

# PRESS RELEASE

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## SCHOOL ABSENCES AND THE LAW – WHAT HAPPENS IN JACKSON

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JACKSON (August 16, 2013) - Truancy (school absences) can lead to larger problems for teens. The Juvenile Probation Department of the Jackson County Circuit Court – Family Division works with local schools and the Intermediate School District (ISD) to encourage youth to attend school and avoid delinquent behavior. The Jackson County Prosecutor's Office considers a youth truant when they have 10 unexcused absences in a school year. Determining truancy includes several steps. First, truancy complaints are submitted to the Prosecutor's Office by school districts or the ISD. Upon reviewing the complaint, the prosecutor may authorize a petition (a formal request from the court) and a hearing will be scheduled with either the Juvenile Referee or the Diversion Coordinator. For first time petitions, an informal court hearing called a Diversion Conference is conducted to evaluate the youth for program attendance. If the selected program is successful, the youth's record will be concealed. For second time (or more) petitions, an Inquiry Hearing is scheduled with a Referee and a Probation Officer will be assigned to the case.

The court works with local non-profit agencies in helping Jackson County's youth make better decisions. Youth are referred to programs specific for the reason that they are petitioned to the court. Nurturing Parenting, an evidence-based program, is sponsored by The Child and Parent Center. This eight-week program has a truancy component and focuses on enhancing parent/child relationships and communication. The program also addresses coping with increased stress that accompanies raising teens. The truancy session discusses what keeps youth from doing well in school and gives information on how to be more successful.

Youth are also petitioned to the court for charges linked with drugs and alcohol. Once petitioned to the court, a youth may be placed in a diversion program or on probation depending on their past court history. As with truancy, there is programming designed specifically for substance abuse. A First Time Offenders Program (FTOP) is offered to those who have no previous drug or alcohol charges. A youth assessment is completed to determine program eligibility. FTOP is an educational program designed for youth and their parents to inform them of short and long term affects of abuse. The program also teaches stress management and helps improve communication and strengthen the relationship between parents and youth. FTOP is run by Family Services and Children's Aid (funded through the Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and Clinton, Eaton, Ingham Community Mental Health Coordinating Agency) and classes are held at the United Way of Jackson County. The program is six sessions; three of which parents and youth participate together.

If the assessment conducted determines a youth may be in need of a more intensive program, the youth is referred to Allegiance Substance Abuse Services. At Allegiance, they may receive individual, group or a combination of both therapies. If a youth successfully completes the FTOP or Allegiance Substance Abuse Program, the diverted petition will be concealed at the court and will not be open to the public.

Through the hard work and dedication of local non-profit agencies, schools and the courts, the youth of Jackson County can have a chance to succeed in school and be drug and alcohol free. Teaming up with local agencies, the courts are able to give youth in Jackson County a chance to have their first (and hopefully last!) petitions diverted and concealed if they are successful in programming.

**More information about:**

- *Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition* and its activities, please contact Kelsey Haynes at (517) 796-5133 or via email at [khaynes@uwjackson.org](mailto:khaynes@uwjackson.org)

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