

Sponsor Statement

SB 31 Truancy

Within the past year, the state of Alaska (and particularly the Anchorage area) has experienced increasing incidences of gang-related violence and crime. Consequently, a number of school districts have asked for the Legislature's help in dealing with the problem of chronic truants. Young adults and teens who are chronic truants are often the most vulnerable for recruitment into gangs, and school districts are discussing and asking for assistance to help them deal with this population of students who are walking the streets rather than the halls of their public schools.

Senate Bill 31 sets up criteria for school districts that defines an "unexcused absence" in their truancy policies and dictates certain intervening actions for chronic truants, such as:

- One unexcused absence in a month requires notification of the parent or guardian
- Two to four unexcused absences in a month requires a conference with parent or guardian
- Seven or more unexcused absences in a month, or 10 or more in a school year, flags the school district to petition the court for a juvenile delinquency determination under AS 47.12 or protection as a child in need of aid

Leading experts say that states and school districts who deal with truancy aggressively have less youth crime issues than states who do not. This legislation is offered in hopes that by tracking the beginnings of truant behavior and setting clear consequences, we can effect a change of course by working with the truants and their immediate support systems.