

Takin' You to School:

Issues in Education from a Historical Perspective

AHTC Summer Institute Lesson—2009

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Part 1: Compulsory Education:

Primary Source: “The Law”; Illinois Superintendent of Public Instruction (1905); Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL

Description: This is a circular distributed by Ada H. Kepley, the Truant Officer for Effingham Schools. Its purpose is to inform the public about the specifics regarding compulsory education in Illinois.

Prompts:

- Should the government compel youth to attend school? Why? Have the reasons changed over time?
- Why does the law choose ages 7 through 14? Has this changed? Why?
- How many days must a student spend in school? Why that many? Has this changed over time? Should Illinois switch to year-round schooling?
- Does the law allow for home schooling? Does this undermine the intent of the law?
- What is defined as the penalty for truancy? Would this be an effective deterrent?
- What are the roles of the truant officer? What role is described for the teacher?
- In section four, what other penalty is outlined? Why would a parent commit this offence?
- On what date was this act originally passed? Describe the historical context in which this act became a law. Why then?
- What would life be like today without the truancy law?
- What changes would you make today to the truancy law?
- Is there ever a justification for students to not attend school?
- What about students that are expelled? Should they be considered truant?

Enrichment:

Research the [truancy laws in Illinois](#) today for purposes of comparison.

Discuss the Supreme Court case [Wisconsin v. Yoder](#) (free exercise of religion vs. compulsory attendance).