

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention Names Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty 2026 Person of the Year

IATDP honors the architect of Attendance Science for a career that changed how schools, courts and lawmakers understand why students miss school.

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas, Oct. 22, 2026 – The International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention (IATDP), the nation's oldest organization dedicated to truancy, chronic absenteeism and dropout prevention, has named Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, Ph.D., MSW, its 2026 Person of the Year. The association surprised her with the award on Oct. 20 at its 114th Annual Conference in Corpus Christi, where she also delivered a keynote address.

The award recognizes her "extraordinary leadership, groundbreaking research, and unwavering dedication to advancing school attendance through visionary innovation." It honors the full arc of a career spanning more than three decades and the creation of a new field: Attendance Science.



Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty (center) receives the 2026 IATDP Person of the Year Award with IATDP leaders at the 114th Annual Conference in Corpus Christi, Texas.

What is Attendance Science?

Attendance Science is the systematic, evidence-based study of why students show up to learning and why they stay away. It separates two ideas that schools often blend together. Attendance is the count of who is present. Absenteeism is the set of reasons behind each absence. Attendance Science measures both, using validated instruments and testable frameworks, so schools can match each absence to the right response: support for a family in crisis, care for a student in distress, and accountability where it fits.

Dr. Gentle-Genitty built the field's foundations. Her Perception of School Social Bonding (PSSB) instrument, listed in APA PsycTests and validated with 3,507 students, measures how strongly students feel attached and committed to school. Her work classifies absence into four categories (truancy, school withdrawal, school avoidance and school refusal) so that schools respond to causes with support rather than punishment.

A career across the globe

Her work began in 1994 in youth service for the Government of Belize and as Executive Director of the YMCA of Belize (1999—2004). She led research on young people across five CARICOM countries, co-founded the International Network for School Attendance (INSA) in 2018, now spanning more than 20 countries, and edited two international journal collections read more than 310,000 times in more than 160 countries.

Within IATDP, she served as an early leader, executive, journal editor and President (2016—2017), and remains a lifetime member.

In Indiana, she testified to the Interim Study Committee on Education in 2024, urging lawmakers to record the reasons students miss school. The state's 2025 law, Senate Enrolled Act 482, now builds a statewide framework of absence categories. In 2025 she founded Attendance USA, which certified its first 75 Certified Attendance Professionals in September 2026.

"I have known Dr. Gentle-Genitty since she joined in 2007. Her work is tireless and her advocacy for students unwavering. This recognition is long overdue. It should have been for the century. Dr. Gentle-Genitty has earned this recognition, for she has never stopped asking us all to know more and do better for our children. Indiana should be proud. We are," said Keith LeLeux, Executive Director, IATDP.

"None of us are expert, but we learn more from each other," Dr. Gentle-Genitty has said of the attendance movement. "I choose joy every single day in this work."

About IATDP

The International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention is an association of educators, government officials and stakeholders whose work dates back to 1911. IATDP shares information, emerging practices and research that support learning and increase attendance and high school graduation rates. Its 115th Annual Conference meets Oct. 17—22, 2027, in New Orleans. Learn more at iatdp.org.

About Attendance USA

Attendance USA serves as the collective voice of the field of attendance and absenteeism in the United States, uniting research, practice, policy and families to reunite education and care. Its next national convening is slated for Indianapolis, May 17—18, 2027. Learn more at attendanceusa.org.

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