



# **The School Avoidance Puzzle Putting the pieces together**

**Jayne Demsky, Founder  
School Avoidance Alliance  
[jayne@schoolavoidance.org](mailto:jayne@schoolavoidance.org)**

**© Copyright 2022 School Avoidance Alliance.  
All Rights Reserved.**

Email [info@schoolavoidance.org](mailto:info@schoolavoidance.org)

**Who:**

School Avoidance Alliance

**What:**

Educating families & schools

**Where:**

Our one-of-a-kind courses

**Why:**

Parents & schools need to learn school avoidance best practices and evidence-based solutions so you can intervene early and improve outcomes.

**How:**

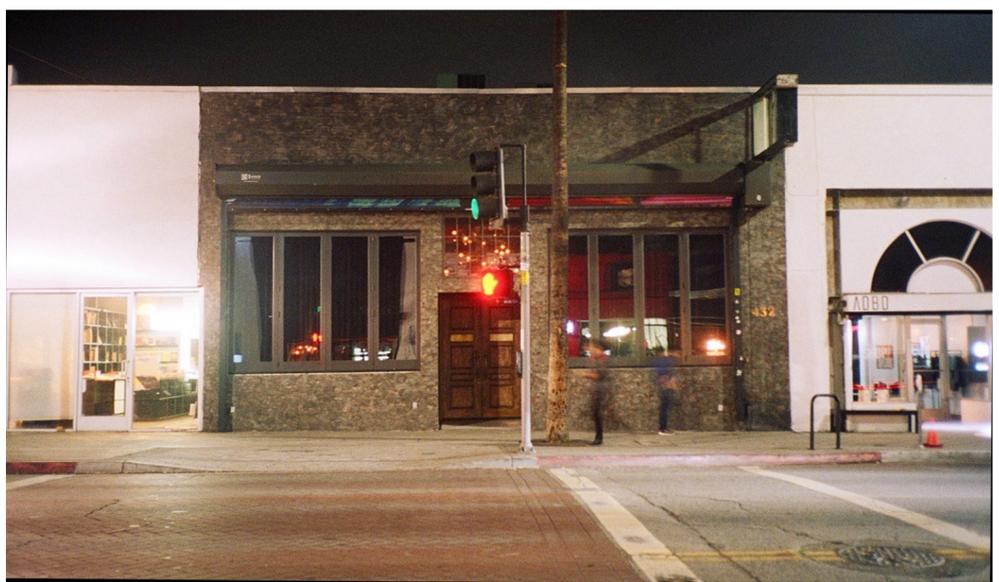
[Our website](#), our School Avoidance Master Class ([parent](#) and [school versions](#)), and our professional development for schools.

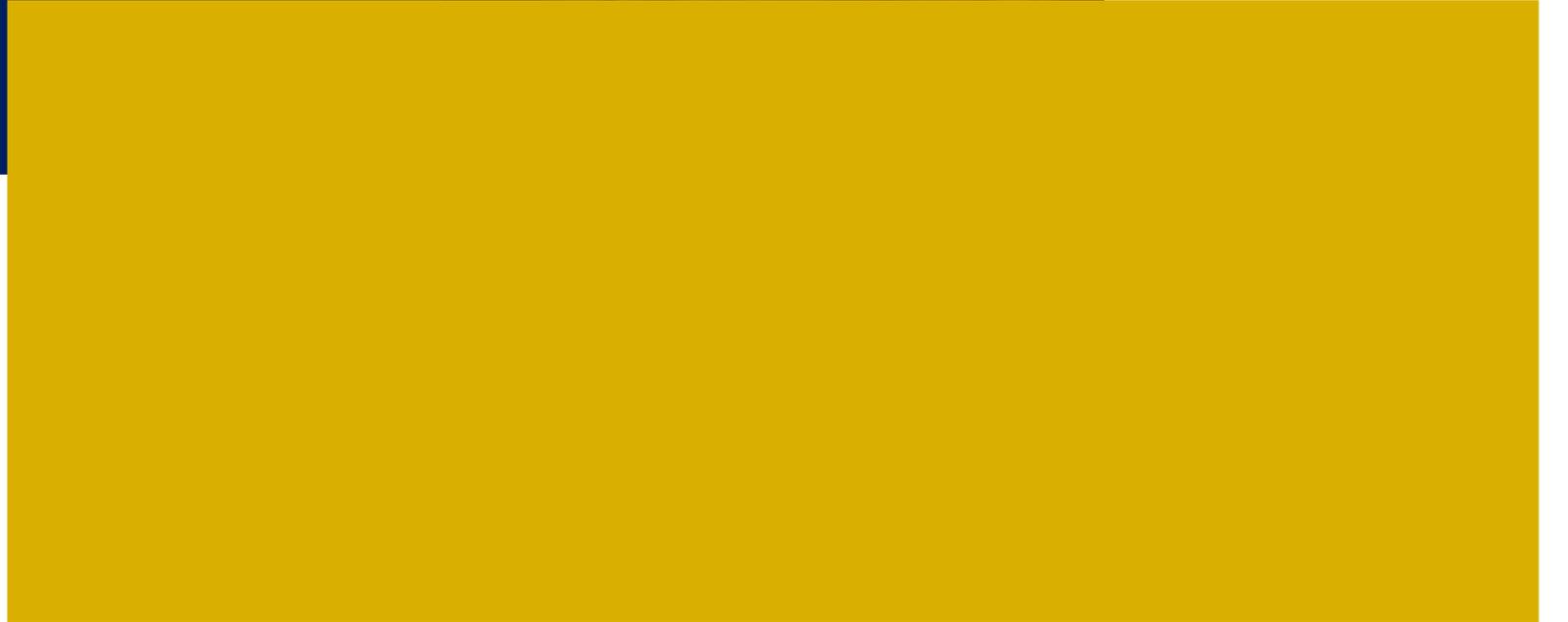


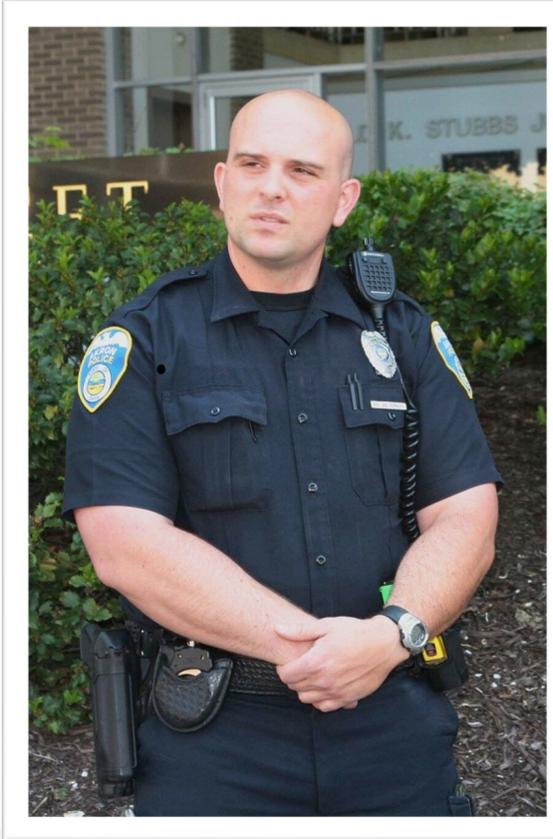
**Jayne Demsky**  
**[jayne@schoolavoidance.org](mailto:jayne@schoolavoidance.org)**

**We are leading the way with our:**

- **[School Avoidance Master Class for Parents](#)**
- **Professional Development for schools**
- **[Tier 2 & Tier 3 Intervention for Chronic Absenteeism](#)**







# Lowlights

One-Off

New York Presbyterian Hospital, Payne Whitney Westchester  
**7 North**

### Introduction

Welcome to 7 North, an 18 -bed acute care adolescent psychiatric unit serving individuals age 12-17 years old in need of intensive treatment.

You have been admitted to a very active treatment unit. Most patients are able to improve enough to be discharged within 10 to 17 days. Our staff will plan aftercare with you so that your improvement can continue well after you leave the hospital.

Sometimes we can make recommendations for alternative living arrangements. While the treatment team will initiate these applications, please expect to return to the residential setting in which you were living prior to admission.

Your aftercare providers will assist you in completing your new living arrangements so that you do not have to delay your discharge.

### Packing List

- Personal hygiene items (no glass, mirrors, or aerosol cans)
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant (no aerosol),



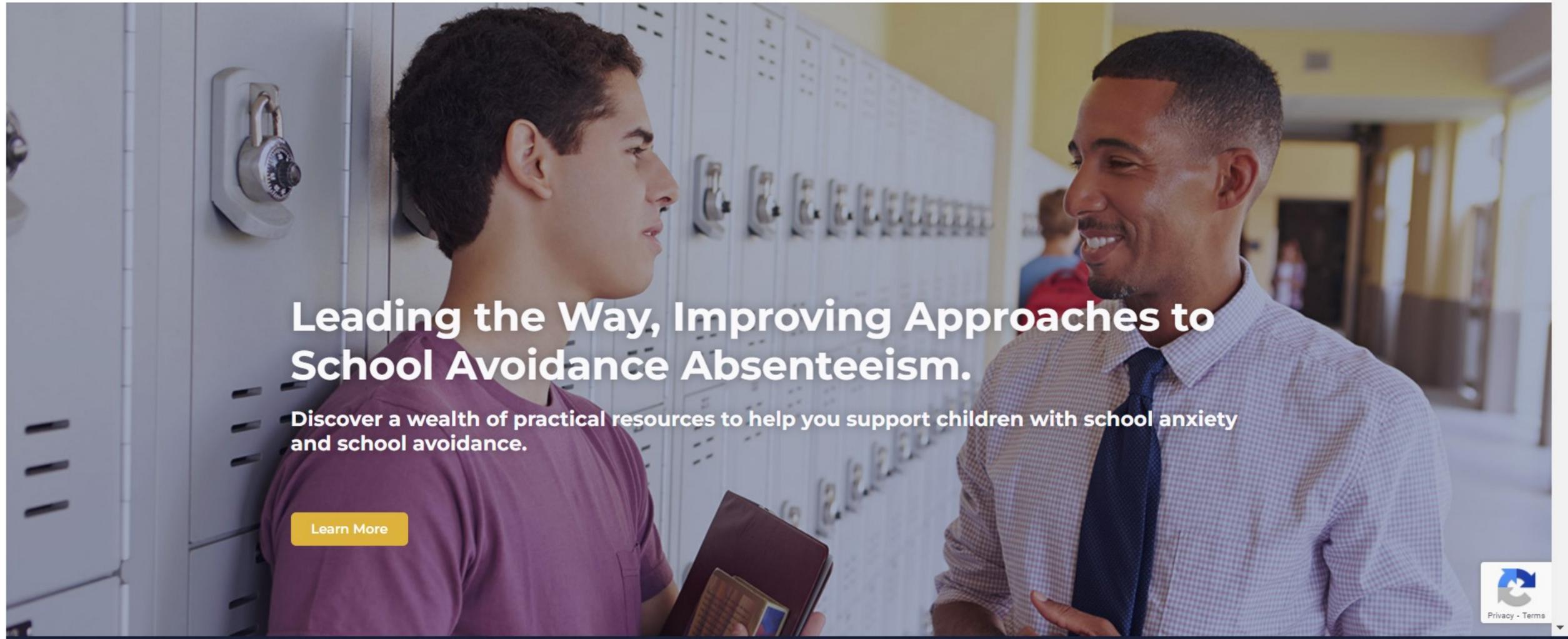




# School Refusal Hope

A PRIVATE GROUP FOR FAMILIES  
SHARE AND SUPPORT

# www.schoolavoidance.org



## Leading the Way, Improving Approaches to School Avoidance Absenteeism.

Discover a wealth of practical resources to help you support children with school anxiety and school avoidance.

[Learn More](#)

3

**Problems  
Solutions**





**What Do You Think is the  
Biggest Problem Standing in the  
Way of Progress and Improved  
Outcomes for Kids Who Have  
School Avoidance?**



# #1 Problem

# AWARENESS



“Awareness is the greatest  
agent for **change.**”

-Eckhart Tolle

Awareness offers more than just *hope* though. **It can lead to action.**



# # 1 Problem

## AWARENESS **FOUR P's**

1

**Public**

2

**Polycymakers**

3

**Parents**

4

**Perceptions**



# PUBLIC AWARENESS

**1 Your friends?**

**2 Absenteeism articles- SA?**

**3 Coverage skewed**



# Media Coverage Skewed

The New York Times

SUBSCRIBE

## More Pandemic Fallout: The Chronically Absent Student

At one middle school, more than 40 percent of the students have been chronically absent this year. Districts are going to great lengths — offering gift cards, night classes — to reach them.

Give this article 683

This article is part of our [Daily Covid Briefing](#)

Chronic absenteeism can stem from a variety of issues including instability at home, work obligations or illness.

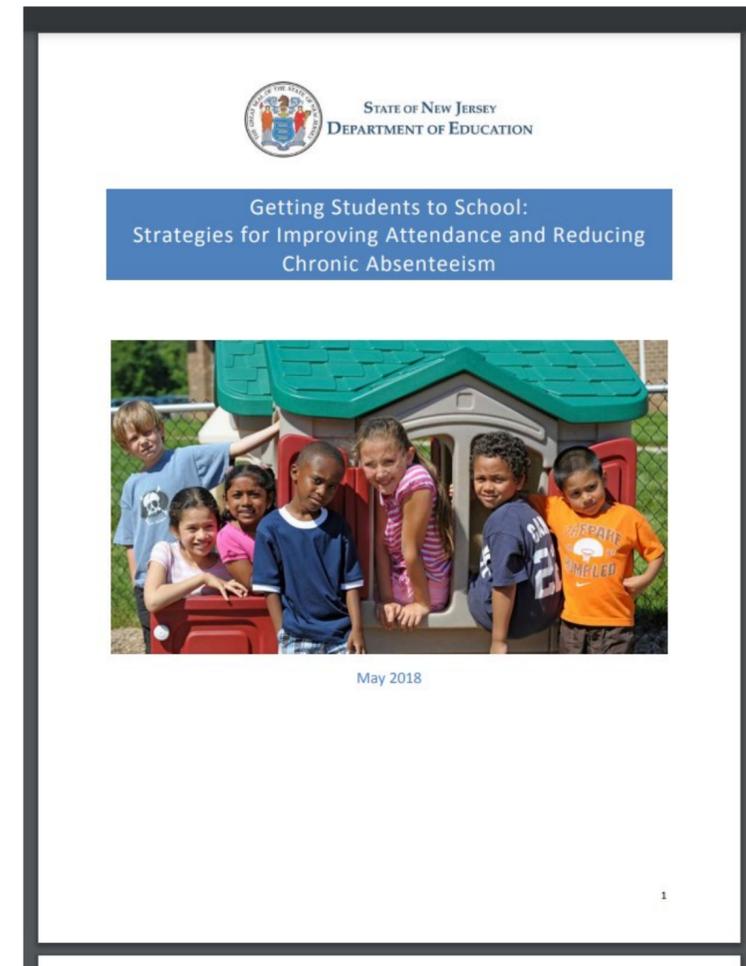


The absences appear to have been driven in part by depression and anxiety among students, cases of which skyrocketed during the pandemic and are now overwhelming health care providers, according to Jeremy Jakoby, the district's director of student services.



# POLICYMAKERS-STAKEHOLDERS

- 1 Not on Radar
- 2 Decentralized
- 3 State Guides
- 4 Pediatricians
- 5 DATA





# Lack of Parent Awareness

- Blindsided
- 2 Questions
- Hard to achieve Early Interventions



-6-9 months, we went to truancy court,

- No one at the school or his psychiatrist put a name on it. I researched it and figured out what it was called. And no one knew what to do about it. I was either told, "you just need to make him go," or other equally dumb ideas.

-1 year m, no mention of the term school refusal/avoidance from any doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, school counselors, teachers, or therapists

-To this day, not one person in the school system has identified school refusal or offered any help

-Several months later, it was said to me like this, "children who have school avoidance or refusal have dire outcomes or futures later in life."

-Despite multiple meetings with school personnel, including the threat of truancy and a well-being check by a uniformed police officer, I did not learn that "school refusal" was a thing until after we pulled my son to homeschool him.

-I think the school psychologist was peripheral aware, not that there was a deep understanding. He seemed to know it was essential to act quickly and plan an increasing return to school/the classroom but then came up with a plan that should've been implemented over weeks and weeks and crammed into five days.

-After -2 years, I feel most others I talk to, including some (good) school counselors, are not very familiar with

# Perception-Branding

What's in a Name ?  
Substance Abuse vs Substance Use  
Disorder  
Monkeypox  
School Refusal

<https://www.hmpgloballearningnetwork.com/site/addiction/blogs/rebecca-flood/education/addiction-needs-rebranding-toward-positive>



# School Refusal Names

In Heyne, Landell, Melvin, and Genitty

ARTICLE IN PRESS

2 Heyne et al.

Table 1  
Chronological Overview of Terms Used in English-Language Literature to Refer to School Refusal, School Withdrawal, and Collections of School Attendance Problems

Terms	Year	Author(s)
<i>Terms for what is commonly understood as school refusal</i>		
A form of truancy associated with neurosis	1932	Broadwin
Psychoneurotic type of truancy; stay-at-home neuroses	1939	Partridge
School phobia	1941	Johnson, Falstein, Szurek, and Svendsen
Refusal to go to school / reluctance to go to school	1945	Klein
Separation anxiety	1956	Estes, Haylett, and Johnson
A variety of separation anxiety	1957	Kanner
School anxiety	1959	Morgan
Mother-philes	1960	Davidson
School refusal	1960a	Hersov
Emotional absenteeism	1964	Frick
Inappropriate home-bound school absence	1980	Waller and Eisenberg
Masquerade syndrome as a variant of school phobia	1980	Waller and Eisenberg
School refusal syndrome	1985	Atkinson, Quarrington, and Cyr
Psychological absentee	1985	Reid
Anxiety-based school refusal	1990	Last and Strauss
Internalizing school refusal disorder	1990	Young, Brasic, Kisnadwala, and Leven *
Anxious school refusal	1993	Mouren-Simeoni <sup>b</sup>
School refusal behavior	1993	Kearney <sup>c</sup>
Extended school non-attendance	2014	Gregory and Purcell
School reluctant	2015	Jones and Suveg
<i>Terms for what is commonly understood as school withdrawal</i>		
Unwitting, even willful encouragement of the parents	1932	Broadwin
Withdrawal of the child from school	1962	Kahn and Nursten
Voluntary absence with parental assent	1969	Berg, Nichols, and Pritchard
Parent-condoned category	1977	Hersov <sup>d</sup>
School withdrawal; parental complicity	1978	Berg, Butler, Hullin, Smith, & Tyrer
Voluntary withholding by a parent	1980	Galloway
Family-motivated truancy	1981	Amatu
Condoned absence	1985	Galloway
Covert support for non-attendance	1987	Blagg
Parent-motivated school withdrawal	1996	Kearney & Silverman
Parentally condoned absence	1997	Berg
<i>Terms for collections of school attendance problems</i>		
Truancy (all types)	1915	Hiatt
Failures of school attendance (all types)	1962	Kahn and Nursten
Persistent absenteeism (all types)	1976	Galloway
School attendance problems (all types)	1980	Rubenstein and Hastings
Persistent unauthorized absence (all types)	1982	Galloway
Pupil absenteeism (all types)	1986	Carroll
School avoidance behavior (all types)	1990	Taylor & Adelman
School refusal behavior (SR+TR)	1993	Kearney
Child-motivated refusal to attend school (SR+TR)	1996	Kearney and Silverman
Truancy (enrolled, no good reason for absence)	2001	Bimler and Kirkland
School avoidance (all types)	2002	Berg
School refusal (SR+TR)	2003	Egger, Costello, and Angold
Non-child-motivated absenteeism (all except SR+TR)	2003	Kearney
Chronic non-attendance (all types)	2003	Lauchian
School attendance difficulties (all types)	2005	Sheppard
Extended school non-attendance (SR+TR)	2007	Pellegrini
Educational neglect (all types)	2011	Larson, Zuel, and Swanson
Voluntary and involuntary absenteeism (all types)	2016	Birlioukov

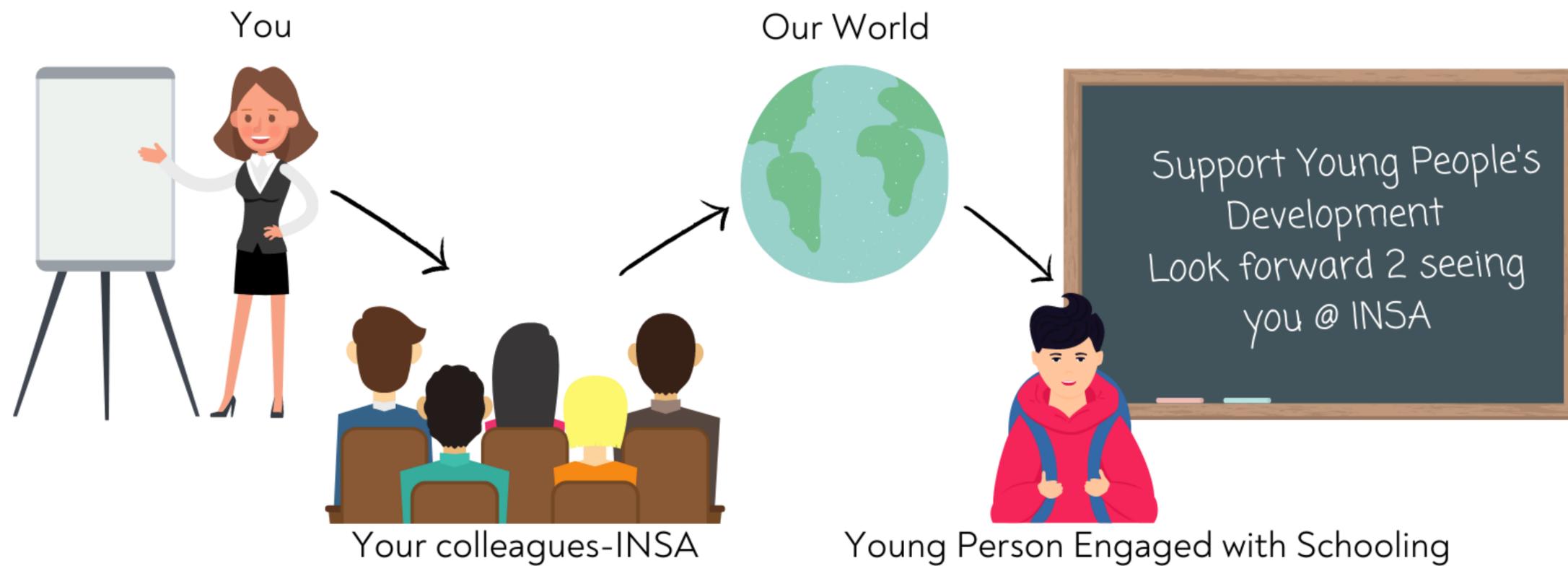
<sup>a</sup> Cited in Kearney (2003); <sup>b</sup> Cited in Martin, Cabrol, Bouvard, Lepine, & Mouren-Simeoni (1999); <sup>c</sup> The term was previously used by Kearney and Silverman (1990), but not defined; <sup>d</sup> Cited in Galloway (1980). SR = school refusal; TR = truancy.

Please cite this article as: Heyne et al., Differentiation Between School Attendance Problems: Why and How? *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.03.006>

A form of truancy associated with neurosis 1932  
 Psychoneurotic type of truancy 1939  
 Mother-philes 1960  
 Inappropriate home-bound school avoidance 1980  
 Masquerade syndrome as a variant of school phobia 1980  
 Psychological absentee 1985  
 Internalizing school refusal disorder 1990  
 School refusal behavior 1993  
 School reluctant 2015

**Behavioral**  
**Cognitive**

# Solutions





# How do we improve awareness in public domain?

Media exposure

Podcasts

Letters to Editor

Industry conferences  
presentations

Comments on Chronic Absenteeism  
stories that ignore SA

Social media-determining #hashtags  
Tagging Stakeholders





# POLICYMAKERS & STAKEHOLDERS

- Target government officials
  - Department of Education
    - Pediatricians
    - Clinicians
- Family services agencies-protective services
  - Truancy officers and officials





# Letter of Concern Manifesto Declaration





# Parent Awareness & Ed



## School Avoidance Master Class For Parents

All lessons are done by experts in each particular field so that you can receive the most relevant and detailed information.

### Module 1: What Parents Need to Know to Help Their Child Return to School and Stay in School

*Dr. Dina Nunziato, Clinical Director, Anxiety Institute*

- ✓ Lesson 1: Learn about anxiety disorders
- ✓ Lesson 2: Hear why school refusal is not truancy
- ✓ Lesson 3: Learn all about exposure therapy
- ✓ Lesson 4: How to break the cycle of avoidance
- ✓ Lesson 5: Develop response strategies
- ✓ Lesson 6: Learn how to build a reintegration plan

### Module 2: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for School Avoidance

*Dr. Anthony Pulliafico, Director, Columbia University Clinic for Anxiety and Related Disorders*

- ✓ Lesson 1: Learn what Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is and what it looks like
- ✓ Lesson 2: See what CBT treatment looks like for school avoidance at Columbia University's Clinic for Anxiety and Related Disorders
- ✓ Lesson 3: Examining the value of each treatment component
- ✓ Lesson 4: Learn how cognitive restructuring works
- ✓ Lesson 5: Dr. Puliafico answers questions from our private FB group

### Module 3: The Four Functions of School Refusal and the SRAS-R

*Dr. Anne Marie Albano, Founder, Columbia University Clinic for Anxiety and Related Disorders  
Co-author of the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R)*

- ✓ Lesson 1: Parents, it's not your fault
- ✓ Lesson 2: Learn the value of the function
- ✓ Lesson 3: Understanding the School Refusal Assessment Scale
- ✓ Lesson 4: Determining treatment options
- ✓ Lesson 5: Dr. Albano answers important questions from our private FB group

### Module 4: How to Teach Your Child They Can Persist in The Face of Fear

*Dr. Jonathan Dalton, Founder, Director, Center for Anxiety & Behavioral Change*

- ✓ Lesson 1: Kid's can and do get better
- ✓ Lesson 2: Understanding your child's avoidance
- ✓ Lesson 3: Utilizing a plan of loving firmness and calm consistency
- ✓ Lesson 4: Learning how to help extinguish your child's anxiety
- ✓ Lesson 5: Using modeling and validating strategies

### Module 5: Dr. Piacentini Answers Important Questions for School Avoidance Families

*Dr. John Piacentini, Director, Child Anxiety Resilience Education and Support (CARES) Center - UCLA*

- ✓ Lesson 1: Hear what to do when your child won't see a therapist
- ✓ Lesson 2: Considerations about homeschooling
- ✓ Lesson 3: Determining if your child needs a higher level of care
- ✓ Lesson 4: How to help your anxious child who picks, pulls, or bites

### Module 6: Parents Guide to Combat School Refusal with School-Home Collaboration

*Krystina Dawson, M.S. Ed., School Psychologist, Greenwich Schools, Founder, Center for One Consulting*

- ✓ Lesson 1: Hear what your school's responsibility is to your child
- ✓ Lesson 2: Determine your child's motivators
- ✓ Lesson 3: Learn how to build a reintegration plan with your school
- ✓ Lesson 4: Using gradual exposure
- ✓ Lesson 5: Hear a real school avoidance case -Krystina and her team helped get her back to school

### Module 7: Free and Appropriate Public Education: Legalities and Practices Regarding School Avoidance

*Andrew Meltzer, Esq., Special Education Attorney, Sussan, Greenwald & Wesler Law Firm*

- ✓ Lesson 1: Understand the laws that protect your child
- ✓ Lesson 2: Hear how your child can qualify for an IEP
- ✓ Lesson 3: Examining accommodations and modifications

## Parents and kids often feel like failures because of inadequate treatment

“

A very significant problem,

tragically only 18 % of kids with anxiety disorders receive any treatment whatsoever.

(compared to ADHD, where almost 80% kids get treatment for their disorder)

Compounding that tragedy is that among the clinicians in the country who work with kids from a mental health standpoint, only about

12% of them are trained in the proper techniques to treat these kids with exposure therapy.

”

**Dr. Dalton, Lab School , Center for Anxiety and Behavioral Change**



# Changing Perceptions

- School Avoidance vs. other names
  - Social media campaigns
    - Awareness Day
  - Cognitive and Behavioral
  - Talking about it-sharing





# #2

## Schools don't understand school avoidanc

- No guidance from state or government
- Wild west
- No transparency, on school site SA mention, whom to call
- Miss opportunities for early interventions
- MTSS
- Attendance Policy
- Over reliance on attendance letters and truancy threats
- Intersection of Educational and disability laws
- Parents don't know their rights
- Education is a broad concept (academic vs Citizen of the world
- Little -No professional development
- What do Insects & Gift cards have in common?





# Intersection of educational and disability laws

## England

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010

## France

Inclusive Education is a key element of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).

## Australia

- The Disability Standards for Education

## United States

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Free and appropriate public education (FAPE)
- Section 504

• revision

Solutions



# Solutions

**EDUCATE THE EDUCATORS**  
**Professional Development**  
**Early Interventions**  
**More effective interventions for**  
**MTSS**



# Everything You Need to Know to Get Your Students Back to School



# Topics

- 1.School Avoidance Facts
- 2.Perspectives
- 3.Therapeutic Interventions
- 4.School Resources and Disability Law
- 5.Intervention Roadmap
- 6.Prevention



# Schools Provide Parent Support

 SCHOOL  
AVOIDANCE  
ALLIANCE

[Get The Course](#)

## A Tier 2 and Tier 3 Intervention for School Avoidance: Achieve Early Interventions and Accelerate Student Returns to School

This course is an immediate Response To Intervention (RTI), delivering evidence-based solutions. Reduce financial liability and intercept the problem of student school refusal the moment it presents itself!

\*You may qualify to get this course for free using ESSER funds.

## The School Avoidance Master Class for Parents: A Tier 2 and Tier 3 Intervention for Chronic Absenteeism

Give your parents access to world-leading school avoidance experts from *Columbia University, the Anxiety Institute, UCLA, the Center for Anxiety and Behavioral Change, and Greenwich Public Schools* (meet our experts below).

Provide your families with an immediate intervention containing the knowledge and tools needed to help chronically absent kids return to learning.



### Our Course is an Early Intervention, Promoting School-Home Collaboration, Improving Outcomes, and Saving You Money

All school avoidance research confirms that addressing the problem early, with the school and parents working cohesively, is critical for getting kids back to school.

#### The Master Class is an essential Tier 2 & Tier 3 Intervention that:

- ✓ Educates parents on school avoidance, evidence-based solutions, and the critical teamwork between school and home. So, parents are ready to come to the table and collaborate on an effective plan right away.
- ✓ Immediately shows parents that your team understands. You are ready to help, setting the tone for empathy, trust, and a collaborative relationship.

- ✓ Our school avoidance experts recommend including psychoeducation like this as a foundational part of treating their clients and their families.
- ✓ It is a primer that educates the family with detailed and necessary school avoidance information that would take them years to uncover and compile by themselves.
- ✓ Our expert instructors from Columbia University, UCLA, the Anxiety Institute, and more empower parents with skills and knowledge; delivered with hope and compassion.
- ✓ Will cut weeks, months, and years off your school's intervention efforts, improve outcomes, and reduce financial outlays.
- ✓ This response to intervention (RTI) can preclude the need for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan.
- ✓ Educates families on school avoidance strategies, best practices, and school resources to effectively partner in Intervention, 504, and IEP planning.
- ✓ It makes your job easier while ensuring kids with school avoidance are given the best chance to return to school successfully.
- ✓ Acts as a primer, educating families with research-based expertise detailing how to help their kids; that would take them months to years to uncover and compile by themselves.
- ✓ Parents can use a ready-to-go intervention right away, giving them expert knowledge, providing hope, encouragement, and the tools to help their children return to school.
- ✓ Provides a return on your investment by saving you money for additional staff, third party providers, special education resources, out of district placements, and possible litigation costs.
- ✓ Eligible for Title 1, Title 2A of ESSA, and American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds. [The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, state guidelines](#)

The course provides 2 ½ hours of learning with our expert instructors.

Contains six modules and incorporates 31 lessons

24/7 Access on-demand from anywhere

If you have questions or request pricing, please email [jayne@schoolavoidance.org](mailto:jayne@schoolavoidance.org)



# 3

## **Punitive Responses**

- **Truancy threats & court**
- **Child protective services**
- **Denial of FAPE**
- **Unenrolling**
- **Gaslighting**
- **Blaming**
- **Inappropriate threats to kids and parents**
- **Police sent**
- **failing**
- **Grade retention**

"I'm sitting in my bedroom, having what I think is my first panic attack. I can't catch my breath, and I just feel an overwhelming desire to cry.

My youngest is 12. She's had some level of school anxiety since kindergarten.

It's gotten so much worse. She has put on home instruction last year.

This year, she got an IEP. Sounded good, so we thought.

First full day of school and she finds herself standing in the hallway, outside of a gym full of 7th graders, while the guidance counselor, teacher and various others are forcing her into the gym.

She's literally having a mental breakdown. At that point, she needs to go run to an empty room, but they won't let her. The principal is telling her that she CAN go on, but SHE chooses not to!

They've even tried telling her they're going to file court charges and I'm going to have to pay huge fines that I probably can't afford.

I'm done! I'm exhausted, I'm sad, I'm angry, my heart is breaking for my baby.

After a week of harassment and bullying by the people who are supposed to protect her, she's home again.

She feels like there's no one left that she needs someone.

All of the teachers the principal of the vice principal the school social worker and her guidance counselor all given her such a hard time that if she needs help or she's having a bad day she has nobody to talk to now."



# 3

## **Punitive Responses**

- **Truancy threats & court**
- **Child protective services**
- **Denial of FAPE**
- **Unenrolling**
- **Gaslighting**
- **Blaming**
- **Inappropriate threats to kids and parents**
- **Police sent**
- **failing**
- **Grade retention**



# Truancy Absenteeism Letters

School Name  
Address  
City, State Zip

Date

Parent Name  
Parent Address  
RE: Student Name  
City, State Zip

Student ID#: XXXXX

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Good attendance is required for academic excellence. [STATE] Education Code determines what types of absences are excused or unexcused. When a child is absent from school and/or tardy in excess of 30 minutes on three (3) occasions in one school year without a valid excuse, the law considers that child to be truant. The law and district policy requires all schools to notify parents when this occurs. The [district name] central office automatically sends these letters based on school records so that parents are aware of absences and can address these concerns.

School records indicate that your child was absent from school without a valid excuse on occasions, beginning with the following dates:

---

Thursday, September 12, 2015  
Thursday, September 19, 2015  
Thursday, September 27, 2015

---

Our goal is to partner with families to ensure that students are attending school every day. Although the following consequences may appear harsh we are mandated by Education Code Article 48260.5 to inform you of the following:

- That the parent or guardian is obligated to compel the attendance of the pupil at school.
- That parents or guardians who fail to meet these obligation may be guilty of an infraction and subject to prosecution pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 48290) of Chapter 2 or Part 27.
- That alternative education programs are available in the district.
- That the parent or guardian has the right to meet with appropriate school personnel to discuss solutions to the pupil's truancy.
- That the pupil may be subject to prosecution under Education Code Section 48264.
- That the pupil may be subject to suspension, restriction, or delay of the pupil's driving privilege pursuant to Section 13202.7 of the Vehicle Code.
- That it is recommended that the parent or guardian accompany the pupil to school and attend classes with the pupil for one day.

Please recognize that we are required to monitor attendance and notify parents of potential problems with student attendance. If you have concerns about your child's attendance, or if you believe there is an error in this notice, contact the school at «SCHOOL\_PHONE\_NUMBER». The designated attendance personnel will work with you to resolve this issue. We look forward to assisting you.

Sincerely,

Principal Signature

Principal Name

Solutions



# **Include mandates to STOP Punitive responses**



## **Wrapping up**

3 major issues that need to be addressed to make progress in helping kids with SA.

### **Awareness, Four P's**

Public,  
Policymakers  
Parents  
Perceptions

### **Educating the educators**

By providing PD educating the educators on best practices and evidence-based solutions

.

**Promoting the dissolution of punitive responses and threats.**



**My goal today was to create awareness and start a broader dialogue around the awareness problem.**





**Our club members thank all of you and continue to rely on you to keep doing what you do, looking for new ways to help them.**



Another membership

CHANGE AGENTS  
WAVE MAKERS  
AGENTS OF CHANGE



SCHOOL  
AVOIDANCE  
ALLIANCE

Jayne Demsky

[jayne@schoolavoidance.org](mailto:jayne@schoolavoidance.org)

**Let me know how we can help your  
organization or school.**

**School Avoidance Master Class for Parents  
Professional Development for schools  
Tier 2 & Tier 3 Intervention**

**Thank you!**