barger that she was waiting on the teachers to release the students to the library. Judge Barger was very courteous and spoke to the students and parents in the library before court began. As the students were walking into the room, it was the first time that everyone on the docket showed up. It was now time for court to begin and Judge Barger called up her



first student, along with her parent. This happened to be the student and parent that were sitting at my table.

“Student A, you’ve now missed 22 days of school,” said Judge Barger. “Do you have anything to say about your attendance?” said Judge Barger. Mrs. Nunley asked, Student A’s mother if she could explain why she has missed so many days of school. Her mother replied, “I believe that she has missed a lot but didn’t know that it was 22 days.” Student A suggested that Mrs. Nunley check with the office about her absences, because she was in In-School and not suspended. She also stated that some of her teachers were not taking absences. Judge Barger asked Student A, “What do you mean, they did not take attendance?” “The teachers don’t call your name so you don’t know if they are taking attendance,” replied Student A. “I will check with the office, as well as the teachers to verify her attendance, so that it will be accurate for next month,” said Mrs. Nunley. Okay, that sounds great, but what about your grades and behavior?” Judge Barger added.

It clearly states on your discipline record that you were sent to the office for disrespecting an adult. This is why I wanted you to get involved in the mentoring program months ago because maybe this could’ve helped your behavior, academics, and attendance,

expressed Judge Barger. Student A’s mother expressed to Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley that Student A needed counseling, because of her behavior. Judge Barger outlined a plan for Student A to follow, with hopes it would improve her grades, attendance, and behavior. Student A’s mother stated that she was the youngest of 11 children and she was doing the best that she could to keep her in school. Judge Barger stated that if she

needed additional assistance, to inform Mrs. Nunley so that she could help. Student A and her mother thanked Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley for their suggestions in regards to Student A and they left.

While Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were preparing to see the next student, I noticed in the back of the room the other parent that was in court with her son was on her phone talking and/or texting. I guess this is why Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley do not get the cooperation from the parents, because the students see that their parents are uninterested and it begins to rub off on them. She must have continued to text at least five to 10 minutes, and then finally it was her turn to see the judge with her daughter.

The other students in the room were very restless and some had their heads down on the table, while others were having conversations. Mrs. Nunley told the students they could not talk during the court sessions, and those with their heads down must sit up or they could have other consequences. So, instead many of the students were slouched down in their seats waiting to see Judge Barger. I could distinctly remember that the judge gave out assignments to the students, which many had not turned in during the prior courts. There was not one single student working; so, to my surprise I assumed that many had already finished, until they reached the table where Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were sitting.

Mrs. Nunley called for Student E to come and see the judge. Student E came up, along with his mother and they both sat down at the table. "Good morning," said Judge Barger to Student E and his mother. "Good morning," replied Student E and his mother. "How are you doing today?" Judge Barger asked. "I'm fine," replied Student E's mother. Student E did not say much when Judge Barger was talking.

“Well, Student E, you’ve been quite busy getting suspended,” added Judge Barger. “Mrs. Nunley, do you have Student E’s attendance record available?” she asked. “Yes,” she replied. “Student E, have you had a chance to look at your attendance prior to today?” Judge Barger asked. “Your attendance report indicates that you have missed more than 20 days of school, and the year isn’t over,” Judge Barger commented. Judge Barger was quite unhappy with Student E and his mother. Neither student E nor his mother followed up with Mrs. Nunley regarding the assistance that Judge Barger had put into place for Student E. His mother replied that she was very busy looking for a job and taking care of her other children. Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger stated that they just wanted to get the necessary assistance that would help Student E to become successful in his academic areas. “I appreciate what you are doing for me and Student E, but I’m a single parent and sometime[s] it’s very hard for me to get everything done,” Mom commented. “We’re here for you so please do not hesitate to ask us for help” expressed Judge Barger. “So, Student E, we will see you next month to see how well you’ve done,” said Judge Barger. Student E and his mother stood up and excused themselves from the table and walked out of the room.

It was about 8:30 and there were eight more students waiting to see Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger was documenting information into Student E’s file before she called her next student.

Mrs. Nunley handed Judge Barger the file for the next student, so she could glance over it before calling him up. The expression on Judge Barger’s face indicated that she was not pleased with the next student. After a minute, Mrs. Nunley called up Student G to see Judge Barger. Student G walked swiftly up to see Judge Barger and

flopped down into the seat. “How are you today?” said Judge Barger. There was not a response from Student G. “How are you today?” said Judge Barger for the second time. Mrs. Nunley suggested that Student G open his mouth and respond to Judge Barger. “Good,” he said. “I’m glad,” she replied. “Please sit up in the chair?” added Mrs. Nunley. “Before we get started, Judge Barger, I just want you to know that I’ve been working with Student G regarding his behavior, but he doesn’t seem to care about anything,” replied Mrs. Nunley, “His teachers have discussed that he has unacceptable behavior in the classroom towards other students and adults when being reprimanded and grades are not improving.” “Do you have anything to say for yourself?” stated Judge Barger. “No, I just don’t like school,” he replied. “Why don’t you like school?” asked Judge Barger. “Because teachers lie on me and...,” Student G added. “I’m sorry you feel this way,” commented Mrs. Nunley. “But this doesn’t excuse the real reason why you are in Truancy Court,” implied Judge Barger. Judge Barger continued,

Student G, it appears that you have been given several chances and nonetheless you haven’t tried to do anything about the situation. It is now up to you to determine whether or not you want your mother to appear in City Court next month. Mrs. Nunley has been there for you and your mother and we get the same response from you.

“I want you here at school every day,” Judge Barger added. “Mrs. Nunley will inform your mother about coming to court next month and try to have a good day,” she said as he was leaving.

Student D had no idea that she was next on Judge Barger’s docket. Student D was called to the front of the room to see Judge Barger. She paced herself as she strolled

up to the table. Mrs. Nunley told Student D to take a seat, so she did. Just when Student D took a seat, her mother eagerly rushed into the library. "I apologize for being late," she said. "No problem we appreciate you being able to attend court this morning," replied Mrs. Nunley. "Before we begin, Student D, is there anything you would like for us to know?" acknowledge Judge Barger. "Student D has missed, so far this year, a total of 38 and a half days," stated Mrs. Nunley. "Mom, do you realize that Student D has missed a little less than 25% of school?" commented Judge Barger. Student D's mother began to get upset that Judge Barger made a comment about her daughter missing a lot of school. She began raising her voice towards Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley and blaming other issues and situations concerning why Student D was not attending school, making failing grades, and having disciplinary issues.

Judge Barger stated that she may need counseling or to notify the social worker about the death of her father, that seems to be affecting Student D. Mrs. Nunley implied that she would have referred her for counseling if she had been informed prior to now, and maybe she could have started the healing process. "That's fine," responded her mother, "I just want Student D to get through the rest of the school year." "Student D it's up to you, as well, to come to school each day and complete your assignments. Once you have this under control, then it becomes an easier task for everyone else including yourself," stated Judge Barger. "Okay," Student D uttered, "I will try to come to school every day." "But, some days it's difficult for her," stated her mother. "I do understand, but she has to come; it's the law," added Judge Barger. "If she continues in this capacity of not attending school, then I guarantee you will be in City Court before the end of this year," implied Mrs. Nunley. "Mom, do you understand or have any other questions?"

Then we will see you again next month” exclaimed Judge Barger. Student D and her mother walked away discussing her grades and attendance.

Student E seemed to be pre-occupied by something, because she had a blank stare as she walked up to see Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. “Hello, Student E,” said Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger. “My, my you’ve been busy, I see,” said Judge Barger. “I noticed that in two of your classes you’ve brought up your grade,” she said with a smile on her face. “This is how your grades should look in all of your classes, but I’m especially proud that you’ve taken the initiative to improve in at least two.” “Your attendance has also improved” replied Mrs. Nunley. “Now you’re on task, so let’s try to remain that way for the rest of the school year,” added Judge Barger. “Do you see what you can do once you put your mind to it?” acknowledged Mrs. Nunley. All Student E could do was keep a smile on her face as Judge Barger was reviewing comments from her other teachers. “This is all you had to do?” replied Mrs. Nunley. “Really, and that means that I don’t have to attend court anymore, right?” stated Student E. “Not exactly; you will have to attend one more month and that’s it for the year, unless you start off the next year the same way,” said Mrs. Nunley. “I guess I will see you next month,” acknowledged Student E. “Yes, you will,” Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley stated. Student E stood up from her seat and gathered her belongings and left the room.

With a few students left to see Judge Barger, it was unbelievable that so many students had missed more than 10 days of school. It appeared that some of the students did not care or have any type of remorse for them for missing school. The students were not the only ones to blame; the parents contributed to their unsuccessfulness in school, as well. With less than a month of school left; some of the students’ processes improved,

with others getting worse than ever. It was now time for Student F to make his way down the aisle to see Judge Barger. Judge Barger stated to Student F, "I like that you're in uniform today." "Thank you," he replied. "Mrs. Nunley, do you have Student F's file?" "Yes," she added, "Here it is, Judge Barger." "Student F, you were suspended again. since the last court date, three days. What is going on with you being suspended?" she uttered, in a firm voice. "I don't know," he replied. Judge Barger responded,

There is something definitely going on with you because month after month you are getting suspended. This is why I wanted you in an after-school program so that you could work on your social behavior, as well as develop techniques that would help you with your anger.

"Mrs. Nunley, will you check to see if Student F can get into the program for the remainder of the school year?" Judge Barger suggested. "Yes, I will talk with the after-school director today," she replied. Student F made a comment that his time was valuable and he did not need to be in an after-school program, because he's been in school all day. "Well, I will call your mother about you attending the after-school program this afternoon," expressed Mrs. Nunley. "I'm going to give you an assignment about being responsible," Judge Barger suggested. Mrs. Nunley interjected and told Judge Barger that his attendance slightly improved since last month. Judge Barger was excited to hear the good news and told him that she was proud of him. "Try not to miss any more days, since you only have one month left of school," suggested Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. "I will try," he stated. "Okay, then we'll see you again during our last month for this year," Judge Barger replied. As Student F excused himself from the table and proceed out the library door, Mrs. Nunley was preparing the file of the next student.

There was one month of school left and a new student had been referred to Truancy Court. Mrs. Nunley had just gotten her file a few days prior to court and explained the situation to Judge Barger. Judge Barger called for Student F to come up to the table. “Student F, hello my name is Judge Barger,” she replied. “Do you know why you’re here today?” “No,” she stated. Judge Barger continued,

Well, you’re here today because apparently, you’ve missed a lot of school, and so your teachers have completed forms regarding your attendance. A letter was mailed to your parent indicating the number of days and the list of days that you’ve missed. Also, in that letter it discusses your grades and behavior too. So far, do you have any questions?

“No,” Student F stated, as she sat there looking amazed. During their conversation with Student F, two other adults came in and sat down at the table with Student F. It was Student F’s mother and her case manager. “Welcome,” replied Judge Barger; then she explained,

Student F’s case is a little late getting to us; however, we’re here to encourage Student F to come to school on a regular basis and for her to improve her grades, too. Once she begins to come regularly, then we’ll be able to see some improvement with her academics. Because you know that attendance and academics go together. You can’t have straight A’s and not attend school, because it’s just impossible. So far, do you have any questions or understand?

“No, I understand,” replied Student F’s mother. “Ma’am, do you have any questions?”

Judge Barger referred to Student F’s case manager. “None at this time,” she responded.



“Student F has had a lot of emotional issues and we’re trying to work with her so that she can deal with it,” Mom replied. “Before this year her grades were average and all of a sudden, they appeared to start going down,” replied her mother. “We’re trying now to work with her through some personal issues that she is dealing with. That’s why I’m here to help encourage Student F and her mother,” exclaimed Student F’s case manager. “Mom, have you spoken to Student F’s teachers?” added Mrs. Nunley. “Not yet. I was going to do that today after court,” she responded. “Student F, I want you to ask your teachers for all of your missing assignments along with some extra credit. Do you think you can do that today?” Judge Barger implied. “Well, what if they don’t give me the work or extra credit?” Student F said. “Then, you should let Mrs. Nunley know and she will speak to them. Is that okay with you?” uttered Judge Barger in a firm voice. “Yeah, I guess,” she added. “You will need to come back to court next month, so that I can verify that you’ve done what I’ve asked you to do. Does that sound fair?” Judge Barger stated, as she was writing down her notes in Student F’s file. “I think so,” she mumbled, as she was looking at her mother and case manager. “She will be back,” added her mother. “Thank you again for coming and remember the next court date will be in May,” added Judge Barger. Student F, her mother, and case manager walked towards the front of the library to leave.

The time was approaching 9:30, and there were two more students who still needed to see Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. I noticed that one student had her head down on the table, while the other one seemed to be writing something. The student writing was the one called up to see Judge Barger. Apparently, she was a new student that had just been referred to Truancy Court, due to the number of days she missed in

school. Mrs. Nunley gave Judge Barger her file and gave a brief background regarding Student G. She was a transfer student from the county and was having difficulties making the adjustment to her, now, new school. Student G's mother explained to Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley, prior to her coming to Fanning she had made straight As and Bs at her other school, and now her grades had decreased tremendously. Student G had "made a little progress since working with Mrs. Nunley through her difficult situation," said her mother. Judge Barger was very pleased to hear that since being referred she had made a little improvement. Student G continued to state throughout the discussion with Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley that she wanted to go back to her other school.

"Unfortunately, that can't happen because we no longer live in that district," stated her mother in a firm voice, "She is going to have to deal with the situation, because I can't do anything about it." Student G's mother seemed very upset about her daughter's attendance, change in behavior, and the fact that she was not willing to make the adjustment. "I try to wake her up in the mornings. But many times, she just doesn't get up. What am I suppose[d] to do when this happens?" she expressed. "Don't worry I'm going to be working with you and Student G," replied Mrs. Nunley. "Thank you, I really appreciate it because I'm not sure what else to do," Student G's mother exclaimed.

Student G and Mom stood up from the table and proceeded to walk out of the library.

It was now time for the final student of the day. The time was almost 9:30 and court was almost over. This was the first time that court appeared to be very long, since the first one in October. As the last and final student was called, the student slowly dragged her feet down to the table where Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were waiting. "Please sit down," said Judge Barger. "This is a new student," replied Mrs. Nunley.

“How are you doing? My name is Judge Barger. What is your name?” Judge Barger stated. “I’m Student H,” she replied. “I’m glad to meet you,” Judge Barger added. Student H did not respond back. “Has anyone ever spoken to you regarding your attendance,” Judge Barger added? “No,” she replied. “Well, you’re here today, because you’ve missed seven days of school and anyone under the age of 17 must come to school every day,” Judge Barger said in her firm voice. “It is the law and your parent will be held accountable for you not coming to school,” Mrs. Nunley interjected. Student H appeared so uninterested in the discussion with Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley that she was looking around the room and down at the floor. Mrs. Nunley asked Student H to look at them while they were talking. There was no response from Student H, so Judge Barger decided not to continue on with the conversation; so, she was told that she will need to come back next month. So, Student H walked out of the library. Mrs. Nunley and Judge Barger documented in her file the actions that were taken.

### **City Court**

#### ***Month 8: May (City Court)***

This day at City Court was going to be a very big day for me and the parents whose children did not attend school on a regular basis. I arrived for City Court about 8:45 on May 19th, not knowing what to expect. It was to my surprise that there was an area outside of the court rooms where it was nearly standing room only. The number of parents waiting to be directed into the court room seemed unbelievable. As I glanced around the room, some parents had their children present, while others did not. Many of the parents could be heard discussing the fact that their children had caused them to be in court.

One parent sitting next to me asked if this was my first time in court and I said yes, but I was here only to observe. She continued on with the conversation, stating how she ended up in the truancy court system. The time was nearing 9:00 and the doors to the courtroom had not been unlocked. The deputy came out to inform the waiting parents that the judge was going to be a few minutes late. After 10 minutes had passed and the doors to the courtroom opened, parents started swiftly moving without hesitation. This was a sign that many of the parents had been through this process before; so, they knew exactly what to do. I walked into the courtroom and began looking for one of the Supervisors of the Deputy Juvenile Officer's. I walked down and introduced myself and she pointed to the area where I should sit. It was to my surprise that I was able to have a front row seat. This was easier for me to take notes and get a clear understanding of what the judge would be saying to the parents.

Mrs. Baker was one of the supervisors for the Deputy Juvenile Officer's and informed me that parents were charged 25 dollars a day for each day the student was not in school. This could include excused or unexcused absences. Any absence that was considered to be excused must have proper documentation from a doctor or hospital, indicating the number of days the student was out. She also informed me that a parent could plead guilty, guilty with an explanation, or not guilty. Guilty meant that you have acknowledged that your student missed the number of days and this also meant a harder sentence for many parents. Guilty with an explanation indicated that the student may have been sick, due to some type of illness, or had medical documentation. Usually this meant a lesser sentence, depending on the documentation provided.

When a parent pled not guilty was when the parent believed that the student had not missed the number of days that the school was reporting to the court and meant that the parent would have to go to trial, and the jury decided whether the parent was responsible. In a lot of cases, the parent usually lost, because the school provided the judge with the necessary documentation to convict the parent as charged. The sentenced outcome could lead to jail time. Mrs. Baker stated that was why it was best to plead guilty or not guilty, because there was no way to predict what the jury would decide. She also indicated that Truancy Court was only in the St. Louis City and not in St. Louis County and parents tended to move because of the court. “But, once you’re in the system you’re in there until the fines are paid, because warrants can still be issued,” stated Mrs. Baker.

The suspense was finally over and the bailiff introduced the Judge for the St. Louis City’s Truancy Court, “Please rise for the honorable Judge Robert Hitt.” Judge Hitt presided over the city’s Truancy Court for the previous two years. Judge Hitt called out the names of the parents on her docket in alphabetical order. Any parent that was not present was called again. Those not present were put on a list to be issued warrants.

Judge Hitt called for her first parent to approach the bench. Parent A was charged with truancy because of her daughter missing 31 days of school. Judge Hitt had previously sentenced her to probation, in which she had to complete community service. Judge Hitt was pleased that she had completed all community services hours and encouraged her to work with her daughter to attend school; otherwise, she would end up back in court. Judge Hitt stated that she had an outstanding balance of 775 dollars and asked if she was paying on her bill or paying it off. “Judge Hitt I would like to just pay

on my balance, but unfortunately, I don't have the minimum amount today. Is there any way that I pay on it next month when I get paid?" "Sure," she stated, "but please understand that if you do not pay, I will have to put out a warrant for your arrest." "No that will not be necessary," stated Parent A, "I will come in next month to make my payment." "Thank you, Parent A, for completing your community service; you may pick up your slip," said Judge Hitt.

Parent B was sentenced to 482 community service hours, because her daughter had not been in school for almost 20 days. According to Parent B, her daughter had special needs, and it was difficult for her to find someone to care for her daughter while she worked. Judge Hitt acknowledged the fact that she only completed 11 hours and asked if other arrangements could be made in order for her to complete the rest of the community service hours. Parent B agreed she needed to complete the hours, but was in the process of finding a caretaker for her daughter and would know something later in the month. "Okay Parent B, once your arrangements are made for your daughter you must complete the rest of your hours, or otherwise you will have a warrant." "Thank you Judge, I don't need anything else to worry about," said Parent B. The court cashier documented the information into the system and she left.

During the court session there were many things that were distracting and very obvious. Some of the parents came into court late and if their names had been called, they had to wait until all of the other parents had been called before they could see the judge. There were also sleeping parents and children in court. It appeared that the sleeping parents and children had just rolled out of bed and came to court; some were still in their pajamas. Many of the parents discussing their situation with others just could not

believe that the judge would charge them with not sending their student to school on a regular basis.

The next parent to be called was a grandmother of three. It was much to her surprise when she had to appear in court because of her grandchildren. The grandmother had sole custody of the grandchildren and apparently, they had not been going to school for the last three years. Each of the grandchildren had missed more than 30 days each for the past three years. The grandmother had to have a representative assist her, due to her being disabled. This was very disheartening for the grandmother. Judge Hitt was very understanding and was willing to work with the grandmother. She “thanked” Judge Hitt, who was allowing her to get more documentation for her grandchildren, for which one was very sickly. “Judge, I will also make a payment of each of my account[s] next month when I get paid. I just don’t have the money right now,” she stated to Judge Hitt. “Please note that granny will pay on her account next month,” Judge Hitt said to the reporter. To the grandmother the Judge said, “Ma’am, understanding that if you don’t make the payment, we will issue a warrant for your arrest.” “I will be here because I don’t want to go to jail,” replied the grandmother. The grandmother, along with her representative, left after getting the receipt to come back next month.

Judge Hitt called for her next parent to approach the bench. Judge Hitt stated, “Parent C, do you have the report card or progress report indicating your daughter’s improvement?” “Yes,” replied Parent C. Judge Hitt reviewed the report card and told the entire courtroom that Parent C had turned her daughter around. “Everyone in the courtroom should ask her what she did to get her daughter back on track,” suggested Judge Hitt. “I’m very proud of her for taking the initiative to improve her grades and you

should be proud as well,” added Judge Hitt. “I’m proud,” said Parent C. “Since she has shown improvement over the past semester, I’m going to close out her case and you can just pay the remaining balance owed,” acknowledged Judge Hitt. “Thank you so much, Judge Hitt, I appreciate you giving me the strength to help my daughter,” uttered Parent C in a raspy voice. The court reporter documented the information into the system and Parent C danced her way towards the back of the room and out of the courtroom doors.

Parent D was ready when Judge Hitt called her name. She walked swiftly up to the bench and greeted her. “Good morning,” replied Judge Hitt. “Good morning,” Parent D replied. “How are you doing today?” She replied, “I’m okay.” “That’s good to hear,” exclaimed Judge Hitt. “Let’s see here, do I have Parent D’s file?” implied Judge Hitt. “Here’s her file,” stated the court reporter. “It looks like student D has missed more days from school since last month,” Judge Hitt expressed to Parent D. “Well, she was sick and I had to take her to the hospital, and they kept her for a week to run some tests,” replied Parent D. “Did you call the school to report her absence?” added Judge Hitt. “No,” replied Parent D. “Remember what I explained to you before; you have to inform the school each and every time she is going to be absent. Otherwise, that just adds to the number of days she has already missed,” Judge Hitt replied. Parent D expressed to Judge Hitt that she called the school several times to speak to the counselor and the counselor at the school was not very helpful to her. She stated that the counselor told her, “She did not have time to talk to her on the phone and that she must make an appointment to discuss her daughter's absences.” Judge Hitt replied that she would call the school and talk with the counselor. Parent D was grateful and said, “Maybe you’ll have better luck than I did.” “In the meantime, try calling the principal and inform him or her about the



situation with the counselor,” suggested Judge Hitt. “I will,” replied Parent D as she was gathering up her papers from the bench counter to leave.

Parent E and her son were next on the docket to see Judge Hitt. “Parent E, please come to the bench. Parent E, I see that you brought your son with you today,” said Judge Hitt. “Yeah, he is suspended and so I made him come to court with me,” Parent E responded. “What did you do to get suspended?” Judge Hitt replied. “I was arguing and it led to us having a fight,” replied Student E. “Maybe you need to learn how to control your anger, because look what happens when you can’t control it,” Judge Hitt commented. “But he shouldn’t be talking stuff about me; then we wouldn’t be fighting,” said Student E. “Mom, you have to talk to Student E about his behavior continuously and let him know what is acceptable and not acceptable,” replied Judge Hitt. “Now let’s look at your attendance record. It indicates that you’ve missed a total of 40 days of school so far this year. Do you have anything to say for yourself?” Parent E interrupted the judge and explained that they moved out of the district to the county four months ago, and just moved back to the city about three weeks ago. The mail was sent to my mother’s house and I just found out that I needed to appear in court. Judge Hitt stated,

This is what I need you to do. See if you can get a letter from the school indicating Student E’s last day at that school and bring it to court with you in July.

I will determine the number of days he missed prior to him transferring and we’ll go from there. Does that sound fair to you?

“Yes,” said Parent E. “Now, are you going to be able to make a payment on your account today? The minimum payment that I will accept is 50 dollars,” said Judge Hitt.

“Well, Judge, the most I can pay today is 25 dollars,” commented Parent E. “Okay, I will

make an exception; but understand that you will have to make up the difference next month when you make your payment,” stated Judge Hitt. “That’s fine,” Parent E uttered as she was paying her payment. The court cashier stated to Parent E, “You will have to keep your agreement, because once I documented it into the system it will automatically issue a warrant if not paid by the due date.” Judge Hitt reminded Parent E as she and her son were leaving, “Do not forget to get the documentation from the school.” “I won’t,” Parent E replied as she was walking up the aisle to leave the courtroom.

The time was quickly passing as other parents were coming in to make payments on their accounts. I noticed that many of the parents were not able to make the required minimum payment that the court required. Some of the parents had very compelling reasons why their payment was less than the 50 dollars. There were parents that had two or more children that were in the system, so that required payments on both accounts. It was now time for the judge to call the next parent to the bench. The Judge called Parent F to the bench. Parent F approached the bench. As Judge Hitt was reviewing Parent F’s file, the expression on her face indicated a concern. Parent F’s daughter had not attended school for the past three years. “What has Student F been doing for the past three years, since she isn’t going to school?” asked Judge Hitt. “She’s been looking for a job,” uttered Parent F. “How is she going to work if she cannot go to school every day?” suggested Judge Hitt. Judge Hitt stated to Parent F, “Student F has cost you a 17,400 dollar fine.” I stared in amazement when Judge Hitt said that was Parent F’s fine amount, because that was the highest fine that had been issued today. Judge Hitt asked why Student F hadn’t been in school in the past three years. “Well, she is 17 years old and she stopped going to school,” added Parent F. Judge Hitt said,

It's the law, and if a child is under the age of 17, she cannot drop out of school. It also depends on when she turns 17, too. If she stopped going to school, did she complete the paperwork at the school indicating that she was dropping out of school?

"What paper work?" answered Parent F. Judge Hitt replied,

In order to drop out of school you must complete paperwork at the school and they document that information in her file. Because, otherwise you will continuously be charged the 25 dollars a day for every day your daughter is not in school. I suggest that you speak with Student F about her behavior about school and get the necessary documents from the school and bring them back to court when you come. How much of the fine are you willing to pay today?

"Um I don't have any money today," Parent F said. Judge Hitt replied,

What is with all of you parents today stating that you cannot pay on your account? Didn't you know that you were coming to court today? I suggest that you get your priorities in order, and I will have the cashier note your account; but you must pay double when you come back in July. Do I make myself clear?

Judge Hitt had heard enough excuses from the parents in the courtroom stating that they could not make a payment on their accounts. Parent F was given a reminder slip by the cashier to come back next month to pay two payments and thanked Judge Hitt as she walked towards the back of the courtroom.

So far, Judge Hitt made her point about the importance of having students attend school every day. One of the most important issues was that the parents were fined a fee for each day that the students were not in school. This should be an indicator for the

parents, but for many they appear to have an ‘I don’t care’ type of attitude. It became very obvious why the students had attitudes, because of the fact that parents were not taking Truancy Court seriously. Judge Hitt explained to some of the parents that when fines are not paid, warrants are issued for their arrest. Being arrested sends a message to the court that you refused or did not care to pay fines related to your child’s education.

There was a brief pause before Judge Hitt called the next parent to the bench. This case was very unique and a bit unusual. Apparently, the mother had custody of her two children and the father had been incarcerated for a period of time. When he was released from prison, he was mailed a letter indicating that he must appear in court. Unaware of the situation with his child not attending school on a regular basis, Judge Hitt informed him of the situation. Judge Hitt asked Parent G, the mother, “Why hasn’t the son been attending school?” The mother stated, she “wakes them up every morning and they gets ready and leaves the house as though they were catching the bus and this went on for several months until the school called her.” “Sir, are you the father of these children?” The father replied,

Yes, I am. Your honor I just got released from prison about two weeks ago and received this letter. I did not know anything about my son not going to school. I called his mother and she didn’t say much, so I thought that I better come so I could find out what was going on.

“Thank you for your honesty,” Judge Hitt added, “Ma’am, why didn’t you talk to the father about the letter that he received and the reason behind it.” “Um,” she mumbled, “I don’t know,” shrugging her shoulders. Judge Hitt spoke to the mother,

This is unfair to the father; don't you realize that. He just got out of jail and don't you know this may cause him to go back in? Ma'am, are the children living with you at this time?

"No, Judge, they are in DFS custody," replied the mother. Judge Hitt asked, "The girl that is also in the system, is she your daughter, too?" "No, Judge, she is not my daughter; but I took care of her most of her life so I consider her as my daughter." "So, you are telling me that both the children have the same name?" added Judge Hitt. "Yes, I wanted them to have the same name," mumbled the mother. How long have the children been in DFS custody?" implied Judge Hitt "They've been in there around four months," commented the mother.

The father added, "See your honor, I didn't know that until today. Like I said, I shouldn't be responsible for paying a fine, since the children having [not] been in my custody, and I'm not the father of the daughter." "Do you know for sure that you're not the father of the girl?" "Yes," replied the father, "We had a DNA test done before I went to prison and that's how I found out." The father continued, "Right now, I'm in the process of trying to get my son out of DFS custody so I can know what's going on with him."

"What about the daughter?" responded Judge Hitt. "I'm not sure about her she since she isn't my daughter. Her mother will have to get her, I guess."

"Thank you for all of your input on the situation," Judge Hitt added. "We'll see what can be done since you [did not know] about the situation," suggested Judge Hitt. "Parent G, I'm holding you fully responsible for the fine, so would you like to make a payment on the account today?" expressed Judge Hitt in a firm voice. "I will make a

payment on both accounts,” the father responded. “Please see the cashier and she will credit the accounts and, Ma’am, you’re responsible for making all of the payments on the account,” said Judge Hitt. “Do you understand that I cannot hold him responsible for the children not attending school, because they were in your care?” he continued. “Yes,” replied the mother. “I will see you on your next court date,” commented Judge Hitt. The father “thanked” the judge again, as they were leaving the courtroom.

Judge Hitt took a few minutes to organize some files because they were apparently out of order because some of the parents did not show up for court. After a brief moment, Judge Hitt had things back in order. She was ready to call her next parent to the bench. “Parent H, if you are present, please make your way to the front.” As the parent approached the bench Judge Hitt asked how does she plea. Since this was the parent’s first time, Judge Hitt had to go through the entire proceeding with her. She reviewed the number of days that the school reported that her daughter had been absent and asked if she still attended the school that sent the report. “Yes, she still attends that school,” Parent H replied. Judge Hitt added,

Okay, I’m going to read you the information and [you] let me know how you would like to plea. Student H has missed 35 days of school and since this is your first time you must plead guilty, not guilty, or guilty with an explanation.

“Judge, I would like to plead guilty,” said Parent H, “Yes, I know that Student H has missed some days but I thought that when I called the school that those absences were excused and that they wouldn’t affect his attendance.” Judge Hitt explained,

Ma’am, as you see the absences were counted against him. The absences that each child misses at school [are] recorded and reported to the court. Now if the

child is in the hospital or has an illness then documentation from the doctor is needed to indicate specific dates.

“I just don’t understand why I’m responsible for him not attending school,” uttered Parent H in a firm voice. “Because he is your child and the only way that the child will remain in school is to hold the parent accountable,” Judge Hitt added. Parent H responded in a raspy voice,

But, Your Honor, I wake him up every day before I leave for work. You see, I leave before him so I assume he is going to school. When I get home in the evenings, he isn’t there because I get home before him. He comes into the house as though nothing is wrong. So, I ask how is school and he says, fine. Then, what I’m I suppose to say, you’re lying?

“Parent H, I understand. But it never crossed your mind to contact the school to make sure he made it there or did you ask about his grade?” replied Judge Hitt. “This would’ve been a clue that something is going on with him” Judge Hitt added. Parent H responded.

Judge, I’m a single parent that has to work, so it’s hard for me to take off because that cost[s] me money. Like I said before, I just trusted him to do the right thing; so, now I have to pay for his mistake and that’s just not fair.

Judge Hitt added,

Your son’s grades are suffering because he isn’t attending school. There are consequences for everything that we do; so, because he isn’t attending school, the consequence is a fine this time. Nonetheless, if he continues with this same behavior severe consequences may erupt from this; like jail time or Student H being placed in a home.

“I understand, and trust me I will do everything I can to keep this from happening again. So, once I pay the fine, is that it?” said Student H’s mother. “No, it’s a little more than that. It will depend on Student H if he wants to continue down this path,” Judge Hitt said. “When I get home, I will talk to him about this, and if I have to change my hours at work then I will,” expressed Parent H, “Thank you for your help. Will I have to make a payment today since this is my first time in court?” “Yes,” he stated, “Please, see the cashier and she will take care of you and give you a receipt for the next court date.” Parent H moved down a few spaces in front of the cashier while she typed her information into the system. Once she made a payment on her son’s account, she walked up the far-right side of the courtroom and left.

Before Judge Hitt called for the next parent, she asked the parents in the courtroom if they were just coming in after their names had been called. There were three parents whose names were called previously that notified the judge that they were just coming in and Judge Hitt informed them that they would be at the end of her docket.

The next parent called was the lady I met before, when I arrived earlier this morning. The judge called Parent I to approach the bench. Parent I strolled down from the back of the room up to Judge Hitt. She explained to the judge that she does not have any faith in the judicial system, because she was arrested and locked up during her last month of her pregnancy, because her son was truant, and she did not know that there was a warrant out for her arrest. Parent I complained to the judge that she had to spend a few days in jail and ended up losing her job. Judge Hitt was apologetic about the situation, but made it clear that when your child is not in school, it becomes the court’s responsibility to hold the parent accountable.



Parent I stated as she was wiping tears from her eyes:

As a parent, I've done just about everything to get him to school. I take him to school and drop him off, but for whatever the reason he seems to not stay at school. I've gotten calls about him just walking out of the school and everything else. Judge, I have two other children that I have to take care of. I just can't worry about him if he isn't going to do what he is supposed to do.

Judge Hitt asked if the two other children were younger or older. She stated, "I have one older and one younger; Student I is the middle child." "Parent I, have you had any other problems with your other children?" "No," she replied, "My older son is a full-time college student and my younger son is only two years old." "Did you ever get the feeling that because he is the middle child, he feels like he doesn't get enough attention," added Judge Hitt? "No, because I do for all of my children, especially my youngest. He's not able to do for himself, so I have to," Parent I implied. "What type of relationship did you have before you had the last child?" Judge Hitt implied.

Mom (Parent I) commented, in an unsettling voice,

It was okay; I noticed that when I told him I was having another baby he began to act out, but I just thought it was something that preteens go through. I told him that things were not going to change, just because of the baby. But once I got locked up it made me put things into perspective. By then it was a little too late. Now he has cost me a lot, my job, money that I don't have, and a lot more. I caught him coming into the house really late and so I spanked him and he called the police. Do you know how that hurt me? I had a very difficult pregnancy with all of my children and when the police told me that I could not hit my child, I said

then you take him; so, they did. After a few days he was returned to the house and I've had nothing but problems ever since. It was like he knew how to get to me so he did it.

Judge Hitt responded by saying that she needed to seek a counselor, so that the two of them could sort through their problems; but, in the meantime, Parent I was still responsible for the fine that Student I accrued for not attending school.

“Parent I, I want you to talk to Student I’s school and maybe they can refer you to someone. Again, I am very sorry for everything you’ve been through,” Judge Hitt added. “When you come back for your next court date, you will need to bring Student I with you. Please see the cashier for a reminder slip of the next court date, stated Judge Hitt. The court cashier gave Parent I the reminder slip and she left the courtroom still wiping tears from her eyes.

The time was almost 12:45 and there were about two parents left to see the judge. The parents were only making payments on their accounts so there was not a need for the judge to see them. After the parents left, Judge Hitt discussed with the cashier the number of parents that did not show up for court. The court cashier stated that there were at least six parents that warrants had been issued for failure to appear in court and 49 parents in attendance. Judge Hitt gathered her files and left the courtroom, while the cashier documented the six parents into the data base. I was able to thank Mrs. Baker for allowing me to attend the court session, and she gave me her card and stated that if I needed anything else to let her know, and I proceeded up the aisle through the courtroom doors.

### **Truancy Court**

*Month 8: May (Truancy Court)*

Today was the big day for Truancy Court. It was the last and final court session for the 2010-2011 school years. Judge Barger would make a determination if some of the students would be referred to city court in July with their parents. As I was walking into the library, there were about two students waiting to see Judge Barger. One student had his head down on the table and the other student appeared to be working on some type of assignment. Mrs. Nunley walked in and greeted us and said that court would be starting in about 10 minutes. In walked another student, just as Mrs. Nunley was speaking and he was not in uniform and just flopped down at the table and started talking to the student that was working on an assignment. The two students continued to talk until Mrs. Nunley walked back into the library with Judge Barger. It was almost time for court to begin and there were only three students and I knew each month Judge Barger averaged about five or more students on her docket. Mrs. Nunley sent the list of students who needed to be in attendance for Truancy Court to the office. The secretary announced the truancy court students' name over the intercom. A few minutes later an office worker came in to report that many of the students on the list were suspended or absent. "Thank you," replied Mrs. Nunley to the office worker. "You're welcome; if some of the students on the list come in tardy, I will just send them to you," she said.

Judge Barger was ready to begin today's court session. Mrs. Nunley called up the first student. It was a new student that had just been referred to the court. Apparently, Mrs. Nunley had just received the completed paperwork from her teachers and she had to appear in court. "Good morning," Judge Barger replied. "Good morning to you," replied Student A. "How are you doing today?" added Mrs. Nunley. "I'm okay," added Student

A. As Judge Barger was about to ask Student A another question, her mother walked into the library. “Excuse me Judge and Mrs. Nunley, I’m Student A’s mother, and I wanted to let you know that I’m unable to stay because I have to take care of some family issues.” “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that,” replied Judge Barger. “I just wanted to come up to meet you and let you know my situation,” the mother stated. “Thank you for coming and I hope you get things worked out,” acknowledge Judge Barger. “Yeah, I hope so, too,” exclaimed Student A’s mother as she was leaving. “Please let me know if there is anything you need,” stated Mrs. Nunley, “I will continue work with Student A because I’ve noticed that she has improved in her math class and has made some progress in her other core subjects, too. Surely, I don’t want her hard work to go unnoticed.” “That sounds good,” implied Judge Barger. Judge Barger suggested that Student A could leave and explained to her that Mrs. Nunley would see her after court. Student A walked to the back to get her backpack and jacket and left. There was a little discussion between Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley about some alternatives that she could offer Student A and her mother.

While Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were reviewing the next student’s file another parent walked into the library. She sat down at the table with me and said, “Good morning,” and I replied back by saying, “Good morning,” too. Mrs. Nunley called the next student’s name, but he was not present; so, she called for Student B and his mother. Student B and his mother walked up to the front of the library where Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were waiting. “Thank you, Mom, for being able to attend,” replied Mrs. Nunley. “Student B, I’m reviewing your attendance record and it indicates that you’ve missed 21 days of school and your case will be referred to the Truancy Court

Program next year,” commented Judge Barger. Mrs. Nunley interjected and explained to Student B and his mother that depending on how long his case has been opened will determine if possibly he will be referred to City Court. “We will look at your attendance and grades after school is out to make that determination,” said Mrs. Nunley. “But in the meantime, you still need to come to school every day until school is out,” expressed Judge Barger. “By the way Mrs. Nunley, when is school out for the students?” implied Judge Barger. “School is out for the students on June 3rd, so that means you only have about a week and a half until you’re out for the summer,” exclaimed Mrs. Nunley. “Student B, I want you to do your best to make it to school for the remaining days,” added Judge Barger. “Okay, I will try; hopefully I won’t get sick and have to stay home.” “If that happens, hopefully, you’ll take some medicine to make you feel better and still manage to get to school,” acknowledged Judge Barger. “Well, I hope you make some better decisions next year regarding your attendance and grades,” said Judge Barger. “I do, too,” replied his mother, “because this is not only affecting him but it’s affecting me too.” “Maybe he will have the summer to think about some of the decisions he’s made this school year and not take the same route for the upcoming year,” added Mrs. Nunley. “That’s so true,” Judge Barger replied, and his mother agreed by nodding her head. “Ma’am, it was really great that you were able to attend a few of the court sessions and work so closely with myself and Mrs. Nunley with trying to help Student B,” expressed Judge Barger. Student B and his mother then left the library.

Student C was next on the docket to see Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. This was Student C’s second time in court and he was given an assignment to talk with his teachers about getting extra credit. Once Student C sat down, Judge Barger asked him how was

his morning going; and then, she asked for his assignment. Mrs. Nunley stated that Student C was in In-School Suspension for fighting and had many issues with other students and adults. His grades did improve slightly, but his attendance was still not where it should be. Judge Barger began asking him questions regarding things that he liked to do, or places he would like to visit; he did not respond to any of her questions. Student C was looking around the room showing no eye contact or interest towards Judge Barger or Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger stated to Student C that “you’re supposed to use eye contact while people are speaking to you.” “Why,” he said? “This shows respect for that person who’s talking to you,” Mrs. Nunley replied. Student C added that he would not be attending school here next year, because he was moving to St. Louis County. “Do you know what district you’ll be in?” stated Mrs. Nunley. “I’m going to go to school in Normandy,” Student C uttered. “Well just remember that district is still going to require you to attend school every day, because it’s the law that students under the age of 17 attend school on a regular basis,” exclaimed Judge Barger. “Good Luck at your new school,” added Judge Barger. “Thanks,” he said as he was looking down at the floor. Mrs. Nunley commented to Judge Barger that once his records were transferred, she will close out his case. “Do you have any questions for me or Mrs. Nunley?” added Judge Barger. “No, now can I leave?” he implied. “Sure, again good luck at your new school,” said Mrs. Nunley. Student C stood up and pushed his chair up and walked with his head down out of the library.

The next student on Judge Barger’s docket was one that missed 40 or more days and had continuously missed more days. Judge Barger asked Student D, “Why are you continuously missing days of school?” Student D shrugged his shoulders and uttered, “I

don't like school." She then asked him another question; who is going to take care of you in the future? "My mama," he stated. Mrs. Nunley said, "She cannot take care of you for the rest of your life." "Yes, she can," he replied, "That's her job," as he was picking at his nails. Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley were explaining to Student D about being referred to the St. Louis City Truancy Court and that did not interest him at all. He continued picking at his nails and began looking around the room. Judge Barger asked Student D if he was an only child, to find out a little more about him, but he did not answer. Several more questions were asked and Student D refused to answer, so Judge Barger added

Since you do not want to pay attention, then you may leave. My time is valuable and I'm taking time from the students that I tutor to come and do court with you.

I would appreciate it if you would look at me while I'm talking to you.

"We're referring your case on to City Court; and please let your mother know that she will be receiving a letter from the court about her day and time in which she will have to report," added Mrs. Nunley. Again, Mrs. Nunley tried to gain his attention, as well, and he was not responding to her. "Student D you may leave," So, he stood up and walked swiftly out of the library.

Mrs. Nunley told Judge Barger that she had spoken to his mother at least five times about his behavior about school. Judge Barger responded to Mrs. Nunley saying that Student D would need some counseling, because there are some issues going on with him that need to be addressed. "I agree," replied Mrs. Nunley. "I guess he will find out the hard way when he attends City Court," said Mrs. Nunley. Judge Barger documented

in her notes about Student D and began getting her file together for the next and final student of the year.

I glanced at the clock, and it read 9:00. The time was moving very quickly. Judge Barger was down to her last student on her docket. Mrs. Nunley called for Student E to come up to the table. Student E walked quickly up to the table and was very excited. “Good morning,” he said to Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley. “Good morning,” they replied. “Boy, you are sure in a really good mood,” said Judge Barger. “I am,” he replied. “I talked to my teachers like you told me to last month and I got my grades up in their classes,” Student E said with a smile on his face. “Mrs. Nunley do you have his file?” Judge Barger added. “I do. Here it is Judge,” responded Mrs. Nunley. “Let’s take a look at his grades,” expressed Judge Barger. “Wow, Student E you’ve really brought up your grades. I’m so proud of you. Don’t you feel good about yourself for doing it?” Judge Barger stated. “Yes. I didn’t know if the teachers were going to give me the extra credit work, because some of them say if you don’t do the regular work, you can’t get extra credit,” he replied. Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley continued to keep Student E encouraged about keeping his grades up and coming to school. “Your attendance had also improved too.” Judge Barger told Student D that she would see him next year and for him to have a wonderful summer. “I want you to start the school year on the right track, and remember if you need anything you can always ask Mrs. Nunley,” she added. “Thank you,” he said as he was standing up stretching and gathering his belonging to leave. Judge Barger and Mrs. Nunley noted his file with his improvements and gathered the rest of the students’ files and put them into one stack on the table.



Truancy Court was officially over for the 2010-2011 school year. Mrs. Nunley restated to Judge Barger that there would be a few students referred to City Court in July, due to their attendance and grades, and they would be notified by mail after school was out. She also added that a group of selected students would participate in a one-day retreat with other Deputy Juvenile Officers over the summer. Judge Barger suggested that Mrs. Nunley keep in contact with her during the summer to inform her of the upcoming Truancy Court for the 2011-2012 school year.

**Summary:**

An analysis of the observations of the Truancy Program did not fully support that researcher's belief that a Truancy Court Program would prevent absenteeism as only three students exited the program. The researcher found that students who exhibit attendance concerns in school needed additional supports for attendance to improve. Based on the observations of students who were a part of the Truancy Court Program, the supports needed were academic, mentoring, and family support, as well as other resources for their families.

## Chapter Five

### Overview

Normandy Middle School's attendance was less than 90% and should have been 95% or better. The school averaged about 40 students daily that were tardy (Normandy School District, 2009). The students arrived from 10 minutes late, and up to two hours late (Normandy School District, 2009). When asked the reason for their tardiness, they usually did not have a legitimate reason. The attendance data clearly shows that Normandy School District had to address the truancy issue that prevailed at Normandy Middle School. According to the St. Louis County, Missouri, Family Court, truant students must attend school on a regular basis until the age of 17 (St. Louis County, MO, Truancy Court Manual, 2002-2003). Any student not abiding by the law would result in referral to the Juvenile Detention Center. The Truancy Court Program was designed to serve as a legal intervention to assist and support truant students and their families with getting the truant students back on track with attending school on a regular basis. Attendance is the key factor to a good education (Coffee County Schools, 2021). The purpose of this study was to examine the operation of a truancy court at Normandy Middle School and St. Louis Public Schools. This chapter provides a summary of the study and presents an opportunity for discussion for future reinstatement/continuation of a truancy program in the Normandy School District (Normandy Schools Collaborative) and provides a rationale for other school districts to consider similar action.

The focus of this study was to investigate a way for truant students to come to school on a regular basis and on time. This study utilized a combination of descriptive quantitative and qualitative research. The purpose was to determine whether

implementing a Truancy Court Program will increase students' attendance in middle school.

### **Interpretation of Results**

After observing the Truancy Court Program in action with Judge Barger, the results of the study did not support the researcher's hope that truancy court could be the intervention for compelling students to attend school daily. This study did not support the researcher's belief, as it was based on middle school students navigating life situations while trying to be a student. The judge of the Truancy Court Program recognized that each student was unique and needed different support to be able to attend school and to be successful with school.

A few of the things that the judge would require of students in the Truancy Court Program were: writing an essay, a mentoring program, assistance with seeing a medical doctor, and a parenting workshop for the parents. The judge often assigned essays to students who exhibited a positive attitude in the importance of an education.

### **Summary of Findings Resulting from the Research Questions**

The summary of the research findings indicated many of the students wanted to come to school, but having to care for younger siblings and ailing family members, etc., kept them from attending school on a daily basis. The parents relied heavily on the student to step up to assist in caring for family members and the avoidance of going to school. Parents were dependent on their students to make adult choices instead of choices that were going to benefit them in the future. Judge Barger put the responsibilities back on the parents, by ensuring that they show up for truancy court and assigning a DJO to

the student. Every student case was handled differently, in a manner that was conducive to the parents' and students' needs.

***Summary: Positive Actions Witnessed at Truancy Court***

There were several positive actions witnessed during the truancy court proceedings. One, was the relationship Judge Barger had with each of the students. Judge Barger's soft tone was soothing to listen to while she spoke with students, DJO, and parents. Judge Barger never had to raise her voice to convey to the parents' that students should be in school. In fact, she called upon the DJO to assist the parents in an effort to get students to school on time and on a regular basis. Judge Barger found something positive with each of the students whether it was asking their favorite color or what sports do they play? The personal connection was key to gaining a happy ending.

***Summary: Positive Actions Witnessed at City Court***

The positive actions witnessed during city court were that most of the students had previously attended court in the past. Judge was able to ask if anything had improved, and if not, what was the issue? Parents were fined \$25 per day for each day a student had an unexcused absence. Instead of having the bailiff take the parent into custody for non-compliance, she was able to work something out with those parents who were struggling to pay the fines. She stated it was not her intent to have parents in jail, and she wanted to show some compassion for the parents making every effort to do the right thing.

**Potential Suggested Changes In Truancy Court**

I sincerely believe that all school districts should warrant an active truancy court. Attendance is an issue that all districts have, from rural, county, city, and charter schools.

Students are going to have attendance issues, no matter where they live. Appropriate processes in place may help to reduce the number of attendance issues districts face on a daily basis. The locations of truancy courts can be determined or voted upon by individual school district boards of education. The operations of a truancy court can be implemented by using attendance data to state the school district position on what is needed to reduce the number of students not coming to school regularly. The school districts can begin by looking at neighboring districts that operate a truancy court. Each school district's demographics are not the same, so developing a system in place that works is key.

### ***Processes, Locations, Operations***

I truly believe the overall processes on the referral process was adequate on the selection of the students. The location of the truancy court was helpful to the parents because some lack transportation and having to go to a different location on a monthly basis would cause other problems. The truancy court should have a court reporter (secretary) to keep all documents such as progress reports, report cards, doctor's statements, and any paperwork submitted by the student, parent, DJO, counselor, or school. The DJO and Judge keeps all notes taken during the court hearings.

### **Future Research**

Other questions for consideration could include:

1. Do students from a single-parent family with little or no education attend school less than those from a single-parent family with post-secondary education?

2. Are students attending school at a lower percentage based upon socioeconomic status?
3. Are students attending school at a lower percentage due to negative environmental issues? The students' attendance will improve as a result of attending the truancy court.

### **Conclusions**

Students who participated in the truancy court program needed positive alternative to reduce the number of unexcused days missed. Judge Barger's encouragement, a determination, perseverance of not giving up on them helped to gain trust from some of the students and their families. If students are making improvements with their attendance and not being referred back to truancy court were headed in the right direction.

Judge Barger believed if one student trusted and understood how important it is to come to school on a daily basis, this would help to reduce the number of failing grades some earned. If students had to be referred back for a follow up and made adequate progress, they would receive an incentive. For some of the students this meant a lot

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