

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/stopping-the-blame-game-on-teen-truancy>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Complex problems often get superficial, even frivolous treatment in the media. Not so with [a terrific story on the Huffington Post](#) about the complexities surrounding teenage chronic absenteeism a problem that plagues school systems nationwide yet has no effective antidote to date. For example, in the 2007-2008 year approximately 40 percent of high schoolers about 140,000 teens, missed over a month of school in New York City. The article deserves praise for its vivid, thorough treatment of the subject, as well as because it duly credits the Vera Institute of Justice for the [research that we've been doing on chronic absence among teenagers](#) and how to craft effective responses that keep kids engaged in school.

In New York State the focus of Alex Bergs and Megan Gibsons piece and Veras research the response to teen chronic school absence can be to call the state child abuse and neglect hotline and report that the head of the household may be engaging in what the law calls educational neglect. That may work for young children, but the data show that it doesnt address the pattern among teens, who largely make their own decisions about whether to go to school. And currently there arent really any other effective systemic responses. Imagine if Ferris Bueller had taken his days off in New York instead of Chicago and his high school principal, Mr. Rooney, phoned in an allegation that Ferris doting if overworked parents were neglecting his education.

Bevanjae Kelley, the grandmother profiled in Bergs and Gibsons story who gets tangled up in the system, is a loving, concerned guardian well aware of her granddaughter Ayannas penchant for skipping class and the polar opposite of the people the system was designed to ferret out. And Ayanna wasnt up to anything as edgy as Buellermost of the time she was cutting class, she says, she was at the computer lab, reading her e-mail.

Granted, many kids who stay away from school have far more working against them than Ayanna theyve fallen way behind and are sometimes years older than their grade-mates. But there is a tremendous amount at stake. Our countrys future depends upon finding a way to keep kids in school and learning.

So Vera will continue to apply its research and analytic skills to coming up with responses that work. And it is exciting to see that New York City officials are appropriately prioritizing this issue and these families by seeking comprehensive solutions: [just today, Mayor Bloomberg announced](#) a first-ever citywide campaign to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy.

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