TOOL KIT FOR CREATING YOUR OWN TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAM

Introduction

Communities are always searching for early signs of a child's decision that school isn't worthwhile. Poor school attendance is one such marker that a young person may be headed for trouble. It is an indicator of a disposition to give up that is both reversible and preventable. Children who skip school are telling their parents, teachers, and principals that it is time to take action to keep them on track. This tool kit is designed to be a resource for doing just that.

The first chapter of this packet provides an ***Overview of Truancy***. People who build programs to reduce truancy should know certain important facts about it – such as research on the extent of the problem, its short and long term consequences, what factors contribute to kids becoming truant, and what kinds of efforts to improve school attendance have actually worked. Such information and more can be found in the *Truancy Fact Sheet*, which contains some eye-opening statistics about a serious national problem.

Good truancy reduction programs rely on the writings, research, and experiences of truancy experts. These are summarized in the tool kit's *Truancy Literature Review*. This analysis of the truancy literature succinctly covers topics such as the extent of truancy, its causes, connections to quitting school, juvenile delinquency, and lessons learned from the evaluation of truancy reduction programs.

Many legal and economic issues arise as we try to cope with truancy. These issues include compulsory attendance laws and their impact on parents, grade retention policies, economic factors contributing to truancy, economic consequences of truancy and of dropping out of school, and the cost-effectiveness of truancy reduction programs. These issues and others are summarized in *The Legal and Economic Implications of Truancy: Executive Summary*. In addition to these topics, this piece includes recommendations for dealing with truancy of interest to courts, schools, state lawmakers, and researchers.

The ***Overview of Truancy*** chapter is intended to increase your knowledge base about this important national problem. The next chapter of this tool kit – ***Truancy Programs*** - is a must-read for those who want to do something about it. One of the first issues to be tackled by program developers is to understand how truancy is defined. Most programs look at reductions in rates of truancy to gauge their impact. But as you will learn in *Guidelines for a National Definition of Truancy and Calculating Rates*, there are nearly as many definitions of truancy as there are programs to reduce it. Any program that seeks to show a reduction in truancy rates will have to resolve myriad issues, such as what is an excused and unexcused absence; how many unexcused absences result in a child being labeled as truant; and how much of a school day must a child miss to be considered absent for the entire day. Once truancy is defined, the next task is to figure out how to calculate a rate of truancy – both to allow the extent of the problem to be

understood, and to provide a baseline so that impacts of a truancy program can be measured. The best ways to go about measuring the progress made as a result of a truancy program are covered in *How to Evaluate Your Truancy Reduction Program.* This piece explains elements of evaluation design, including data collection methods, analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, and the use of control groups.

Once these important decisions about how to define and evaluate truancy have been made, program developers must sit down and hammer out the program details. Guidelines for program development are included in *Truancy Prevention in Action: Best Practices and Model Truancy Programs: Executive Summary.* This article outlines critical components of truancy programs such as family involvement, use of incentives and sanctions, developing a support network, and program evaluation. The next report in this chapter – *Blueprint Programs for Violence Prevention Programs That Reduce Truancy and/or Improve School Attendance* – offers more programmatic nuts-and-bolts. It reviews 18 "blueprints" programs from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, and the evaluated outcomes of those programs related to truancy and school attendance. This report provides useful examples of specific programs in the youth violence prevention field and their impacts upon truant youth. The final item in this chapter, *Using a Typology for Truancy Prevention*, provides an example of a power-point presentation describing the important elements of a truancy reduction initiative that might be used with community groups interested in ways of tackling truancy issues.

Truancy programs are the responsibility of the community and not just of schools, or parents, or the courts. This point and other principles for preventing truancy from rearing its head are highlighted in the third chapter of this tool kit, which is about ***Promoting School Engagement***. This chapter begins with *School Policies that Engage Students and Families.* The policies discussed range from modifying school grading policies related to attendance to creating alternatives to out-of-school suspension and expulsion.

Schools should make concerted efforts to engage students in order to prevent truancy. The next article in this section discusses a long-term effort by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) to develop and validate a way to measure school engagement. *Quantifying School Engagement: Research Report* describes an ambitious project to measure the construct of school engagement that has already achieved some success. The remaining portions of this section cover examples of different campaigns to promote school attendance, achievement, and attachment. *Developing an Effective Media Campaign Strategy* summarizes the work done by some of the most effective public programs that encourage school engagement. *Count Me In For Learning!* is an example of a power-point presentation that describes ways to promote regular school attendance. Finally, a set of posters for self-assessment of student engagement are included in *Effective Marketing Through Truancy Reduction Posters.*

The fourth and final chapter of this tool kit – ***Quick and Easy References –*** gives you practical ideas for managing truancy cases (*Truancy Case Management Handbook:*

Advice from the Field), improving school attendance (*10 Things A School Can Do To Improve Attendance*), increasing parent and community involvement (*How Can A School Achieve High Levels of Parental and Community Involvement?*), creating *Alternatives to Juvenile Detention for Courts*, and working with other agencies to keep kids in schools as explained in *Joint Efforts To Improve School Attendance.* The last reference in this chapter – *School Attendance Tracking: Challenges and Effective Practices* – lists some of the challenges involved in tracking attendance, and some effective solutions for addressing those challenges.

It is our hope that this tool kit will serve as a map for guiding communities along the best road to an important destination: the place where one of their most serious juvenile problems is recognized and reversed.

Chapter One: Overview of Truancy

- **Truancy fact sheet**
- **Truancy Literature review**
- **The Legal And Economic Consequences Of Truancy: Executive summary**

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What is Truancy?

- Any unexcused absence from school is considered a truancy, but states enact their own school attendance laws. State law determines 1) the age at which a child is required to begin attending school, 2) the age at which a child may legally drop out of school, and 3), the number of unexcused absences at which a student is considered legally truant.

- Truancy is a status offence – an act that is a crime due to the young age of the actor, but would not be illegal for someone older. The other most common status offences are running away from home, alcohol use, curfew violations, and ungovernability.

Truancy: The extent of the problem

- While there is not an abundance of national truancy data, some metropolitan areas report thousands of unexcused absences each day.

  DeKalb, Jay, "Student Truancy," ERIC Digest 125, April 1999.

- Data from Wisconsin show that during the 1998-99 school year, 15,600 students or 1.6% of enrolled students were truant per day. Truancy accounted for about 1/3 of total absences that year. Truancy rates in the 10 largest urban school districts were twice as high as the state average.

  Legislative Audit Committee of the State of Wisconsin, "A Best Practices Review: Truancy Reduction Efforts," August 2000.

- Students with behavioral problems are often assigned to a counselor, but school counselors have large caseloads. Public high schools employed one counselor for every 284 students in 2002. Large schools (1,200+ students) employed one counselor for every 335 students. Counselors in schools with over 50% minority enrollment were responsible for 22% more students than their colleagues in low minority enrollment schools – 313 compared to 256 students.

  National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Table 12: Number of guidance staff and counselors, and the number of students per guidance staff and per counselor assigned to public high school students, by selected school," http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/2003015/images/tab12.gif, October 1, 2004.

- Boys are only slightly more likely to be sent to court for truancy than girls. According to juvenile court statistics collected by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 54% of all petitioned truancy cases between 1990 and 1999 were for males, and 46% were for females.

  Puzzanchera, C., et. al., Juvenile Court Statistics 1999, National Center for Juvenile Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, July 2003.

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Truancy is a risk factor for other problems

- Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs of students headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion, or dropping out.

  Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., Thornberry, T. P. & Cothern, L. (2000, November). Co-occurrence of delinquency and other problem behaviors. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, OJJDP.

  Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., & Thornberry, T. P. (1994, March). *Urban delinquency and substance abuse: Initial findings*, OJJDP

  Morris, J. D., Ehren, B. J., & Lenz, B. K. (1991). Building a model to predict which fourth through eighth graders will drop out in high school. *Journal of Experimental Education, 59*(3), 286-292.

- Lack of commitment to school has been established by several studies as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout.

  U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services; and National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, 2001.

  Blum, R. W., T. Beuhring, and P. M. Rinehart, Protecting Teens: Beyond Race, Income and Family Structure, Center for Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, 2000.

  Huizinga, D., R. Loeber, T. P. Thornberry, and L. Cothern, "Co-occurrence of Delinquency and Other Problem Behaviors," Juvenile Justice Bulletin, OJJDP, November 2000.

  Loeber, R., and D. P. Farrington, "Young Children Who Commit Crime: Epidemiology, Developmental Origins, Risk Factors, Early Interventions, and Policy Implications," Development and Psychopathology, v. 12, 2000, p. 737-762.

  Loeber, R. and D. P. Farrington, Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998.

  Welsh, Wayne N., Patricia H. Jenkins, and Philip Harris, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, v. 36, n. 1, February 1999, p. 87-110.

  Kelly, B. T., et al., "Developmental Pathways in Boys' Disruptive and Delinquent Behavior," Juvenile Justice Bulletin, OJJDP, December 1997.

  Huizinga, D., R. Loeber, and T. P. Thornberry, Urban Delinquency and Substance Abuse: Initial Findings, OJJDP, March 1994.

- A number of studies have found that truants have low self-esteem and experience greater feelings of rejection or criticism from their parents than non-truants.

  Bell A., Lee A. Rosen, and Dionne Dynlacht, "Truancy Intervention," *The Journal of Research and Development in Education*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1994, p. 203-211.

  Corville-Smith, J., et. al., "Distinguishing Absentee Students from Regular Attenders: The Combined Influence of Personal, Family, and School Factors," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 27, No. 5, October 1998, p. 629.

- In 1991 and again in 1993, three grand juries in Dade County, FL analyzed the data from more than 5,000 of the county's most serious juvenile offenders and found that excessive truancy was one of the three traits most of them had in common.

  "Dade County's Juvenile Offenders: A Study of the Need for Early Intervention," in The Circuit of the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida in and for the County of Dade. Spring Term A.D. 1993. Final Report of the Dade County Grand Jury.

- Of the 85 juveniles convicted of murder in New York State between 1978 and 1986, 57.6% had a history of truancy, 7.1% did not have a history of truancy, and 35% of the records did not include school attendance information.

  Grant, et. al., "Juveniles Who Murder," in Child Trauma I: Issues and Research, Ann W. Burgess, Ed., Garland Publishing, Inc.: New York and London, 1992, pp. 459-472.

- After the police opened a truancy center in North Miami Beach and began picking up school aged youth on the street during school hours, crime diminished substantially in the targeted neighborhoods. For example, vehicle burglaries decreased by 22%, and residential burglaries criminal mischief both decreased by 19%.

  Berger, W., and Susan Wind, "Police Eliminating Truancy: A PET Project," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Vol. 69, No. 2, Feb. 2000, p. 16-19.

- A combined analysis of survey data from 28 communities collected between 1980 and 2000, shows that truancy is a particularly good predictor of middle school drug use. Truant 8th graders were 4.5 times more likely than regular school attenders to smoke marijuana.

  Halfors, D., et. al., "Truancy, Grade Point Average, and Sexual Activity: A Meta-Analysis of Risk Indicators for Youth Substance Use, Journal of School Health, Col. 72, No. 5, May, 2002, p. 205-211.

Results of high school failure

- No one really knows what the drop out rate for truants is; most school districts do not collect the data.

- Data from the 2000 census show that high school dropouts had only a 52% employment rate in 1999, compared to 71% for high school graduates, and 83% for college graduates. Of those who worked full-time year-round in 1999, high school drop outs earned only 65% of the median earnings.

  http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1usboth.html/

- For every race and gender group, high school dropouts claim more in government-funded social services expenditures than high school graduates. For men in particular, dropouts incur more in criminal justice costs. The average dropout costs more than $200,000 in current dollars over the course of his or her lifetime.

Vernez, Georges, Richard A. Krop, and C. Peter Rydell, Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs, RAND MR-1036-EDU, 1999.

- As of 1997, 41% of prison inmates, and 31% percent of probationers 18 years and older had not graduated from high school or earned a GED, compared with 18% of the general population.

  Harlow, C. W., "Education and Correctional Populations," Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, January 2003, NCJ 195670.

Court and community responses to truancy

- Seventeen states have laws requiring young people to stay in school or maintain a certain grade point average to earn or keep their drivers' licenses.

  Kelderman, Eric, "Truant Teens Lose Licenses in Georgia and Other States," stateline.org, Thursday, August 19, 2004. http://www.stateline.org .

- Most truancy reduction efforts can be categorized as either school-based, court-based, or community-based. There are many examples of all three kinds of programs operating nationwide. Check the Truancy Registry, accessible from this website, for details of all the programs in this voluntary registry. One example of each type of program is listed here:

  - Community-based program: Communities in Schools, Inc. operates in 235 school districts in 30 states. They work not only improve school attendance, but to break down all barriers to high school graduation.

  - School-based program: Denver Public Schools has focused its truancy program on middle school students, trying to reverse patterns of truancy before they become ingrained in the high school years.

  - Court-based program: The At-Risk Youth Program of the Seattle County Court, though a court-based program, involves the community in providing attendance workshops that are alternatives to standard truancy court hearings, and case managers to work with the family of each truant youth.

- According to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, there were 1,332 truants in juvenile detention in 1997, 913 in 1999, and 784 in 2001. The Census Bureau conducts this survey biannually for OJJDP, counting juveniles in detention nationwide on a single day in late October.

  Sickmund, Melissa, "Juveniles in Corrections," Juvenile Offenders and Victims National Report Series Bulletin, June 2004. And online data from the 2001 survey at http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/asp/State_Offense.asp, 9/23/04.

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Factors Contributing to Truancy

Research, and our own experience, shows that the factors contributing to truancy stem from three realms: family and community, school, and personal psychological characteristics. They are listed below.

School Factors

- Lack of effective and consistently applied attendance policies.
- Poor record-keeping, making truancy difficult to spot.
- Push-out policies, for example, suspension as a punishment for truancy and automatic "Fs" for students with poor attendance.
- Parents/guardians not notified of absences.
- Teacher characteristics, such as lack of respect for students and neglect of diverse student needs.
- Unwelcoming atmosphere, for example, an unattractive facility or one with chronic maintenance problems.
- Unsafe environment, for example a school with ineffective discipline policies where bullying is tolerated.
- Inadequate identification of special education needs, leading some students to feel overwhelmed and frustrated with their inability to succeed.

Home and Community Factors

- Family health or financial concerns that pressure the student to care for family members or work during school hours.
- Child is a victim of abuse or neglect.
- Pressures arising from teen pregnancy or parenting.
- Safety issues such as violence near home or between home and school.
- Parental alcoholism or drug abuse.
- Negative role models, such as peers who are truant or delinquent.
- Parents/guardians who do not value education and are complicit in student's absences.

Personal Factors

- Poor academic performance, sometimes due to special education needs, and a resulting lack of self-esteem.
- Unmet mental health needs.
- Alcohol and drug use and abuse.
- Lack of vision of education as a means to achieve goals.

Components of Effective Truancy Reduction Programs

- Parent/guardian involvement, or whole family involvement.
- A continuum of supports, including meaningful incentives for good attendance and consequences for poor attendance.
- Collaboration among community actors such as law enforcement, mental health workers, mentors, and social service providers, in addition to educators.
- Concrete and measurable goals for program performance and student performance. Good record keeping and on-going evaluation of progress toward those goals.

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Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review

National Center for School Engagement

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review

Communities across the nation are taking a renewed interest in the problem of poor school attendance. Truancy reduction programs designed to serve students who have attendance problems are rapidly being organized according to a number of models. Some are school-based, others court-based, and some operate through community service agencies. All share the same general purposes: to improve school attendance in the short term, with the longer term goals of raising grades and encouraging high school graduation for students who are at risk of dropping out.

As the search intensifies for ways to nip truancy in the bud and reverse established patterns of school skipping, more people are seeking sources of information about the causes and outcomes of poor attendance, and about practices that effectively reduce truancy. In general, the literature surrounding truancy is in its infancy. Researchers are just beginning to add studies on school attendance to the vast quantity of work on at-risk and delinquent youth. This document seeks to summarize what we know to date, and point to areas in need of further study.

How Extensive is the Truancy Problem?

The scope of the truancy problem is difficult to measure, and data are extremely limited. The first obstacle to data reporting and consistency occurs at the classroom level. The accuracy of school attendance records depends upon the accuracy of attendance taking. The second difficulty is at the level of school district practice and policy. Many schools and school districts record absences as excused unless proven otherwise. Attendance secretaries may be unable to distinguish between legitimate and fraudulent excuses, and as a result, the number of reported unexcused absences is

difficult to establish with any certainty. The third and perhaps greatest obstacle is the lack of consistent data reporting requirements at the state level. Since both compulsory education rules and the definition of truancy are set according to state law, calculating the number of truants across multiple states is like adding apples and oranges. Some states require children to start school at age five, while others do not mandate attendance until age eight. Students must attend school until they are 16 in most states, but a number have increased the age to 17 or 18. Theoretically, data can be summarized across schools within each state, yet, averaging truancy rates across rural and urban districts, or high and low income districts, may obscure important patterns.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires, for the first time, that school districts submit attendance data to their state government if they are to receive federal money for education. Although the NCLB data reporting measure is a positive move, in and of itself it is insufficient to produce a global picture of truancy. For one thing, there is no requirement that states turn those data over to any federal agency. Secondly, states are allowed to define their own formulas for calculating truancy rates, so the rates that schools report will still not be comparable across states. At the time of this writing, not all states have determined the required formulas. Of concern is the possibility that requiring attendance data will create an incentive for some schools to push out students who have attendance problems, rather than try to re-engage them and risk continued absences. A student who has withdrawn cannot be absent.

Although we do not have data on the incidence of truancy, we do have data on the number of truancy-related court filings. According to juvenile court statistics gathered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the number of petitioned truancy cases increased 92% from just over 20,000 in 1987 to almost 40,000 in 1996 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). The same data show the rate of truancy petitions per

1,000 young people aged ten or older increased 97% among black students, 70% among white students, and 11% for students of other races. It is not clear to what extent these trends reflect an increase in the incidence of truancy versus an increase in the propensity of schools to send truants to court. However, a national review of discipline issues in schools conducted in 1996-1997 found that school principals perceived student absenteeism and tardiness to be the two most serious problems in their schools (Fiore et al., 1997).

One example of the prevalence of truancy in our major cities may be derived from a study using Denver Public Schools data from school years 2002/03 to 2004/05. Average unexcused absences per year ranged from just under six for elementary school students, to over eight for middle school students, and to around 17 for high school students. Almost 20% of all DPS students missed at least ten days without a valid excuse, causing them to meet the legal definition of 'truant' in Colorado[1]. Truancy peaked during 9th grade, then tapered off, presumably as the most truant students reached the mandatory attendance age of 16 and dropped out (MacGillivary & Mann-Erickson, 2006).

Though we still cannot see the extent of the truancy forest, we are beginning to understand the life cycle of the trees within that forest. This article summarizes the growing body of research on the causes of truancy, and then on its outcomes or correlates. Lastly, it will review the lessons we have learned based on research to date.

What Factors put Children at Risk for Truancy?

An overwhelming proportion of truant youth face major problems in their lives that challenge their ability to attend school. Contributors to truancy are often divided into

[1] Section 22-33-107, Colorado Revised Statutes.

school, family, and personal factors (Bell et al., 1994, Corville-Smith et al., 1998). Family factors include homelessness (Twaite & Lampert, 1997), poverty, single-parent families, large family size, and transportation difficulties (Jones et al., 2002). Other family factors such as elevated levels of family conflict, and ineffective parental disciplinary practices including inconsistency, both extremes of over-protectiveness and neglect, and rejection also play a role (Bell et al., 1994, Corville-Smith et al., 1998). McNeal (1999) finds that, although all forms of parental involvement result in lower rates of truancy, the beneficial effects of parental involvement are greater among families with higher levels of socio-economic status.

School factors include poor relations with teachers (Corville-Smith et al., 1998), inappropriate academic placement (Jones et al., 2002), and ineffective and inconsistently applied attendance policies (Bell et al., 1994). Pellerin (2000) explores the effect of advanced placement (AP) classes. She finds that high schools in which students are partitioned into AP and non-AP groups promote what she calls disengagement, which she measures by levels of class-cutting. Her results have not been replicated, however. An ethnographic study conducted in a large, multi-ethnic urban high school uses three theories of organizational culture, described as lenses of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. Using these approaches, she dissects attendance policies and the confusion surrounding them. She paints a complex picture of how jointly held, but conflicting visions of school identity result in inconsistent application of attendance policies. The inconsistency is noticed by students, causing confusion on one hand and a perception of unfairness on the other (Enomoto, 1994).

Personal factors include poor self-esteem, feelings of academic incompetence, poor relationships with other students (Corville-Smith et al., 1998), and gang involvement (Fritsch et al., 1999). Truants generally report less attachment to school,

and less satisfactory experiences at school, than non-truants. School commitment is sometimes viewed as an intervening variable (Jenkins, 1995) that can mediate the effects of some family variables, such as mother's education and parental involvement, but not others, such as large family size and living in a single parent family. The literature generally differentiates school refusal, which is based on a diagnosed school phobia, from other causes of truancy (King & Bernstein, 2001), offers an extensive literature review); however, from a school's point of view, the outcomes are one and the same.

Data on 634 students served by seven Truancy Reduction Demonstration Programs funded by the OJJDP reveal the depth of the challenges faced by truant youth. Eighty-seven percent qualified for free or reduced lunch, 19% had individual education plans, indicating a need for special education of some kind, 15% had school discipline problems at program intake, and 13% had juvenile justice involvement at program intake – a high proportion considering 70% of the students were not yet in high school. Thirty-six percent lived with only one adult in the home, and 20% lived with no working adult in the home (Finlay, 2006).

The most serious home problems often result in interventions by protective services. Records of over 17,000 New York City children in foster care reveal dismal school attendance rates – only 76.2% before being placed out of the home, and 77.7% afterward (Conger & Rebeck, 2001). A study of Colorado truants with persistent attendance problems included an analysis of juvenile justice records, which were available for 29 of the 30 study participants. The records showed that twelve of the 29 youth (41%) had been removed from their homes at some point by the child welfare agency. Out-of-home stays ranged from 19 days to over three years, with an average of almost one year each (Heilbrunn, 2004).

The juvenile magistrate who ruled on truancy cases in Denver took an unofficial tally of the major issues he found to exist among the truants whom he saw in court on one day early in 2003. Of the 40 truants, only three revealed no readily discernable underlying problem. A wide range of issues surfaced among the 37 remaining students including child neglect, abandonment, mental and physical health concerns including substance abuse among both parents and students, and 18 prior referrals to health and human services (Heilbrunn, 2004).

Mental and physical health problems, poverty, and family dysfunction can contribute to truancy, as can negative aspects of a student's school experience, such as bullying or feelings of academic failure. Personal academic motivation may help a child overcome some of these challenges, but given the seriousness of some of the issues faced by chronic truants, many need significant support to get them back on track.

Outcomes and Correlates of Truancy

Truancy has been clearly shown to be related to high school dropout, substance use and abuse, and delinquency. The relationships are circular, rather than linear. That is, truancy can be both a cause and a consequence of any of these troubling behaviors.

Connections to High School Dropout

The link between truancy and dropout has been demonstrated by a number of studies that show that dropouts may begin having attendance problems as early as 1st grade (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), or 4th to 8th grade (Morris et al., 1991). Students who skip significant numbers of classes often fail to earn credit for those classes, either because they also neglect homework and fail tests, or because of mandatory attendance requirements set by the schools. Students who have experienced school retentions and are overage for grade as a result, are at greater risk of high school dropout, even when the

retentions occur in the early grades (Abrams & Haney, 2004; Herzenhorn, 2004; Roderick, 1995). When they occur in high school, the chances of giving up on a degree are even greater. Baker et al. (2001) provide a more thorough review of a larger number of retention studies, a task beyond the scope of this article. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey show that attendance and other behavioral engagement measures have an effect not only on high school graduation, but, for those who do graduate, on college enrollment and graduation as well (Finn, 2006).

Several studies document the failure of truants to earn credits and progress on schedule. A study of the class of 2000 in Philadelphia shows that time enrolled in school does not necessarily equate to educational accomplishment. Researchers found that most Philadelphia dropouts spent several years registered in their high schools, but earned very few credits during those years (Neild & Farley, 2004). A recent analysis conducted in Denver Public Schools shows that high school graduates in the class of 2004 missed an average of 14 days over the school year, while those who dropped out in that year missed 53 days. Over 25% of the original freshman class had fallen behind by at least one year, and affected students reported that poor attendance had been a contributing factor. Graduates averaged a 2.86 GPA (B-), compared with 1.0 GPA (D) for dropouts (Hubbard, 2005).

Several studies analyze the motivational factors that keep young people in school or cause them to drop out. Hardre and Reeve (2003) find that a combination of three factors successfully predicted 27% of the variation in attitudes toward dropping out. One of those factors alone – school performance – predicts 17% of the variation in dropout intentions. School performance, as measured by standardized achievement tests, is heavily impacted by attendance (Caldas, 1993; Lamdin, 2001). Data from the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect show that students with 95% attendance

were more than twice as likely to pass standardized achievement tests as students who attended only 85% of the time (Kelly et al., 2005). Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison (2006) surveyed young people who left high school without graduating and find that, depending on the grade level in which they dropped out, between 33% and 45% say they missed class often during the year before they dropped out, and between 59% and 65% say they missed class frequently during the year in which they dropped out. Truancy, therefore, is a clear warning that a child may drop out.

The NCLB has had a profound influence on schools' incentive structure. NCLB requires that states set academic improvement goals based on standardized test scores and graduation rates, with the goal of 100% test proficiency and 100% high school graduation by the year 2014. However, test score accountability has been enforced much more strictly than graduation rate accountability. School administrators are keenly aware that a school is better off if low-performing students drop out (including most severely truant students) than if they take standardized tests and reduce the school's chances of earning Annual Yearly Progress (Losen, 2004). A review of the records of New York City Public Schools found that over 160,000 students were "discharged" between 1997 and 2001; the figure represents the number of students who were dropped from the rolls by the schools, not necessarily those who dropped out voluntarily. Although attendance records of the discharged students were not included in the report, students with poor grades, learning disabilities, and English language learner status were over-represented in the group. The author hypothesizes that many of these students were forcibly dropped as part of an effort by schools to avoid being identified as low-performing (Gotbaum, 2002). Long before the enactment of NCLB, research documented how strict and unevenly applied high school disciplinary procedures target disruptive and truant students and create an

environment that encourages dropout rather than high school completion (Bowditch, 1993).

Although the incidence of unexcused absence is are hard to pin down, we have a better idea of what high school dropout and graduation rates actually look like, and they are nowhere near what schools generally release to the media or post on their websites. When students stop attending, high schools generally assume they have transferred rather than dropped out. Dropout rates are counted only in terms of the number of students who take the time to fill out the drop forms. Graduation rates are based on the unverified assumption that many dropouts have moved elsewhere and their numbers are removed from the denominator as well as the numerator of the equation. Another common practice is to divide the number of graduates in June by the number of entering seniors in the previous September – so any student who dropped out before beginning his or her senior year is not counted. However, data show that most dropping out occurs long before students earn enough credits to be considered seniors. A number of recent studies seek to calculate more accurate graduation rates by focusing on larger geographic areas and taking city or statewide demographic changes into account. These studies, while differing slightly in their estimates, show general agreement in concluding that roughly 1/3 of our children are not graduating with a regular diploma four years after they enter high school (Barton, 2004; Barton, 2005; Greene, 2002; Greene & Winters, 2005).

Connections to High School Expulsion

A study of students expelled from Colorado schools found that nearly half of the youth had been chronically truant in the year prior to the expulsion, and 20% of the sample had been expelled for truancy (Seeley, K. & Shockley, H., 1995). (The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) advocates *never* suspending or expelling a child for truancy.) A 1998 survey of all Colorado school districts indicates that most teachers

and school administrators believe they can identify students who will eventually develop chronic truancy problems as early as second or third grade and further believe these same students are often those who later become disengaged with school and eventually drop out or are expelled.

Connections to Substance Use

Although most work focuses on the relationship between substance use and school problems generally,[2] a number of studies have looked specifically at truancy. Data from the Rochester Youth Study show a clear, linear relationship between truancy and the initiation of marijuana use. Among 14-year-olds, students who report skipping occasional classes are four times as likely to initiate marijuana use as students who reported never skipping class. Those who reported skipping between one and three days are seven times as likely, and those who reported missing four to nine days were 12 times as likely to initiate marijuana use. Chronic truants, defined as those who report missing ten or more days in a school year, are 16 times more likely to initiate use as non-skippers (Henry & Huizinga, 2005).

The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (Rainone et al.1993) conclud that serious truants are prone to substance abuse at much higher rates than non-truants, and that about 24% of serious truants need alcohol or drug treatment, while only 10% of moderate truants and 3% of non-truants need such treatment. Evidence from a Massachusetts study shows that truancy is also predictive of blunt[3] use (Soldz et al., 2003). And data from *Monitoring the Future*, collected in schools, show that even among high school seniors, those who admitt to truancy have higher rates of marijuana use than those who are not truant (Bachman et al., 1998). A

[2] Perhaps the best, most recent work is drawn from the Adolescent Health Survey. Blum, Beuhring and Rinehart (2000) found that frequent problems with school work are predictive of both cigarette and alcohol use.

[3] Blunts are hollowed out cigars stuffed with marijuana.

study conducted among 10th and 12th graders at one urban Michigan high school shows that truancy is a consistent predictor of high levels of cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use, as well as binge drinking. However, it does not predict changes in substance use between 10th and 12th grade, leading the authors to conclude that young truants develop patterns of substance use early and tend not to change those patterns greatly (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002). A meta-analysis of data from 28 communities shows that truancy, along with low-GPA and recent sexual activity, is a strong predictor of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use for 7th to 12th graders, but that truancy is a particularly strong predictor for the middle school students (Hallfors et al., 2002).

Connections to Juvenile Delinquency

The correlation between school failure and delinquency is well established (Balfanz et al., 2003; Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1990; Hawkins & Lishner, 1987; Smith, 2000; Wang et al., 2005). In Hirshi's (1969) landmark book, *Causes of Delinquency*, he proposed that a lack of school bonding releases students from their connection to conventional society and thereby leads to delinquent behavior. Since that time, many researchers continue to establish this link (Empey, 1982; Farrington, 1996; Thornberry, 1996).

Truancy as a specific type of school problem clearly relates to delinquency. Farrington (1996) finds that of the 400 youth in their Cambridge, England study, 48% of truants were convicted of delinquency, while only 14% of non-truants were convicted. Researchers conducting the OJJDP study entitled "Causes and Correlates of Juvenile Delinquency" identify three pathways to boys' problem behavior and delinquency. Truancy is an early, and key, step in what they call the "authority avoidance pathway"

(Huizinga et al., 1994)[4]. Data from the Rochester Youth Study, one of the three studies contributing to the "Causes and Correlates" work, show a startling relationship between self reports of truancy and delinquency. Students who report skipping occasional classes are four times as likely as non-skippers to report having committed a serious assault, almost five times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime, and twice as likely to have been arrested. Chronic truants are 12 times as likely to report having committed a serious assault, 21 times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime, and almost seven times as likely to have been arrested as non-skippers (Henry & Huizinga, 2005).

Truant youth contribute significantly to the incidence of daytime crime. Data from the National Incidence Reporting System indicate that the number of crimes committed by school age youth in Denver during school hours exceed those committed after school (MacGillivary & Mann-Erickson, 2006). When truancy is addressed, crime and delinquency rates drop. A drop in the crime rate occurred when police conducted truancy sweeps in Miami (Berger & Wind, 2000) and St. Petersburg, Florida, (Gavin, 1997), and when Tulsa County Schools successfully reduced truancy through a new policy of filing court cases (Wilson, 1993). The Dallas Police Department successfully reduced gang-related crime by aggressively pursuing truant youth (Fritsch et al., 1999).

Connections to Other Risky Behaviors

Young people who skip school also engage in a number of risky behaviors. Adolescent Health Survey data show school problems, including truancy, to be related to weapon related violence, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and early sexual intercourse. The effects hold for the population in general, and for almost every combination of ethnic group and risk factor (Blum et al., 2000). Data from the "Monitoring the Future" study

[4] Study participants present the specific correlations between school problems and delinquency in other publications. See Huizinga & Jakob-Chien, 1998, and Huizinga et al, 2000.

show that truancy is predictive of drinking, driving after drinking, and riding in a car with someone who has been drinking (O'Malley & Johnston, 1999). In an anonymous survey of 25 Colorado truants, 12 report having carried a gun or other weapon at least once. Even if the weapons were intended for defensive purposes only, the figure is indicative of a high potential for violence in these young people's lives (Heilbrunn, 2004).

Connections to Adult Crime

Though data on the relationship between truancy and adult criminal behavior are limited, chronic truancy clearly leads to high school dropout and dropouts are greatly over-represented among prison and jail inmates. Bureau of Justice data from 1997 (Harlow, 2003) show that while 18.4% of the general population had neither a high school degree nor a GED, fully 41.3% of the incarcerated population did not have a degree. By 2002, the proportion of jail inmates without a high school degree rose to 44% (James, 2004).

Heckman and Masterov (2005) conclude that "one of the best-established empirical regularities in economics is that education reduces crime." A three-state recidivism study (Steurer & Smith, 2003) compared recidivism rates between jail inmates who completed educational programs while incarcerated and those who did not complete an educational program. The study shows that in all three states—Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio—rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration rates are all significantly lower for those completing a program. Alternatively, Lochner and Moretti (2004) estimate that increasing the high school graduation rate by one percent would yield $1.8 billion dollars in social benefits, largely a result of preventing an estimated 94,000 crimes each year. A moving and in-depth study of death row inmates reveals that truancy beginning in elementary school, and a continued pattern of failure throughout school, are typical of our most tragic criminals (Schroeder et al., 2004).

Official Responses to Truancy

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDPA) instituted several regulations designed to reduce the number of juveniles, particularly status offenders, sentenced to detention, and to protect all detained juveniles from exposure to adult criminals. Following the passage of the Act, the number of truants sentenced to detention fell dramatically (Juvenile Offenders and Victims, 1999). However, the Act still allows for juveniles to be detained for failure to obey a court order. That means that a judge may write a truant a court order to attend school, and a child who does not obey that order may then be sentenced to juvenile detention without technically violating the JJDPA.

Despite the intent of the JJDPA, many judicial districts send young people to detention for failure to attend school. The practice is common enough to warrant serious reflection. Data from the *Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook* show that 784 juveniles were being held in a residential facility for truancy on the last Wednesday in October 2001. (Notably, that figure was lower compared to previous years. In 1997, 1,307 juveniles were in custody for truancy on count day, and in 1999, 913 were in custody on count day.) Multiplying the 2001 count of 784 jailed truants by 365 days in a year yields an estimate of 286,160 total days spent annually in juvenile detention for reason of truancy (Sickmund et al., 2004).

Some status offenders spend considerable amounts of time in detention. Thirty-six percent (36%) of committed status offenders had been in placement for at least 180 days on the day of the 1997 survey, and about 15% had been in placement for 360 days. That is longer than youth sentenced for property offenses, although not as long as those placed for person offenses (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

Lessons Learned

Lessons from Schools that Sought to Recapture Lost Revenue

In some cases, schools and districts have been able to recover significant amounts of funding by actively pursuing truant students. In response to a $20 million deficit, Oakland Unified School District in 2003 decided to begin prosecuting parents. The effort was specifically designed to regain up to $19 million in per pupil funding (White & Fiss, 2003). In Tulsa, Oklahoma, county officials created a system in which parents are held legally responsible for truancy on one hand, but are provided with parenting support on the other. They credit the program with increasing school enrollment by 800 students a year and regaining $300,000 in per capita funding (Gerrard et al., 2003). The Fort Worth Independent School District in Texas added $4 million in state money to their 2004-2005 budget after raising their average daily attendance by 1% the year before (Murphy, 2005).

Lessons from Truancy Reduction Program Evaluations

Several excellent sources of information about best practices are readily available. Reimer and Dimock (2005) assemble a detailed description of effective programs, policies, and practices to reduce truancy, available through the National Dropout Prevention Center. Additionally, two Web-based databases are good public sources of information on a wide range of TRPs. The NCSE maintains a growing online database of truancy reduction programs at www.schoolengagement.org. At this writing, over 130 program directors have entered information about their approaches to truancy reduction and their accomplishments. The National Dropout Prevention Center maintains a similar database that includes programs with a range of goals. Searching the database for "truancy" currently yields 60 programs.

Programs that show improvements in school attendance tend to involve intensive case management, be family focused, and incorporate both sanctions for continued truancy, and rewards for improved attendance. Project Respect in Pueblo, Colorado involves entire families in fun activities that require school attendance for participation (Baker et al., 2005). The Louisville, Kentucky truancy court meets in elementary and middle schools before the school day starts and involves "pep talks" and applause for the accomplishments of each student (Byer, 2000). Jacksonville, Florida provides a continuum of interventions, beginning with one-day Attendance Intervention Team Meetings, followed by intensive case management, and eventually results in a possibility of a one-day parental arrest for educational neglect (Finlay, 2006).

True cost/benefit studies of a broad range of truancy reduction programs have not been conducted. However, one study analyzed the costs of three Colorado truancy reduction programs (TRPs), and the three truancy courts which participants must attend if they fail these programs (Heilbrunn, 2003). The study asks how many students a program must help through graduation in order to recoup its cost. It concludes that the most expensive of the three TRPs must only result in high school graduation for one out of 115 participants in order to pay for itself. The less expensive programs need to graduate one of about 350 participants. The smallest of the three court programs must encourage one of 115 petitioned truants to graduate, while the Denver truancy court must motivate only one of 739 truants to graduate in order to be financially worthwhile. These dramatic figures suggest that any program that is demonstrably successful in returning truant students to the classroom is likely to be highly cost-effective as well.

Many, but not all, truancy reduction programs show improved attendance subsequent to intervention. A study of a police-run truancy sweep in which truants were taken to a truancy center and required to sit still and be quiet, with heads on desks, for up

to six hours before being released to parents or the school, showed little positive effects on subsequent school attendance or delinquency (Bazemore et al., 2004). The lesson from this study might be that one-time interventions that involve punishments, but no supports, are not sufficient to correct any of the underlying problems that initially prompt the truancy.

Lessons from Youth with AttendancePproblems – Students' Voices

Fires in the Bathroom (Cushman, 2003) reports students' experiences in high schools, and their advice for teachers. It is the product of extensive focus groups with students from a variety of backgrounds. A chapter is dedicated to what happens when things go wrong, the first section of which deals with truancy and dropping out. The students have a number of poignant comments about skipping school. One student sums up the affect of being overwhelmed by a huge, new school. "When I was first starting ninth grade I felt so alone. I used to cut every day, leave classes early, come in late, just to avoid being there…. Some people like just being a face in the crowd, but it made me feel like nothing." (p. 162) The students report that truancy becomes a pattern that is harder and harder to break the longer it goes on, even after cutting classes loses its appeal.

> When you skip school it's like an addiction, you skip it so much that you're like: What's the point of going, even if you want to be in the school. After a while it's not fun anymore, you're sitting there watching TV – all the stuff that was fun when you're first skipping gets a little boring. And you're like: I shoulda been in school, it would be more fun. There's this block that keeps you from going. A kid knows their life is going down the drain. But if you don't like your school, and then you skip so much that you're embarrassed to go back, then you just don't go. I used to cut and smoke, and drink, and read. I think I was depressed. (p. 166-167)

Attempts to return to class often result in sarcasm from teachers, which, not surprisingly, sends students fleeing once again. One student said that "after three straight days [of cutting] I went back and the teacher said in a sarcastic way, 'Why are you here? I'm glad

you've graced us with your presence.' And that was it, I'm like: [forget] you. I just left and didn't go back" (p. 166).

Interviews conducted among 467 high school dropouts reveal that almost all of them wish they had not dropped out. Having "missed too many days to catch up" is the second most common reason cited for dropping out, and is cited by 43% of the interviewees. Seventy percent of the participants report that having increased supervision in school to ensure that students attend their classes would improve students' chances of staying in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Once schools have exhausted their interventions, court is generally the last resort. Although judges make use of a wide range of sentencing options (Heilbrunn, 2006), little solid research has been conducted on the comparative effects of various choices. Most hotly contested is the use of juvenile detention for truants. The small, Colorado study discussed earlier asked 30 students who had spent some time in detention, whether, in retrospect, they thought they had benefited from the experience. Their assessments were fairly evenly divided, however, those who said they benefited from detention had spent considerably fewer days there than those who said they did not benefit. This may indicate that if detention is going to have a positive effect, it will do so quickly, and repeated and long sentences may be futile, or even counterproductive (Heilbrunn, 2003).

Conclusion

In general, the causes and outcomes of truancy are much more thoroughly researched than the effectiveness of various interventions. It is clear that truancy is an outgrowth of other underlying problems. Factors that contribute to truancy include family issues arising out of substance use, mental health needs, or poverty that causes parents to work long hours or requires inadequate living conditions. School factors

including whether a child feels like someone at school cares, strict policies that may have the unintended consequence of pushing students out of the classroom, and inappropriate class placements may contribute to making a child feel like he or she does not fit in to the school community. Layered on top of family and school experiences, are personal factors such as academic ability, placing a value on education, and motivation. Some truants have physical and mental health needs that make school attendance difficult.

Although truancy often results from deep-seated problems in a child's life, it creates additional problems in its wake. Although some young people miss school to care for younger siblings or to work, truancy frequently leaves young people with plenty of time to get into trouble. The frequency of risky behavior, including alcohol, tobacco and drug use, early sexual intercourse, driving or riding with a driver under the influence, and criminal activity increase with the frequency of truancy. Truants tend to do poorly in school, and fail to earn high school credits and progress toward graduation. A large proportion become discouraged and drop out altogether. Failing to earn a high school diploma is devastating for the individuals, but the negative effects of inadequate education seep throughout society. Dropouts are rarely prepared to contribute to the workforce, use more social service dollars than graduates, and require greater criminal justice expenditures than graduates.

It is in every community's interest to correct truancy before it becomes such a serious problem that it threatens high school graduation. Schools, school districts, courts, and community coalitions across the country operate a wide variety of programs to improve the attendance and achievement of struggling students. Although rigorous evaluations are few, many such programs show great promise. Truancy can be corrected, particularly among the youngest students, and among students whose attendance is addressed promptly. Punishments alone are not adequate to bring students back to the

classroom because they do not correct the causal problems. Combinations of supports, sanctions and rewards reduce truancy, and pay off for individual students and for society.

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The Legal and Economic Implications for Truancy
Executive Summary

National Center for School Engagement

July 9, 2005

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

The Legal and Economic Implications of Truancy

Executive Summary

The myriad legal and economic issues that surround truancy are intertwined and interdependent. This review paper summarizes these issues. The first section describes school attendance laws, how they are applied, and the most commonly used methods of curbing truancy. Sections two and three discuss legal issues and economic issues respectively. They address issues facing schools, truant youth, parents, community and business, and court and law enforcement. Section three includes a discussion of the costs of ignoring truancy and the benefits of addressing it. Section four discusses types of truancy prevention and reduction programs. It includes a list of best practices, and addresses the importance of monitoring and reporting program results. Section five concludes the paper with recommendations for state lawmakers, schools and school districts, courts, truancy reduction programs, and researchers. Finally, a list of additional resources is provided. Throughout the paper, many examples of successful truancy reduction programs, laws, alternative school and court structures are included.

This paper should be of use to several audiences: those who want to build political will to initiate a truancy reduction program; practitioners who work with struggling students; school, community, and court representatives will find the sections relating to their particular area of interest useful; and scholars will find a ready-made research agenda. For anyone concerned with the educational accomplishments of our up-and-coming workforce, this paper should provide a thorough introduction to the breadth and seriousness of the school attendance issue, and to the enormity of its consequences.

School attendance laws

Compulsory education laws are determined by state legislation. States typically require school attendance from the ages of six to 16, but variations in laws mean that depending on a child's state of residence, (s)he is required to attend as few as nine or as many as thirteen years of school. Only 16 states require attendance until the age typical of high school graduation. In most states, young people are entitled to receive public education until the age of 21, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that failing students who are expected to lower schools' standardized test scores are often encouraged to withdraw. State laws also vary regarding the definition of truancy. South Carolina attendance law is reproduced in an appendix. The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools and districts to report attendance rates for the first time, yet differences in state definitions mean that no aggregated national data on truancy will be available even under the new regulations.

Legal issues and perspectives

Schools face a number of laws and regulations on how attendance is recorded, how enrollment is calculated, grade retention policies, zero-tolerance policies, reintegration of incarcerated students, their responsibility to pursue truants, and by the No Child Left Behind Act. As a last resort, schools must file court cases but have no say in how they will be handled or how the court is organized. And , school officials must be aware that parents and students can, and sometimes do, file law suits.

Truants face direct legal consequences of poor attendance. Many schools automatically fail students who miss a designated number of class periods. If the school files a truancy petition, the student must appear in court and face court sanctions. Yet the indirect legal consequences of

truancy may be more severe. Truants are more likely than average to become involved with both juvenile and adult criminal justice systems.

Compulsory attendance laws often stipulate parental responsibilities with consequences that vary according to the age of the child, state of residence, and court philosophy. Sanctions most often include fines, orders to attend school with children, or attend parenting classes. In the extreme, parents may face dependency and neglect charges, lose custody of their children, or be sentenced to jail time.

Seventy-two cities have daytime curfew laws for school-aged youth, though rarely are businesses legally prevented from serving youth. Truants are often viewed as a nuisance when they congregate in public places.

Courts and law enforcement have a wide array of choices in dealing with truants. Law enforcement departments must decide whether to pick truants up and what to do with them. The court system must decide which court will hear truancy cases; whether to hold a separate truancy docket; how to achieve consistency in sentencing across judges; what sanctions to employ, and whether and what kind of alternative truancy reduction program to offer.

Economic issues and perspectives

Truancy reduction programs (TRPs) are highly cost-effective. The average high school dropout costs society over $200,000 (discounted to the current value of the money). Yet many TRPs operate on less than $100,000 a year. Thus, if they make the difference between graduation and dropout for even one child annually, they may be viewed as a sound investment of public funds.

Attendance has economic implications for schools. On one hand, most schools are funded based on attendance during “count day” or “count week.” On the other hand, truant students are

expensive to educate; they use more counselor time, generate more disciplinary referrals, and require more tutoring. Schools have more incentive to promote good attendance when funding is based on average daily attendance throughout the year.

Economic hardship both contributes to and is exacerbated by truancy. Parents who work long hours cannot monitor school attendance. Those who have trouble paying bills tend to move frequently – a risk factor for school dropout. Truancy exacerbates these problems when parents must take time off from work to address their children's school attendance or pay court fines. Yet the greatest cost of truancy that leads to high school dropout is incurred in lost earning potential. High school graduates earned over $8,000 more than dropouts in 2000.

Business has a dual interest in school attendance. In the short run, truants may be customers of local stores, but may also be responsible for shoplifting. In the long run, American business benefits from a more educated workforce.

Although law enforcement and courts incur costs when they deal with truants, those costs will be offset by savings in handling delinquency and adult criminality in the future. The cost to law enforcement of handling truancy can be minimized by setting up truancy drop-off centers. The cost to courts can be minimized by using alternatives to juvenile detention.

Truancy Prevention and Reduction Programs

Truancy reduction programs (TRPs) take a wide variety of forms. They may operate in one school, or cover a school district or a state. Most are organized either by schools, a court, or a community coalition. School districts use case managers, school attendance review boards, alternative schools, and distance learning options in their battle against truancy. Courts that run TRPs tend to take a social service rather than a punitive approach. Some run court programs right at the school building. Community based programs, of which there are many models, have

the advantage of drawing on a wide range of talents and funding sources, and having a broad base of support.

Regardless of the type of program, monitoring progress and outcomes is essential to maintaining support and funding. Process evaluations, outcome evaluations, and cost-benefit analyses have different worthwhile purposes. Evaluations of many programs show short run success, but few studies have followed participants long enough to know whether programs are achieving their long-term goal of high school graduation.

Summary and Recommendations

Truancy is both a cause and an effect of legal and economic problems. Research shows that truants: often come from low-income families; have parents who lack high school degrees; are victims of abuse or neglect; have mental health problems; or have parents with histories of criminality or substance abuse. Some are highly intelligent and bored with school. Regardless of a child's circumstances, unstructured time provides opportunities for youngsters to get into serious trouble. Society has a responsibility to ensure they gain the tools necessary for successful adult life; otherwise, we perpetuate the cycle of low education and low opportunity. Problems not solved among this generation will likely surface again in the next.

TRPs promote educational success, reduce juvenile and adult criminality, save taxpayer money, and generate indirect benefits via social service referrals. Their benefits will likely continue to be felt by the children of today's participants. A broad range of agencies and groups must take responsibility for making structural, systemic changes in order to improve life's opportunities for our children. The paper concludes with specific recommendations for state laws, school and school district policies, courts, truancy reduction programs, and researchers. Examples include the following.

Recommendations for state laws

- ✓ Expand data reporting laws.
- ✓ Eliminate push-out laws, and get school incentives right.
- ✓ Encourage consistency in the educational experiences of children removed from their homes by the court.

Recommendations for schools and school districts

- ✓ Make accurate attendance reporting a priority.
- ✓ *Never* assign out-of-school suspension as a punishment for truancy.
- ✓ Eliminate automatic "Fs" for students who miss a certain number of class periods. Alternatively, allow students to earn back attendance credit for unexcused absences by attending Saturday school.

Recommendations for courts

- ✓ Create a truancy docket within the juvenile or family court so that all truancy cases are heard on the same day. This saves schools significant resources in terms of personnel time, making schools more willing to file cases.
- ✓ Every youth is entitled to an advocate who may be a lawyer, a guardian ad litem, or a social service worker.
- ✓ Truancy court judges should have flexibility in sentencing options, including alternatives to juvenile detention for even the most difficult cases.

Recommendations for truancy reduction programs

- ✓ Catch problems early, and act aggressively.
- ✓ Gain trust and support of parents and students by advocating for truant youth and their families.
- ✓ Use both carrots and sticks in dealing with truants and parents.

Recommendations for researchers

- ✓ Are there different typologies among truants? In other words are there subsets of truants with different characteristics, motivations and likely outcomes?
- ✓ What is the interaction between truancy and delinquency? What characteristics are predictive of the truant-only, delinquent-only, and truant-delinquent populations?
- ✓ Above all, how can we best motivate students with poor attendance problems to return to class, stay there, and graduate?

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Chapter Two: Truancy Programs

- **Guidelines For A National Definition Of Truancy And Calculating Rates**
- **How To Evaluate Your Truancy Reduction Program**
- **Truancy Prevention In Action: Best Practices And Model Truancy Programs: Executive Summary**
- **Blueprints For Violence Prevention Programs That Reduce And/Or Improve School Attendance**
- **Using A Typology For Truancy Prevention**

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Guidelines for a National Definition of Truancy And Calculating Rates

National Center for School Engagement

August 2006

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Guidelines for Defining Truancy and Calculating Rates

Considerations in Defining Truancy

Generally, most educators and court personnel who deal with truancy define it as an unexcused absence from school. Beyond this general understanding is a myriad of state and local permutations that qualify and quantify truancy through statutes, policies, regulations, and even school building codes of student conduct. The intent of this document is not to prescribe a national definition, but rather to advise on important elements to consider. New federal requirements make state education agencies determine a school-by-school truancy rate. The first step is for the appropriate state agency to decide what "truancy" means. Then they can begin to develop a formula for a rate. This publication is designed to help those who take on the task of defining and reporting truancy.

Sample Definition

The following is a generic definition of truancy that fits many states' policies. It is offered as a starting point. As with any definition, there are questions raised in interpreting and implementing it. Some of these questions follow the definition.

Unexcused Absence/Truancy- *If a student is absent without an excuse by the parent/guardian or if the student leaves school or a class without permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, it will be considered to be an unexcused absence and the student shall be considered truant.*

Questions to consider include:

1. What constitutes an "excuse"? Need it be written? If so, is an e-mail message good enough? Will a phone call suffice? Must the excuse be verified by a school official?

2. How many truancies can occur before the school is required to intervene with parents, sanction students, and make court referrals?

3. How are parents notified that their child is truant?

4. What if the school does not agree with the parent's decision to excuse an absence?

5. Are suspended students considered truant?

All of these questions require either state or local policies in order to interpret and implement them in the real word of school management. Because of differences in the way states answer these and other questions, aggregating state data into a national rate is problematic. Any federal reporting requirements must acknowledge state and local differences in the definition of truancy and its implementation.

Components of a Truancy Definition

Minimally, the following considerations should be made in formulating any complete policy statement about truancy. These are the areas that should be clarified:

1) Truancy is any absence unexcused by the school. An absence that is excused by a parent but not by school officials is still a truancy.
2) Truancy applies even if only part of the day is unexcused. In secondary school, students often skip one or two periods but attend the rest of the day.
3) Truancy is determined only if a case is reviewed. There should be a review and determination by a school official that the absence was unexcused before it is labeled a truancy.
4) Truancy is a term reserved for cases that are referred to court: The "truancy" label should only apply to students who have so many unexcused absences that they have triggered a court referral. This level of truancy is often referred to in statutes as "chronic truancy".
5) Truancy only applies to students between the ages of compulsory school attendance. Truancy is a term applied only to absences accrued by students who are required by state law to attend school.

The Federal Requirements for Truancy Reporting

Beginning with the 2005-06 school year, state education agencies are required to report truancy "rates" on a school-by-school basis to the US Department of Education. The specific federal requirements appear on the following page[1]:

[1] Information provided by Janelle Krueger, Colorado Department of Education, Division of Prevention Initiatives, 2004.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: **Title IV, Part A, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities; SEC. 4112. RESERVATION OF STATE FUNDS FOR SAFE AND DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS.**

(c) State Activities

(3) UNIFORM MANAGEMENT INFORMATION AND REPORTING SYSTEM-

(A) INFORMATION AND STATISTICS- A State shall establish a uniform management information and reporting system.

(B) USES OF FUNDS- A State may use funds described in subparagraphs (A) and (B) of subsection (b)(2), either directly or through grants and contracts, to implement the uniform management information and reporting system described in subparagraph (A), for the collection of information on —

Report to State on school-by-school basis.

(i) truancy rates;

(ii) the frequency, seriousness, and incidence of violence and drug-related offenses resulting in suspensions and expulsions in elementary schools and secondary schools in the State;

(iii) the types of curricula, programs, and services provided by the chief executive officer, the State educational agency, local educational agencies, and other recipients of funds under this subpart; and

(iv) the incidence and prevalence, age of onset, perception of health risk, and perception of social disapproval of drug use and violence by youth in schools and communities.

(C) COMPILATION OF STATISTICS- In compiling the statistics required for the uniform management information and reporting system, the offenses described in subparagraph (B)(ii) shall be defined pursuant to the State's criminal code, but shall not identify victims of crimes or persons accused of crimes. The collected data shall include incident reports by school officials, anonymous student surveys, and anonymous teacher surveys.

Report to the public required.

(**D) REPORTING- The information described under subparagraph (B) shall be reported to the public and the data referenced in clauses (i) and (ii) of such subparagraph shall be reported to the State on a school-by-school basis.**

(E) LIMITATION- Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to authorize the Secretary to require particular policies, procedures, or practices with respect to crimes committed on school property or school security.

For the first time, these new federal requirements will provide a national view of truancy. If we are to marshal resources and improve social policy, this kind of data is essential for policy makers and public officials. The specific reporting processes are still being developed in many states and will not be uniform across states. Even within states,

truancy definitions sometimes vary from school to school. Because of the complexity and ambiguity of defining and reporting truancy, we will at best have a general picture of truancy trends as we move forward. Each state's definition and rate calculation will need to be reviewed at the national level, and any national report will have to be made with many qualifiers.

The Truancy Rate Calculation Example[2]

As an example, we will use the Colorado formula for calculating a truancy rate. Districts are already providing, by school, both the *Student Total Days Attended* and *Student Total Days Possible*. This forms the basis for determining the "attendance rate" which then allows the calculation of a "non-attendance" rate. A non-attendance rate differs from a truancy rate, however, since it includes excused in addition to unexcused absences. The calculation of a truancy rate according to the Colorado method follows:

Student Total Days Attended
+ Student Total Excused Absence Days
+ Student Total Unexcused Absence Days
= Student Total Days Possible

Other Ways to Calculate Rates

An alternative way to calculate Student Total Days Possible is to add the number of students enrolled in the school across each day of the school year. Following that method, the Student Total Days Possible would equal the sum of:

(Students1 + Students2 + ... + StudentsY)

[2] Example taken from a presentation titled, "State and Federal Issues of Truancy Under the No Child Left Behind Act," by Janelle Krueger, Colorado Department of Education, Division of Prevention Initiatives. Presentation at "Partnering to Prevent Truancy" conference hosted by Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, December 2004.

where Students1 equals the number of students enrolled on the first day of the school year, and StudentsY equals the number enrolled on the last day of the school year.

Regardless of the method chosen, the question arises of how to count one "day" of attendance or absence. The calculation is best performed in secondary schools as the sum of periods attended (or missed) in order to be most accurate. A student who sleeps in and misses every first period all year should be thought of neither as "never truant" nor as "always truant". However, in high school, a policy decision still needs to be made regarding how to code free periods during which the student does not need to report to anyone. If the student misses all other periods during the day it is reasonable to mark the student absent during free periods as well. But what about days in which the student attends some classes but not others? Rules regarding how to count days present and days absent must be decided upon, and can be expected to vary across schools and districts.

Note that ideally, Student Total Days Possible is not the product of the total number of school days in the year and the official number of students registered in the school. The reason is that the true number of registered students changes throughout the year, but the official number is usually a tally of students present in school on only one particular day or during one particular week. Some students enroll after the school year has begun and others leave before the end of the year, so the average number of students enrolled in the school on any given day may differ from the official count. If average enrollment drops after count day, using the official enrollment number will inflate the total number of school days possible and make the truancy rate look smaller than it really is. If overall enrollment grows after count day, using the too-small enrollment number will shrink the total days possible and inflate the truancy rate.

Once a count of Student Total Days Possible has been made, the rest is easy. Divide Student Total Unexcused Absence Days by Student Total Days Possible to yield a truancy rate. Multiply that rate by 100 to yield a truancy percent.

$$\frac{\text{Student Total Unexcused Absence Days}}{\text{Student Total Days Possible}} = \text{Truancy Rate}$$

Conclusion

Clearly, every state will wrestle with the definitional complexities and the calculation process and find reasons to question the final rates. A key variable is how schools count who is "enrolled" to find the possible student days of attendance. Another key issue is how to decide whether an absence is excused or unexcused. It is inevitable that arbitrary decisions will need to be made to determine who is counted, and how they should be classified. Local variations in policies and practice will be the unavoidable result.

Despite the method that schools and states choose to use, and the lack of consistency across schools, the reporting requirements of No Child Left Behind mean that we will at last have a reasoned estimate of truancy that can inform public policy. We need to focus national attention on attendance; truancy rate reporting will help us better understand how many students are missing school and missing learning so that we can develop state and national strategies to improve school engagement.

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HOW TO EVALUATE YOUR TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAM

National Center for School Engagement

September 2005

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

How to Evaluate Your Truancy Reduction Program

Plan Ahead

- It is best to plan for evaluation at the same time that you design your program.
- Set aside money for evaluation in your initial budget application.
- Do not give up on evaluation if you did not plan it at the beginning. Start now!

Create a Logic Model of Your Program

- Decide what outcome(s) you want. Some possibilities are improved attendance school-wide; improved attendance among participating students; improved grades among participating students; increased feelings of attachment to school among participating students, or their families, or the student body in general.

- What program components will be most likely to achieve your goals?

- Be sure your program components and your designated outcomes match. In other words, if all your interventions are aimed at a small subset of students with serious attendance problems, you may not see measurable outcomes across the entire student body. But that will not mean that your program is not working – it means your evaluation is not well designed.

Know What Kind of Evaluation You Need

- Process evaluation, also known as implementation evaluation, looks at the way in which a program is set up and is operating. It is particularly relevant when an established program already shown to be effective is being copied in a new location. Unless the program is implemented as intended, one cannot expect to achieve the same good results. Process evaluation lends itself to both qualitative and quantitative data collection.

- Outcome evaluation measures the effects of a program once it has been established. A program will not likely be ready for an outcome evaluation until it has been in operation for some time – generally a year or more. If begun too early, an outcome evaluation will likely show no results and may unnecessarily dampen enthusiasm for a potentially good program.

- Cost-benefit analysis compares the cost of a program as measured in dollars to the outcomes of that program, also measured in dollars. If benefits are greater than costs, then the program may be said to pay off. Sometimes it is difficult to put a price on benefits; cost-effectiveness analysis may be used to compare the cost of a program as measured in dollars, to benefits measured in something other than dollars. For example, how many additional high school credits are earned as a

result of a $50,000 truancy reduction program? Cost-effectiveness analysis is most useful when comparing multiple programs.

Think About Your Data and Data Collection Methods

- Data come in two general forms, quantitative and qualitative. Each provides a distinct purpose and you must consider what kind of data will be best used.

- Studies of school attendance lend themselves easily to quantitative analysis, but the most thorough evaluations include both.

- School records can provide data on outcome measures such as grades, class credits, disciplinary referrals, and attendance, which can be correlated with race, gender and age.

- Students, parents and school personnel can be surveyed. Be careful how you formulate survey questions; borrowing from other surveys is the best way to get meaningful questions. Provide clear directions so that respondents understand how to complete the survey. Always have a professional review your survey before administering it; remember junk in – junk out.

- Interviews can include structured questions in which respondents select from a set of designated responses; these data are quantitative. Interviews may also include open-ended questions that allow respondents to answer any way they please; these questions provide qualitative data. Direct quotations should be taken.

- Focus groups bring together a group of people – usually between 5 and 10 – to discuss their experiences. Questions are open-ended and discussion is encouraged. Focus groups should be tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Focus groups provide qualitative data.

Know How to Collect and Analyze Quantitative Data

- Quantitative data are numeric; they can be counted and measured.

- Obvious examples include student grades on a 4-point scale, days or class periods attended or missed, and class credits earned.

- Quantitative data such as attendance, grades and credits may be collected from the school's administrative records. Quantitative data on the number of students served by a TRP, or the number of students who received tutoring or a family service referral, may be collected from the records of a TRP's social worker. Be sure to keep track of these things. Create a system for recording social worker interventions on an on-going basis and keep up to date.

- Most survey data are also quantitative. Administering a survey is the most practical way to collect data from a large sample of respondents. The following is an example of a quantitative survey question.

How helpful was the tutoring program in motivating you to attend class regularly? Please circle your answer.

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Not at All Helpful		*Somewhat Helpful*		*Very Helpful*

- Several computer programs are useful aids in analyzing quantitative data.

SPSS and *SAS* are statistical software packages capable of sophisticated analysis. You will need someone competent with statistics and familiar with the programs to use them. You may need to contract with a qualified consultant for your data analysis. *Microsoft Excel* is adequate for very simple record keeping and analyses, but not sufficient for advanced statistical analysis.

The Truancy Reduction Application Interface (TRAIN) is a web-based data collection and analysis program available from the National Center for School Engagement for a technical assistance fee. No statistical or programming experience is needed.

Know How to Collect and Analyze Qualitative Data

- Qualitative data are non-numeric. They are descriptive text passages, observations, field notes, records or documents, audio or video files.

- Qualitative data can come from interviews and focus groups, and sometimes from open-ended questions on written surveys. Collecting and analyzing qualitative data is time-consuming, and therefore expensive. It is most practical to collect qualitative data from a relatively small sample of respondents.

- While quantitative data are best suited for answering the "what" question, qualitative data are best for answering the "how" and "why" questions. Quantitative data may tell you a program did not work, but you will not know why it did not work without some qualitative data.

- It is best to tape record and transcribe interviews and focus groups to record actual responses.

- The following is an example of a qualitative interview question.

What effect did the tutoring program have on your class attendance?

- Several computer programs are useful aids in analyzing large amounts of qualitative data.

NVivo and *Atlas-ti* allow users to import text files, code electronically, and gather all selections with the same code for analysis. The programs themselves are

relatively user friendly, but training in qualitative data analysis is needed to know what to do with your data.

What is Longitudinal Evaluation and When Would I use It?

- Longitudinal evaluations measure changes that occur within the same group of students over time.

- They require taking a "baseline" measurement, in other words, measuring the outcome variable(s) *before* the intervention begins (or in its very early stages if need be), and comparing it to a second measurement of the same variable(s) taken at the end of the program. This is also called "pre" and "post" or a time series design.

- Both quantitative and qualitative data may be collected longitudinally, though a longitudinal study is generally thought of as having a quantitative component.

  Example of quantitative baseline data:
  (number of class periods skipped in the month prior to TRP intervention)
  (total number of class periods in the month prior to TRP intervention).

  Compare the above truancy rate to the comparable figure for the last month of TRP participation:
  (number of class periods skipped in the last month of TRP participation)
  (total number of class periods during that month).

  Was there improvement? How much? Was the change large enough to be meaningful?

- Does improvement last beyond the end of the program? Follow participants over time to find out. What happens three months after the end of the program? Six months? One year?

- Note: if attendance typically varies according to the month of the year you should consider comparing, for example, a student's attendance rate in the November prior to TRP participation, with that student's attendance rate in the November following program participation.

What are Control Groups and Experimental Groups?

- The best way to be sure that a program is having an effect is to compare students who participate in the TRP to students who do not.

- Students in the *experimental group* receive a treatment that is under evaluation – in this case, they participate in a TRP. Students in the *control group*, sometimes called the *comparison group*, do not participate. Researchers are then able to

compare changes in attendance among students in the experimental group to changes in attendance among students in the control group over time.

- Why is a control group important? If you discover only marginal improvement in attendance from one year to the next among TRP participants, you may be discouraged. However, truancy typically worsens as children get older. If attendance among your control group declines significantly over the same time period, your program may be having a greater impact than it appears based solely on participant behavior.

- In order for the comparison to be valid, experimental and control groups must be as similar as possible in as many factors as possible. First and foremost, they should have similar patterns of absences; but other variables to consider include gender, racial/ethnic background, age, economic background, and school characteristics among others.

- The best way to ensure that experimental and control groups are similar is to randomly assign students to each group. Ethics must be considered. Is it ethical to deny a truant child the services of a TRP? If your budget is limited and you cannot serve all the eligible students, perhaps it is. If your budget is large enough to serve everyone and you have good cause to believe that the program will be effective because you have copied a proven program, perhaps it is not. Do not fail to consider ethical issues.

- A good alternative source of a control group is to study students in a nearby school that does not offer a TRP. Be sure the school serves a similar population of students.

- If your evaluation budget cannot support a control group, do not give up. Survey, interview, or conduct focus groups among TRP participants to understand what effect the program had from their perspective. If they began attending class more regularly, why did they do so? Did it have anything to do with the program? Or was it mostly due to other factors? If their attendance did not improve, why?

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.

National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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TRUANCY PREVENTION IN ACTION: BEST PRACTICES AND MODEL TRUANCY PROGRAMS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Center for School Engagement

July 2005

An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
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Truancy Prevention in Action: Best Practices and Model Truancy Programs
Executive Summary

Truancy has long been identified as an educational, social and juvenile justice issue worthy of public and private attention. It has been linked to many problem behaviors in adolescence, school failure, school dropout and juvenile delinquency, among others. Many national and local agencies are working to identify the best strategy for addressing truancy. In order to improve the chances of success, it is recommended that developers focus on those programs, approaches and strategies that have already demonstrated success.

Utilizing best practices is a sound investment strategy:

- *By studying those programs that have been proven to reduce or prevent truancy, practitioners and policy-makers avoid re-creating the wheel and have more time to spend on implementation and evaluation issues.*
- *By taking advantage of the research and development efforts of others, staff has more time to spend on adapting a strategy to meet the demands of the local community.*
- *By financially supporting practices that have demonstrated success, public and private funders engage in prudent expenditure of limited monies.*

Adopting and adapting approaches that have demonstrated their success is simply the most practical strategy for developing programming given the current and reasonable focus of policy-makers and funders on clear outcomes and cost/benefit analyses.

Critical Components of Truancy Programs
As a result of the research and assessment work conducted by the Department of Education (DOE), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N), the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) and others, a set of critical components linked to positive outcomes for children and families has been identified:

Collaboration
Truancy programs that include a broad-based collaborative as part of their approach are stronger and may last longer. Most funding and government agencies now expect that new programs engage in collaborative community-based planning. OJJDP identified collaboration as a required component for initial and ongoing funding in the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program and for Title V Delinquency Prevention monies. The NDPC/N includes school-community collaboration as an effective strategy for dropout prevention. In addition, The National Network for Youth points to collaboration as an important part of successful after-school programs.

Family Involvement
Involving parents/guardians and family members in truancy prevention and intervention is critical. There is a large body of research demonstrating the positive outcomes associated with increased parent/guardian involvement in school activities including improved academic achievement and reduced likelihood of dropout. Involving parents/guardians in truancy programming is more than simply inviting their attendance at a school or court meeting. True participation means that parents/guardians are sought after for their advice, experience and expertise in the community, as clients of our public systems of care and as experts in the lives of their children. This means engaging parents/guardians as a natural course of events, not just when things are not going well.

Comprehensive Approach
Effective programs simultaneously focus on prevention and intervention. As described by the National Center for School Engagement, many factors contribute to truant behavior. Youth fail to attend school due to personal, academic, school climate, and family related issues. A truancy program may be called upon to help a family obtain counseling, advocate for a family to receive entitlement benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), negotiate a new school schedule, figure out transportation solutions, and other more traditional social work activities such as mental health evaluation and counseling services. An effective truancy plan will address these issues and be prepared to respond to the first unexcused absence of an elementary student and not give up on the 100th absence of the habitually truant adolescent youth.

Use Incentives and Sanctions
Among the list of successful truancy practices identified by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), is the use of a continuum of approaches or a combination of incentives and sanctions. Specifically, meaningful sanctions for truant behavior and meaningful incentives for school attendance are key components of promising and model truancy programs. Sanctions, traditionally used to respond to truancy, frequently mirror the punitive steps taken against other undesirable behaviors: detention, suspension, petition to juvenile court, denial of privileges, etc. Incentives tend to be recognition-based, but may include special experiences or even monetary rewards. The critical task in this area is to design sanctions and incentives that are *meaningful* to youth and their families.

Develop a Supportive Context
A supportive context is crucial to developing a sustainable and effective truancy program. Programs that exist in a supportive context are more likely to survive and thrive than those that are fighting against system infrastructure or acting in isolation. Time spent nurturing a supportive context is well worth the effort. In this case, context refers to the environment in which the truancy program engages youth and their families. The context can be determined by an umbrella agency, a neighborhood, a set of laws and policies and/or a political reality. It is in the truancy program's best interest to impact and influence this context to better serve families and to survive the inevitable changes and challenges that occur to even the best of programs.

Evaluate the Program
In these lean financial times, government agencies and private funders are limiting their investments to those programs or practices that have clearly demonstrated some success. It is imperative that programs measure their impact in an effort to improve services. In addition, the criteria used to identify whether program models and practice approaches are proven or promising rests largely on the rigor of their evaluation design. It is mandatory in this environment to collect and examine data on program outcomes.

Best Practices Improve Truancy Programming
Programs that include each of these components are stronger and more successful. How these components are incorporated into existing approaches or developed from scratch should be determined by the needs and strengths of the local community. Creativity and determination are required for successful and lasting implementation of any new program!

For a more complete discussion of truancy program development, the economic and legal impact of truancy and the importance of collaboration in truancy programming, look for the truancy series to be released in Fall 2005 by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network www.truancypreventionassociation.com in collaboration with the National Center for School Engagement www.schoolengagement.org

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The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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Blueprints for Violence Prevention Programs That Reduce Truancy and/or Improve School Attendance

National Center for School Engagement

January, 2007

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Blueprints for Violence Prevention Programs That Reduce Truancy and/or Improve School Attendance

This report describes Blueprints for Violence Prevention programs that address truancy, school attendance, and/or student achievement concerns, and the evaluation studies that have tracked these programs' outcomes. Programs become "blueprints" model programs based upon standards of program effectiveness developed by the Center for the Study of the Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The programs described here are grouped by setting: school based programs (10), community based programs (3), school and community based programs (3), and programs offered in other settings (2). Each listing includes name of the program, type of program, age of students covered, setting, program goals, program description, study design, study sample, and study outcomes. This report offers conclusions based on results from the 18 programs featured.

SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMS

Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program (formerly Preventive Intervention)

Program Type: Cognitive-Behavioral Training; School - Individual Strategies
Age: Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle - Junior
Setting: School

Program Goals: The Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program aims to prevent an increase in school failure experiences among high-risk adolescents. The program also strives to reduce school and community delinquency, including school-based problems, unemployment, criminal behavior, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Program Description: The intervention consists of four components: (a) collecting up-to-date information about students' actions from interviews with teachers and records of daily attendance, tardiness, and disciplinary action; (b) providing systematic feedback to students and/or parents about the students' actions; (c) attaching value to students' actions (e.g., students could earn points toward a special field trip by coming to school, being on time to class, receiving no disciplinary action); and (d) helping students determine strategies for modifying their behavior and thus earning more points. The program lasts for two years, with booster sessions available during the following year.

Study Design: Eighty 7th graders, including 40 from a low-income, inner-city school and 40 from a middle-class, suburban school, were matched into pairs based on relevant school failure variables. Each pair was then randomly assigned to the intervention or control group for a two year period. The control group received no treatment. During a one year post-intervention period, biweekly booster sessions were available to the experimental group. Fewer than 50% of participants attended these booster sessions; notes from the meetings were mailed to participants who did not attend the booster

sessions. Sixty three of the original 80 students participated in an interview on their employment, drug and alcohol use, and criminal behaviors during the post-intervention year. Court records of participants were analyzed five years after the intervention; at that point in time, 60 students remained in the sample.

Sample: Sixty six students completed the two year program, including 44 males and 22 females, with a mean age of 15 ½. Thirty six of these participants came from the suburban school while 30 were from the urban school; 42% were African American and 58% were white. Of the 66 students who completed the program, 63 subjects participated in the follow-up interview; school records could only be obtained for 58 of these students. Finally, 60 subjects with a mean age of 19 ½ participated in the five-year follow-up.

Outcomes: Significant differences were found after the second program year when intervention subjects' grades and attendance significantly improved while control subjects' grades and attendance continued to decline. One year after the end of the program, intervention youths were significantly more likely to have been employed and were less likely to have been involved in criminal behavior. Intervention youths also reported significantly lower rates of illegal drug use (3% of treatment youth vs. 16% of control youth), with the exception of marijuana and alcohol use, for which the intervention yielded no significant differences. Five years after the end of the program, intervention youths were 66% less likely to have a juvenile record than control youths.

Career Academy

Program Type: Academic Services; Employment – Vocational; School - Environmental Strategies
Age: Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: School

Program Goals: The goals of the Career Academy are to enhance high-, medium-, and low-risk students' engagement and performance in high school and provide them with the credentials and skills needed to make successful transitions to post-secondary education and, eventually, a career.

Program Description: Career Academies are school based programs that seek to reduce dropout rates, as well as improve school performance and career readiness among high school youth. A Career Academy (CA) is organized as a school-within-a-school, where students work in "small learning communities." Each small learning community involves a small number of students working with the same group of teachers for three or four years of high school with the aim of creating a more personalized and supportive learning environment for students. CAs use a career theme to integrate academic and vocational curricula. In an effort to build connections between school and work and to provide students with a range of career development and work based learning opportunities, CAs establish partnerships with local employers.

Study Design: A large scale, multi-site, random assignment research design was utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of CAs in achieving their goals. The researchers studied 9 CAs with a sample size of 1,764 students. Students in the sample were identified in the 8th or 9th grade and were followed through their senior year of high school. Students were identified as either posing a high-, medium-, or low-risk for dropping out of school, based on selected background characteristics and prior school experiences. Because each of the characteristics used to define the subgroups was measured before students were randomly assigned to a study group, there were no systematic differences in observed background characteristics between the treatment group and the control group within the three risk subgroups.

Data utilized in the study consisted of survey information provided by both Academy and non-Academy students in the study sample, performance indicators obtained from school records and transcripts, and standardized test scores from a test the researchers administered to the sample of students. Qualitative data was collected during field visits to each participating site.

Sample: The final sample size was n=1,764. Of these, 345 were male, and 45 were Caucasian. Ten sites were initially selected for the evaluation. One of the initial CAs was disbanded after 2 years in the study and was unable to provide sufficient follow-up data to be included in the impact analysis. The attrition rate reported for the treatment group was generally low, estimated at about 10%.

Outcomes: Among treatment group students with a high risk of dropping out, there was a significant reduction in dropout rates, improvement in attendance, increase in academic course-taking, and increase in the likelihood of earning enough credits to graduate on time. Among treatment group students with a low risk of dropping out, there was an increase in the likelihood of graduating on time. Treatment group students across risk-levels experienced an increase in vocational course-taking without reducing their likelihood of completing a basic core academic curriculum. When findings are averaged across groups, there are only slight reductions in dropout rates and modest increases in other measures of school engagement; the only significant impact was for more positive youth development experiences in the past year. CAs did not improve standardized math and reading achievement scores.

High-contrast CAs, those intervention sites where the school environment is very different from non-CA schools, produced a statistically significant lower dropout rate among medium-risk students, as well as an increase in completion of a core academic curriculum. Conversely, low-contrast CAs produced higher dropout rates, reduced attendance, and lower rates of academic course-taking for medium-risk students.

Chronic Truancy Initiative

Program Type: School - Individual Strategies
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary
Setting: School

Program Goals: The Chronic Truancy Initiative (CTI) is a school and community-based program designed to reduce absenteeism and other problems within families of identified elementary and kindergarten chronic truant youth.

Program Description: The CTI aims to decrease absenteeism among those identified as chronic truants. School attendance records are reviewed by school staff. Students who miss 20% or more days of school in a six-week period are defined as chronic truants. To reduce chronic truancy, attendance records are reviewed regularly. After truants are identified, a variety of increasingly serious measures are taken. Upon first being identified as truant, a letter is sent to the parents. If no improvement in attendance is observed, then the student is referred to a school attendance officer. Attendance records are reviewed again after the student is referred to the attendance officer; if improvement does not occur, then the child and family are referred to a social service agency. If the student remains truant after these interventions, then a uniformed police officer visits the family's home, along with the attendance officer. Finally, if attendance has not improved after these interventions have taken place, the family may be prosecuted under state compulsory attendance laws.

Study Design: Three elementary schools located in a Midwestern city participated in the CTI. Attendance data was collected from the school district's research and evaluation unit. A total of 281 students met the authors' definition of chronically truant. A pre- and post-intervention analysis was conducted in which student attendance was reviewed before and after each intervention to determine improvement. In addition, a paired samples t-test was used to determine if differences in attendance were statistically significant.

Sample: School A was composed of 50% Caucasian, 11% African American, 34% Hispanic, 4% Native American and 1% Asian youth. School B included 35% Caucasian, 8% African American, 52% Hispanic, 4% Native American and 1% Asian students. School C comprised 43% Caucasian, 18% African American, 37% Hispanic, and 2% Native American youth. Eighty five percent of the target school population and over 94% of the participants in this sample were eligible for the free or reduced school lunch program.

Outcomes: Attendance significantly improved among all truants during each of the first two intervention stages, receiving a letter from the principals and being referred to the attendance officer. Attendance for all truants improved slightly but non-significantly during the third stage of the intervention, referral to social services. However, attendance was *reduced* slightly but non-significantly for all truants during the final stage of intervention, contact by police; this final phase signified a negative effect of participation in the intervention.

Of the 281 students in the sample, 204 met the definition of a chronic truant and 77 were considered nonchronic (missing less than 20% of school days). When data were re-examined, the positive effects of the first two intervention stages remained significant

among the chronically truant. Effects on attendance for nonchronic truants, however, were *negative* although nonsignificant.

Comer School Development Program

Program Type: School - Environmental Strategies
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle - Junior
Setting: School

Program Goals: The Comer School Development Program (SDP) aims to create a positive, supportive, and wholesome school climate devoid of interpersonal violence. The program is also designed to promote and support children's development in six interrelated domains: physical, language, ethical, social, psychological, and academic.

Program Description: The Comer School Development Program (SDP) addresses various aspects of school climate related to the prevention and reduction of violence in the school setting. There are three main program components: (a) a school planning team that involves parents and school staff in making the critical decisions that shape school policy, influence school climate, and direct school programs; (b) a student and staff support team composed of mental health professionals and child development experts, whose task is to identify and/or develop ways to address developmentally and socially appropriate responses to issues affecting students and staff, including violence; and (c) a parent involvement program that engages parents in meaningful ways in the life of the school. Because the program adheres to the philosophy that each school should determine its own academic and social goals, the SDP specifies only the processes and structures needed to establish, monitor, and modify these goals.

Study Design 1: A four-year randomized experiment featured 23 middle schools, repeated measurement with more than 12,000 students and 2,000 staff, a survey of more than 1,000 parents, and extensive access to students' records. Prince George's County, Maryland was selected for study because of its predominantly African-American school population and its considerable internal variation in household economic standing. Twenty-three of the 25 middle schools in Prince George's County were included in the study. Students were studied in three adjacent cohorts that began in seventh grade in 1991, 1992, or 1993. Since students attend middle schools for 2 years, the total study period in these schools was 4 years.

Each year, questionnaires were used to assess staff judgments of program implementation quality, student and staff judgments of school climate, and students' reports of their social and psychological development. Averaging across schools, years, and the two questionnaires, 81% of eligible school staff completed questionnaires. During the program's second year, a telephone survey was conducted with a random sample of parents from each school who had given consent for their child to be in the study. A total of 1,046 parents completed the survey, for an average per-school response rate of 54% of those selected into the random sample. In addition, school records were used for annual assessments of each student's school performance, and interviews were conducted with

the coordinator and the facilitators of the county School Development Program. At the end of the first and last years, telephone interviews were conducted with each principal, and in one year a telephone interview was also conducted with a random sample of parents from each school.

Sample 1: The eligible population consisted of 22,314 students who were enrolled in the 23 middle schools when the early-seventh-grade questionnaire was distributed. Across the three cohorts, active consent was obtained by 77% of the eligible students. Because active consent was only obtained from 50% of the Latino students, they were excluded from the sample. This left 12,398 students in the longitudinal sample; these participants were 66% African American, 24% Caucasian, 4% Asian American, and 6% of other ethnic backgrounds. According to student reports, 63% of students in the sample lived with both biological parents and 12% lived in single parent families; 83% of fathers or male guardians and 69% of mothers or female guardians were employed full time. Five percent of mothers did not complete high school, 34% were high school graduates, and 35% were college graduates.

Outcomes 1: The most evident program effect related to academic achievement, as the Comer schools showed less of a drop in grade point average when the three cohorts were combined. No reliable main effects emerged in regard to staff or student ratings of school climate.

Study Design 2: Using 5th through 8th grade students, the Comer School Development Program was evaluated in 10 inner city Chicago schools over four years, contrasting them with 9 randomly selected no-treatment comparison schools. All schools, whether treatment or controls, wanted to be in the Comer program. The schools entered the study at differing times, either in the fall of 1991, 1992, or 1993. Data collection continued in all schools until the end of the 1996-1997 school year. In the first year a school entered the study, student outcome questionnaires were administered in late fall as a pretest. Thereafter, testing took place at the end of every school year. Each spring, students completed a questionnaire focusing on school climate. Later in the spring, staff filled out a questionnaire about the quality of program implementation and perceptions of school climate. Two study designs were utilized to test the impact of the Comer SDP: a cross sectional design and a three and four year longitudinal design.

Sample 2: The schools in this study were located in economically disadvantaged African-American neighborhoods in Chicago. Most of the students had parents or guardians with no education beyond high school, and more children lived in homes without two biological parents than with them. Average test scores began at about the 30th percentile; their standard deviations suggest that very few students scored above the 50th percentile.

Outcomes 2: At the school level, results indicated that the program reduced negative social behaviors. Students in Comer schools reported relatively less acting out over time and less anger than youth in control schools. For both reading and math, program schools started about 3 points below the controls and finished at the same level; however, these are considered small changes by conventional statistical standards.

Study Design 3: During the 1982-83 school year, four elementary schools were selected to participate in the first phasing-in of the Social Development Program in the Benton Harbor Area schools. The following criteria were used in selecting the schools: (a) principal's interest in the program, (b) low level of student achievement, and (c) high rate of student behavior problems. Three additional schools were selected during the 1984-85 school year. The purpose of the analysis was to determine what, if any, changes occurred in student achievement and other school-related behaviors from the first year of the program implementation to the 1985-86 academic year.

Sample 3: The school populations varied from 341 to 864 students. The student populations of all four schools were considered low-income; ethnic composition ranged from 76 to 94 percent African American. As indicated by scores on the California Achievement Test (CAT), students enrolled in three of the four schools were functioning below national standards at all grade levels.

Outcomes 3: Program schools experienced gains in Reading, Mathematics, and the Total Battery on the CAT. In Reading, the average gain for the program schools equaled that of the district as a whole at the second-grade level and exceeded the district gains at the 5^{th} and 6^{th} grade levels. In Mathematics, the average gain for program schools exceeded that of the district at the 2^{nd} and 4^{th} grade levels. The proportion of students in program schools achieving at least 75 percent of the objectives in Mathematics ranged from 45 percent in 1982 to 78 percent in 1985. In 1983 and 1985 the increases in the proportion of students achieving at least 75 percent of the objectives in Mathematics were larger in program schools than in the district as a whole. Program schools also experienced a larger increase than the district as a whole among students attaining at least 75 percent of the objectives in Reading.

The number of suspension days for program schools declined steadily between 1982-83 and 1984-85. Suspensions decreased by 8 percent in 1983-84 and by 19 percent in 1984-85. In comparison, the district as a whole experienced a 34 percent increase in suspensions in 1984-85. Absenteeism among program schools declined by 18 percent between 1982-83 and 1984-85. Corporal punishments in program schools declined by 80 percent in 1983-84 and 100 percent in 1984-85. The district as a whole experienced a 23 percent decline in corporal punishments in 1983-84 and 36 percent in 1984-85.

Operation SAVE KIDS

Program Type: Diversion; Parent Training; School - Individual Strategies
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: School

Program Goals: Operation SAVE KIDS aims to reduce truancy and instill a sense of responsibility in students and their parents.

Program Description: Operation Save Kids is a truancy program that requires school personnel to monitor school attendance closely and contact parents promptly if their children have three days of unexcused absence. Parents must respond, outlining measures they have taken to ensure that their children are attending school. If a child continues to be truant, the school notifies the prosecutor or law enforcement agency to request that criminal charges be filed against the parents. However, the prosecutor can offer families a deferred prosecution diversion program designed to strengthen family relationships and encourage youths to go to school.

Study Design: A one-group, pretest-posttest study was conducted in Peoria, Arizona. Operation Save Kids was implemented in 15 school districts (12 elementary and 2 high schools), in 10 cities and towns, in western Maricopa County (more than 60 schools & 56,000 students). By the end of the 1995-1996 school year, WESTMARC had contact with 292 truancy students and their families.

Sample: No further sample description was provided.

Outcomes: Within the first two years of the program, daytime juvenile property rates declined by 65% and citywide truancy was cut in half. When parents were notified by mail of their child's absence, attendance increased for 72.2% of the students and only 27.8% were referred for prosecution.

Positive Action through Holistic Education (Project PATHE)

Program Type: School - Environmental Strategies; School - Individual Strategies
Age: Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: School

Program Goals: Project PATHE seeks to increase bonding to the school and reduce school disorder through the implementation of broad-based structural changes; these changes might include adopting different disciplinary procedures, management practices, or school activities. The program also aims to increase student educational and occupational attainment.

Program Description: The school-wide intervention has six major components: (a) staff, student, and community participation in revising school policies and designing and managing school change; (b) organizational changes aimed at increasing academic performance; (c) organizational changes aimed at increasing school climate; (d) vocational preparation; (e) academic and affective services for high-risk individuals; and (f) special academic and counseling services for low-achieving and disruptive students. Individualized treatment plans addressing academic or behavior objectives were implemented with high-risk students by specialists. The programs mostly calls for counseling or tutoring sessions. Other activities include peer counseling, rap sessions, field trips, and referrals to other agencies when necessary. Target students are closely

monitored, and parents are called after three absences. Specialists also meet with parents following disciplinary incidents.

Study Design: This project utilized a nonequivalent comparison group design involving all teachers and students in five middle schools (four program and one control) and four high schools (three program and one control) in low-income, predominantly African American, urban and rural areas in Charleston County, South Carolina, between 1981 and 1983. The school, rather than the individual, is the unit of analysis; the individuals surveyed in 1983 are not necessarily the same individuals surveyed in 1981. The entire student and teacher population was surveyed in all years except 1981, when a random sample of 300 students was taken in the high schools. Survey response rates averaged 79%, 82%, and 86% for all schools in 1981, 1982, and 1983 respectively.

Sample: Seven schools were located in inner city Charleston and the other two were located in a rural, impoverished area on James Island. The inner city schools were nearly 100% African American; the rural schools were each 68% and 79% African American.

Outcomes: Treatment high schools showed significant decreases in serious delinquency, drug involvement, suspensions, and school punishments, while the treatment junior high saw significant decreases in suspensions. Student alienation significantly decreased in the treatment schools. Attachment to school significantly increased in treatment middle schools but significantly decreased in the comparison school. School attendance increased significantly in treatment and comparison high schools and self-concept significantly increased in all schools except the comparison middle school. Treatment students experienced slightly more academic success and graduated at a higher rate than control students.

School Breakfast Clubs

Program Type: School - Environmental Strategies
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle - Junior
Setting: School

Program Goals: The goals of School Breakfast Clubs include providing breakfast for children who might otherwise start the school day without having eaten; establishing a positive relationship at the start of the school day, thereby improving attitude, behavior, and motivation to learn and helping to reduce lateness and poor attendance; and offering healthy eating choices, providing the opportunity for children to sample and hopefully develop preferences for healthy options.

Program Description: In 1999, the United Kingdom Department of Health announced a national pilot scheme to promote the development of school breakfast clubs across England.

Study Design: The design was a cluster randomized controlled trial in which 6,076 pupils from 30 schools were randomly assigned into the breakfast club or control conditions.

Follow-up measures were collected 3 months and 12 months after the beginning of the program.

Sample: The final sample of 6,076 students was 50% male and 50% female with a mean age of approximately 10 years. Sixty seven percent of the participants were in primary school and 33% were in secondary school. Ninety three percent of the control group participants were Caucasian, 6% were Asian, and nearly 2% were Black. Over 90% of the students in both groups reported eating breakfast sometimes or always. Additionally, over 70% of parents in both groups reported that their children had low emotional stress at baseline. The majority of students from both groups reported no classes or days of school skipped within the last month.

Outcomes: Overall, the analyses revealed that the intervention group showed greater improvement in concentration than the control group on the first and second follow-up measures. Fewer secondary students in the intervention group reported having skipped classes on at least one day within the last month and having skipped at least one day of school within the last month, as compared to students in the control group. Lastly, it was found that primary students in the program reported eating more fruit for breakfast than control students.

School Transitional Environment Program (STEP)

Program Type: Academic Services; School - Environmental Strategies
Age: Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: School

Program Goals: The primary goal of the School Transitional Environment Program (STEP) is to address and ease major adolescent life transitions, especially the transition from junior high school to high school. The program focuses on increasing the availability of social support to adolescents experiencing this transition and reducing the complexities involved in making the transition.

Program Description: The School Transitional Environment Program (STEP) seeks to mediate the negative effects for adolescents that are associated with making the transition from junior high to high school. Specifically, the program focuses on increasing social support and decreasing the task-oriented difficulties for adolescents who are experiencing this transition. The program uses two components in order to accomplish these goals. First, the program restructures the role of homeroom teachers, who take on additional roles as counselors and school administrators to the program participants. Second, the program seeks to reorganize the social system the student is entering. STEP students are assigned to classrooms in four of their classes only with other program participants in order to keep a constant peer group in a relatively fixed location of the school.

Study Design 1: During the summer prior to their freshman year, students were randomly selected from among 450 students entering a large urban high school with a total

enrollment of approximately 1,700. Students needed to meet specific criteria in order to qualify for participation in the project: students needed to demonstrate satisfactory adjustment to school (for example, meeting all grade and attendance requirements in 8th grade for promotion into high school) and could not be considered in need of special mental health programming. The treatment group included 65 participants. The control group of 120 students met the same qualifying criteria and were matched according to sex, age, and ethnic background.

Analyses were conducted in order to determine whether the program was successful in mediating the negative consequences often associated with the transition from middle school to high school. Evaluations were conducted at the midpoint and at the end of the academic year. Of the 185 students originally selected to participate, 59 treatment and 113 control students completed all of the evaluations. Chi-square analyses indicated that there were no significant differences between the final samples and the original samples in terms of sex, age, and ethnic background.

Sample 1: The only demographic information provided was the population make-up of the school. The ethnic composition of the school was 57% African American, 19% Caucasian, 22% Hispanic, and 2% other; most students came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Outcomes 1: Short term effects found in the research study indicate that students who participated in the STEP program were more likely to maintain their academic level one year after transitioning to the new school, and less likely to be absent than control students. STEP students also had a more positive self-concept and a higher positive perception of the school social environment. STEP was shown to be effective in reducing levels of emotional, behavioral, and academic dysfunction following school transition. Long term effects illustrated that program youth were less likely to experience school failure and dropout.

Specifically, in comparison to control group participants, Project STEP participants who experienced a middle to high school transition showed higher academic performance on both school attendance and grade point average which was sustained through a five year follow-up; reported a higher perceived self-concept that remained stable through the 9^{th} grade year; and were more likely to report positive perceptions of their school environment through the 9^{th} grade.

Also in comparison to control students, Project STEP participants who experienced a transition into junior high school after one year of participation reported making more positive adjustments and maintained positive perceptions of the school environment; performed better academically; and showed better teacher reports of student behavior and adjustment.

Study Design 2: This replication of Project STEP was a two-year non-randomized study looking at the transition of adolescents into middle school or junior high; the transition year could have been either the 6^{th} or 7^{th} grade year. The sample consisted of 1,204

treatment students and 761 control students. Treatment students attended one of four schools that had adopted core STEP elements, while the control students attended one of four different schools where STEP elements had not been introduced. The schools represented a wide variety of geographic, demographic, and structural characteristics. The primary interest of researchers was the impact of Project STEP on easing the transition for students. Researchers collected student self-report measures by asking teachers to administer surveys in their classrooms; there was an 85% return rate on these surveys. In addition, researchers collected information from teachers on each student regarding behavioral adjustment of the student.

Sample 2: The total sample included 1,204 students who were enrolled in STEP schools and 761 students who were enrolled in non-STEP schools. The sample demographics indicated that 17% of the participants were non-Caucasian, while 44% came from a household in which the highest level of parental education was high school graduation. Because the structure of the schools varied, transitions were defined differently; 58% of the students made the transition in the 6^{th} grade, while 42% of the students made the transition in the 7^{th} grade. School demographics indicate that the mean entering class size for treatment schools and control schools were 295 and 179, respectively. In addition, the overall average size of the STEP schools was 880 while the overall size of the non-STEP schools was 434.

Outcomes 2: On the measure of perceptions of school environment, analyses revealed that STEP students had a significantly more positive experience than non-STEP students did during the transition year. A correlation was also found between the STEP environment and student outcomes (101 out of 112 correlations were significant), indicating that a positive school environment is significantly associated with positive student adjustment and performance. Specifically, STEP students reported significantly lower levels of school transition stress and better adjustment on measures of school, family and general self-esteem, depression, anxiety, delinquent behavior, and academic performance. Teacher reports on classroom behavior and adjustment were more positive for STEP students; academic and attendance records were significantly more favorable for STEP versus non-STEP students.

Taking Charge Program

Program Type: School - Individual Strategies
Age: Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: School

Program Goals: The main goal of the Taking Charge Program is to teach skills that are critical to long-term self-sufficiency of pregnant and parenting teenagers. Cognitive-behavioral skills-training programs provide many features identified in successful programs for adolescent mothers.

Program Description: The Taking Charge Program is a task-centered, cognitive-behavioral, school-based group intervention developed specifically for helping adolescent

Mexican American mothers improve problem-focused coping behavior, social problem-solving skills, and school achievement. The program curriculum is delivered over the course of eight weeks. The program's main objective is to teach skills that are critical to long-term self-sufficiency of pregnant and parenting teenagers.

Study Design: The investigation was a randomized, experimental group design with pre- and posttest and follow-up measurement. The target population for the study was pregnant and parenting female students. The sample was drawn from an urban school district on the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas. Five of the district's 12 high schools were selected for participation in the study. All female students who were under eight months pregnant or currently parenting children were invited to participate. Of 86 women who initially entered the study, 73 completed the pretest-posttest phase; the treatment group consisted of 33 women, while 40 participants were in the control group.

Sample: Preliminary analyses revealed no differences between groups in age, grade in school, ethnicity, parenting status, and living arrangements. The average age of the participants was seventeen. Of the 73 participants, 70 identified themselves as Mexican or Mexican American. Forty-one of the participants had one child, 11 had two children, and 17 were pregnant for the first time.

Outcomes: The results indicated significant social skills improvement in the treatment group on the Rational Problem-Solving Subscale (RPS). Differences were also found on the Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (A-COPE), with the treatment group showing significant improvement in problem-focused coping behavior while the controls coping behavior decreased. The mean attendance rate increased for treatment group participants and decreased for controls. Grade point average also increased in the treatment groups while decreasing in the control group. These effects were maintained at the thirty-day follow-up. Overall, the participants in the treatment group showed improvement over the control participants on all measures.

Truant Recovery Program

Program Type: Police Crime Prevention
Age: Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: School

Program Goals: The primary goal of this program is to return truants to school as soon as possible.

Program Description: The Truant Recovery Program authorizes police jurisdictions to make contact with students on the streets during school hours. If the students do not have a valid excuse slip, they are taken into temporary custody. The students are then taken to the Student Welfare and Attendance Office (SWAT). The SWAT personnel contact the parents of the student, and counseling is given to student and parent before the parent returns the student to school. If the parent cannot be contacted, the student is returned to

school by SWAT personnel. The school and SWAT office monitor the student's attendance more closely in future. Three additional program components are designed to provide accountability and consequences: all contacted juveniles are screened for probation violations and bench warrants; attendance records are reviewed with habitual truants being referred to juvenile court; and students may be enrolled in a Suspension Alternative Class, an in-school endeavor that promotes students' reintegration into schooling.

Study Design: A pre-post design was used to examine the Truant Recovery Program, which drew a random sample of 178 students that had been taken to the SWAT office in 1997. Detailed criminal and juvenile justice data were collected for each truant for two years before pick-up by police and for 18-21 months after the contact. Academic performance information was collected for three years prior to the contact and two years afterwards. No control group was used in the study.

Sample: The sample was 69% male and 31% female. Participants were 60% African American, 25% Hispanic, 8% Asian, and 3% Caucasian. Truants' median age was 15; 30% were 13 years or younger and approximately 10% were older than 16.

Outcomes: During the 18-21 month follow-up, contacts with local police increased. Comparisons of academic performance showed that the vast majority of truants continued to struggle in school after the truancy sweep. Approximately 75% percent became involved in at least one disciplinary incident, more than 90% recorded an unexcused absence, and 88% received at least one below-average D or F grade.

Despite these continued struggles, school performance did improve in certain aspects. The students got into trouble less often and were punished less frequently, skipped school less (generally missing less school), and improved their grades.

COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMS

Ada County Attendance Court

Program Type: Juvenile Justice, Other
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary
Setting: Community

Program Goals: Ada County Attendance Court aims to reduce school truancy and tardiness, thereby decreasing the likelihood of dropout and serious future offenses.

Program Description: Ada County Attendance Court is a diversion program designed to reduce student absenteeism. The program operates under the juvenile court's jurisdiction, but is a multiagency partnership. The attendance court cases are usually initiated by a referral from a school administrator. This referral is typically made after the school unsuccessfully attempted to handle the problem internally. An attendance court coordinator investigates the referrals, and ultimately makes the decision whether or not to

set a hearing date. If a hearing date is set, then the school resource officer issues a court summons.

Study Design: Direct observations of four court days totaling 15 hours took place between April and May of 2002. Several interviews were also conducted with participants to clarify activities that occurred during the proceedings and to determine the nature of the referral process. Finally, referral sheets provided demographic data, number of absences for current and previous year, case statute, attendance record after the initial hearing, and teachers' perceptions of student progress after the initial hearing.

Sample: Fifty four percent of participants were female. Fifty seven percent of students became involved with Attendance Court between 4th and 6th grade, while the other 43% became involved between kindergarten and 3rd grade. Fifty-nine percent of students lived with a single mother, 35% lived with both parents, and 6% lived with a single father. Tardies accounted for 8% of referrals, excessive absences for 46%, and a combination of excessive absences and tardies for 46%. The mean number of student absences during the current year for students who were referred to the court was 15.5, whereas the mean number of absences during the previous year for these students was 25.5.

Outcomes: The student referral sheets provided some preliminary descriptive statistics for analysis. Sixty-five percent of cases were closed successfully; 9% were either referred to a prosecutor or closed due to the student moving, 6% were closed due to the student being involved with foster care, and 2% were re-opened. Seventy seven percent of students improved attendance after the initial hearing, while 12% did not improve. The remaining students' improvement could not be judged due to withdrawal from school; these students may have moved, entered homeschooling, or been removed from their homes. Finally, 73% of students increased their academic performance as indicated by grades following the initial hearing, while 16% did not improve. Again, the remaining students' grades were not measured for the same withdrawal reasons.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA)

Program Type: Mentoring - Tutoring
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: Community

Program Goals: Big Brothers Big Sisters of America aims to delay or reduce antisocial behaviors, increase academic performance, improve attitudes and behaviors, strengthen peer and family relationships, increase self-concept, and provide social and cultural enrichment.

Program Description: The BBBSA program matches volunteer adult mentors with at-risk children and youth, anticipating that caring and supportive relationships will develop. Mentors are selected, screened, and matched with children based on shared goals and interests of the child and adult volunteer. Mentors are expected to meet with the child at

least 3-5 hours per week for a period of 12 months or longer. BBBSA staff monitor the relationship and maintain contact with the mentor, child, and parent/guardian throughout the matched relationship. BBBSA staff can provide advice and guidance to the mentor, as well as support and encouragement.

Study Design 1: Sites for this study were selected from eight BBBSA offices nationwide which met the criteria for a large caseload and geographic diversity. The sites included Philadelphia, Rochester, Minneapolis, Columbus, Wichita, San Antonio, and Phoenix. Of the 1,138 youth found eligible for matches, baseline interviews were conducted with 1,107. Half were randomly assigned to a treatment group, for which BBBS matches were made or attempted. The other half were assigned to BBBS waiting lists for 18 months. The matched youth met with their mentors for an average of almost 12 months, with meetings about 3 times a month lasting approximately 4 hours each. The ultimate goal of these visits was to provide a supportive relationship.

Sample 1: Of the total 1,138 sample participants at the time of assignment, 959 were available at follow-up including 487 treatment youth and 472 control youth. Of the 487 youth in the treatment group, 378 were matched with a mentor during the study period. Statistical analyses indicated that there were no baseline differences between the treatment and the control group youth. The sample was slightly more than 60% male and over 55% non-Caucasian; of non-Caucasian youth, the participants were 71% African American, 18% Hispanic, 5% biracial, 3% Native American, and 3% other. Sixty-nine percent of the youth came to the program between the ages of 11 and 13. Many of the youth came from poor households, with over 40% receiving either food stamps and/or cash public assistance. Ninety percent of youth lived with one parent, and 5.6% lived with one of their grandparents. Approximately 20% of the parents/guardians did not graduate from high school, and over 35% had completed only high school or earned a GED. Many of the youth in the study had experienced difficult personal situations, including divorce or separation of their parents, family history of substance abuse or domestic violence, or were victims of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse. T-tests performed on the two groups revealed no demographic and descriptive differences between the treatment and control groups at baseline.

Outcomes 1: Effects found in the research studies indicated significant reductions in adolescent initiation of alcohol (27%) and illicit drugs (46%), as well as incidences of hitting other people. Adolescents mentored by a Big Brother or Big Sister saw improvements in academic performance and achievement; treatment youth skipped half as many days as did control youth, felt more competent about doing schoolwork, skipped fewer classes, and showed modest gains in grade point averages (marginally significant, $p = .10$). These gains were strongest among minority females. Mentees also experienced improvements in quality of relationship with parents and peer emotional support.

Study Design 2: This study evaluated the impact of the BBBS program on academic achievement of at-risk youth. Participants in the treatment group were matched with a mentor after a stringent screening process; mentors and mentees met for two to four hours per week for a commitment of one year. Matches were supervised by case managers

through contacts with the parent, youth, and mentor. Training was provided to all volunteers and families.

Sample 2: Treatment youth in this quasi-experimental design study were boys recruited from agency events, while control participants consisted of boys who had been accepted into the BBBS program but were waiting to be assigned a mentor (average length of time on list was 15 months). The original study contained 17 participants in each group. At post-test, 12 treatment youth and 13 control youth remained. Average age of treatment youth was 11.9, while the average age of control youth was 10.4. The sample was predominantly Caucasian, with African American and Hispanic youth also represented. All study participants had the risk factor of being from a single parent home, and at least one additional risk factor in order to be eligible to participate. Other risk factors included family, school, peer, and substance use risk factors.

Outcomes 2: Analysis indicated that there was a significant impact of mentoring on composite scores on standardized tests for academic achievement. Adjusted mean scores in reading and math also indicated significant differences between the two groups, with no significant difference in spelling scores.

Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA)

Program Type: Academic Services; After School; Drug Prevention / Treatment; Leadership and Youth Development; Mentoring – Tutoring; Recreation - Leisure - Community Service; Skills Training
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: Community

Program Goals: Boys and Girls Clubs of America strives to help at-risk youth decrease problem behaviors by increasing their exposure to and involvement in prosocial activities and prosocial norms and values.

Program Description: The Boys and Girls Clubs of America are designed to help youth make healthy choices in their physical, educational, personal, social, emotional, vocational, and spiritual lives. The clubs provide the following basic resources to club members: (a) a safe haven away from the negative influences of the street; (b) guidance, discipline, and values from caring adult leaders; (c) constructive youth development activities and programs in supervised, supportive environments; (d) access to comprehensive, coordinated services that meet the complex needs of youth at risk; (e) educational support, increased awareness of career options, and guidance in setting goals; (f) a comprehensive violence prevention initiative; and (g) a vision of a safer, healthier, and more productive life.

There are five core program areas including Character and Leadership Development; Education and Career Development; Health and Life Skills; the Arts; and Sports, Fitness, and Recreation. The programs focus on developing social competence among youth

participants through alcohol, drug, and pregnancy prevention; career exploration; and delinquency and gang prevention. BGCA also seeks to promote positive youth development through less structured programs such as sporting events, recreation games, and health and fitness activities.

Study Design: This cross-sectional design examined the correlations between Club attendance, reasons for attendance, activities, academic achievement, and drug and alcohol use. One hundred and twenty youths were recruited for participation in the study at an urban Club located in a western community. An additional 30 youths were recruited at a local neighborhood apartment complex where many youth that attended the Club reside, in order to provide a comparison group of youths who frequented the Club less often. One hundred fifty youths returned the parent/guardian consent form during the two-week recruitment period. The final sample included 139 youths because youth who disclosed that they were not honest were dropped from the study. A 90-item questionnaire battery was administered to obtain information in five areas: participation in the Club, motivation for involvement, age, academic achievement and school engagement, and substance use.

Sample: The sample was 42% female and 58% male; participants ranged in age from 10 to 17 years, with a mean age of 12.02 years. The ethnic background of the sample was 46% Hispanic, 35% Caucasian, 7% African American, 5% Native American, and 7% other. Fifty four percent of the youths in the study resided in single-parent families.

Outcomes: According to the cross sectional study, overall monthly attendance at the Club was positively related to self-reported grades, enjoyment of school, and effort in school. Club participation was negatively related to favorable attitudes toward cheating and cigarette use. Participation was significantly related to truancy, favorable attitudes toward cheating, enjoyment in school, and effort in school. Statistically significant relationships favored youth with higher levels of participation in Club activities. Participation was significantly related to 30-day cigarette use. Again, statistically significant relationships favored youth with higher levels of participation in Club activities.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMS

Girl Power!

Program Type: Community, Other Approaches; School - Environmental Strategies; Skills Training
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: Community; School

Program Goals: The goals of this program are to reduce the incidence of substance abuse and related risk factors while increasing the resiliency skills of girls; to infuse science-based substance abuse prevention practices in organizations serving youth; and to increase public information and awareness about proven substance abuse prevention

programs. The program also aims to increase school bonding and achievement through school-based activities and active partnerships with the schools. Evidence of effectiveness is demonstrated by improved grade point averages; reduced negative school behavioral incidents; and improved school attendance of program participants.

Program Description: The Girl Power! program was created by the United States Department of Health and Human Services as a public education campaign promoting healthy life choices for adolescent girls. The program includes prevention efforts and activities at the individual, community, and policy levels. Activities implemented to meet the program goals and objectives include the following: weekly 90 minute Girl Power! groups that focus on education and problem-solving skill development and meet over a 32-week period; alternative activities and community service projects that provide meaningful opportunities for girls and promote confidence and community pride; weekly activities and interaction with peers and healthy adult relationships; and school-based activities or other activities that increase school bonding and success.

Study Design: The study was a pre-posttest design, which included middle school and late elementary school girls, ages 10-15.

Sample: No description of the sample was provided; however, the program targets middle school and late elementary school girls, ages 10-15.

Outcomes: The results of the 1998-2000 school year revealed that 62% of Girl Power! participants had an increase in grades; 70% had an improvement in attendance; and 73% of these students had no record of disciplinary behavior in the school during this academic year. The results of the 2001-2002 school year revealed that 63% of participants (only 53% of the total sample was measured) had an increase in grade point average after the first nine weeks in the program; 86% improved or remained stable in the area of school bonding, as measured by respect for school property and on school report cards; and 81% demonstrated improvement in the area of self-control.

LA’s BEST

Program Type: Academic Services; After School; Recreation - Leisure - Community Service; School - Individual Strategies; Skills Training
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary
S*etting:* Community; School

Program Goals: LA's BEST is a comprehensive, community-based intervention that seeks to foster a safe environment in which interpersonal skills and self-esteem can be developed. It attempts to integrate the educational support structure to enhance children's opportunities and supplement and enrich regular educational programming with new educational and recreational activities.

Program Description: This community-based, after school intervention program offers assistance with homework, library activities, interpersonal skills and self-esteem

development, and fields trips emphasizing the performance arts, in addition to recreational activities. Students enroll and are expected to participate on a regular basis.

Study Design: This program has been evaluated using a non-random, longitudinal design, beginning in the 1993-1994 school year. Second through fifth grade students enrolled in the program and were tracked through the 1997-1998 school year. Absences and English proficiency were measured by school-reported data. Achievement test scores on either the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) or the Stanford-9 Achievement Test (SAT-9) were used to generate reading, math, and language arts abilities.

Sample: A total of 4,312 students received the intervention, while 15,010 children were in qualifying schools but did not participate. This latter group served as a comparison group for certain evaluations. In the intervention group, 50.7% were female, 73.7% were Hispanic, and 58.6% were considered Limited English Proficient. In the non-intervention group, 66.9% of the students were designated as Limited English Proficient.

Outcomes:
Pretest - Posttest Results: For students with at least four years of program involvement, and controlling for gender, ethnicity, income and language status, higher participation was significantly related to higher math, reading, and language arts achievement scores and significantly related to better school attendance. Path analysis results indicate that higher participation led to higher school attendance and, in turn, led to the higher levels of academic achievement.

Treatment versus Comparison Group: Treatment students in the 4th grade cohort, the only cohort analyzed for this measure, made significantly better improvements in language redesignation (Limited English Proficient to English Proficient) than comparison students at posttest and again in grades 6 and 8. There were no differences found on this measure in grades 5 and 7. Treatment students in the 5th grade cohort had significantly fewer absences than comparison students in grades 6 and 7, though these differences disappeared in grades 8 and 9. Finally, in the first year, treatment students had significantly lower math achievement scores than comparison students, but these differences no longer existed by the 1997-1998 school year.

Student Transition and Recovery Program (STAR)

Program Type: Academic Services; Community Supervision and Aftercare; Diversion; Juvenile Justice, Other; Mentoring - Tutoring
Age: Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle - Junior
Setting: Community; School

Program Goals: STAR aims to reduce bullying, suspension, expulsion and juvenile anti-social behavior by combining military-style drilling and exercise with academic tutoring.

Program Description: STAR is comprised of three levels of intervention for middle school students at risk of being suspended from school or placed in a juvenile detention

facility. STAR I is a one-day intervention for students referred by the school system. The one-day program involves rigorous military exercise and training. This level is meant as an "attention-getting" program for students who are at-risk for escalating problem behaviors. STAR II is a 30-day program for students referred by the school system for consistent problem behaviors that would usually warrant suspension. Students spend five hours a day at the STAR facility before and after school. Students participate in a military style "boot camp" every morning before school, and wear uniforms and military hairstyles. Students receive two hours of academic tutoring and conflict resolution instruction per day as well as attend weekly student group counseling. Parents must attend a weekly parent support/skills group. STAR III is a 24 week program, similar to STAR II, for students who are referred by the court system and is proscribed in lieu of juvenile detention placement. During the first phase, students participate in STAR II activities. Successful completion of Phase I -- including passing all subjects and no program violations -- allows the student to move into the second phase in which students no longer attend the morning military drilling, do not wear uniforms and parent/student counseling groups become optional. In Phase III of this program, students report to the STAR facility only one time per week and schools must submit weekly progress reports.

Study Design: Anonymous, voluntary parent and youth surveys were collected and compiled, in addition to standard year-end school-generated reports on attendance, grade point averages, and disciplinary referrals from ten program sites in Georgia.

Sample: The youth in this sample were middle school students in Georgia at risk of suspension, expulsion, or detention in a juvenile facility. No additional demographic information was provided.

Outcomes: On surveys, 79% of students and 75% of parents felt that STAR helped improve grades. The second most significant change cited by 67% of students and 65% of parents was improved relations with family members.

Absenteeism and suspension/expulsion rates for three years of STAR implementation in eight Georgia sites showed fluctuating patterns. The percentage of students absent 10 or more days declined in the first year (1996-97) of STAR implementation from 23% to 12%; this indicator increased to 19% the following year and remained at that level for 1998-99. The suspension/expulsion rate also exhibited an erratic pattern; the rate declined for two years from 32% to 11%, then increased to 14%.

All schools reported a marked decline in absenteeism and an increase in grade point averages.

PROGRAMS IN OTHER SETTINGS

Police Led Truancy Intervention

Program Type: Police Crime Prevention; School - Individual Strategies

Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School
Setting: Juvenile Justice Setting; School; Social Services

Program Goals: Police Led Truancy Intervention aims to improve subsequent school attendance and reduce subsequent delinquency of youth processed through the Truancy Unit.

Program Description: The Police Led Truancy Intervention program is a truancy and delinquency prevention program using law enforcement and a community-based truancy unit to deter youth from skipping school. Sheriff's deputies or other law enforcement officers patrol communities looking for youth not accompanied by an adult during school hours and confirm that these youth have not been granted an excused absence from school. After verifying that the legal criteria are met for admission to the Truancy Unit, officers escort the truant youth to the Unit where they are processed, assessed, interviewed by staff, and informed of a forced silence requirement during their stay. Informal counseling with clinical staff is provided on an as-needed basis during intake. Unit rules are explained to all youth, as are the disciplinary actions in place for those who break the rules. Youth may stay at the facility for a maximum of six hours, at which time they must be released to a parent, guardian, or competent adult willing to sign for their release.

Study Design: The Police Led Truancy Intervention was evaluated using a quasi-experimental design that compared students processed in the truancy unit to those stopped by an officer but not processed in order to gauge its impact on two sets of intended outcomes--reductions in unexcused absences from school and subsequent delinquency among school aged youth. To assess this impact, three attendance variables were used: (a) a simple dichotomous measure based on whether the youth returned to school the day after processing at the Truancy Unit (processed youth) or being stopped by an officer (nonprocessed youth), (b) a comparison of the total number of unexcused absences 30 days before and after the encounter, and (c) the total number of days missed for the remainder of the school year following the intervention. Delinquent involvement was measured by referrals to the Department of Juvenile Justice, the agency responsible for most juvenile justice services.

Sample: During the 1999-2000 academic year, 12,330 youth were stopped by police on suspicion of truancy; of these youth, 7,395 were processed through the Truancy Unit and the remaining 4,935 were released after questioning. The sample of processed youth was 64% male, 39% Caucasian, 53% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. The sample of nonprocessed youth was 72% male, 28% Caucasian, 65% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. The distributions for age and grade were almost identical for both samples.

Outcomes: Among youth processed at the truancy unit, 71% returned to school the next day, while 63% of the nonprocessed youth returned to school the next day. Thirty days after a police encounter, 26% of nonprocessed youth had perfect school attendance,

compared to only 9% of processed youth. For the remainder of the school year, only 5% of processed youth had perfect attendance after the intervention compared to 21% of nonprocessed youth after being stopped and questioned by an officer. In the processed group, 43% missed fewer days of school after the intervention than before, compared to 28% of the nonprocessed youth. It should be noted, however, that 48% of both groups had more absences in the 30 days after the intervention than before. Finally, among those students who had been truant for 31 days or more, the mean number of days absent measured over the entire school year after the intervention for processed youth was 21 days with a standard deviation of 19 days, while the mean number of days absent for the nonprocessed youth was only 11 days with a standard deviation of 13 days, a significant difference. In summary, at the bivariate level, it appears that processed youth had some good short-term results, with more returning to school the next day and missing fewer school days 30 days after processing. But the program had a negative impact on long-term attendance, with the non-processed students missing fewer days over the entire year and more likely to have perfect attendance.

Using multivariate analyses, with other variables held constant (processed/nonprocessed, prior involvement in the juvenile justice system/no involvement, prior attendance, age, race, and gender), processed students were significantly more likely to have improved attendance at the 30-day interval than were nonprocessed students. The only other significant finding indicated that males were more likely to have improved attendance during the 30-day follow-up than were females. Unfortunately, the long-term data collected on attendance for the remainder of the school year indicated that processed youth missed significantly more days than nonprocessed youth. In addition, students who had delinquency records were more likely to miss more school days throughout the year after their police encounter (either processed or stopped by police) than were students without delinquency records. Finally, the impact of prior attendance is also relatively strong and statistically significant: the greater the number of days absent prior to the intervention, the greater the number of days absent after the intervention.

There were no significant differences between either the processed or nonprocessed students on measures of delinquency after an encounter with an officer, even among students with a prior record of delinquency. No significant results were found for the delinquency outcomes with either processed or nonprocessed students when all other variables were controlled for.

Wraparound Services Model – Columbus, Ohio

Program Type: Counseling and Social Work; Employment – Vocational; Family Therapy; Juvenile Justice, Other; School - Environmental Strategies
Age: Late Childhood (6-11) – Elementary; Early Adolescence (12-14) - Middle – Junior; Late Adolescence (15-18) - High School

Setting: Community; Hospital / Medical Center; Mental Health / Treatment Center; School

Program Goals: The goal of the wraparound services program is to support normalized and inclusive options for youth with complex needs and their families. The behavioral goal is that the juvenile participants who receive the wraparound services will have fewer subsequent arrests, fewer school absences, not be expelled or suspended, not run away from home, not be picked up by the police, and not be assaultive.

Program Description: The wraparound services approach is a comprehensive model that joins the efforts of significant individuals in the youth's life with the community. These efforts are joined to identify and build on the strengths of the youth and family, while encouraging behaviors that would reduce the likelihood of further involvement with the juvenile justice system. The wraparound services approach was built on two major beliefs; (a) that families need to be involved in helping their family member and (b) that maintaining community living is paramount. Effective treatments address the multiple determinants of delinquent behavior and provide broad-level, complex, community-based interventions. In the wraparound services program, problem areas are divided into eight life domains including Home/Living Arrangement, Family/Surrogate Family, Psychological/Emotional, Educational/Vocational, Legal, Social, Safety, and Medical.

Study Design: This study used a pre-post test control group design with random assignment to treatment conditions. Program participants were tracked and contacted following program entry. The program offered a follow-up for subsequent juvenile court contacts and subsequent at-risk and delinquent behavior. Research staff workers conducted follow-up interviews every other month for 18 months, or 9 times, over the course of the investigation. The study included only participants that met the project criteria: under 17 years of age, referred for charges filed against them for unruly or delinquent behavior (misdemeanant or felony levels 3 and 4), those in the pre-sentence stage who had been adjudicated unruly or delinquent (misdemeanant or felony levels 3 and 4), and those entering the children's services intake division for delinquency or unruly behavior, but not for neglect or dependency cases. Initially, 500 youth were invited to participate in the study; 307 youth agreed to participate and entered the program. Of the 307 participants, 166 were excluded from the study due to loss of contact, moving, or inadequate implementation of services. Of the remaining 141 participants, 73 were randomly assigned to receive wraparound services and 68 to receive conventional services.

Sample: One hundred and forty one juveniles who entered the juvenile justice center in Franklin County, South Carolina, participated in the investigation. Participants included 54 females and 87 males. The participants' ethnicity was 50% Caucasian, 49% African American, and 1% biracial. The participants' mean age was reported as 14.85 years; however, all juvenile participants had to be under the age of 17 to qualify.

Outcomes: Participants in the wraparound program participants had fewer unexcused school absences, were expelled or suspended from school less, ran away from home less, were picked up by police less, and were less assaultive than control youth. There were no significant differences found between the two groups with regard to arrests or incarceration during program involvement. The study did find support for the hypothesis

that those involved in wraparound services would engage in less at-risk and delinquent behavior. However, it failed to provide empirical support for the hypothesis that youth who received wraparound services would have fewer subsequent criminal offenses at 6, 12, or 18 months than youth who received conventional services.

Conclusions

Studies on all 18 programs included findings regarding attendance, while studies on 12 of the programs included information on academic achievement. Nearly all of the programs demonstrated increased attendance and academic achievement, indicating that a range of strategies in various settings can be effective in bolstering student participation and performance. However, two programs, the Chronic Truancy Initiative (school based program) and the Police Led Truancy Intervention (program in other setting), demonstrated initial increases in attendance with long term decreases following police intervention.

In addition, of the 18 programs reviewed, 8 received positive rankings by at least one of the following agencies:

- United States Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP)
- United States Department of Education (DOE)
- National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
- United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Blueprints for Violence Prevention (OJJDP Blueprints)
- United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Title V Community Prevention Grants Program (OJJDP Title V)

The following table displays the 8 favorably reviewed programs:

Program	CSAP	DOE	NIDA	OJJDP Blueprints	OJJDP Title V
Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program (formerly Preventive Intervention)	Promising			Promising	
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA)	Effective			Model	Exemplary
Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA)					Effective
Career Academy					Effective
Chronic Truancy Initiative					Promising

Positive Action through Holistic Education (Project PATHE)				Promising	Promising
School Transitional Environment Program (STEP)				Promising	Effective
Truant Recovery Program					Promising

Six of the 8 favorably reviewed programs were considered school based programs, while the other two were considered community based programs. No programs in either the "School and community based programs" category or in the "Programs in other settings" category were noted by the aforementioned organizations. The following table demonstrates the 8 favorably ranked programs by setting category:

School Based Programs	**Community Based Programs**
Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program (formerly Preventive Intervention)	Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA)
Career Academy	Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA)
Chronic Truancy Initiative	
Positive Action through Holistic Education (Project PATHE)	
School Transitional Environment Program (STEP)	
Truant Recovery Program	

Implications

A variety of program types and settings can be effective in increasing student attendance and academic achievement. Programs that include police intervention may have long term negative effects on student attendance. Program developers may benefit from analyzing and replicating elements of programs that have achieved national recognition, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

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The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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Using A Typology for Truancy Prevention

National Center for School Engagement

July 28, 2006

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

NCSE

Using a Typology for Truancy Prevention

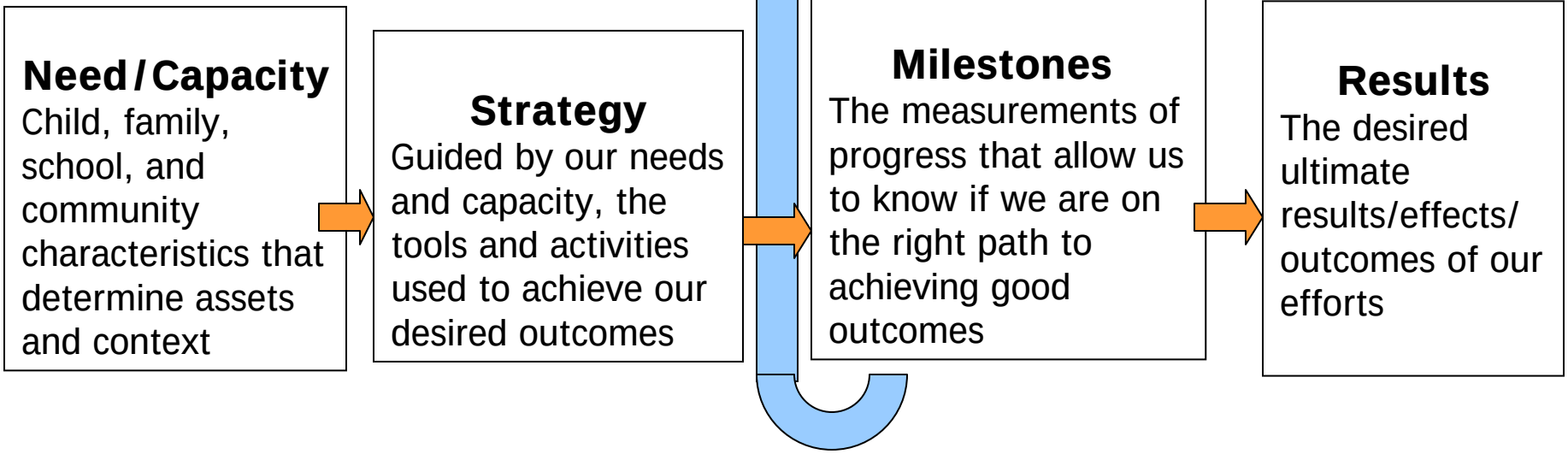
Overall Steps to Success

- Assess needs and resources
- Develop a logic model
- Plan for success around attendance, attachment, achievement
- Data-based decision making
- Review / change policies
- Balance sticks and carrots
- Select your interventions
- Implement your actions
- Public awareness and involvement

RESULTS-BASED
TRUANCY PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

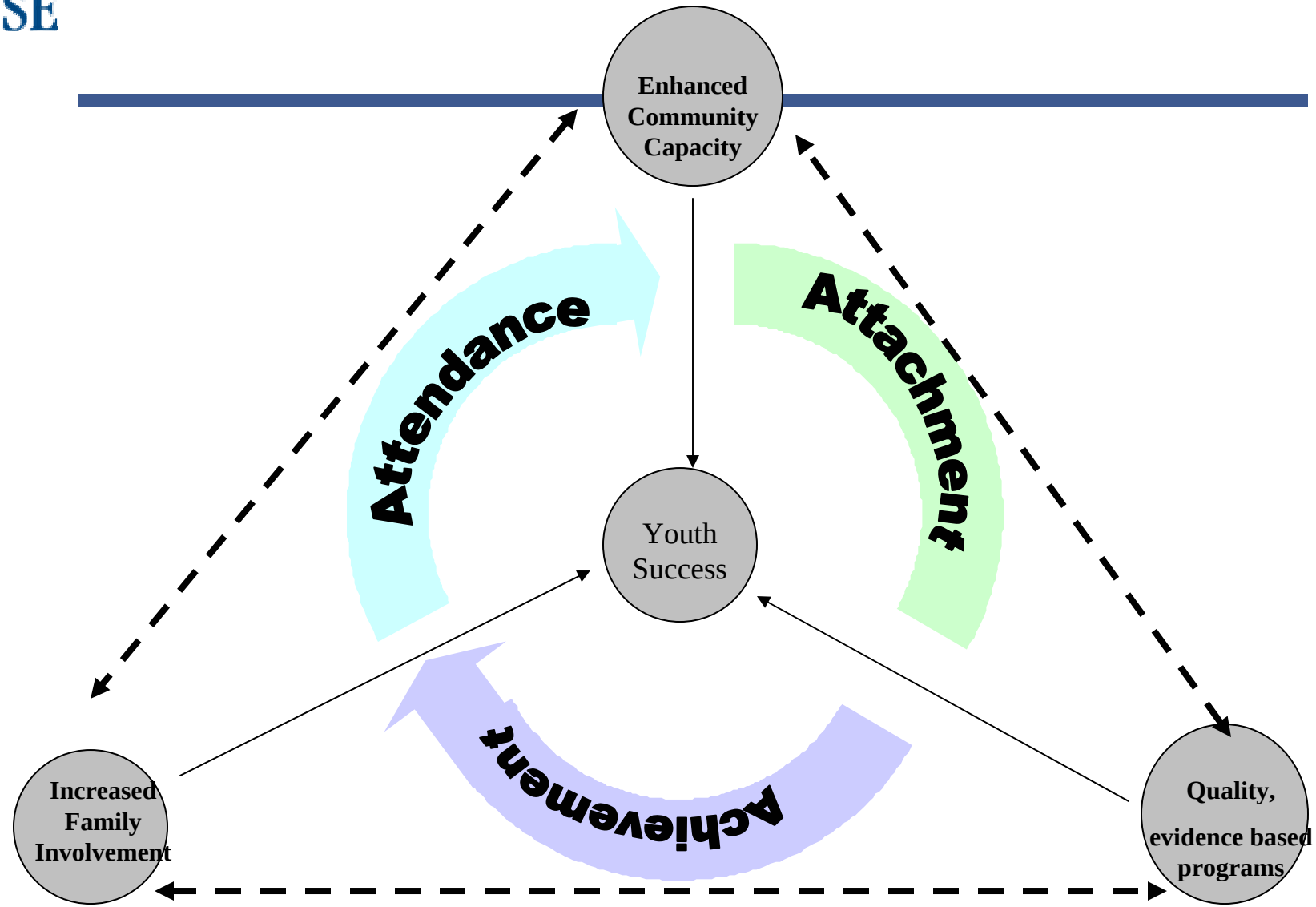
Principles that guide the work:

- Diversity is valued
- Families are actively involved
- Youth are treated with respect
- Collaboration with community partners is critical



Solutions for Truant Youth

NCSE



A Continuum Typology

1) **What?** Collaborations for Community Action: **Who:** Schools, courts, police
   Actions: Planning and interagency agreements

2) **What?** Public Awareness Activities **Who?** School & community
   Actions: Media, publications, community campaigns

3) **What?** Short Term Interventions **Who?** Schools
   Actions:
   Teacher-parent call and conversation
   Principal-teacher-parent conference
   Student Attendance Review Boards (SARB)
   Parent-student workshop to develop behavior contracts & school accommodations
   Home visits
   Mediation

4) **What?** Longer Term Interventions **Who?** School, courts, community
   Action: Case Management: youth advocacy and service coordination
   Action: Student Support Services: counseling, academic tutoring

5) **What?** Court interventions **Who?** Courts, juvenile services
   Actions: Parent arrest, detention of youth, fines , Dependency and neglect petitions, At-risk youth petitions, Driver's license revocation/delay

Local Action
Where do we start?

- Know your attendance laws, local policies & their inconsistencies
- Develop a strategic plan across agencies
- Focus on attendance and engagement not just truancy
- Adopt promising practices that “fit” locally
- Create both incentives and graduated sanctions
- Involve students and parents in planning programs to improve attendance and engagement
- Take baselines and track progress

Sticks and Carrots: Mix and Match

Sticks/Sanctions	Carrots/Incentives
Fine or Arrest of Parents	Attendance Awards
Contempt Citation & Detention	Change Teachers/ Placement
Withhold TANF from Parents	Flexible School Schedule
File CHINS/PINS Petitions	Tutoring & Academic Support
File Educational Neglect Petition	Home Visits + Plan
School F Grade for absence	Service Learning
No Extra Curricular Activities.	School-Home Contracts
School Suspensions/.Expulsions	After School Programs
Suspend Driving License	Classmates Send Letters Home
Take cell phone away	Case Mgmt. Services
	Truancy Workshops

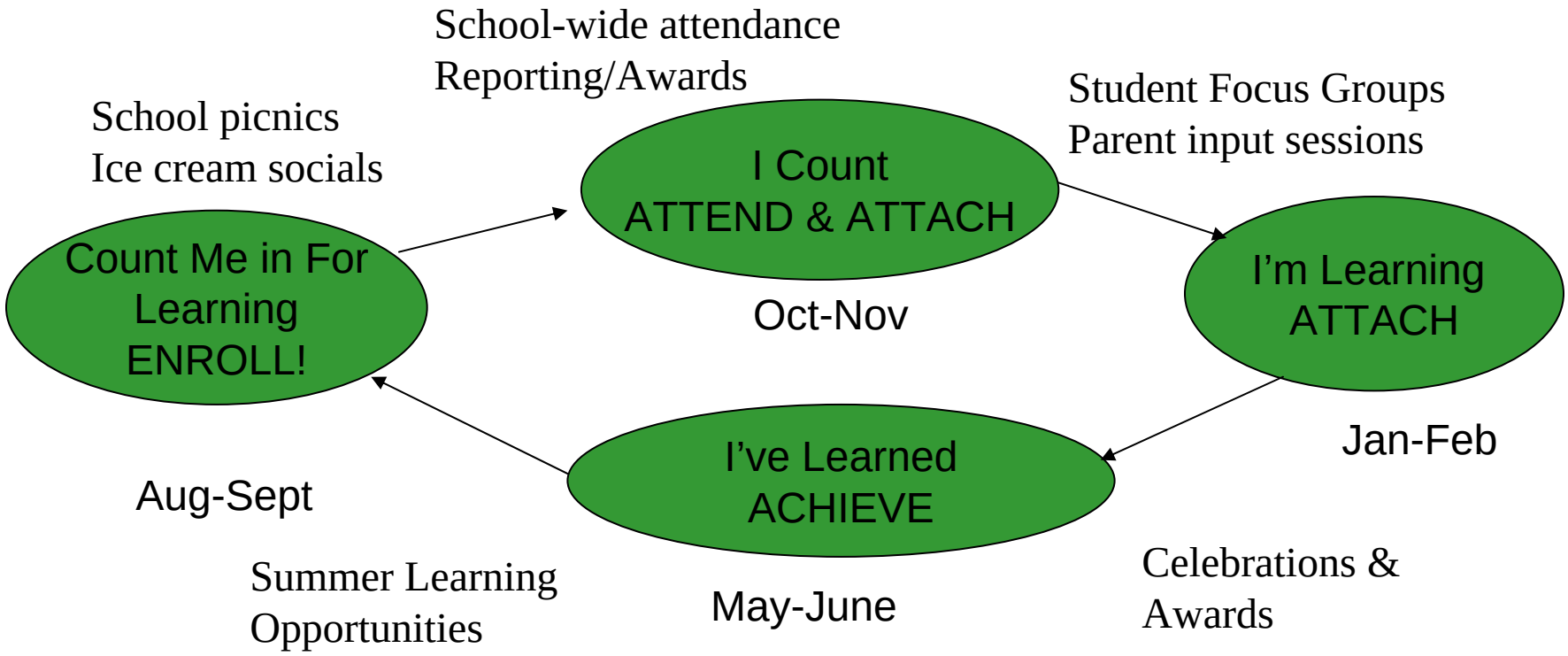
Typical Policies Needing Change

- **End out of school suspensions for being truant**
- **Finance schools by average daily attendance rate, not one day counts**
- **Document attendance and truancy by school and set goals**
- **Less use by courts of detention for truancy**
- **Remove attendance as a factor in grading**
- **Start secondary schools later in the day**
- **Provide partial credit options for students**
- **Conduct a “push out” policy audit of rules and practices**
- **Eliminate “ push-out policies” and modify to promote engagement**
- **Raise compulsory attendance age to 18**

Count Me In For Learning!

Public Education Campaign for School Engagement

Year-Long Topical Activities in Schools and Communities



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Chapter Three: Promoting School Engagement

- School Policies That Engage Students And Families
- Quantifying School Engagement: Research Report
- Developing An Effective Media Campaign Strategy
- Count Me In For Learning!
- Effective Marketing Through Truancy Reduction Posters

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School Policies that Engage Students and Families

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School Policies that Engage Students and Families

School policies tend to either to engage students and families in the learning process or push students out of schools. Often, there is much variability across schools as to how these policies are implemented. In general, the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) has identified the following policies that are more conducive to recapturing students in school.

☑ ***Attendance Policies that Distribute Responsibility Broadly***

Many school and school district attendance policies place the responsibility for student attendance solely on the shoulders of parents/guardians and the student, themselves, without recognizing that teachers and school staff also have some accountability for attendance. Beyond accurate attendance monitoring, school personnel should consider what l motivates students to attend classes and school functions Additionally, schools must consider their response to chronic truancy. Schools should have a clear and consistent process in place for the first unexcused absence and for subsequent unexcused absences. This process must be communicated to students and parents at the outset of the school year. Staff must be available to track down truant students to find out what is the underlying cause of excessive absences. If supports and resources are needed, these should be provided through school social workers or psychologists. Teachers should be encouraged to make the necessary interventions including parent contacts or conferences. All parties must take responsibility for improving attendance. This includes students, parents, extended family, teachers, other school personnel and the community.

☑ ***Grading Based on Attendance***

Grading based on attendance is becoming a more common practice in schools. It clearly communicates the importance of attendance and consequence of non-attendance. A student should be rewarded for participating in class discussions. At the same time, failing a student due to a pre-determined number of absences, without any appeals process, can be very detrimental to the students' success. Consider this example. If a student has already failed a class, what is the motivation to continue to attend this class? A student may choose to just leave school. Although some may start again the following semester or school year, often students find it easier to never re-enroll. Providing partial credit for completed coursework is a worthy alternative. Consequences for non-attendance are important, however when students are attaining passing grades, despite non-attendance, does it make sense to fail the student? Additionally, appeals should include a jury of impartial school and community members. Appeals processes for class credit must involve more than just the classroom teacher.

☑ ***Withdrawals Due to Excessive Absences***

A common school district's local school policy is to withdraw students who are over the mandatory school age, due to excessive unexcused absences. Although many policies also indicate that substantial effort must be made to contact the pupil and/or parent to identify the reasons for non-attendance, in practice this is not always the case. Schools typically do not have the staff or resources to track down every chronic truant. Unfortunately, without this kind of effort, the dropout rate will only increase. Schools

need to explicitly describe the steps necessary before withdrawing disenrolling students. These steps should include a face to face visit with both the student and his/her parent/guardian. The school should develop a school re-engagement plan or offer other creative options such as a GED or alternative school. All efforts should be made to track down missing students.

☑ ***Establishing a Statewide Common Student Identification Number***

In order to truly understand graduation and dropout rates, a statewide student identification number should be established. This ID should be assigned to students when they are first enrolled in elementary school and should follow them through to high school graduation. All alternative, charter and GED programs should use this same student numbering system. In this way, more accurate statewide dropout and graduation rates can be developed. More accurate data will help schools and communities understand the true extent of the problem and intervene accordingly.

☑ ***Use Alternatives to Out of School Suspension and Expulsion***

Many schools suspend or expel students for excessive unexcused absences and most recognize that this consequence does not typically re-engage the youth in school, or prevent further truancies. Often students are pleased that they are allowed 3 days off school, which was the point of skipping class in the first place. In-school suspensions and detention are a viable alternative. Meaningful community service for excessive absences such as tutoring younger students or organizing a school event are good alternatives. Withholding privileges can be effective, such as no school athletics or field trips, however, we recommend that these are used as incentives as opposed to punishments. Sometimes extra curricular activities are the only thing that motivates students to attend and long term banning from these activities can motivate students to dropout. Additionally, catch-up classrooms are recommended for students to re-engage in learning while not holding back their other classmates.

☑ ***Creative and Effective Communication to Notify Parents of Absence***

Although it is critical that parents are notified of their child's unauthorized absence from school, often students erase the voice mail message or toss the school letter before mom or dad know about the problem. Additionally, some chronic truants are homeless, do not have phones or are from families that do not speak English. Finding effective ways to communicate absence is critical. Given enough school personnel, home visits are ideal. Many truancy officers and school resource officers are beginning to do home visits with truants and their families. Often truants become delinquent (Gavin, 1997) so establishing rapport with the family early on is critical.

☑ ***Coaching Students to Alternative Schools, GED programs or the Work Place***

Adults and children all have different ways of learning. Mainstream schools do not work for all students. However, schools cannot be too quick to coach students to alternative options. With high stakes testing, it is often tempting to encourage low achieving, chronically truant students to leave their home school for another alternative. Often it is these students that are "pulling down" the school average. A recent report from ETS (Barton, 2005) indicates that nationally one-third of our students are failing to graduate

from high school. This begs the question, if mainstream high schools are not working for one-third of our students, isn't it time for schools to change. Many feel that school reform is so difficult that it would be easier to establish a separate system of alternative and charter schools. However, others feel that these schools draw valuable and needed funding from our mainstream public schools. This debate will continue and probably not be resolved in this decade. In the meantime, schools must be cautious about coaching students out of school or pushing students out, too quickly

☑ ***School Finance Based on Average Daily Attendance***

School funding is often based on a fixed per pupil cost. However, how those pupils are counted varies widely between states. Some schools receive the funds based on the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the school year. Other states have one or several "school count" days. Often schools will hold large celebrations and pizza parties to get as many students as possible to school on count day. If a student has an unexcused absence on count day, schools often have the option of filing a truancy petition within a certain time period in order to recoup costs for that student. Unfortunately, after count day has passed, there is very little motivation for schools to keep students in the classroom. Overcrowding, limited school supplies, and high teacher-student ratios often encourage schools to let go of absent students. It is recommended that all states use an average daily attendance to calculate school finance. In this way schools have incentives to keep students in school to the end of the school year. Additionally, school finance will more closely approximate actual students served.

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Gavin, T. (1997). Truancy: Not just kids' stuff anymore. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 66*, 8-14.

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Quantifying School Engagement: Research Report

National Center for School Engagement

December, 2006

An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Quantifying School Engagement: Research Report

Introduction

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) received funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to evaluate their Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program. As part of this evaluation, CFFC created the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE). One function of NCSE was to develop an instrument to measure students' school engagement in order to assess whether interventions in three intensive demonstration sites had an effect on student engagement. This article explains the process by which NCSE created the student school engagement survey and summarizes the preliminary data about the reliability and validity of the instrument[1].

Background of School Engagement

For decades, educators and educational researchers have been interested in the effects of students' attitudes about school and their experiences in school on achievement and attendance. Researchers have conceptualized these attitudes and experiences in a variety of ways, with little consistency in methods and theory.[2] Researchers have used a multitude of terms to describe what they think is important to study when it comes to attitudes and experiences.

Klem and Connell (2004) discuss different concepts that have been used. For instance, Marks (2000) conceptualized engagement as "a psychological process, specifically, the attention, interest, and investment and effort students expend in the work of learning." Connell and colleagues defined and measured two forms of engagement: ongoing engagement, which includes student behavior, emotions, and thought processes during the school day, and reaction

[1] The actual pre-post test evaluation results using the survey can be found in the Houston and Jacksonville evaluation reports.

[2] Although theory does not necessarily seem to guide the research, many researchers in the area cite B. F. Skinner and Albert Bandura in their literature reviews.

to challenge, which refers to a student's coping strategy for dealing with perceived failure in school (Connell & Wellborn, 1994; Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1996). Using the Rochester Assessment Package for Schools (RAPS) instruments, Klem and Connell (2004) found that students who were at optimal levels on their engagement measures were "44% more likely to do well and 23% less likely to do poorly on the performance and attendance" indices. In addition, students who were considered below average in engagement were 30% more likely to do poorly on student outcomes.

Fredricks and colleagues also published a comprehensive article that synthesizes the research in school engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) and put this body of research into a theoretical framework consisting of three types of engagement: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement. And while there are arguably overlaps in these concepts[3], it appears to be a good way to conceptualize the work and add to the field. The following is a description of each:

1) Behavioral Engagement: Broadly defined as doing school work and following rules.

Examples:

- Positive Conduct: Consists of behaviors that illustrate effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions, contributing to class discussion, following rules, studying, completing homework, and participating in school-related activities.
- Absence of Disruptive Conduct: Not skipping school and not getting in trouble.

[3] For instance, a scale item designated as cognitive engagement because it refers to the effort put forth in doing school work might also be considered a behavioral engagement because it reflects behavior rather than thought.

2) Cognitive Engagement: Essentially defined as motivation, effort and strategy use. This includes a psychological investment in learning, a desire to go beyond the requirements and a preference for challenge.

Examples:

- Flexibility in problem solving, preference for hard work, investment in learning beyond just behavioral engagement, mental effort, and desire to master a task.

3) Emotional Engagement: In general, this includes interests, values and emotions.

Examples:

- Affective reactions in the classroom, attitudes towards school and teachers, identification with school, feelings of belonging, appreciation of success in school.
- The antithesis of positive feelings are also emotional engagement items.

The division of engagement is not intended to imply a definitive separation, because as Fredricks et.al. (2004) state, "these factors are dynamically interrelated … they are not isolated processes" (pg. 61). Instead, the division merely aids in understanding that "engagement" as a whole is a multi-dimensional construct. In fact, the authors discuss numerous overlaps in past research, and the potential for overlaps is evident in the concepts as they define it. Consequently, we would expect these components to be highly correlated with each other, but relate differently to student outcomes such as achievement and attendance.

Fredricks et al. (2004) also discuss the past research in terms of what associations have been found between the types of engagement and achievement. The authors conclude that there is a body of evidence showing the relationship between behavioral engagement and achievement exists but that there may be mediating factors that influence this relationship. In addition, it is

unclear if behavioral engagement is predictive of deep understanding of material. Little convincing evidence has been found concerning a link between emotional engagement and achievement. This, however, may be due in part to inconsistent ways in which researchers have measured what Fredricks et al. conceptualize as emotional engagement. However, evidence of a relationship between cognitive engagement and achievement is much stronger, including data from scores on achievement tests designed to measure in-depth understanding. The work in this field, however, does not eliminate the possibility of a bi-directional influence between outcomes and engagement: it is most likely that they influence each other.

The relationship between engagement and dropping out has been studied somewhat. Not surprisingly, behavioral engagement, which includes measures of skipping class is related to dropping out than the other two engagement types (Connell, Spencer, and Aber, 1994, Rumberger, 1987). There is little empirical evidence that emotional or cognitive engagement is related to dropping out. However, it seems plausible that cognitive engagement is related to achievement. If it is true that students whose academic performance is poor are less engaged, then it is possible they are also more likely to drop out. In addition, students who feel emotionally disengaged may also be less likely to continue their school careers. In general, there simply have not been enough studies using these types of clear engagement distinctions to draw conclusions about the nature of engagement and student outcomes.

Methodology in the Survey Design

We examined multiple survey instruments that concerned attitudes and experiences with school to design the student engagement questionnaire for the OJJDP intensive sites. All potential engagement or similar concept items and scales were identified through various sources, including national surveys, surveys from schools, journal articles, and the Core

Measures book produced by CSAP. The research and evaluation team at CFFC worked collaboratively to select the questions that appeared to be most promising in terms of validity and reliability, and that covered a breadth of content. However, in order to cover the breadth of content, but also keep the instrument at a reasonable length, the original scales were not used in their entirety, which had the potential of reducing their validity. The survey items came from the following data sources:

- ADD Health Survey – The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
- Core Measures - CSAP
- School Integration Index, based on ADD Health
- Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris (2002)
- Pellerin (2000)
- Pemi-Baker School District (2002)
- School Climate Survey – From Data Analysis for Comprehensive Schoolwide Improvement by V. Bernhardt (1998)
- Jenkins (1997) – Based on Hirschi's social bonding theory

Although these are the primary sources we chose, many of the questions were modified somewhat in wording. These changes were made in order to make the survey consistent in terms of the response scales we chose and/or to make the items more clear to the students. In addition, CFFC added unique questions that seemed pertinent to the project but were not considered school engagement questions. For instance, we added questions about exposure to school drop out, expulsion, and suspension, thoughts of dropping out, experience with school failure, students' experience as parents, activities while skipping school, victimization experience, attitudes toward their neighborhoods, future aspirations, and parental involvement.

After identifying the items we felt would be most useful, we examined each one for "fit" into one of the three types of engagement: emotional, cognitive, or behavioral, based on the descriptions above. Each team member labeled each item by engagement category. The feedback from each member was analyzed and items with general consensus (with all but potentially one member agreeing that there was a fit) were assigned to be part of one of the three scales.

This process led us to create the following scales:

Emotional Engagement

Sixteen items fit this category.

19a When I first walked into my school I thought it was Good….Bad.
19c When I first walked into my school I thought it was Friendly….Unfriendly.
19d When I first walked into my school I thought it was Clean….Dirty.
22c I am happy to be at my school.
22d The teachers at my school treat students fairly.
22f I like most of my teachers at school.
22m The discipline at my school is fair.
22o Most of my teachers care about how I'm doing.
22p Most of my teachers know the subject matter well.
22r There is an adult at school that I can talk to about my problems.
22s I respect most of my teachers.
22v Most of my teachers understand me.
23d I feel excited by the work in school.
23f My classroom is a fun place to be.
23u I enjoy the work I do in class
23w I feel I can go to my teachers with the things that I need to talk about.

Cognitive Engagement

Twenty-two items fit this category.

21a How important do you think an education is?
21b How important do you think it is to get good grades?
21c How important do you think the things you are learning in school are going to be to you later in life?
21f How important do you think it is to have a good job or career after finishing school?
22h I am getting a good education at my school.
22j I will graduate from high school.
22k I want to go to college
22n Most of my classes are boring.
22p Most of my teachers know the subject matter well.

22q I learn a lot from my classes.
23e I am interested in the work I get to do in my classes.
23g When I read a book, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand what it is about.
23h I study at home even when I don't have a test.
23j I talk with people outside of school about what I am learning in class.
23k I check my schoolwork for mistakes.
23l If I don't know what a word means when I am reading, I do something to figure it out, like look it up in the dictionary or ask someone.
23n If I don't understand what I read, I go back and read it over again.
23p I try my best at school.
23r I get good grades in school.

Behavioral Engagement

Seven items fit this category

14 How often have you thought of dropping out?
23a When I am in class, I just pretend I am working.
23b I follow the rules at school.
23c I get in trouble at school.
23q I skip (cut) classes during school.
23s I skip (cut) the entire school day.
23t I try to stay home from school.

We received achievement and attendance information from the Gulfton neighborhood in Houston, TX, Kent County in Seattle, Washington, and Jacksonville, Florida. These data were correlated with the engagement scales to examine validity. We expect that if school engagement is related to achievement and attendance, the scales should be correlated to these indicators. In addition, we would expect that cognitive engagement would be more highly correlated with achievement than attendance, whereas behavioral and emotional engagement might be more highly correlated with attendance than achievement. However, since we believe that engagement is a single concept with multi-dimensions, we expect that each type of engagement would be related to student outcomes as well as to each other. In addition, we ran Cronbach Alphas on each scale in each site to examine scale reliability[4].

[4] Cronbach's Alpha is an index of reliability for a set of items that indicates the extent to which items measure the same characteristic. Also known as the indicator for scale internal consistency and as scale reliability coefficient.

Results

Reliability

A "reliable" instrument is one that produces the same measurement if used repeatedly with the same population. Each of the scales is clearly reliable. The typical acceptable Cronbach Alpha in social sciences is .70. Each of the scales, with the exception of behavioral engagement in Jacksonville, Florida exceeds this, and does so consistently. It is true that by adding items to a scale one can expect Cronbach Alphas to be higher (assuming the items are at least somewhat related to the construct of measure). Thus, the lower Cronbach Alphas in the behavioral scale may be due in part to the relatively few items (7) in this scale compared to the other two (16 in the emotional and 22 in the cognitive scales). See the tables below for details.

Emotional Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Cronbach's alpha
Houston	57	.884
Jacksonville	39	.895
Seattle	39	.902

*Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Cognitive Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Cronbach's alpha
Houston	66	.904
Jacksonville	41	.922
Seattle	43	.867

*Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure. Note: If the item "Most of my teachers know the subject matter well." were deleted in Houston, the alpha be .901.

Behavioral Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Chronbach's alpha
Houston	72	.797
Jacksonville	46	.489
Seattle	47	.793

*Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Validity

An instrument is considered valid when it measures what it is supposed to measure. There are a number of ways to assess validity. We chose convergent validity, in which constructs that are similar to the instrument are identified, valid data sources for those constructs are gathered and the relationship between the instrument and the already established valid data is assessed. We attempted to examine whether the scales were related to other school outcomes (such as GPA and attendance) in order to assess the validity of the engagement scales. These results are broken out by site.

Houston

In Houston, the emotional engagement scale was not significantly correlated with GPA, but the cognitive scale correlated with GPA. The coefficient was .369, which is significant at the $p<.005$ level ($N = 62$). This means the cognitive engagement scale accounts for approximately 14% of the variance in GPA. The behavioral scale also correlated with GPA .345, which is significant at the $p<.005$ level ($N = 68$). This means the behavioral engagement scale accounts for approximately 12% of the variance in GPA. There were no significant correlations between attendance and cognitive or emotional engagement, however, the correlation between behavioral engagement and days missed was .20 ($p=.15$, ns). Finally, the emotional scale correlated with the behavioral scale .22 (ns) and correlated with the cognitive scale .68, $p<.001$. The behavioral scale is correlated with cognitive scale .52, $p<.001$.

Seattle

In Seattle, none of the engagement scales correlated with GPA or absences. Behavioral engagement correlated with cognitive engagement, $r(51) = .64$, $p<.001$ and with emotional engagement, $r(51) = .35$, $p<.05$. Emotional engagement correlated with cognitive engagement, $r(51) = .72$, $p<.001$.

Jacksonville

Since the students served in Jacksonville are primarily in elementary schools, we received Math and English grades rather than GPA. We also received attendance information broken down for excused and unexcused absences.

The behavioral scale did not correlate significantly with grades, but was correlated with unexcused absences, $r(40) = .352$, $p<.05$. The emotional scale was significantly correlated with Math grades, $r(32) = .48$, $p<.01$, English grades, $r(32) = .43$, $p<.05$, and unexcused absences, $r(33) = .61$, $p<. 001$. The cognitive scale was also significantly correlated with Math grades, $r(34) = .40$, $p<. 05$, English grades, $r(34) = .37$, $p<.05$, and unexcused absences, $r(35) = .46$, $p<. 01$. None of engagement scales correlated with excused absences.

The emotional and cognitive scales were significantly and highly correlated; $r(37) = .928$, $p<.001$, where as the behavioral scale was not significantly correlated with the cognitive scale and was only marginally correlated with the emotional scale; $r(30) = .31$, $p = .05$.

Conclusions

The school engagement survey was designed to measure school engagement as a whole. In this project it was tested with small samples of truant students. Consequently, the participants in this study are likely to be less engaged than students as a whole, and to have a restricted range of achievement and attendance indicators than that which would be found in an entire student body. This complicates testing for validity and reliability. Nevertheless, we found support for the reliability of the engagement scales and some support for the validity.

The scales met and exceeded the desired criterion for reliability; in all but one case, the Cronbach Alphas ranged from .79 to .92. Cronbach Alphas can range from 0 to 1. The higher the number, the more likely the items in the scale are measuring a similar concept. These numbers indicate that the items "fit" in these scales.

The scales also appear to be valid as evidenced in two of the three sites. In Houston, cognitive and behavioral engagement was significantly related to GPA. Behavioral engagement was correlated with attendance, but not significantly so. In Jacksonville, all the scales were

significantly related to unexcused but not excused absences. In addition, emotional and cognitive engagement were also related to Math and English grades. Although similar findings were not found in Seattle, these findings do suggest that engagement is likely to predict and/or be predicted by attendance and achievement.

Behavioral engagement is more closely related to attendance than grades, which is not surprising given that some of the items are self-reports on missing classes. Jacksonville's data included excused absences, which were not related to any of the engagement indices. If we believe that excused absences are legitimate (e.g., illnesses) and therefore not related to student engagement, we would expect no relationship to exist. Consequently, this is perhaps a good illustration of "discriminant validity" in which a construct unrelated to engagement, like excused absences, would not be expected to be related to engagement. Nevertheless, the lower reliability indices for this scale indicates that the next steps should be to add items to improve reliability and perhaps broaden the construct in terms of other school related behaviors.

In addition, the cognitive engagement scale was more consistently correlated with achievement than the other two types of engagement. This makes conceptual sense. One would expect that students who report putting more effort into school work would achieve higher grades.

All of the scales are correlated with each other. This too, makes conceptual sense because as stated earlier, engagement is conceived to be a multi-dimensional, but unified, construct. The fact that these correlations ranged from not significant to .93 show that although they are related, they are not measuring identical concepts within engagement.

These results indicate that a school engagement questionnaire can be a useful tool in assessing cognitive, behavioral and emotional engagement as well as providing some indication of how students may be doing in terms of attending school and achievement. However, there is much more research to be done before the school engagement instrument designed for this study can be definitively said to be the best tool to use. Additional work, some of which has already been done, includes qualitative research with students (focus groups about engagement and one-on-one cognitive interviews about the survey items), and gathering schoolwide and hopefully districtwide engagement and student outcome data in multiple states.

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Developing an Effective Media Campaign Strategy

National Center for School Engagement

September, 2005

An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
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When the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sent out requests for proposals to sites interested in becoming demonstration programs for truancy reduction, they required five main strategies to be developed. One of these key strategies was a public awareness campaign. The National Center for School Engagement has worked with each demonstration site as they developed these public awareness activities. Summarized in this report are some of the best media campaign strategies.

Everyone at one time or another has been exposed to or affected by a public awareness campaign/communication campaign. A campaign can be defined as a coordinated communication effort that is conducted through the mass media, interpersonal communication or some combination. Whether one takes notice or not or makes behavior changes is directly related to the effectiveness in which the message is delivered. For example, simply reading a brochure with the message "Buckle Up" is unlikely to bring about any noticeable individual or social change. However, campaigns that include a diverse mix of other media vehicles are more likely to influence people to make choices in line with the campaign information. Formulating an effective media campaign is essential to the success of the message.

Below are the basic questions that need to be answered to develop a plan for an effective media campaign. The following questions can be a useful first step:

- ***What goals do you want to accomplish?***
  Pinpoint very specifically the action and/or awareness that you want your target audience to adopt.

- ***Who is the target audience?***
  The target audience is a segment of a population that will receive the media message. Carefully dissect the population into the target category by profiling the audience to better understand their attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Knowing what the target audience thinks about the issue at hand and where they obtain information will play an important part in determining appropriate media channels used in delivering your message.

- ***What messages will bring about the desired change or outcome?***
  Message development is of utmost importance. The root message should come from quality discussion and brainstorming. The root message also should position your goal in a unique and appealing way to the target audience. Choose more than one message (but no more than three) to prevent staleness and to encourage a view from different angles. Suggestions for message development include: interviews, surveys, focus groups, and piloting materials with the target audience.

- ***What media channels will be the most efficient and cost-effective?***
  There are several categories of mass media: News media includes television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. Advertising and public service announcements may involve print, radio, television and billboards/bus boards.

Public affairs events may include rallies, conferences, and speeches. To help inform the decision of which type or types of media to use, be aware of where the target population gets its information, which channels are most/least believable, what your budget will support, and what will provide adequate "dosage" of the messages on a regular basis. Building and maintaining relationships with local media will aid in better results during a campaign.

- ***How will progress be monitored?***
  There are two common evaluation techniques to consider for evaluating a public awareness campaign: process and outcome. A process evaluation will ask questions such as "how is the implementation going?" or "are we meeting benchmarks"? An outcome evaluation will focus more on the number of people reached or how behavior has changed. Through ongoing evaluation measures, you will know
  - whether your messages and supporting materials are being seen,
  - whether your messages are perceived to be credible and plausible, and
  - whether your messages are affecting behaviors.

  It is recommended that you document comments and anecdotes about what people are saying regarding the campaign. Be aware of influences that may alter the meaning of the messages or that may cast suspicion on the campaign or campaign sponsors.

  An example of an extraordinary public awareness campaign currently being demonstrated is Jacksonville United Against Truancy (JUAT) in Jacksonville, Florida. JUAT's main goal is public awareness and the reduction of truancy. The National Center for School Engagement interviewed Shelley Grant, Director of Youth Offender Programs for the State Attorneys Office, and invited her to share thoughts about their public awareness campaign.

  What was the goal of JUAT's public awareness campaign?

  - Public awareness, first and foremost.
  - Dispell misperceptions that truancy is "skipping school for a day at the beach" or that it is inconsequential or harmless.
  - Truancy is not just a student problem; it is parents who keep their children home, preventing them from getting an education.
  - Relate what truancy really is today and then help people understand that there are serious consequences to it. A lot of parents don't know the laws regarding truancy. Specifically, if parents keep their kids out of school they could be prosecuted.

  What worked? What are some of the successes that the campaign has enjoyed?

  - The first day of school campaign has been successful through the years. When school first began earlier in August there were 10,000 children missing the first day of school. In the last couple

of years it has been in the hundreds - thousands and thousands less than it used to be. The campaign has certainly proven effective just by looking at first day of school attendance.

- JUAT is responsible for establishing Truancy Awareness Month in October.

What were some of the types of media and products used?

- A successful campaign needs something to draw students to the table. The use of lanyards, stickers, and pencils has worked in the past. Now with the new theme of Count Me In For Learning, we have Frisbees, calculators, and pencil pouches.

- A brochure puts something in their hands that they can hold onto and read later.

- Outlets and events are things like Back-to-School rallies and fairs, places where there are going to be children and parents who need information about school. These are places we focus our attention on always providing information at event tables.

- PSA's were produced that were of fair quality. Unfortunately, they are very expensive to do and we couldn't afford to buy airtime so the PSA's were running at 2 am and 4 am. [Editor's Note: Public Service Announcements are announcements that inform the public about a community service. These announcements are sent to the media (radio, television and print) at no charge. Typically, one cannot designate times that the messages are aired. However, if the media is approached as a sponsor of the message better air time is often awarded.]

- One year, a couple weeks prior to school starting, we had information flashing on the screen at local movie theatres about school starting and the importance of being in school on a regular basis.

- During the 2nd year of the campaign, an art class at one of the local colleges was given a class project to develop a sign for the sides of buses in Jacksonville about truancy. One young woman designed a picture of a bus passing by very quickly and it said "don't miss the bus to your future". This ran on buses for several months and seemed to be very effective.

What are some of the challenges and barriers of a media campaign?

- As a state agency, not having the expertise in the marketing field has been difficult in terms of graphics, press conferences, timing, and having the connections.
- Also, as a state agency, not always having the funds to do what you want to do. [Buying ad time on] Television is cost prohibitive when you operate on a grant.
- Trying to focus on the positive side of truancy. "Gloom and doom" is the nature of the business in a state attorney's office. Creating a message that doesn't focus on the negative can be challenging.

Talk more about the collaboration efforts that go into this campaign. Who is involved?

- The Chamber of Commerce has been very involved in the last few years in the back to school efforts.
- The school system appears to be fully on board with the new Count Me In For Learning campaign.
- In the past, Burger King has provided coupons for free Whoppers for students.
- Burger King and BellSouth have provided funding for the campaign.
- Winn Dixie, a local grocery store, has supported back to school efforts by placing event fliers in grocery bags.

Were media efforts evaluated? What was found?

- Parent surveys were administered and questions were asked regarding knowledge of truancy laws and motivation for getting kids to school. The responses indicated that a large portion of parents are knowledgeable about the laws and that those laws are quite motivating to get their children to school. Based on those findings, the Public Awareness campaign does seem to be getting the word out.

- Media attention around parental arrest is two fold. On the one hand, it is negative attention for the parent; but on the other hand it delivers a powerful message to other parents. It is reported that the state attorney feels this is the only offense that media attention is worthwhile because it lets other parents know this can happen to you if you don't send your children to school.

- The number of children who miss the first day of school has been reduced by thousands as seen by looking at day one attendance records.

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Count Me In For Learning!

National Center for School Engagement

July 28, 2006

An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
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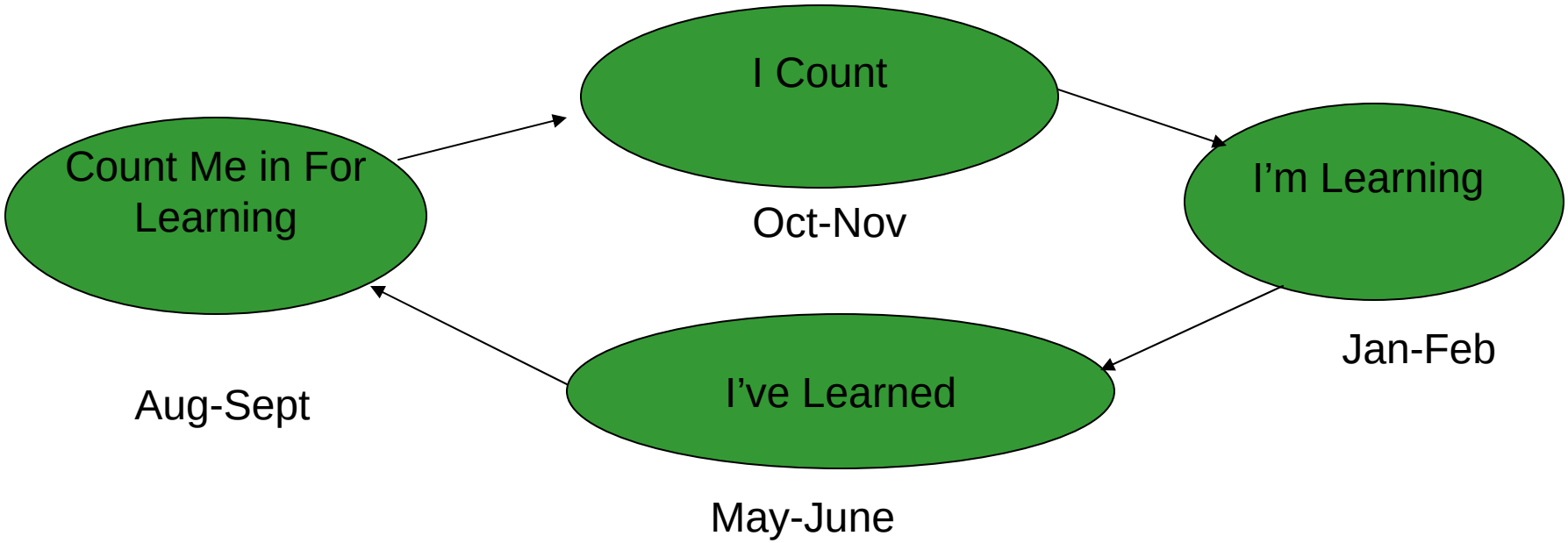
Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Count Me In For Learning!

Public Education Campaign for School Engagement

School Year Activity Cycle



NCSE

Why a Public Engagement Campaign?

- Schools incorrectly assume that the public will automatically show up to enroll their children. Estimates in Seattle and Philadelphia are at about 20,000+ children daily in each city who are not enrolled in any school
- Parents and children need to understand the importance of regular school attendance
- Attendance needs to be valued and celebrated year round to assure school funding, but mostly for student learning
- Parents and students engaged in school is the best indicator of achievement
- Count Me In for Learning is a brief set of ideas for local planning to take adopt change adapt to local needs

Count Me in For Learning

August Prior to School Opening

Example Activities

- Mobile School Enrollment at parks, rec centers, shopping malls, businesses
- Line up business partners for dissemination of Count me In message on shopping bags, fast food bags, posters
- Create give-aways like buttons, book bags, back to school lists, book marks, posters, T-Shirts, etc
- Media events about school enrollment, TV interviews, hotline for where to enroll an school info
- Family potluck dinners and fund nights at schools just before opening

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I Count

October-November

Example Activities

- School Count day activities (also state test day activities)
  - Welcome snacks
  - Parent socials and info sharing sessions
  - “I Count” stickers or buttons for all
  - Student led DJ music at lunch
- “I Count” poster & essay contests
  On Learning & staying in school
- “Improve the School” student focus groups
- Teacher- student role swaps
- School climate surveys and discussions

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I’m Learning

January-February

Example Activities

- Attendance & achievement awards
- Mid-Year Completion celebrations
- “Improve the school” parent focus groups
- Learning is Cool poster contest
- Student letters & phone calls to excessively absent students
- Teacher home visits
- Parent- teacher- student evening ice cream socials about learning
- Hands-on learning days

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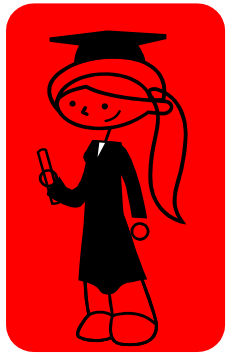
I’ve Learned

May-June



Example Activities

- HS Graduations make front page and TV news
- School & Business awards and incentives for graduates and continuants (elem-MS; MS-HS)
- What I’ve Learned essay contests
- What I wanted to learn student focus groups
- School celebrations and awards for attendance, achievement, academic lettering, service learning
- Student speeches, art, music science and math presentations of learning to service clubs , churches, civic groups
- Presentations of Learning a requirement for graduation and continuations

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Public Awareness Pays

- Communities with high levels of school attendance have fewer day time crimes and lower first time drug use
- Communities who set an expectation of regular school attendance see better outcomes for their children and youth
- Public awareness campaigns can help achieve high levels of school engagement, academic achievement and parent involvement
- Count Me In is just good public relations!

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Effective Marketing Through Truancy Posters

National Center for School Engagement

December, 2006

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Effective Marketing Through Truancy Reduction Posters

Public awareness is an important way to promote positive behavioral change in the general public or for a targeted group. Tools to raise public awareness include disseminating information, creating knowledge, and building understanding. For a comprehensive campaign, multiple avenues should be used, such as:

- Newspapers
- Newsletters
- Press releases/conferences
- Annual reports
- Magazines
- Television
- Radio
- Brochures
- Posters
- Billboards
- Audiovisual presentations
- Photography/Art
- Websites
- Events
- Exhibitions
- Theatre
- Community meetings

In addition to spreading the message far and wide, keep in mind that a campaign can range in cost from minimal to expensive depending on resources. Examples can be seen in the following text that represents this range.

In April 2006, The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) hosted a national truancy prevention poster contest to find out what materials communities are using to support truancy prevention and to promote the importance of school attendance. While the contest called for posters, the materials submitted were also used as brochures, newsletters, t-shirts, and advertising on buses.

A voluntary panel of judges was composed of representatives from juvenile courts and community programs, as well as high school students, truancy officers, social workers, and psychologists. In addition to the criteria used for rating creativity, originality, and marketing, judges were asked to provide comments about what they thought and how they felt regarding the posters.

The judges found the following elements to be fundamental in whether or not a poster was “good”, effective, or had impact.

Audience:	Who was the target audience? Are there multiple audiences? Was the audience too broad or too specific? Would the audience experience an impact or be driven to action?
Appeal:	Eye catching Attention getting Too wordy Use of color Use of visuals/graphics
Message:	Clarity of message Wordiness Relevance Positive/Negative Appealing tag line/catch phrase Language
Facts:	Use of facts/statistics Accuracy of information

Sixteen entries were received and judged based on originality, creativity, and marketing appeal. Awards were given in three categories:

1) Community campaign
2) School district/area-wide campaigns
3) Individual school/Community campaigns

In addition, two Judge’s Awards were acknowledged based on other unique qualities.

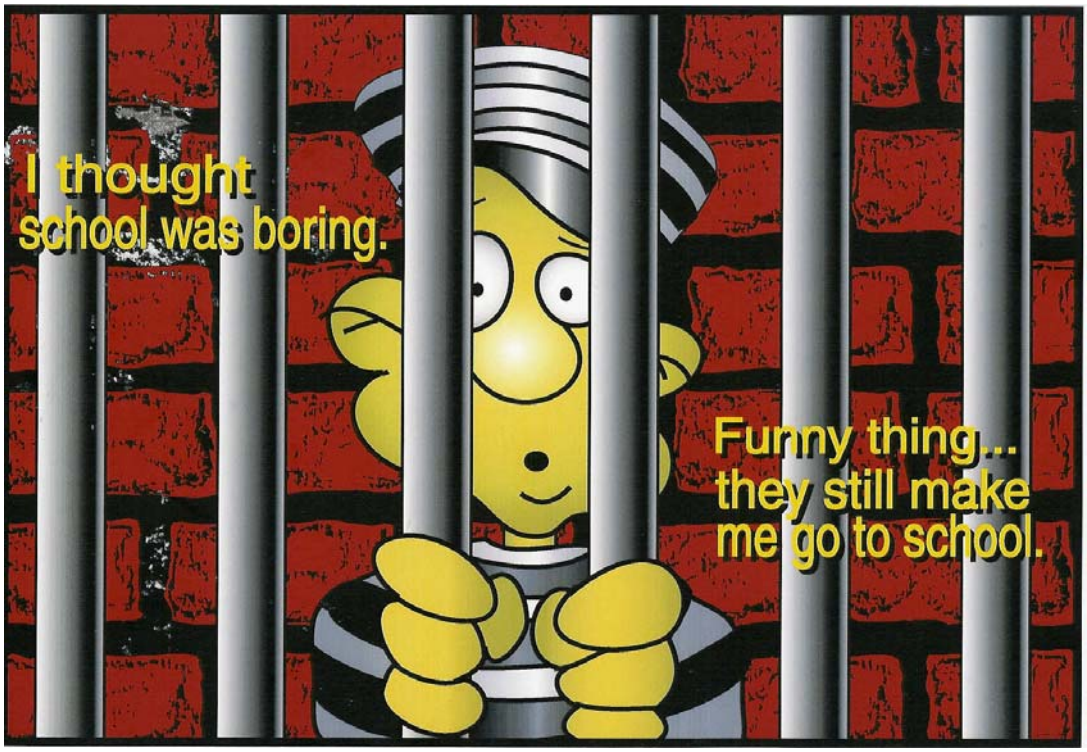
Each entrant was asked to describe how the entry was developed and give an example of its effectiveness. Below is a description of the award winners, photos or samples of the materials, and narrative about the campaign development.

The award for **“Community”** campaign went to Richard Williamson, LMSW-AP from Watauga, TX. His entry included hallway posters that could also be featured on websites.

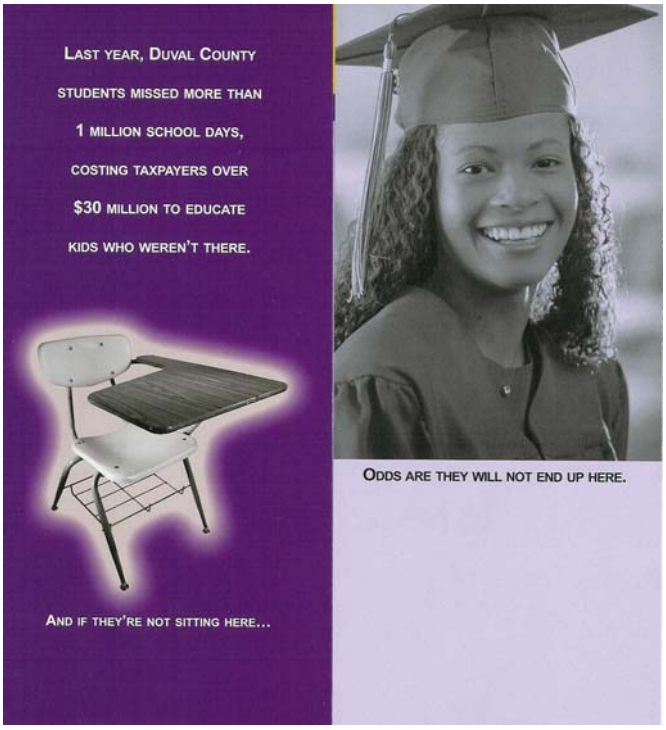
> He writes, “*A couple of years after leaving foster care, one of my former foster youth (a former truant) made drug-related choices resulting in incarceration. At my request, he drew the truancy-related artwork while incarcerated (he received about $3,000 for the artwork).When he was released, we went to a printer and used grant funding to print the series which is now in use in over 100 schools and other youth serving agencies in the Dallas area. While in the foster care system,*

he graduated from high school and an art school. The artwork was also used for brochures, display stands, four styles of book covers, posters, and websites".

By visiting www.truants.org, you can view the posters developed by this former truant.



The award for the "**School district/School area"** campaign went to the State Attorney's Office, 4th Judicial Circuit of Florida in Jacksonville. This entry included brochures entitled, "Count Me In For Learning". They are part of a public awareness campaign to stress the importance of attending school regularly. There are two versions of the brochure: one is for elementary school children, the other is for secondary school children. The latter is shown below. They were distributed to every student in Duval Public Schools.

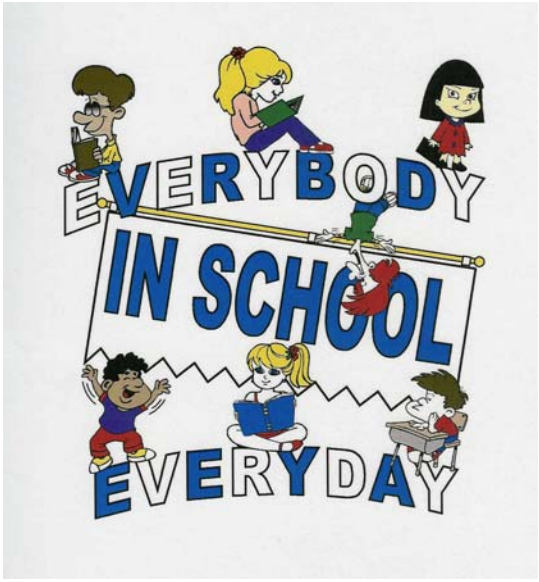


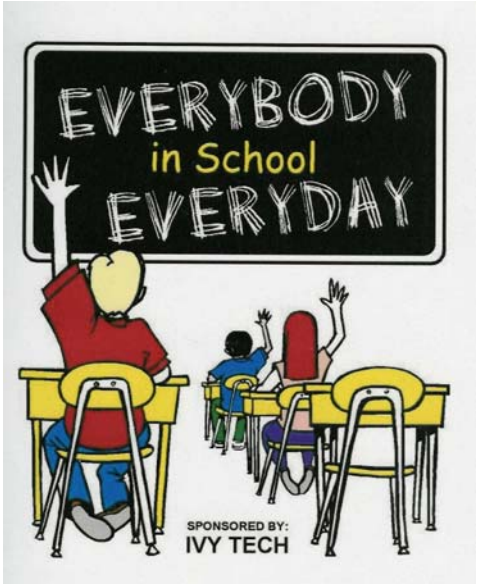
The Teen Court Program Coordinator in Jacksonville submitted the above entry along with a description of development.

> *"We have two brochures, one aimed at elementary children, the other at secondary children. The elementary brochure opens up to a picture of a smiling girl graduating, to reinforce the positive aspects of staying in school so the younger children have something to look forward to. The secondary brochure opens up to a picture of a jail cell, to reinforce where they could end up if they do not attend school regularly. This brochure serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of truancy. These brochures were developed by the State Attorney's Office and were widely distributed with the help of JUAT (Jacksonville United Against Truancy). JUAT is a collaboration of community partners dedicated to the reduction of truancy and public awareness of truancy in Jacksonville. These brochures were recently distributed to all Duval County students during the 2005-2006 school year. We have not had enough time to determine effectiveness, but the wide distribution is success in itself."*

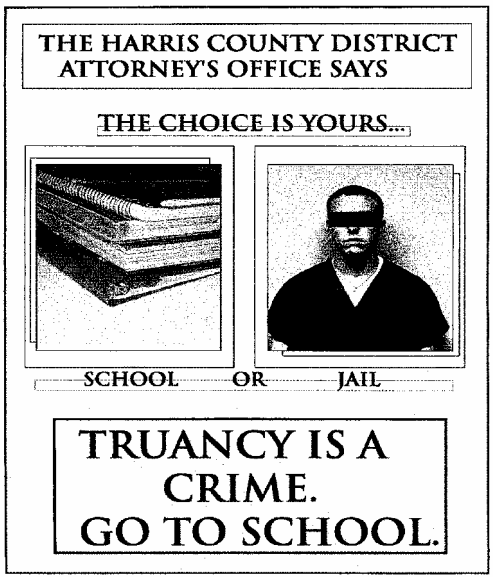
The award for **"Individual school and community"** campaign went to Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation in Indiana. The entry represented a local "Attendance Awareness Month" event. It included hallway posters and T-shirts with the message, "Everybody in School Everyday." The Coordinator of Student Services submitted the entry and reported a description of development.

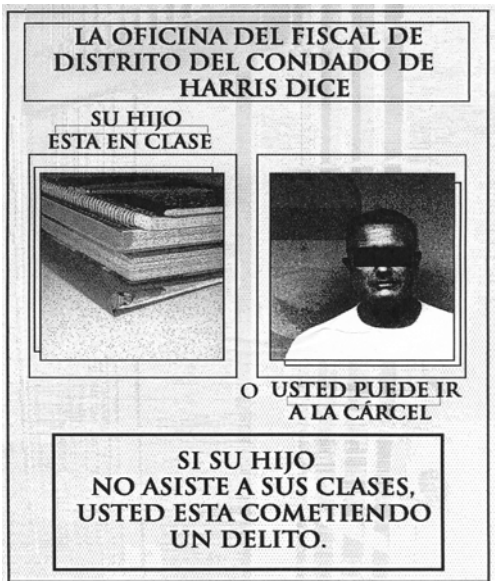
"*Posters were made and t-shirts were printed with the attached logo. The posters were displayed throughout the school buildings as well as in various public buildings such as the court house, the Office of Family and Children's Services, and local grocery stores. T-shirts displaying this logo were given to the winners of the elementary poster contest. One of the posters, completed by a 4th grade student, actually inspired the poster that will be used for Attendance Awareness Month in September 2006*."





One of two Judges Awards aptly named the **"*Straight-Up* Award"** was given to Harris County, Juvenile Division for their entry, "Harris County Stay-in-School Program Posters." This entry generated much discussion among the judges and was very controversial. It was recognized by youth as "straight-up" because it sends a clear message that truancy is serious. However, it is important that accurate messages be sent. Not all truants go to jail and not all parents of truants go to jail. Youth detention can be a consequence for a violation of a court order that mandates school attendance. These messages were published in both English and Spanish.





The second Judges Award, called the **"Eye-Catching Award"**, went to the State Attorney's Office, 4th Judicial Circuit of Florida in Jacksonville for a bus poster that was done in collaboration with Florida Community College. The poster was created as part of a class project. The student's favorite artwork was selected to be made into a bus poster. Part of its appeal is that it reaches multiple audiences.

A public awareness campaign is a great way to spread an important message to targeted audiences in a geographic area. NCSE encourages other communities to produce their own public awareness campaigns to reduce truancy and increase school attendance.

For more information, please visit our website: www.schoolengagement.org

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.

National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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Chapter Four: Quick and Easy References

- Truancy Case Management Handbook: Advice from the Field
- 10 Things A School Can Do To Improve Attendance
- How Can A School Achieve High Levels Of Parental And Community Involvement?
- Alternatives To Juvenile Detention
- Joint Efforts To Improve School Attendance
- School Attendance Tracking: Challenges And Effective Practices

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Truancy Case Management Handbook: Advice from the Field

National Center for School Engagement

January, 2007

An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Table of Contents

Methods

Around the country, school administrators, counselors and teachers, juvenile court personnel and community members are working to start or improve truancy reduction programs. Although there is no single best model, a key component of many successful programs is the case management that helps to reveal and surmount the underlying challenges to routine school attendance. In the Fall of 2005, The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) solicited contributions in the form of program descriptions, general advice, and specific case studies of successful students from two groups of case managers. First, as part of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program Evaluation, case managers for three of the funded programs were asked for their contributions. Second, NCSE posted a solicitation on the truancy listserv[1] for anyone who would like to contribute. A format outline accompanied both requests and is reproduced in Appendix A. As a result of these inquiries we received program descriptions and general advice from seven programs operating in seven states. Case managers who work for these programs submitted twenty-two case studies.

This Truancy Case Management Handbook is intended to help case managers learn what is working for their colleagues to aid them in improving their own practice. The Handbook is organized into three sections. "Advice from the Field" is a summary of key recommendations and insights gleaned from the submissions, and is the only substantive part of this report written by NCSE staff. Points included in this section were

[1] In order to subscribe to the listserv, go to www.schoolengagement.org, click on the tab called Join Our Network, and follow the directions to sign up for the listserv. All are welcome.

made by at least two, and generally more, of the case managers. "Program Descriptions" includes basic information about how each program operates, and a general advice section written by a program leader. "Case Studies" includes each of the twenty-two case studies. While remaining loyal to the meaning and intent of each contributor, each piece has been edited for grammar and clarity, and, in order to protect the confidentiality of the students and their families, students' names are changed and case managers' names deleted from the individual stories. We would like to thank the following case managers and program directors for taking the time to contribute to this document:

Christian Anderson - Isanti County, MN

Stephanie Bartholomew – Olaith, KS

Yolanda Champion – Jacksonville, FL

Shelley Grant – Jacksonville, FL

Susana Herrera – Houston, TX

Barbara King – Seattle, WA

David Kopperud – CA

Terri Martinez-McGraw – Pueblo, CO

Adam Myers – Seattle, WA

Dawn Nannini – Seattle, WA

Kari Simpson – Olaith, KS

Jan Solomon – Seattle, WA

Jeremy Crowe – Seattle, WA

Advice from the Field

The recommendations made by the various contributors to this handbook are remarkably similar. Even though the case managers work in different communities and within different program structures, they largely agree about how to work most effectively with families to promote school attendance. The following is a summary of advice given by our contributors, and lessons readily apparent from the case studies. Each suggestion included in this list was made by two or more contributors. Additional ideas, reported by just one case manager, appear in the individual testimonies. One point on which respondents do diverge is that of suggested case load. However, since managers agree that some students need much more assistance than others, the reported differences may have to do with the mix of students served. Several contributors note that an ideal case load for intensive service provision includes 20-30 families, but case managers can handle more cases if truancy is being identified and addressed early.

The following recommendations are grouped by topic area:

Program structure:

- Involve community agencies in the process of program development.
- Early intervention works best and is the most cost effective as well.
- House case managers in the school if possible to promote close contact with students.
- Take the time to build relationships with community agencies.

General strategies:

- Make lots of referrals.
- Follow-up is critical.
- Understand the community and the culture from which students come.

- While a high school diploma should be goal for most students, recognize that for some, the best option may be a GED.

Relationships with families and students:

- Always include families.
- Promote communication within family.
- Home visits are invaluable for uncovering underlying challenges the student faces.
- For each of the students about whom case managers wrote, there exist significant challenges regarding home life, mental health issues or both.
- Listen.
- Be consistent.
- Be respectful.
- Try not to pass judgment, and focus on the family's strengths.

Warnings:

- Do not do so much for a family that you become a crutch.
- Show students you are friendly and you care without being overly familiar.

Program Descriptions

Jacksonville, Fl. Truancy Arbitration Program

1. General Program Background Information:

a.) The following information is for the Jacksonville, Fl. Truancy Arbitration Program (TAP) based at the State Attorney's Office. The program director is Shelley Grant and the case manager is Yolanda Champion.

b.) TAP provides services to parents and students. All families receive case management. The case manager has the capacity to monitor attendance, conduct home and school visits and to assist the family in any other way possible. TAP also can pay for the family to receive counseling, recommend for the child to receive tutoring or for the parent to receive parenting classes. The case manager can also link the family to other social services if needed.

c.) We serve children who have reached the age of 6 years old or will be turning 6 years old by Feb. 1st of any school year, but have not reached the age of 16 (6-15 years old). For the 2004-2005 school year, gender is just about evenly split with 47% male and 53% female. Thirty- eight percent of the students are white, 57 % are African American, and 6% are of another nationality. The majority of the students are on free or reduced lunch which indicates low incomes.

d.) I try to go out in the field at least 2 ½ days a week to do home visits. When I'm not in the field, I'm on the phone with my students' parents, and they inform me why their child didn't attend school that day or a day within that week. I normally have 200-250 cases open at a time. The cases that are high risk receive intensive case management which includes phone calls, home visits, and school visits or conferences as needed. When visiting parents, I'm there for about an hour and sometimes longer depending on the situation. In Jacksonville, parents of truant students may be arrested for educational neglect. Parents are typically held in jail during one school day following an arrest. I try to help the parents on my caseload avoid arrest, but if they do not cooperate and their child's attendance does not improve, I have no choice but to recommend prosecution.

2. Your advice to case managers:

a.) What to do...examples

i.) Advise case managers to try and keep their case load at 70-75 cases and this way you are able to be more effective in working with your parents, by being able to monitor more frequently, before a case becomes high-risk. This might also allow you to spend time with families focusing not only the bad, but also the good, because these parents need that extra support person with a good listening ear.

ii.) Forming relationships with community agencies plays an important role in reducing truancy. If you can get your School Superintendent, Sheriff's Office, State Attorney's Office, and social service agencies involved, then citizens may see less crime being committed by juveniles (specifically daytime residential burglaries) and fewer dropouts from your school system.

The schools must first identify the truant child and then proceed with an initial school based intervention and, if proven unsuccessful, refer the case to the appropriate agency (ex. agency that work with kids who are ungovernable and can be held accountable for their own actions or to the State Attorney's Office, where the parent can be held accountable). The State Attorney's Office is here to intervene in trying to get that parent involved in their children's schooling. The Sheriff's Office's patrol officers can pick up all the truants that they see during school hours and deliver them to nearby middle or high schools or truancy centers. The personnel there can contact the parent to come and pick that student up. The parent is being made aware that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Counseling services come into play to address ungovernable behavior and if a parent feels family counseling would be beneficial. With everyone collaborating and coming together as one, at risk children return to school and delinquent activity decreases.

b.) What not to do....example

i.) Do only what is necessary for a family because when you go above and beyond, they become dependent on you and it is hard to get them out of that frame of mind. You don't want them to feel as though they need a crutch to lean on to get them through situations. They need to be taught to handle some situations on their own.

Houston Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project

General program background

The Gulfton Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project was funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to reduce truancy through early identification, assessment and intervention, improve juvenile and parental accountability, and increase community awareness and education concerning truancy.

The Project provides a comprehensive truancy reduction and prevention program for the Gulfton Community. Services include:

- Comprehensive Public Awareness and Education Outreach Campaign
  - Provide bilingual truancy awareness/prevention presentations to student and parent groups and area businesses and apartment managers
  - Promote the Youth Watch Campaign, distribute truancy posters and conduct community trainings on truancy laws and reporting truant youth
  - Publish articles on truancy laws and consequences in local bilingual newspapers

- Early Identification, Assessment and Intervention Case Management Services
  - Home visitation program conducted by Houston Police Officers for early intervention with truant youth and their families
  - Identify related needs of truant youth and families and provide referrals to social services
  - Implement an incentive program for participating students
  - Provide semi-monthly educational workshops to participating students
  - Provide a university campus tour for participating students

- Juvenile and Parental Accountability for Truancy
  - Promote public awareness of the laws and consequences of truant behavior
  - Increase parental involvement by collaborating with the target school's Parental Involvement Specialist
  - Issue warning notices and truancy citations and refer participating students to the Juvenile Accountability Court Program

The project strategy is implemented in three phases: Attendance, Referral and Enforcement. The uniqueness of the strategy allows law enforcement, school officials and city employees to collaborate to reduce truancy through early identification, assessment and intervention, as well as improve juvenile and parental accountability. The Truancy Reduction Project has also implemented a comprehensive public awareness and outreach campaign designed to educate the general public about truancy laws at social service provider and business organization meetings, and community events, in addition to providing truancy awareness and prevention presentations. The Gulfton Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project is operated by the City of Houston Mayor's Anti-Gang

Office and has developed a partnership between the Houston Police Department, the City of Houston Municipal Courts, and the Houston Independent School District.

Houston's Gulfton neighborhood is a densely populated 3.2 square mile apartment community where a majority of its residents are immigrants. Gulfton consistently has one of the highest crime rates in the city according to the Houston Police Department. The crime concerns of Gulfton residents include crimes by juveniles, gang violence, violent crime, robbery, drug trafficking, alcohol related crimes, prostitution, and property crime. While crime overall is decreasing in the Gulfton area, crimes attributed to juveniles, such as theft and vandalism, remain consistent. In addition, socio-economic, cultural and community risk factors all contribute to truancy among youth who reside in the Gulfton neighborhood. Most Gulfton parents face economic difficulties, language and cultural barriers, and limited opportunities for acculturation. These challenges can make complying with compulsory education laws a low priority. In addition, parents are not always aware that compulsory education laws exist.

The target population for the prevention component is all school-aged Gulfton youth and their parents/guardians. The initial target population for the intervention component was 250 eighth and ninth grade youth enrolled at Jane Long Middle School and Robert E. Lee High School and their parents/guardians who reside in the 77081 zip code. Currently, its services are limited to 250 ninth grade students. The majority of participating students are Spanish speaking and have immigrant backgrounds. Their ages range from 15 to 19. During the 2005-2006 school year, approximately 20 to 25 ninth grade girls received intensive case management services. The Gulfton Truancy Reduction Project assists students with a variety of issues ranging from high-risk gang involvement and victimization, to a lack of parental supervision and provides family support services.

The Project Coordinator spends an average of 25-30 hours a week providing case management services. Twenty to twenty-five females receive approximately 3-6 hours of intensive case management services a month depending on their individual needs.

Advice to case managers or those setting up case management programs
The ideal case load depends on the level of truancy and the issues affecting the student. One case manager can serve 30 to 40 students if the students are considered "early intervention" and exhibit a low level of truancy. If students are "late intervention" and exhibit high levels of truancy, a single case manager should focus on no more than 20-30 cases.

It is important to form relationships with community agencies. To begin, case managers and program coordinators should attend functions and meetings in their community and network with other attendees. Networking is especially important in order to build a referral base for your clients. Case managers should familiarize themselves with the services in the area and how each agency can complement the program and vice versa.

Parents and families should always be included in the process of working with truants. Case managers should understand the issues affecting the target population and

community. Rapport is the key to providing effective case management services. It is important not to make promises you cannot keep. Follow-up and consistency are crucial when working with families. A flexible schedule is particularly important when serving working-class families. Remember their time is limited and valuable. Change is a difficult process for everyone, so do not expect quick and dramatic changes. Acknowledge small improvements with incentives such as school supplies or household items.

When working with students, I find that gaining their trust is invaluable. Be understanding, patient, do not pass judgment and **listen**. Be consistent and follow-up, follow-up, follow-up! Be honest and open. As the case manager in Gulfton, I typically ask students what they believe is best for them and then work collectively with them to help them achieve it. It is a mistake to assume that what they need is an adult to tell them what is best for them, what to do, and/or treat them as if they are incompetent. I work with students to identify their goals. Students are receptive to this strategy. Meet with them regularly, not just when something is wrong.

What not to do....

It is important not to expect students and their families to share the same values and beliefs as you do. For instance, when I began working with this Project, I was determined to advocate high school graduation with a diploma and see General Educational Development (GED) Testing Programs as an ultimate last resort regardless of the student's situation due to my values. But as I began providing case management services, I realized that although I may share the same cultural background and have generally similar experiences as the students, I must revise my goal of advocating initially for a high school diploma to advocating for the completion of high school in the manner that best suits the student. Completing high school is a significant accomplishment for anyone, but to this target population, it indicates true triumph over risk factors that challenge their integration and acculturation process.

The At Risk Youth Program, King County Superior Court, Juvenile Services Division

General program background

The At Risk Youth Program, through King County Superior Court, Juvenile Services Division, was developed in 1999 with a grant from OJJDP to provide alternatives to the formal court process for court-involved, truant youth in King County, Washington.

Initially, two alternatives were developed: Attendance Workshops and Community Truancy Boards.

a) The pre-court attendance workshops have provided truant youth the opportunity to develop behavior contracts with their parents in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. These contracts are monitored by the school district for thirty days to assess compliance and level of behavior change. In the event of non-compliance, school districts can refer youth to community truancy boards (if available) or request a preliminary hearing for these youth to obtain a court order compelling them to go to school.

b) With the initiation and support of Superior Court, Becca[2] staff helped schools develop Community Truancy Boards (CTBs) in several school districts. CTBs consist of school district personnel, including but not limited to, the Becca representative (liaison to court), school counselors, school nurse, and volunteer members of the community. Unfortunately, due to decreases in funding, not all school districts were able to maintain their CTBs, and currently there are only two in operation in King County. The CTBs are very effective, however, in that a student and parent(s) are given time to meet with the board and explain their circumstances in depth, resulting in referrals, recommendations, and commitments from all parties to take necessary steps agreed upon to resolve the problems that impact youths' attendance. A stipulated agreement is the outcome of this meeting, and therefore a binding court document.

c) In addition, four case managers serve youth and families in King County. Each is assigned to a geographic area that serves the school districts in that region. By focusing on specific geographic areas, they are able to provide individualized case management by establishing on-going relationships with school-based and community-based staff, as well as with law enforcement, attorneys, and social workers. They act as liaisons between families and other providers to facilitate the success of families following through with their court-ordered obligations.

Superior Court operates a Becca Court in two sites in King County, with a full-time Becca commissioner who rotates between both locations. Truancy, At Risk Youth and Child In Need of Supervision (CHINS) cases are heard Monday through Friday in one or the other courthouse.

[2] The Becca Bill is Washington State's compulsory education law. It is named after a school-aged girl, named Rebecca, who was murdered during the school day while she was truant. More information can be found at http://www.metrokc.gov/proatty/truancy/becca.htm.

Services are free to all youth and families in the 19 King County school districts that we serve.

c) Please describe in general the youth you serve, i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, income.
We serve all truant youth from KC, mostly middle-high school students. We have no statistics on individual demographics at this time, although we serve many immigrant populations and a variety of ethnic groups. Many families are low income, but not exclusively.

d) How many hours per week (or month) do you dedicate to providing case management services, and what is your caseload?
Current caseloads are between 35-45, however not all receive the same amount of service or require the same amount of work. We are working to establish guidelines for this, as the ideal caseload is closer to 25 for in-depth work.

How many hours on average do you spend with each client?
See individual case history reports.

Advice to case managers or those setting up case management programs.
i) What is the ideal case load?
For intensive case management: 20-25.

ii) Ideas about forming relationships with community agencies
Identify common "causes" in your geographic area. Actively recruit service providers offering support to families in those areas. Find out other agencies' needs and goals, so that you have mutual incentives to partner, e.g., one agency that offers parent support and education may have trouble getting attendance at their voluntary events. This could become a resource for a family.

Join, or help facilitate a network group – providers/agencies with common target populations that can get cross-trained in the other programs' information. Advocate for relationship development between schools and service providers. Schools and courts alone cannot meet the needs of all families.

Attend school meetings as often as possible; this practice allows the court to support efforts made by schools, as well as provide them with information about more resources.

Put together resource/information packets to hand out to agencies; offer to come speak to staff about your program, and take back information about theirs.

iii) Strategies for involving parents and families
"It's not the process, but the people along the way that made it work." Quote from a mom after a successful intervention.

Always introduce yourself to both parents and youth. If possible, try to meet with them before a preliminary or fact-finding hearing; letting them know what to expect from the court process helps to reduce tensions and stress. Let them know what you can and can't do, remind them as to why they're in court and give them hope: e.g., "If we all do our jobs well, this process will be helpful for your family."

- Give your card to both parents and youth.
- Try to find out what the family perceives as barriers/challenges to the youth's attendance;
- Be non-judgmental;
- Use a strength-based approach throughout involvement, e.g., find out what goes well, what works, and capitalize on those strengths;
- Remember that buy-in among parents is greater on an At-Risk Youth petition than a Truancy petition because parents filed in order to seek help. In a truancy case, parents are involved because the school filed.

iv) Strategies for gaining student trust

- Introduce yourself to the student as well as the parent(s);
- Make youth feel important;
- Compliment students in front of their families and others when appropriate;
- Acknowledge that things are difficult. Explain your role, and your hopes for them, and that the more you know about their challenges, the better you can help the situation;
- Set clear boundaries, and let youth know what you can and cannot do.
- Meet with youth alone at some point; tell them, and then remind them, that what happens depends on choices they make – that they have some control in whether or not they come back to court;
- Be honest and non-judgmental;
- Listen to them – ask what they think is helpful, and offer assistance in areas the youth identifies. Your perceived attitude towards them is vital for them to buy in to your assistance.
- Be genuine – youth are used to being talked down to – a combination of respect and a sense of humor will go a long way. Acknowledge youths' progress and assets, and keep expectations high. You may be the first adult that sees them as "successful," and it can be motivating.

v) The balance between sticks and carrots

After establishing rapport, and building trust, you want to balance friendliness and helpfulness with accountability. Holding kids accountable to expectations also helps build trust, and lets them know you think they can be successful.

vi) Working with the schools

Attend staffings when possible and appropriate. Case management involvement can often help ease tensions between the school and the youth/family. Provide updates about community services/referrals to the schools. School staff change over time, and resources

unused by some staff members may seem more useful to others. Work on clarifying the issues that impact the student's attendance.

vii) Other thoughts

The court process is expensive; the better we do our job, the more helpful and meaningful the experience to our community members – make it count!

It's important for case managers to continue accepting contact with former students. If young people are not in good standing at school, it's hard for teens to find out about opportunities to continue their education. Their parents are focused elsewhere, and the youth may still want direction.

viii) Best Practice Ideas

- Case managers need to be accessible.
- If there's an option to choose additional cases, look for those that have three or more contempts, or are over two years old, to find out what is keeping the case around and move it along.
- Know when to step out, as well as to step in.
- Court case managers are unique, in that they work hard to direct youth and families away from their own agency, by hooking them up with outside services, etc.
- Use an intake package if available.

TLC for Children and Families, Inc., Olathe, Kansas

General Program Background

Juvenile Intervention Services for Truants (JIST) offers a twelve-week community-based intervention to youth and their families who are seeking assistance to improve family relations, school attendance and increase positive adult interactions for youth. JIST also offers a school-based service, with the case manager located in the school for truancy prevention. The case manager builds relationships with at-risk students and their families to provide support and advocacy on the youth's behalf. The JIST case managers meet face to face with each youth on a weekly basis for 1 to 2.5 hours to review and set goals; provide appropriate referrals to resources and to advocate on the youth's behalf for services. JIST serves youth aged 12-17, male and female, all ethnicities and all socioeconomic levels. The maximum caseload is 12 students per case worker. For the fiscal year 2005, 193 youth were served in both programs. Sixty-six percent of youth who were available for follow-up information and completed the 12-week program maintained a 95% or greater attendance or graduated from high school during the 12 months after the program. One hundred percent of youth who were available for follow-up information and completed the12-week program had no new juvenile offender adjudications during the 12 months after the program.

The overall goals and objectives for the case manager are to: 1) provide strengths-based case management services to youth and their families to increase functional skills, decrease the need for judicial intervention and maximize independent functioning in the community, 2) effectively communicate with youth, parent/guardians, caseworkers, schools, law enforcement, Social and Rehabilitative Services, attorneys, judges, District Attorney's Office, and other social service agencies, 3) assess and identify strengths and needs of clients and complete case plans with youth, 4) provide the most beneficial referrals for the clients, including education, support and crisis intervention by becoming familiar with community based programs and services, and 5) focus on providing services and referrals that allow the youth to remain in their homes.

Advice:

- Use positive reinforcement for small steps taken in the right direction.
- Always be sincere.
- Be honest and direct.
- Follow through with consequences.
- Empower the students by allowing them to select among a set of choices that you provide.
- See their side of the situation.
- Connect them to an adult or someone at the school to whom they can relate.
- Be a motivational speaker.
- Let each one know that they are special in their own way.
- Focus on their strengths and all the positives of the situation. (If they are in denial that a problem exists, then focus on how the issue will affect their lives.)
- Refer, refer, refer.

California School Attendance Review Boards

General Program Background

In California, the State School Attendance Review Board (State SARB) has been strongly encouraging the development of case management strategies for students with persistent school attendance or school behavior problems. Our concern is that too many high-risk students disappear from the educational system with no case management or follow-up after an initial identification of their problem. California is only slightly above the national average in its graduation rate as determined by the National Council for Educational Statistics; the SARB process, if fully implemented, would provide a safety net for students who are no longer engaged in school. Early identification is only useful if it is followed by early intervention and follow-up.

California's *Education Code* Section 48273 encourages case management of high-risk students by requiring every school board to adopt regulations for gathering and transmitting information about students with persistent problems to the county superintendent. The State SARB has developed a format for case management reports which includes information on the number of interventions attempted at the school level by grade, as well as cases referred to the SARB level. The form is available at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/documents/sarbformat.xls. This data tool is vital for case management of students with persistent school attendance or school behavior problems because it encourages follow-up and allows for county level strategy intervention development. In his *February 2005 Highlights* to county and district superintendents, Jack O'Connell, California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, stated: "Just as decisions about instruction must be driven by data, so must decisions about dropout interventions."

Another approach to improving case management in California has been the development of a sample school board policy with administrative regulations for attendance supervision. California's *Education Code* Section 48240 requires school boards to appoint a supervisor of attendance and such assistant supervisors of attendance as may be necessary to supervise the attendance of students in the district or county. School boards are also required to prescribe the duties of the supervisor of attendance and assistant supervisors of attendance, not inconsistent with law. Although the law does not specifically require that case management be one of those prescribed duties, case management for students with persistent school attendance problems is a logical duty of the supervisor of attendance. The State SARB has developed a sample school board policy with administrative regulations which may be adapted by school boards to meet local needs and which is available at http://www.cde.ca.gov/45463 . The State SARB encourages school districts in California to develop school board policies and local strategies for case management which will reduce the number of dropouts in the state public education system.

The State SARB has also developed a *School Attendance Review Boards Handbook* available at *http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/documents/sarb02.pdf* . This handbook emphasizes the importance of early identification and intervention, and provides a sample

"Case Chronology Work Sheet" on page 36. The "Case Chronology Work Sheet" provides a format for recording contacts or actions taken in case management. The handbook also contains more formal documents which may be used in case management:

- "Attendance Records and Summary of Action" (page 37)
- "School Attendance Review Board Information Sheet" (page 39)
- "Confidential SARB Referral Form" (page 40)
- "District Attorney Mediation Referral" (page 42)
- "District Attorney Truancy Referral" (page 45)
- "Subpoena for SARB Hearing" (page 46)
- "School Site, Student, and Parent Agreement" (page 47)
- "Summary of Parent(s) and Pupil Conference Agreement" (page 48)
- "Student-Parent Agreement" (page 49)
- "SARB Confirmation of Agreement Letter" (page 50)
- "SARB Congratulations Letter" (page 51)
- "SARB Identification Stickers" (page 52)
- "Petition to the Court to Suspend or Delay Driving Privilege Pursuant to *Vehicle Code*" (page 53)

These sample tools or documents for case management were designed as models or examples for California, but I believe many of these tools could be adapted for case management in other states. If anyone has questions about the SARB process in California, I may be contacted at *dkopperu@cde.ca.gov* or (916) 327-3590.

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Isanti County, MN Truancy Probation Officer Program

General Program Background

Program Name

Isanti County Truancy Probation Officer Program (Isanti County, MN)

Services Provided

Pre-court truancy interventions for all students grades 9 – 12 at an area high school as well as post-court supervision (Probation) for all juveniles referred to court from this school for truancy.

Student Population Served

Primarily Caucasian, ages 14 to 18, male and female, primarily average income level, approximately 1700 students, mainstream students as well as students receiving special education services.

Case Management

The Truancy Probation Officer (PO) has two separate caseloads:

1. The *Probation Caseload* ranges from five to fifteen juveniles who have been placed on probation for being adjudicated habitually truant. These juveniles all attend or attended the high school in which the Truancy PO is officed during the school year. The time spent working with these juveniles varies each week. In an average week, approximately 50% of the PO's time is spent working with this caseload. The PO ensures that each juvenile completes his/her court orders and follows the conditions of probation. The Truancy PO also assists other Juvenile PO's not on site at the high school with probation-related matters when convenient.
2. The *Truancy Intervention Caseload* includes all students (approximately 1700) at the high school in which the PO is officed during the school year. During the school year the PO works full time at the high school. While Probation duties are a part of the PO's daily routine, pre-court interventions with the general school population are the primary focus of duties during the school year. Fifty to seventy-five percent of the PO's time is spent working with these students in an average week. Due to the large number of students with whom the PO communicates, visits are generally very short – no more than a few minutes. Some interventions are more time consuming.

Advice for Developing a Truancy Intervention Program

1. Develop a position where the only focus of duties is on improving school attendance. This prevents other duties from taking valuable time away from truancy interventions.
2. Include the school(s) who will be receiving truancy intervention services, Probation, the County Attorney's Office, local Judges, local law enforcement and any other involved area agencies in the development process. All parties will be involved at some point (pre- or post-court) and will have valuable input as to how the program can be most effective. A positive working relationship with all parties involved is critical to a successful program.

3. Clearly define roles/responsibilities of all parties involved in the truancy intervention process. Depending on the number of students in the school(s) that will be serviced, it may be appropriate to designate some duties to school counselors, assistant principals, instructional assistants, etc. Divide the caseload up in a way that most effectively reaches as many students as possible at the targeted time.
4. Document your truancy intervention protocol. This provides a point of reference if there is ever any question as to when to intervene with students, and who is responsible for what.
5. If possible, have staff officed in the school(s) that you will be servicing. The close contact with students and visibility within the school is important. Students need to know where they can go if they have questions/concerns regarding attendance. This also allows for easy communication with school staff.
6. Start interventions as early as possible.
7. Involve parents early and often in the intervention process. Parents appreciate any kind of contact. Parent support is necessary, particularly in cases where truancy is chronic.
8. Communicate regularly with all agencies involved in the truancy intervention process. Regular updates on how the program is going are helpful for all. This will help to maintain a positive working relationship with all and will greatly increase the effectiveness of your program.
9. Assign the responsibility of determining consequences for truancies to school staff (counselors, assistant principals, etc.). This allows the truancy interventionist to be a support person in helping students improve their attendance, rather than meting out negative consequences for poor attendance. This also helps the truancy intervention staff to maintain a positive relationship with students.
10. When selecting a person to work as your truancy intervention staff member, find someone who enjoys working with the age group of students you will be servicing and someone who communicates extremely well with others. This is a critical piece of a successful program.
11. While it's important to be a support person for students who are having problems and are, as a result, being truant, be careful not to become too "friendly" with students. Teenage kids are very good at taking advantage of such a situation, and an overly familiar relationship is counter-productive.
12. Work diligently with every student until all resources and opportunities to improve have been exhausted. Don't give up on any student.
13. Understand that school is not the place for every child. There may be a time when you need to suggest an alternative learning program or GED. If that is appropriate, that is OK. Students need to be in a program where they are being successful.
14. Have a clear attendance policy at the school(s) with which you will be working. Be sure everyone involved has a full understanding of that policy and the consequences associated with it and that the policy is fully and consistently enforced.

Advice for case managers

I have worked with hundreds of students over the past four years and have experienced several successes, big and small, in that time. I think there are several reasons for those successes:

- The students see that someone cares
- Someone is able to explain to these students why it is so important to graduate from high school and that they develop responsible behaviors (including attendance) while at school, as these behaviors will carry on into their adult life.
- I clearly understand our school's attendance policy and am able to relay that knowledge to the students and apply it to how they can improve and be successful.
- Students have been referred to support services that they truly need and have not been connected to before
- The cooperation I have had with the school and area agencies has been wonderful. Our program would not be successful without the cooperation we have.
- I truly enjoy working with the students at the high school. I connect very well with them, and I think that they feel comfortable in my office.

A Particularly Challenging Case

The most challenging cases that I have experienced are the ones where the student truly does not fit in at the high school, honestly does not care whether they are successful or not and, whether they are aware of it or not, are looking for a way to get out of the high school and into another program. The way they commonly do that is through chronic truancies. In our efforts to help these students be successful at all costs, we often times offer them opportunity after opportunity to improve their attendance while trying everything we can think of and being as creative as we can be. Eventually there comes a time when we have to recommend an alternative placement or suggest that the student pursue a GED, because that is truly the only way that he/she will be successful. It is sometimes difficult to realize that a student does not belong in a regular school setting and that keeping them there is setting them up for failure, but it is necessary to be able to make that decision when the time is right for the student.

The Importance of an Effective Truancy Intervention Program

Promoting positive school attendance is so important to all students not only to their success at school but also in their future. Kids often times do not see how their actions and behaviors during their teenage years will effect their adult lives. Helping kids to understand that correlation will positively change their lives forever!

Project Respect Truancy Reduction Program, Pueblo, CO

General program background.
The goal of the Pueblo School District 60's Project Respect Truancy Reduction Program is to reduce the truancy rate by identifying the causes of truancy and implementing effective interventions in order to give all children the educational opportunities they deserve. Research indicates that truancy often leads to a life of delinquency and crime. Truancy Prevention in Pueblo, Colorado is taken very seriously. Pueblo School District 60 and the 10th Judicial District Court have taken an aggressive stance in the fight against truancy.

The goals of the Truancy Reduction Program are to address underlying risk factors for truancy:

1. Improve school attendance for targeted students.
2. Improve the academic outcomes for students.
3. Improve students' social-emotional lives.
4. Increase student and family access to services in the community.
5. Decrease juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

We serve all of Pueblo School District 60 students and are a school-based program. We have a Community Advocate who works with families and students who are faced with issues of non-attendance, suspension, and who are at risk of school disengagement. We are located in most Title One schools and serve many students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. We serve 324 students: 83% Latino, 11% Caucasian, 4% Native American and 2% African American.

Your advice to case managers or those setting up case management programs
Our Community Advocates are case managers. They provide the following services to families:
Daily Responsibilities:

1. Provide services to families, addressing engagement and attendance;
2. Provide tutoring, mentoring, mental health or substance abuse treatment;
3. Provide anti-bullying education;
4. Abide by and enforce the Dist. 60 school attendance policy;
5. Ensure accountability for grants;
6. Collect and record data for Project Respect;
7. Obtain and maintain approved releases of information;
8. Transport students and families to/from school and to/from appointments;
9. Scrupulously maintain confidentiality;
10. Prioritize home visits

The average caseload for an advocate ranges from 12 to 18 families who meet program criteria.

•Responsibilities of the Community Advocates:

1. Work with student's attendance and discipline issues;

2. Collaborate with school staff, community agencies, students, courts and families concerning educational, social and emotional needs.

•Goals of the Community Advocates:

1. Alleviate any obstacles interfering with academic success;
2. Improve attendance and enhance school engagement.

We engage students and families by having or providing:

- Monthly Pot-Luck Family Nights
- Love and Logic Parenting Classes
- Annual Basketball Tournaments
- Annual Volleyball Tournaments
- Cinco de Mayo 10k/5k Run/Walk
- 16th de Septiembre Golf Tournament
- Attending parent/teacher conferences with the parents/students
- Home visits
- Doing strength based inventories for parents and students and proving services.

Community Partners include:

•Catholic Charities
•DAP/Pathways for Youth
•Department of Social Services
•Symphony
•Cathie Bonham MA LPC
•Tom Farley Esq
•Pueblo School District 60
•Title One funding
•Colorado Trust
•El Pomar
•Little Ceaser's Dave Femester
•Sonic
•Colorado Juvenile Minority Family Advocate
•OJJDP
•Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
•National Center for School Engagement
•Colorado After School Network
•Pueblo Medical Society
•Pueblo School District 60
•10th Judicial District Court
•Catholic Charities
•Pueblo Police Department
•Pueblo County Department of Social Services
•Pueblo County Detention Alternative Program
•Posada Homeless Shelter
•El Centro Del Quinto Sol Community Center
•YMCA
•Pueblo Chamber of Commerce
•Crossroads Drug and Alcohol Center
•YWCA-Child Care Center at Keating
•Boys and Girls Club
•21st Century Learning Center•Project Unidos Mentoring Program
•Operation School Bell
•Rare Breed Youth Sports
•Pueblo Community College
•University of Southern Colorado-Social Work Department
•University of New Mexico- Highlands- Social Work Department
•Private Donors
•YWCA-Women's Crisis Center
•Pueblo County Probation Department
•Spanish Peaks Mental Health Center

What Works:

- Do not tell the family what is wrong with them, they already know. Always work from a strength based philosophy.
- Encourage school engagement/parent involvement, whatever a parent can do to assist in the education process.
- Celebrate strengths and successes.
- Encourage community partnerships
- Learn names of the family members; be engaging and sincere when speaking to them.
- Keep an open door policy at your school.
- Let the family know they can call upon you when appropriate.
- Have a resource guide for community agencies and phone numbers to contact if the family is facing a challenge.
- Know your community resources and include them in collaboration in providing services for students and families.
- Truancy is a community issue and must be treated as such.
- Keep accurate data regarding services to families and students. If the data show that you are not making a difference, try something new and review your data again until you show gains. **Your data should drive your program!**

Success Stories

Anthony

Background of the Student and Family

Anthony, aged 15, lived in an apartment building that houses low-income families with varying ethnic backgrounds from three public school districts. Last fall, Anthony was placed with his biological mother, 34 years old, by state services, after a period of living with his grandfather while his mother was in treatment. She was struggling to attend state funded community college, work part time, and remain sober. The state supported the youth living in the two bedroom apartment with his sister, his mother's boyfriend, two pit bulls, a cat and a python snake. It was small, crowded and the youth slept on the floor in the living room. The boyfriend was the most stable member of the household and worked daily as a construction laborer. All household members were Caucasian. The mother's health was poor, and she was ill often. Anthony felt his mother favored his older sister.

Challenges and Assets

Anthony liked living with his grandfather and other family members and resented his mother's efforts to have him back home with her. He thought she just wanted his support funding; he had no privacy by living in the living room. He was angry at home and at school. He had often been suspended for bad behavior and was expelled for the remainder of the school year. His mother was angry and had few effective strategies to support her child except to complain about the school. The youth was put on probation for a community offense and his probation counselor worked hard with the family to stabilize household tempers. The juvenile probation counselor did not know the educational systems in the community and suspension was the norm for the teen. Anthony knew how to stay home via suspension and make his mother angry. That was the one thing he controlled.

The family rallied when they felt the support systems lagging and, at these times, they were most responsive and active. The youth is intelligent with good transfer grades from the school near his grandfather's home. He tested negative for substance abuse and he only got into trouble because he wanted spending money. He wanted to work and get out of the home; however, he was only 15 years old. His sister attended another school district and seemed to have fewer challenges. She worked in a subsidized city program during the summer and he wanted to do that, too.

Case Management Activities

I visited the family at home and listened to the members tell their stories and wishes. His probation counselor was open and eager to provide support services if the family would participate regularly. I asked for in-home family counseling and anger management skills for the youth via juvenile services, and I tackled the school district. I am currently

looking for a tutor for Anthony to keep him engaged in school work while he is on the wait list for an alternative program. He wants to return to his home school in the fall so he may remain on tutoring services to pass two classes by year end. Tutoring expenses will be covered from a grant and will continue through the fall if Anthony attends his sessions regularly. I met with staff from his home school and developed a good relationship with his counselor and a male teacher, who personally agreed to engage Anthony. The challenge was an administrative staff member who felt Anthony intimidated female teachers and she kept suspending him to protect her young teacher's ability to control her overcrowded classroom.

Anthony attended weekly Anger Reduction Training (ART) classes and graduated with new skills and an ability to understand anger in others. Mother and son are participating in family counseling sessions and he seems to like the counselor and the process. He feels he can return to school and remain in school. Home is improving, and his mother feels relief.

I obtained an application for the summer work/education program his sister participated in last summer and personally spoke to a program manager to see if Anthony could participate in it this summer. They agreed to give me an application and to give it heavy consideration for enrollment. His mother is pleased that I am advocating for her son. He has a weekly job, now, working for the school district assisting the track and field manager with the spring season. He reports to the district stadium after school, gets his long jump/triple jump assignment and remains at work until the last event is held and he is dismissed. He is earning money, participating in an appropriate activity and learning to maintain a time card, take direction, and show initiative.

Anthony is attending all his assigned classes and services. He is working weekly, has not re-offended and is eager to attend tutoring and summer work. His outcome is excellent, and the family home is peaceful. He has a new probation counselor and she is an advocate for him and willing to attend school meetings and continue all the services in place.

Alternate Strategies

When I received the case, Anthony had already been suspended for several days, and I did not have a clear understanding of the school's position. Only after working with his counselor on a schedule change, did I find out about the teacher who complained about his actions in her classroom. The youth made a big mistake more than once and the school needed to support their young teacher with a mentor and discipline strategies. Anthony was not the only disruptive student, and the classroom is part of a newly organized small school program inside a traditional building. There were no options for transfer because only a few instructors taught 9th grade classes. I would have asked the administrators to provide some kind of program or administratively transfer Anthony to another building for his 9th grade year before he became a target for the teacher and administrator.

Tyrell

Background of the Student and Family

Tyrell is a 16 year old African American youth living in a state-supported home with little contact from his biological family. He qualifies under IDEA as needing 100% self contained classroom instruction and vocational training. He tested positive for substance abuse while under the supervision of juvenile services. He continues to be supervised by a probation counselor. He is currently living out of the school district with his African American foster parent and her mother's extended family. The home is crowded, friendly, and very organized. There are eight members of the household and he sees his prior foster mother daily because she lives upstairs, and his current guardian is her daughter.

The last two years of schooling, while he was living with his biological father, resulted in several suspensions, truancy issues and offenses in the community. The local probation office had him under supervision on prior matters and he felt lost, alone and abandoned. He said his father would often visited, but he did not provide financial support for Tyrell. His biological mother lost custody of him due to her ongoing drug use during her pregnancy. He was placed in foster care because his father could not be located at the time. When he was two years old, his father tried to care for him, but he has been in and out of care with his foster mother's family for years.

Challenges and Assets

Tyrell needed enrollment in his residing district and his foster parents were not sure how to transfer him since they could not locate his father for permission or a change of guardianship. He failed to attend school for several days, was suspended for possession and had no transfer grades. He needed IEP instructional materials and a self contained classroom for success. Tyrell used drugs sporadically when not in his new home. Another challenge was financial; his foster family wanted state support for the youth. He came with no clothes, shoes or medical coverage.

Tyrell was on community supervision and needed close monitoring to maintain his placement.

Working with his placement family is a pleasure, and their high expectations for Tyrell are an asset. They will not tolerate drug use, but will support him in attending outpatient treatment. His prior foster mother knew his father, spoke respectfully of him in front of Tyrell and wanted both parties to have a positive relationship. She was willing to participate in family counseling and include all members of the household so everyone would know the expectations. All the other children in the family attend school daily and pass their classes.

Case Management Activities

I arranged to meet his placement mother at the enrollment center for his new district, and I discussed the family situation with their personnel. I facilitated enrollment of the youth

and brought his immunizations, IEP and transcripts. He was immediately given a choice of classes and placed in an appropriate educational program. It is beneficial for a Case Manager to bring all necessary documents when enrolling a student in school.

Next, I wrote the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) a letter explaining the home situation and the need for support funds for the family. The family now receives financial support to help the youth with his needs. His probation counselor provided in-home family counseling and the entire household participated in their weekly sessions. I worked on outpatient treatment and finally found an inner city group that provides activities, sports and field trips along with weekly counseling.

Outcome

I am optimistic for his outcome is as long as he remains with his current family and is free from drugs. Seeing his father is not beneficial unless his father chooses to visit him at home. The youth is currently engaged in school, happy and drug free.

Josh

Josh, a 15 year old male and 10th grader, was referred to the JIST (Juvenile Intervention Services Truancy) Program through the Johnson County District Attorney's office. He had just been released from Juvenile Justice Authority custody and returned home when he was placed in the Truancy Case Management Program. While in a group home his grades and attendance improved, but soon after he returned home, truancy became an issue again.

His JIST caseworker learned that Josh and his immediate family had been in and out of the system several times. At the time Josh was signed into the program, both parents were on probation themselves. Once in the program the caseworker discovered three main issues that led to Josh's truancy: alcohol and drug abuse by Josh and other family members, domestic violence and negative sibling role models who were delinquent themselves.

Alcohol and drug abuse, specifically marijuana use, were used as Josh's recreational activity and during the program he had a positive drug screen. He was struggling with his grades and failed all but two classes. Along with resources for substance abuse relapse treatment, Josh and his family were given numbers for food and utility assistance and domestic violence intervention. His parents' issues of domestic violence and substance abuse reportedly decreased as a result of their being on probation and also having a desire to keep their son both in school and at home.

During the 12-week program, Josh, guided by his caseworker, began to focus on his individual strengths and how to keep from returning to custody. He set goals for himself in the areas of Education, Socialization, Identity, Affection, Health and Economic Situation.

While on the program, Josh's school attendance dramatically improved as did his grades. On his last progress report, he earned all A's and has not missed a single day of school so far this year. To say that he successfully completed the program would be an understatement.

Jeremy

Background of the Student and Family

Jeremy was the nicest chronically truant kid I have known - popular, handsome, charming, and athletic. He was 16 at enrollment in my Stay in School Program and had every intention of going to school daily, but he did not get up in the morning and his family did not want the job of waking him. He had an attention disorder, had medications but at times did not take them, and his parents were tired of filling prescriptions. Jeremy was Caucasian, tall and athletic, but with fourth grade math skills and 9th grade reading skills. His father was an alcoholic and his mother had a job most of the time. His sister had graduated and attended community college and worked. When I interviewed her, she said she had just gotten tired of her brother and how he manipulated her parents, so she left home.

The youth was on supervision and completed probation without attending school.

Challenges and Assets

Jeremy agreed to do everything but failed to follow through with his intentions. He did not take his medications regularly, and said he did not like how it made him feel. He hyper focused on baseball and was a star pitcher in a local premier league. He wanted to play for the school varsity team, but he could not qualify because of his grades and attendance. Jeremy knew his game schedule and could make every practice, game, and team meeting. Baseball was his mother's favorite sport and she supported her son by raising funds for the team.

The family home was modest and there were always kids around and family friends. I sensed that it was acceptable to his family for Anthony to skip school, and because he was an athlete, he found acceptance, recognition and fame. He went to prom with his girlfriend and did not have to work because of practice or team meetings. There are no expectations for him except to play professional baseball.

Case Management Activities

It took me awhile to understand the family dynamics and history. Even though his best grades were in vocational classes, I could not get Jeremy interested in career testing or classes. He would respond by attending team meetings because he liked all the other Stay in School members and he wanted an incentive check for participating in team vocational activities.

I spent time with his mother trying to understand his school failure. When I visited the family in the late morning, his parents were in bed. I made arrangements for psychiatric evaluations, drug screenings, etc. His probation counselor and I met several times and I kept him informed of Jeremy's participation in my program. Jeremy completed probation even though he did not go to school. I enrolled him in two alternative projects, but he always failed to attend. His school district filed a truancy petition but he managed to avoid consequences.

Outcome

While I was working with Jeremy, I felt like I did not make a difference in his life and feared that he would easily slip through the cracks. Nonetheless, Jeremy is now 18 years old and he wants to go to the local community college. He has decided to attend school and he wants a diploma or GED so he can play baseball. School is finally his decision and it is now a part of his focus. He comes into my office every month or so, to check in, and he always thanks me for enrolling him in my program and being there for his family. Case Management of this youth did not look successful during his active enrollment, but all of the opportunities ended up benefiting him in the long run.

Amy

Background of the Student and Family

Amy was a 15 year old 9th grade girl (born in the U.S.), who lived with her mother. Her parents are from Ethiopia and they separated in 2000. Father lives out of state. The child had no health issues.

Challenges and Assets

Amy came to the attention of the case manager due to a truancy petition that had been filed by the school district. The school counselor had reported that the youth had a big problem with skipping classes, mainly Language Arts and History. Amy's attendance improved after a school meeting with her and her mother. However, her attendance became problematic again after Amy ran away from home.

Amy's mother was concerned with her daughter's attendance and with her not following house rules. Mother reported the youth would go and come as she pleases and engage in reckless activities. Mother was also worried about who Amy was spending her time with. Mother reported that during one occasion Amy had a boy over during school hours and they were having sex. Amy admitted that she did have a boy over to her house but only for ten minutes during the day when she should have been in school. She also has made allegations that mother beat her. Amy reported when they lived in Ethiopia her father would beat her and mother as well. The mother admitted that they use physical discipline to punish their daughter, but stated that neither she nor her father "beat" Amy.

Amy complained that her mother does not let her do anything or go anywhere without her mother's supervision. She also reported that her mother wanted her to hang out only with Muslim friends. Her mother reports she only wants her to refrain from hanging out with bad people and believed some of Amy's friends may be gang affiliated. The school district filed a truancy petition and was in the process of starting the contempt process.

Case Management Activities

As case manager I spoke with the school counselor who reported that she asked the mother to come and talk to me about other resources and possible referrals. I met with the mother, discussed the issues (listed above) and offered assistance. The mother reported that Amy had participated in individual counseling, but they had not tried any family counseling. The case manager also spoke with the mother about filing an At-Risk-Youth petition. Her mother said she would like to file one, and did. During the course of working with the family, the case manager referred the family to family counseling, a wraparound support program and to a gang awareness and prevention program.

The case manager contacted the family and other community-based providers weekly to see how things were going. During the course of two years, Amy had several warrants issued for her arrest for either failure to appear or for leaving her court-ordered placement. As a result, she went through several sanctions including writing book reports

and papers, performing community service hours, day reporting, work crew, and secure detention.

The case manager developed a good working relationship with Amy and her mother and from time to time was able to mediate and counsel both to assist them in understanding the court process and navigating through services.

The Outcome

After a long road, Amy started attending school daily, keeping her counseling appointments, following house rules and not running away from home. As a result, her mother allowed Amy more time with her pro-social friends, which had a positive impact on the mother /daughter relationship. Amy's mother commented that she is talking "with" her daughter, instead of "at" her daughter.

The case manager recently had contact with Amy who reported that she is enrolled in a community college and that she and her mother have a good relationship.

Several factors contributed to this family's success. First, both Amy and her mother were willing to engage in services and were open to trying something new. The case manager is doubtful that this family would have been connected to the community services without case management. Access to the community-based services that were provided to the family required collaboration between the case manager and the person or agency providing the services.

Mark

Background of the Student and Family

Mark was a 16 year old 10th grade boy, born in the U.S. He lives with his mother and father on an island near Seattle. Despite the fact that his mother and father are wheelchair bound, they are very mobile.

Challenges and Assets

Mark came to the attention of the case manager due to his assistant principal who had inquired about possible resources and filing information. The case manager's understanding was that Mark had been taking advantage of his parents' inability to keep up with him. Mark would not maintain regular school attendance, and at times he would not come home on time for curfew. Mark had also been verbally abusive to his parents.

Case Management Activities

The case manager spoke with the assistant principal who reported that the school had tried a number of interventions with Mark and his parents in order to assist Mark in attending school on a more regular basis. The assistant principal also reported that Mark had only had two discipline referrals. The case manager went to the school to work with the staff on filing their petition and also conducted two home visits with the family. Mark's parents reported that he had been prescribed medication for depression but that he was no longer taking it. They also reported that they had been diligent in stressing the importance of education to Mark.

The case manager worked with the parents, mental health counselor, and school to come up with an attendance agreement that Mark would be able to follow. The case manager also worked with Mark in looking at other educational alternatives. Although there were not many in the area, Mark was very excited about the CEO (Career Education Options) program at the community college. Mark agreed he would attend school everyday in order to show the CEO program he was serious about his education.

The Outcome

Mark started attending school each day and was looking forward to attending the CEO program in the fall.

Recently, the case manager had contact with the previous assistant principal, who is now the principal, and he reported that Mark currently has a job and is doing well.

The success of this story comes from the parents' ability to overcome their own disabilities and from the case manager's effort to track down every service available as well as attend every school meeting and court hearing. The case manager was able to help

keep the family together and communicating at this time, and by establishing rapport with the youth, was able to help him make a positive educational decision.

Malaya

Background of the Student and Family

Malaya was a 15-year-old 9th grade Filipino girl who lived at home with her parents and her 11-year-old sister. Both of Malaya's parents worked outside of the home. Her mother moved to the United States in 1993. Her father and both daughters moved in 2001.

Challenges and Assets

Malaya's father reported that his wife was difficult to communicate with, stubborn, talked a lot, and refused to listen. The father also described Malaya as being "out of control". She was truant from school, ran away from home, and did not obey the curfew. Malaya's father reported that he found her at her boyfriend's house during school hours. Due to Malaya's failure to maintain regular school attendance, the school district filed a truancy petition with the Juvenile Court.

Malaya stated that her mother talked too much, didn't listen, and lectured her about her behavior. She also stated that her parents argued because her mother wanted everything her way. Malaya reported that she did not like being with her family because her parents were too strict and they did not trust her. Malaya's father and mother (on rare occasions) met with the bilingual teacher, counselor and assistant principal to work through some of their family issues.

Case Management Activities

The truancy petition was relatively new, and the school district had just begun the contempt process at the time the case manager met with Malaya's father to assist him with filing an At-Risk-Youth (ARY) petition. The court granted the petition and ordered Malaya to follow the court order. The court also ordered the parents to attend parenting classes. Malaya's father indicated (on the record) that he worked the graveyard shift and it would be difficult for him to attend the classes. Her mother did not enroll in the parenting classes and had not participated in the ARY process, despite continuous encouragement from the case manager, including numerous phone calls, mailings, and referrals to culturally appropriate service providers.

The Outcome

Malaya had four warrants issued for her arrest over a nine-month period. However, her parents decided not to have the warrant served on her at school, since she started attending school on a more regular basis. At one point, Malaya's mother was court-ordered to appear at the next hearing. She appeared and started taking the ARY process seriously. Near the end of the case manager's involvement, Malaya and her mother began to communicate more effectively. Malaya stopped running away from home and she and her parents reported "things are much better."

Aziza

Background of the Student and Family

Aziza was a 16-year-old 10th grade girl born in the U.S. to Somali parents. She lived with her mother in public housing. Aziza has no other siblings and no history of substance abuse.

Challenges and Assets

Aziza's mother reported that she was not following the house rules, not attending school on a regular basis and was verbally abusive. The mother also reported that as a result of Aziza's inconsistent school attendance, the school district had filed a truancy petition, but had yet to file a motion for contempt. Aziza's mother reported that she frequently ran away from home and would be gone for up to ten days at a time. She also reported that they had tried family counseling, but that she felt Aziza could benefit from some individual counseling.

Case Management Activities

The case manager met with Aziza's mother to discuss the truancy process. The mother requested additional information on filing an At-Risk-Youth (ARY) petition because Aziza was running away from home. The case manager explained the process and assisted the mother with filing the petition. Over the course of four months, the case manager worked with Aziza's mother, Aziza and the school counselor to adjust Aziza's school schedule and to enrolled her in night classes. The case manager also referred her and her mother to a culturally appropriate service provider for individual and family counseling.

The Outcome

During the time of the case manager's involvement, Aziza only ran away from home once. She finished her night school classes and started attending school regularly. Within four months, Aziza's mother reported that she "made a total turn-around and was no longer verbally abusive." As a result of Aziza and her mother's improved relationship, her mother requested and was granted a dismissal of the ARY petition. The case manager has not had contact with the family since the dismissal.

Sue: The Power of a Home Visit

Sue was in the second grade and seldom went to school. When Sue did go to school she always appeared tired and could not concentrate. You see, Sue had 74 absences her first grade year and during the second grade she was quickly approaching many more. There were phone calls home and oftentimes either the phone was disconnected or no one answered. Mom would sometimes call from a pay phone to say her daughter was sick.

The Project Respect Program began the second semester when Sue was in the second grade. The Community Advocate assigned to Fountain Elementary School reviewed the attendance of all students in the school. Sue's attendance waved a red flag; the advocate knew she had to act fast. She called Sue's home and, yes, the phone had been disconnected. The Advocate did a home visit and it took time before someone answered the door, but the Advocate continued to knock and wait. Finally, Sue's mother answered. The advocate stated, "we really miss having Sue in school, is there anything I can do to help you get her to school?" The mother was hesitant at first, as she thought the Advocate was from the Department of Social Services. The Advocate explained she was from the school and had resources to share if there was a problem that prohibited Sue being in school. The mother then reluctantly invited the Advocate in.

The apartment was located along a long narrow hallway up several stairs. The smell of cat urine filled the air. The advocate and Sue's mom went into the apartment and asleep on the couch was Sue. The advocate asked, "Do you and Sue know what time school begins?" "Yes", mother replied, but Sue is sick today. The Advocate asked, "What can I do to help?" Mother stated, "There are many problems and I don't know where to begin." The mother stated that she and Sue must sleep during the day because the apartment is infested with bats that are active during the nighttime, and that is why they have many cats. And there was one more thing; a bat had bitten Sue the night before. The Advocate then hurried over to Sue to see if she was all right. The Advocate then took Sue and her mother to the emergency room for treatment. Sue began her series of rabies shots that day.

The Advocate then knew this was just the beginning of her work with Sue and her mother. The Advocate called the Housing Authority and got emergency housing for Sue and her mother. The Advocate got the city to condemn the apartment building so no one else had to endure what Sue and her mother did. The Advocate also contacted Goodwill to get furniture and clothing for Sue and her mother. And I am glad to say that Sue is now in the eighth grade and has been on honor roll for four of those years and in the third grade achieved perfect attendance. The Advocate and Sue's mom are still in contact and the Advocate attends most of Sue's school functions. The power of one home visit can make a difference in the life of a child!

Dylan

Background of the Student and Family

Dylan was a 16-year-old 10th grade Caucasian boy, born in the U.S., who lived with his mother.

Challenges and Assets

The school district had a truancy petition in place, and Dylan's mother had filed an At-Risk-Youth petition. The case manager became involved after the school district requested assistance in filing a motion for contempt on the truancy petition. In addition to truancy issues, the mother reported that Dylan was not following house rules or the curfew. Dylan was participating in a drug and alcohol outpatient program, but he had stopped attending that as well. Mother reported that Dylan had a history of being verbally abusive and would often throw objects in the house.

Case Management Activities

The case manager spoke with the school district and the mother and discussed with them how best to approach Dylan's truant behavior. His mother and the school district agreed that they would pursue filing the motion for contempt under the At-Risk-Youth petition. In the course of filing motions for contempt, the case manager made several referrals to various programs and services including a drug and alcohol program, a wrap around support team, and alternative education. The case manager met with Dylan's mother on several occasions to explain the programs and services and to assist her with working through any barriers that prevented Dylan from getting connected with them.

The Outcome

In light of all of the motions for contempt, Dylan made dramatic improvements in following house rules, attending school, and getting back into outpatient treatment. At last contact, Dylan was considering obtaining his GED and enrolling in a culinary arts program. Jurisdiction had run out on the At-Risk-Youth petition, but the school district's truancy petition was still active.

Randy

Background of the Student and Family

Randy was a 16 year old 10th grade Caucasian boy who lived with his mother and grandmother. Randy had no known health issues, however, his mother reported that he might have been suffering from clinical depression. His mother also reported that his grandmother repeatedly "stirs up grief" and makes her family unhappy, even causing the mother to loose her job.

Challenges and Assets

The school counselor reported Randy had not attended school on a regular basis since 5th grade. At the time the truancy petition was filed, he had a total of 30 unexcused absences. The school district also reported that Randy's mother felt he should have been allowed to attend the drivers education class, since he had maintained perfect attendance in that class. The school district tried a number of interventions; including an attendance agreement with the parent (Randy refused to participate in the agreement process), a referral for in-home family counseling, and a referral to a multi service agency.

Case Management Activities

I was assigned as a case manager to assist Randy in enrolling in a GED program. I met with Randy and his mother to discuss the importance of following the court order and how I could assist them through the process. Randy's mother stated that she would like him to get his driver's license so that he could get a job. I gave Randy and his mother information on GED programs and he chose one at the local community college. I worked with Randy in getting him to take the entrance exam. I had several conversations with Randy and was able to motivate him to take the exam and begin the program. I also had several conversations with his mother to discuss Randy's underlying issues including the possible depression. She was not willing to explore those issues, and her focus remained on helping him get his drivers license so he could get a job.

The Outcome

After three months of court hearings, warrants for failure to appear, and motions for contempt, Randy's mother withdrew him from the school district which enabled him to enroll in and attend the GED program. At last contact, Randy was still attending the GED program.

Lacy

I. When I first started working with Lacy and her family she was 15 years old and in 9th grade in the small, rural town of Enumclaw. She rarely attended school and was failing all classes. Lacy is Caucasian and lived with her mother and step-father. Her older sister had moved out on her own but lived nearby and continued to be part of the family. The family was in the middle income range, but early on in our involvement the mother decided to quit her job to be more available for Lacy. Lacy had been arrested twice on theft charges but was not on probation. Mental health issues appeared to impact the functioning of Lacy and her mother.

II. Lacy was referred to case management assistance in part due to the level of conflict between her and her mother. The family dynamics were intense and all were attempting to deal with past trauma and establish new roles when the mother remarried. Lacy had been inappropriately touched by an adult at age 13. The man was prosecuted and in custody. Lacy's older sister had been sexually abused by Lacy's father (her sister's step-father) so Lacy did not have contact with him. Lacy was using marijuana and alcohol, and when the conflict increased with her mother she would run away for several days at a time. In addition, she was dating a 19-year-old boy who had fathered a baby with another 15-year-old girl. Lacy's parents were very concerned about her involvement with this boy and felt he was a negative influence given his criminal history and chaotic family.

III. Early on I provided the mother with information on the At-Risk-Youth petition (ARY). Referrals were given for a drug/alcohol assessment, parent support groups and individual counseling. Mother appeared on the verge of a breakdown, and later shared that her husband expected her to require psychiatric hospitalization during this difficult time. The more the parents attempted to access resources for Lacy, the more she rebelled and ran away. Her mother scheduled four consecutive drug/alcohol evaluations for Lacy, all of which she missed. Eventually the provider was unwilling to reschedule. When Lacy was picked up on a warrant for failing to appear for a hearing, I arranged a drug/alcohol evaluation at the detention center, which recommended outpatient treatment.

Lacy's mother struggled with concerns for her daughter's safety, and was overwhelmed with the court process and how best to utilize this resource. We worked closely and in many ways my role was that of "parent mentor". We discussed strategies and planned short-term and long-term goals. Oftentimes, her mother just needed someone to tell her she was working hard to help her child, and to remind her to take care of herself along the way. Parent support referrals were given regularly and the mother began to make calls and access support from those groups.

Conflict within the family was noted and both Lacy and her mother requested family counseling. A referral for Functional Family Therapy, contracted by the court was made. The intake session was held at the detention center, as Lacy continued to have difficulty staying home.

The school truancy representative worked closely with the family, and we linked the truancy and ARY cases. The school Lacy attended was small, and traditional options were limited. Relationship building continued between the representative and the family, especially with Lacy.

At one point Lacy left home and chose to stay with her boyfriend in his car, in differing locations. The family was near exhaustion when she returned home with news that she was pregnant. In many ways the family felt the ARY petition was increasing the conflict and adversarial relationship between Lacy and her parents. The petition was dismissed at the parents' request and their focus became rebuilding the relationship with Lacy, and the health of her and the baby. The truancy petition was left in place to "be the heavy" and provide structure. The truancy representative continued to work closely with Lacy's parents and me. I located a program that provided education on how drug use affects a fetus and made a referral for Lacy. I also connected the family with specialized services for pregnant teens and continued to provide support to Lacy's mother.

IV. Lacy is currently attending an alternative program near her home. The truancy representative was able to arrange a special schedule for this young mother. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl in August 2005 and is residing at home with her mother and stepfather. She attends school regularly and had top grades. She is earning credits rapidly and is scheduled to graduate on time. She has career goals including continuing education after graduation. The relationship within the family is greatly improved. Lacy and her mother came in to visit a month ago and shared what they felt had helped. Lacy noted her relationship with the district representative was supportive. She felt that knowing she could end up in detention gave her the extra push to get out of bed on the mornings she didn't want to. The improved relationship with her mother made it all come together. Lacy's mother felt that "the people we met along the way helped more than the actual court process." She voiced her appreciation of having a case manager and how helpful this role was in an e-mail to the court when she requested a dismissal of the ARY petition. Lacy will receive recognition at the King County Truancy Awards put on by the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office on May 5th, 2006.

Marissa

I. Marissa was a 15 year old Caucasian girl living with her mother. Mother was not married, but her boyfriend was part of the family. Marissa had no siblings. Marissa and her mother were both raised by Marissa's maternal grandmother, and both suffered intensive emotional abuse from her. Marissa was placed with her grandmother when she was very young as her mother struggled with substance abuse issues. Marissa returned to her mother at age 13 and both were struggling to overcome their abusive pasts while developing a nurturing relationship.

II. The school requested case management assistance to engage Marissa and her mother in making education a priority. Marissa's assets included being artistic, active, verbal, honest, and having a willingness to participate in services and try new things. Her mother was committed to working through their past issues and keeping herself drug-free. Marissa attended school, but often skipped classes she did not particularly enjoy. She struggled with typical ADHD characteristics such as misplacing completed homework, forgetting assignments and socializing in class instead of paying attention. She had chosen to stop taking her ADHD medication due to side effects.

III. My first goal in working with this family was to begin a relationship with both individuals. I concentrated on active listening to understand their needs better. The mother's relationship with the school was strained, and her response varied from strongly defending her daughter to becoming overwhelmed and blaming Marissa for all their problems. We worked on finding services in the community that would be supportive, and on establishing family goals. A meeting was scheduled with the school to request that Marissa be screened for additional services. Although she was at or above normal intelligence she was failing many classes. The meeting included the district Psychologist, Assistant Principal, Counselor and several of Marissa's teachers. Marissa was opposed to special education and resistant to medical management of her ADHD symptoms. We developed a plan around ADHD school tips not involving medication with a follow up meeting to check for improvement. We were able to schedule Marissa in an Urban Dance class that she had been unable to access previously.

Community referrals included drug/alcohol assessment for Marissa, Parenting support for her mother, a Functional Family Therapy referral for family counseling and researching summer programs. Marissa began an intensive outpatient treatment program that included individual counseling and family work. Her mother had cancelled the treatment when transportation became difficult, but with assistance from the family counselor we were able to access free transportation for Marissa to and from the treatment program. In general, the family seemed the most stable with active case management. With our goal being self-sufficiency, we worked with the family counselor on increasing the family's support outside of service providers. I worked with this family for seven months, including weekly contact for the first two months, decreasing to once or twice per month for the remaining five months.

IV. Marissa continued to struggle in her traditional high school. She researched and completed an application to an alternative school in her area that was self-paced. She decided to resume medication for ADHD. She began volunteering at the church where she had performed community service hours on her truancy petition. She continued to attend and participate fully in her outpatient drug/alcohol treatment. At her last hearing she had been clean and sober for 8.5 months. The struggles between her and mother flare up from time to time, but they both have resources in the community. Marissa attends the alternative program regularly and reports feeling more comfortable in that environment. The truancy petition was dismissed.

Alex

I. Alex was a 16 year old Caucasian male living with his mother and two younger siblings. His parents divorced when Alex was young, and his father had remarried and had two children from his second marriage. Alex lived with his mother after the divorce, but stayed with his dad and step-mother for one year when struggles escalated between him and his mother. The truancy petition was filed approximately one year after Alex returned to his mother's home. He had multiple absences, and the school reported in the petition that Alex was not engaged in learning, attended for social reasons only, had attitude problems and was failing most classes. He was diagnosed with ADHD and possible depression. Both parents were college educated and were professionals. There wan an unsubstantiated possibility that Alex had been sexually abused by an older neighbor boy when he was ten years old.

II. The referral for case management was made by the Commissioner due in part to the conflict level in the family and the filing of an At-Risk-Youth petition (ARY). The ARY and Truancy petitions were linked, and hearings occurred together. Alex seemed very angry with his mother; there were reports of violent behavior and significant substance abuse. Both parents were actively involved in seeking help for Alex and both attended hearings regularly and kept in close contact with the case manager.

III. Substance abuse appeared to be a major contributor to Alex's struggles. Referrals were provided for an assessment. Inpatient treatment was recommended, but in Washington State a youth must agree to inpatient treatment and Alex was unwilling to go. Drug use and school absences led to several contempts on both petitions. Referrals to inpatient providers and detoxification programs were provided to the parents. I assisted Alex's parents with planning an "intervention" the evening before the treatment bed became available. His mother was encouraged to invite extended family members and friends and also friends of her son to attend and discuss their concerns for his health and wellbeing. They planned to use specific examples and be loving and supportive. The intervention was a success, and Alex agreed to the inpatient program. He completed treatment and enrolled in outpatient follow-up care when he returned home. The school continued to work closely regarding his needs and provided support at the school. Alex requested an appointment with his psychiatrist to discuss medication options. Mother had concerns about stimulants being prescribed given his recent drug abuse. After several months clean and sober the court supported Alex's request.

V. Alex continues in outpatient treatment. He has medication management for his ADHD and is following doctor recommendations. Although both the ARY and Truancy petitions have been dismissed as successful, the court continues to receive updates from Alex's outpatient treatment provider. The reports note that he continues to attend regularly, participates fully and has clean U.A.s consistently. The family's level of conflict is decreased. Alex received a certificate of achievement from our Commissioner for making healthy choices. He is currently enrolled in a district education program that is allowing him to make up credits. He is on track to graduate early!

Angela

Angela came from a stable family until the mother decided to leave. She is very well mannered and quiet. She carries herself well. Her father is a hard worker and has taken on the responsibility of being a single parent. At one point, he was allowing the mother to come back and forth into their lives, but eventually put a stop to it. Dad filed for a divorce, instead of just being separated while the mother's whereabouts were unknown. Dad was allowing Angela to go and stay with the mom during the separation, if he knew of her whereabouts, but this became the contributing factor to Angela's attendance problem. The parents missed the two scheduled Attendance Intervention Team Meetings scheduled at her school, so the case was referred to the State Attorney's Office for further intervention. Since the father took on the responsibility of keeping all of the children, he decided to take some parenting skill classes. He refused counseling services because Angela was beginning to confide in him and he wanted her to continue to do this, since she was comfortable doing so. Dad has someone working with her on Saturdays to pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. He wants her to be around positive role models because her ambition is to be a veterinarian. I involved her in our Honor Rows program, where she could spend time participating in positive scheduled events during the summer time and then as a reward, she was given the opportunity to attend one of the Jaguar football games. She indicated every time I picked her up that she looked forward to that day and always inquired about when the next event was to be held. She stated that she wanted to stay in the TAP program and that way she could see me. I told her that she's doing well in reference to attending school, so unfortunately her case was going to be closed out successfully. She asked if she could call from time to time and if I would check on her sometime. I told her that I would be happy to check on her and her family, to see the progress they are making.

Bailey

I. Bailey is a 14 year old girl, currently on my caseload. She attends a middle school in Kent and is in the 8th grade. Bailey's family is from the Philippines, and Bailey is bilingual. She lives with both biological parents and two older brothers. The family is middle income with both parents employed.

II. Case Management assistance was requested by the school district. Bailey had not attended school for several months. The previous school year she had been truant approximately 80% of the time, so the school planned to hold her back to redo the 8th grade. She began attending when the school offered to promote her to 9th grade with her friends if she could improve her attendance. She did not manage to attend regularly and remains in 8th grade for the 2005-2006 school year.

Areas of concern included communication issues. Her mother speaks English but at times legal matters were difficult for her to understand. I requested interpreters be available at hearings after discussing the option with her mother. Also of concern was the possibility of undiagnosed mental health issues. I asked about the possibility of depression, and her mother reported that Bailey often said she was depressed. Culture played a role, but it was unclear what other factors were contributing to Bailey's struggles.

I scheduled and attended a meeting at Bailey's school with the counselor, mother and Bailey. We learned that although Bailey had had attendance issues since Kindergarten, she was bright and tested at grade level. A new schedule was put in place for Bailey including one period with the school counselor at the end of the day. An attempt was made to assist with building relationships for Bailey at school. Most of her friends had moved up to the high school. Some success was noted with Bailey attending school four of the five days her first week back. Attendance dropped off again and she returned to court on a contempt hearing. She seemed depressed and I spoke with both her and mother about a mental health evaluation. Her mother was resistant at first, but using the family's medical insurance I located a Psychiatrist willing to meet with the family the following week. Bailey was diagnosed with depression and anxiety and prescribed medication. Again, improvement was noted but for a short time only. After gathering information from the school counselor, psychiatrist, parent and student, other areas of concern were discovered. Domestic violence (her father was abusive toward her mother and older brothers) and substance abuse by her father and brother impacted the family dynamics. At a following hearing Bailey disclosed taking 17 of her prescription medications two days earlier. Her mother had not contacted a medical provider or the psychiatrist. They had cancelled appointments with the psychiatrist and had no other services in place. I encouraged the mother to contact the psychiatrist and a medical provider to determine what kind of medical care was needed regarding the overdose.

Her mother did not follow through with accessing services, and a referral to Children's Protective Services was made. Complications developed between CPS court and Truancy court about how to coordinate services to serve this family best. When Bailey took a second overdose, I contacted the crisis center and assisted in accessing family services. A referral was provided to the mother for a D.V. program with an advocate

from the Philippines. Intensive family counseling is being provided through the CPS court which gives additional motivation for the parents to participate. The psychiatrist was able to provide information to the court regarding how much of Bailey's attendance issues were a direct result of mental health problems versus willful violation. His recommendation included family counseling and for Bailey to be held accountable for non-attendance.

I worked closely with this family for the first five weeks. This included the school meeting and referrals. My involvement dropped to once or twice per month when Bailey began working with the psychiatrist, but it increased to a very intensive level after the first overdose. I spoke with the mother daily and with Bailey several times per week for nearly a month.

IV. With mental health issues no longer considered the bulk of the "problem" Bailey received electronic home monitoring (EHM) for failure to attend school. She was informed that not attending would result in secure detention. She agreed to two weeks of EHM (normally the court can only order one week) to avoid secure detention. She attended school regularly while on EHM and continued to attend after being released. The family is participating in culturally competent services and Bailey meets with the psychiatrist regularly. She has purged her contempt citation and is following house rules. Both Bailey and her mother were positive about the changes and hopeful for continued success.

Nikita

I. Nikita was a 12 year old 6th grader in the Renton School District when we first met. She is African American and lived with her mother and five year old brother. The family had financial struggles, but the mother was employed and able to maintain a stable home. Nikita had an I.E.P. for difficulties in Language Arts and for behavioral problems.

II. Nikita was referred for case management due to the conflict between her and her mother, recent Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement and lack of services. CPS had provided intensive in-home family counseling after several confrontations between Nikita and her mother had escalated to the physical level. Nikita was on probation for assaulting her mother. Neither Nikita nor her mother felt the family counseling had been helpful. They were willing to access services and committed to improving their relationship. Nikita specifically noted jealousy of her younger brother and the amount of time her mother spent with him.

III. During the first week with this family, I attended a meeting at the school regarding Nikita's recent suspension. We worked to develop a support team at the school that included the Vice Principal, I.E.P. Lead, School Counselor, Attendance Secretary and a school-based therapist from a contracted agency. Nikita had previously reported harassment from several female students. The harassment occurred outside of the school grounds and minimal follow-up was done. Nikita felt especially vulnerable when walking to school, so the school agreed to provide transportation even though she lived within the designated "walking distance." Nikita enjoyed playing the tuba and the flute but was unable to participate in the school's band due to attendance and behavioral issues. The team developed a plan to connect her with individual counseling at the school when attending, and at the library when suspended, and to provide tutoring and homework packets.

In addition, I made a referral to the court's contracted Functional Family Therapy (FFT), arranged a mental health evaluation for Nikita and parent support for her mother, and began researching community programs for the summer. When Nikita was found in contempt for her suspension, the court ordered community service hours. I made a referral to the Renton Area Black Parents Association (R.A.B.P.A.) and connected Nikita with the director. The family completed the FFT counseling and worked closely with R.A.B.P.A. Nikita met weekly with her therapist at the school. Her mother committed to spending time with Nikita in positive ways and increased the family's overall interaction.

I worked closely with this family for two months. After putting resources in place, my involvement decreased to phone or court contact approximately twice per month.

IV. Nikita became the first "Student Intern" at the Renton Area Black Parents Association, providing assistance at the Community Center and helping deliver school lunches to low-income elementary students over the summer. The Director met with Nikita and her mother to develop goals. They were able to assist Nikita with qualifying

for and participating in the “All City Marching Band” which is a high honor in Renton. The last scheduled court hearing was continued because Nikita was marching in a parade on that date. The family has since moved to the Kent School District. The truancy petition was put on hold as Nikita had begun attending school regularly and was participating in the school band program. The At-Risk Youth petition was dismissed.

Tony

I. Tony was a 13 year old Caucasian male. He had an IEP for 7th grade at a middle school in Tukwila. Tony lived with both biological parents and was the middle of their three sons. His IEP covered language and math. Both brothers also received special education, one at the high school and one at the elementary school. Tony's mother was a strong advocate for his education and had chosen to keep him home rather than attend a school where the IEP did not meet her expectations.

II. The referral for case management came specifically from the Commissioner. Concerns were noted over lack of progress and the notable conflict and tension between the parent and the school district. I was asked to research the situation and provide a list of recommendations to the court. This was a unique request.

III. A copy of the report distributed to all parties is attached. The name has been changed for privacy to the family.

IV. The court ordered that the recommendations included in the attached report be implemented. Tony transitioned back to school, beginning with one class per day. The family completed Functional Family Therapy counseling and Tony learned skills to be assertive and voice his needs to his mother. Tony is currently attending school full-time. He received an award at the 2005 King County Truancy Awards Ceremony.

Tracy

I. Tracy was a 14 year old Caucasian female living with her single mother and 21 year old disabled brother. She was in 7th grade at Renton Middle School. Tracy had an IEP for reading and math. Her mother was unemployed and struggling to access unemployment benefits. Tracy's two older siblings both had truancy petitions in the past. Tracy's father lives in Everett. Her parents divorced when she was four years old, and she had a close relationship with her father until a falling out at age 12. It is unclear what led to the breakdown in their relationship.

II. The family was referred to case management at the request of the school district. Tracy had not attended school for the majority of the school year. The family struggled with financial issues as well as health concerns. Both Tracy and her mother showed signs of depression.

III. The family agreed to schedule a meeting at my office for a thorough intake. We explored areas in which the family felt I could be helpful and identified barriers to school attendance. We created a written plan specifying what Tracy's mother would do, what Tracy would do, and what the case manager would do, and we each received a copy. During the intake, we discussed Tracy's prior diagnosis of depression. She was not taking medication and had not been to a mental health provider in nearly a year. While at my office, we contacted her previous psychologist and scheduled an appointment for the following week. We found the appropriate bus schedule, and I gave the family bus tickets. We contacted the school to let them know Tracy would be returning to school the week following spring break. I arranged to meet with Tracy 20 minutes before school started on that Monday and review her schedule. Tracy agreed to meet me and to bring copies of the poetry she wrote (her suggestion.) She arrived at school with the poetry but her mother had not taken her to the psychologist's appointment. At school, we completed paperwork for her to receive free lunches and arranged for the attendance secretary to be her primary contact at the school.

Her mother took Tracy to the second scheduled appointment with the psychologist at the court's insistence. Tracy requested family counseling, and a referral to Functional Family Therapy was made. Attendance continued to be an issue, but Tracy attended nearly 50% of the time, a substantial improvement over not attending at all. Tracy seemed to enjoy adult interaction, so we made a deal that the first week she attended 100% I would bring her lunch from McDonalds and eat with her. This is generally not part of our role, so special approval was required and received from my supervisor. The following week Tracy had perfect attendance. Her teachers and the office staff knew that she would be having a "lunch guest" as she seemed excited to share. We looked into resources for summer, and I provided Tracy and her mother with options for camps and activities with scholarships.

IV. Tracy expected to be held back that year, due to missing the first six months. Since she finished the school year with marked improvement, the school decided to promote her. She continued to receive mental health follow-up for depression. Mother

was referred to the WorkSource in Renton for assistance with employment issues. Tracy finished the year with an updated IEP and excited about attending high school. She had one of her poems published as “anonymous” in the school flyer.

The family has since moved out of King County and no current information is available. I feel this case specifically shows how many of our youth are eager to connect with an adult. Tracy knew me for a relatively short period of time prior to the “lunch plan” and yet the attention and support from an adult played a significant role in motivating attendance.

Naomi

Background of the Student and Family

Naomi was a 15 year old 10th grade girl (born in Ethiopia). She moved to the US from Kenya in 2001 with her mother, father, 16 year old brother and four year old sister. The family is in transitional housing. Her mother was not working at the time, and her father worked as a school bus driver.

Challenges and Assets

Naomi came to the attention of the case manager due to a truancy petition filed by the school district. Her mother and father had reported that Naomi was not attending school on a regular basis and was not following the home rules. Her mother also reported that Naomi had been verbally abusive, and that she felt she had no control of Naomi. The parents reported that Naomi and her brother would often leave the home without permission, and the parents would report them as runaways. They had tried a number of interventions including a voluntary placement agreement (VPA) and Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) in-home counseling. The FRS counselor reported that the family was making progress and Naomi had been doing better in following the curfew and home rules.

Case Management Activities

I met with Naomi and her father after a truancy hearing to discuss the truancy process and information about the At-Risk-Youth (ARY) petition. A few weeks later, I met with him again to assist him in filing an ARY petition and referred him to FRS for some in-home counseling. Although the family had engaged in FRS services in 2001, they were eligible to receive them again. Due to the mother and father's concerns that Naomi had been associating with known gang members, I made a referral to Seattle TEAM for Youth (STFY), a gang awareness / prevention and case management program designed to work with gang involved youth. Since the parents had filed an ARY petition, the school district took a back seat to filing motions for contempt under the truancy process, with the understanding that truancy matters could be dealt with through the ARY petition. Naomi had been found in contempt of the ARY order on several occasions because she had failed to show for work crew. As a result, she was on the verge of being dropped from the program and could have been subject to additional sanctions by the court. I worked closely with the work crew staff as well as the day-reporting school at Juvenile Court to ensure that Naomi had every opportunity to follow through with the court order.

The Outcome

Despite several motions for contempt, I made several referrals to other service providers and created a positive relationship with Naomi and her family. She made great strides in getting back on track. With the care and support of the STFY case manager and SPD Detective, the FRS counselor, the truancy case manager, and her parents, Naomi's

behavior improved so much that her mother motioned the court to dismiss the ARY petition.

I have not had any recent contact with Naomi or her family. In this case “no news is good news”

Brian

a) Student & Family Background

Brian is a 15-year-old Caucasian male in 9th grade, living with his older brother (18) and grandmother in a middle class neighborhood in Bothell, Washington. Brian had lived with his older brother and grandmother for a number of years, as his mother was in and out of drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Grandmother reported that Brian had a history of marijuance abuse, truancy and anger management issues at the time of the At-Risk Youth (ARY) filing. Brian was enrolled at Kenmore Junior High and had an individual education plan in place for learning disabilities, including language/developmental delays and ADHD, starting last year. He had been suspended from school previously for sexual harassment and assaulting another student. He had also been verbally and physically abusive towards his grandmother.

b) Description of Underlying Problem

Brian was charged with felony kidnapping and harassment (he had threatened his grandmother with a knife). He was skipping class at school and had behavior issues. He was abusing drugs and alcohol, which were the main contributors to the criminal charge involving his grandmother. Grandmother had filed an ARY petition just prior to the above criminal incident, based on out-of-control behavior, truancy issues, property damage, drug and alcohol abuse, and curfew issues. So, the youth had an at-risk youth order, a truancy order and pending criminal charges occurring simultaneously. He had only one prior (misdemeanor assault-diversion) and his grandmother had very little experience dealing with the juvenile court on any level. Assets: Both Brian and his grandmother were cooperative and easy to work with. The youth sincerely wanted things to be better. Grandmother was assertive in maintaining phone contact and trying to make sure she was on top of everything such as court dates, court orders, etc. Brian had a supportive and involved older brother, and he wanted to continue living with his grandmother. Challenges: Grandmother was fragile physically due to her age. Brian had serious drug/alcohol and potentially undiagnosed mental health issues and, as stated, three different court processes happening at the same time. He needed treatment, and his grandmother needed lots of support navigating the court processes and pursuing treatment options. Brian's mother (an addict) also surfaced during the process and wanted him to come live with her, as the social worker providing the family assessment for the ARY had concerns about the safety of the grandmother if the youth continued to live there. Case management was certainly warranted given the above issues.

c) What I did as Case Manager

I worked with the family for approximately three months, at varying capacities. Some weeks I was in communication with the grandmother, school, court and treatment provider off and on throughout the week. The majority of my time spent with the family and the truancy representative involved educating them on the at-risk youth court and criminal court processes, how they intertwined around the above issues, informing them of what to expect next, how to handle certain court hearings and what their options were throughout. I worked closely with the truancy representative on consequences and planning, so that we were all on the same page regarding the youth and court activities. I

assisted the grandmother with learning the process for enrolling the youth in treatment at Ryther Child Center, getting her the application materials, and communicating with Ryther admission staff and counselors. Contact hours: approximately one to three hours per week, for the first six weeks or so. This decreased to perhaps one hour per week during the last month, as the ARY was dropped and probation kicked in. I was essentially the liaison between the grandmother, youth, school district, criminal court, ARY court, social worker and the treatment provider.

d) Outcomes: The grandmother learned how to navigate multiple court systems and the realm of youth drug and alcohol treatment. Brian improved his school attendance and behavior at home, due in part to the criminal court issues and pending probation hanging over him. Grandmother was able to navigate the courts successfully and stated that she was very appreciative of the assistance, support and guidance she received through a very complex and stressful period. Brian was engaged in drug and alcohol treatment, and was following his probation order. The ARY was eventually dismissed due to probation status.

Tony: Contract example

Superior Court of the State of Washington
for the County of King

At-Risk Youth, CHINS and Truancy
401 4th Ave. North
Kent, WA 98032
206) 205-2578
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11-01-04
"Tony"

On 10/22/04 the Becca Commissioner signed an order requesting that Dawn Nannini, Superior Court Case Manager, provide a report to "Tony's" mother and the (_____) School District regarding recommendations. Originally the report was to be completed by 11/08/04, but "Tony's" hearing has been rescheduled to accommodate the Commissioner's schedule and this report is being submitted on 11/01/04 to allow all parties time to review the recommendations.

After meeting with the (_____) School District on 10/26/04, "Tony" and his mother, and their advocate on 10/27/04 and after a phone interview with "Tony's" previous counselor, on 10/29/04, the following observations and recommendations are submitted to the court.

It is important to recognize that all parties interviewed were helpful and cooperative with more common ground than expected. There appears to be an overall desire to find a successful education program for "Tony". All parties commented on "Tony" being intelligent, insightful and artistic. A lack of trust between the parties was also noted, interfering with communication and collaborative problem-solving. "Tony's" behavior may be complicating the strained relationship between his mother and the school district. "Tony" has reported school incidents to his mother that he later denies when the school attempts interventions. In addition "Tony" has made allegations to the school of physical abuse in the home that he later denies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **IEP immediately implemented allowing "Tony" to return to school on 11/08/04.** The school district will bring several possible IEP's to the court hearing on 11/05/04 with the following information included;

* "Tony" to transition back to school with one block per day to be scheduled with his favorite teacher, (name).

* The district will provide transportation and escort "Tony" to/from the class at a separate time from other students to decrease the risk of verbal teasing.

*The school agrees to provide counseling with "Tony's" previous therapist who has tentatively scheduled "Tony" for sessions on Wednesdays at 3:00 p.m. for the months of November and December. The school has agreed to provide transportation to/from the

counseling sessions. (There was talk of the sessions being held at the school but the counselor is available only at his office.)

*A tutor will be provided by the school district. Mother discussed that the tutor's relationship with "Tony" was the most important. It is recommended that the district identify 3-4 possible tutors and allow "Tony" to make the final decision on who he will work with for the next 30-60 days.

*Any of the recommendations that the school agrees to but is unable to put in the formal IEP document may be included in the truancy order.

2. **Family to develop an IST (inter-agency staffing team.)** Information on an upcoming training for wrap around was forwarded to an advocate who is planning to attend if space permits. With an IST team "Tony" would be eligible for a case aide and possible flex funds to help with art supplies, positive activities and respite for his parents. The team approach may also decrease tension between the parent and school district.

3. **Family to research medication treatment for "Tony's" depression/anxiety.** Depression and anxiety were consistently noted in all of "Tony's" evaluations (a summary of evaluations and results was provided by the family Advocate and attached to this document) and by all parties interviewed. There are concerns that the depression and anxiety are contributing to "Tony's" difficulty managing peer teasing and other daily stressors. He was previously on anti-depressant medication for a very short time with minor side effects. It may be helpful for the family to explore the option of different medications helpful for youth with these diagnoses in an appointment with a medical professional.

4. **"Tony" to have a voice in his education.** If possible it would be helpful for "Tony" to be appointed a Guardian ad Litem. When meeting with "Tony" originally with his mother and advocate, he was unable/unwilling to provide information on his likes, dislikes or goals. He asked that I "ask her" and pointed to his mother. When speaking with him one on one, he volunteered that he wanted to return to school and that he was "bored out of my mind." He was also able to articulate various interests, including a desire to participate in sports. His depression coupled with his mother being such a strong advocate for him may contribute to his difficulty voicing his own interests. "Tony" should be allowed to attend court hearings and IEP meetings. He presents as a pleasant, engaging and likeable young man.

5. **Family to participate in FFT.** The court can provide Functional Family Therapy at no cost to this family. It is recommended youth, mother and father all participate. In the past it was noted that father's participation in treatment has been particularly helpful.

6. **Dawn Nannini be assigned for the next 30-60 days for assistance in implementing the above recommendations**.

7. **Truancy review hearing be scheduled to coincide with review of IEP.**

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.

National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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www.schoolengagement.org

NCSE | National Center for School Engagement
~ Promoting truancy prevention and school success

10 THINGS A SCHOOL CAN DO TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE

1. **Make students and parents/guardians feel welcome.** Make a point to say "hello" to every parent/guardian or student you see in the halls and outside--make it your business to know his or her names

2. **Create an environment that enables students to feel successful in something—no matter how small it may seem.** Award academic and attendance "letters," as you do for athletics.

3. **When a student is absent, immediately talk to the parent/guardian — not their answering machine.** Make a personal phone call in the evening, or call parents/guardians at work during the day.

4. **When a student is absent, immediately talk with them about why they were gone—let them know you are aware...**and that you care that they are at school.

5. **Forge a relationship with local businesses where youth may congregate when truant—encourage them to keep students in school during school hours.** Create a poster that states "We support youth in school and will not serve anyone under 16 during school hours."

6. **Forge a relationship with local law enforcement—make them your allies in showing the community, families, and students that school is the place to be.** Empower community police officers to return youth to school.

7. **Don't provide the temptation for youth to be truant.** Close your campuses during breaks and lunch.

8. **Empower and expect classroom teachers to take action when they think a student may be truant.** Ask teachers to make calls to absent youth or families in the afternoon or evenings.

9. **Reward and recognize good attendance—not just perfect attendance.** Post large signs giving the daily attendance for the day. Reward individuals, classes, and the school for increased attendance.

10. **Make your school a place where students feel safe and respected.** Adopt a character education program that is planned and implemented by students.

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HOW CAN A SCHOOL ACHIEVE HIGH LEVELS OF PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT?

The following Keys to Success were compiled and written by the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE). They are based on information from actual school programs.

- Assess family's needs and interests about ways of working with the schools;
- Set clear and measurable objectives based on parent/guardian and community input to help foster a sense of cooperation and communication between families, communities, and schools;
- Hire and train a parent/family liaison to directly contact parents/guardians and coordinate family activities. The liaison should be bilingual as needed and sensitive to the needs of family and the community, including the non-English speaking community;
- Develop multiple outreach mechanisms to inform families, businesses, and the community about family involvement policies and programs through newsletters, slide shows, videotapes, and local newspapers;
- Recognize the importance of a community's historic, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural resources in generating interest in family involvement;
- Use creative forms of communication between educators and families that are personal, goal oriented, and make optimal use of new communication technologies;
- Mobilize parents/families as volunteers in the school assisting with instructional tasks, meal service, and administrative office functions. Family members might also act as invited classroom speakers and volunteer tutors;
- Provide staff development for teachers and administrators to enable them to work effectively with families and with each other as partners in the educational process;
- Ensure access to information about nutrition, healthcare, services for individuals with disabilities, and support provided by schools or community agencies;
- Schedule programs and activities flexibly to reach diverse family groups;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of family involvement programs and activities on a regular basis.

NCPIE is dedicated to developing relationships between schools and families. The coalition's members include the major education associations and advocacy groups in this country. This makes them a great resource for a broad range of publications, training and other services that are available to promote community involvement, family education, family support, and school and family partnerships. For more information, including guidelines on creating a school policy for parental involvement, visit their web site at http://www.ncpie.org/ or call NCPIE's Director, Dr. Sue Ferguson at (703) 359-8973.

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Alternatives to Juvenile Detention

National Center for School Engagement

July 28, 2006

An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
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Alternatives to Juvenile Detention:
Effective Strategies for Working with Truant Youth

Many judges are frustrated by a lack of choices and lack of evidence about what works in dealing with chronic truants. Often, when other efforts fail, juvenile detention is assigned as a last resort. This document provides ideas for interventions other than detention – interventions that hopefully will minimize, or even preclude, the need for such an extreme measure. It recommends a dual approach – the combination of sticks and carrots, sanctions and rewards. Ideally, rewards should be meaningful to the child, and sanctions should be geared toward a positive goal such as career planning or academic catch-up and should be determined according to the needs of the particular child.

The general approach advocated here is based on our experience evaluating truancy reduction programs across the country and on what many program managers and social workers have learned from years of working with truants. Many of the specific, creative ideas included here originate from those programs and from what judges recently reported in a national survey of truancy sentencing practices (Heilbrunn 2006). Additional information about many truancy reduction programs may be found in our Truancy Program Database which is available for browsing on the National Center for School Engagement website, www.schoolengagement.org.

Why not use detention?

There are two main drawbacks to the use of juvenile detention for truants: the potential for doing more harm than good and cost. Negative outcomes can sometimes result from grouping delinquents together and from exposing non-delinquent to

delinquent youth. Such grouping provides a ready means for young people to share bad habits. Just as parents seek to isolate their children from delinquents in the neighborhood or school, so should society seek to isolate truants from the delinquent youth in detention.

Many judges assert that the threat of detention is a powerful deterrent to potential truants. Although no research that we know of has attempted to measure that deterrent effect, it seems likely that some, and perhaps many, youth would indeed be frightened enough by the possibility to maintain fairly good attendance. Children whose truancy is mostly mischievous in nature, who are not too far behind academically, and whose school attendance is within their control may fall into this category. However, neither detention nor the threat thereof can solve the problems of students who face serious impediments to school attendance, such as unmet mental or physical health care needs or fear of violence on campus. Nor can either one make a child appreciate the value of education. Furthermore, there is a risk associated with a first detention stay. Once juvenile detention has lost its fear factor, it will cease to deter not only truancy, but delinquency as well. The deterrent argument leads to two inherent conclusions. One, the sooner truancy is addressed the better, because attendance will be more within the realm of the student and parents' control, and two, the less detention is actually used, the greater its deterrent effect is likely to be.

A second drawback to detention is its cost; the average price of one day in detention was $135.4 in 2001 (American Correctional Association 2002). If a few days in detention are not adequate to scare a student into attending school, many days are not likely to achieve the purpose either. Yet some detention stays for status offenses including truancy run into the hundreds (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999).

The reason for such long detention stays is unclear, but may be related to the fact that judges report using detention for reasons other than punishment of an offense (Heilbrunn 2004; Heilbrunn 2006). It is often used as a means of accessing mental health services, providing shelter, protecting the child from himself or others, and as a means of detoxification, all because more appropriate residential settings are full. It is a sad reflection on our values that we are more willing to fund jails to house our children than services to heal their emotional injuries. Setting up more appropriate channels would be less expensive and more efficient in addition to being more humane.

There is a third and equally important reason for using approaches other than detention for truants. It is not enough merely to get a child back into a seat in school. The child must become *engaged* in school, feel like a part of the school, understand its importance, and be motivated to do the schoolwork, otherwise he or she is not likely to learn much from the classes. Many truants have significant problems in their home lives that do not necessarily become apparent in a courtroom. Such difficulties include poverty, mental health issues or parents with mental health issues, parents who work such long hours that they can provide little guidance, younger siblings or children of their own to care for, or the death, illness or incarceration of a family member. It is no surprise that children who face such challenges are not focused on school. Punishment may make a child less willing to skip school, but will not address any of the underlying troubles that impede school attendance and adopting school success as a personal value. The approaches advocated here are geared toward promoting school engagement, rather than simple punishment of an offense.

Judges need collaborative systems in order to avoid the use of detention.

Imposing strict sanctions requires a system – a system that relies on cooperation between police, probation departments, and detention centers. Providing effective support services requires a system as well – one that incorporates social service agencies, mental health providers, and school personnel in addition to the court. Once a system is in place, it is much easier to get children the services they need. Therefore, many of the alternatives to detention listed in this document require some degree of cooperation with other agencies, most frequently the school and social service or child welfare agencies. Although creating cooperative arrangements among agencies that have not worked together before may seem daunting, once a need is widely recognized, it may not be as difficult as it seems. A number of resources are available to help.[1]

What makes an effective intervention?

- First, a thorough assessment of each child's situation and needs, combined with…
- … the supports necessary for the child to focus on school. Then add…
- … rewards for improvement – carrots! And…
- … sanctions for lack of effort – sticks!

A judge alone cannot assess the often hidden and complex reasons behind a child's truancy. Help is needed, preferably from a trained social worker who could be affiliated with the school, the local social services department, or a community organization.

[1] The American Bar Association has recently launched a focus on truancy and has begun with an excellent document on establishing truancy reduction programs including forming coalitions – see Pennington and Barnes, 2006. For a specific example based on the program in Jacksonville, Florida, see Heilbrunn 2005. In addition, an Internet search will yield many documents that offer tips on building community-wide cooperation regarding a wide variety of issues other than truancy, many of which may be helpful.

Once a child's problems have been identified, a variety of services must be available to correct the underlying causes of truancy. Perhaps the most effective method of organizing a collaborative system of supports is to create a formal Truancy Reduction Program. Depending on the services already available in the community and the level of interagency cooperation that can be built, a Truancy Reduction Program (TRP) may be little more than an organizing structure, or a referral agency, for accessing those services in an efficient manner. If few services are available, an effective TRP must provide the services as well as make referrals.

A number of structures are possible. A student may receive assessments and services before ever being sent to court, in which case court involvement will be a last resort. Alternatively, cooperation with assessment efforts and participation in services may be offered after an initial court referral has been made, as an alternative to a court appearance. A third alternative is for a judge to order cooperation with an assessment and referrals during a court appearance. Regardless of which structure best suits local needs and preexisting systems, there are many alternatives to sending a young person to juvenile detention, all of which are far less expensive.

Once problems have been identified and supports are in place, a system of rewards and sanctions, or carrots and sticks, will have a reasonable chance of success. Listed in the first table below are a number of orders a judge could give, other than juvenile detention. Some of them require the cooperation of other agencies such as the child's school, or the local community college. They are thoughtful ideas that promote a specific, positive goal geared toward getting a child, or in some cases a family, back on track, able and willing to participate in school. Each one is part of current practice in

courts around the country. Some of them are rather standard practices such as drug testing, but others are more creative. Each intervention was reported by at least one, and generally more than one judge who participated in the "Best Practices in Sentencing Truants" survey.[2] They are grouped by the overarching goal the sentence supports.

Meaningful Alternatives to Detention That Can Be Court Ordered, Grouped by Goal		**Support, Stick or Carrot?**
Require student to focus on desired future and how to get there:		
	Tour juvenile detention facilities	Stick
	Tour area jails or prisons	Stick
	Tour local community college and prepare freshman course schedule using college catalogue	Support
	Require student to prepare a job/career plan and learn about the educational requirements of that plan	Stick
	Prepare a budget to match the income from a full-time minimum wage job	Stick
	Essays on career goals or on the student's skills, strengths and interests and how they might apply to a career	Stick
Academic supports and alternatives:		
	Tutoring	Support
	School sign-in sheets	Stick
	Modify school schedule to incorporate classes the student is happier with, or remove the student from a least favorite class or teacher	Carrot
	Modify school schedule to meets student's work or health needs, including a part-time option	Carrot
	Saturday school to avoid losing credit in current classes, or summer school to catch up to grade level	Support
	Alternative learning programs, potentially including residential programs	Support
Community or school engagement:		
	Join a school club or team	Carrot
	Join a community activity	Carrot
Parent involvement:		
	Require parent to attend school with child	Stick
	Weekly meeting with student, parents, and a teacher or school administrator or counselor, with or without the judge	Support
	Court review hearings with parent participation required	Stick

[2] Results of the survey are described in Heilbrunn, "Sentencing Options for Truant Youth," forthcoming on the NCSE website.

	Family counseling	Support
	Parenting classes for parents of the student, or for teen parents when appropriate	Support
Mental health services:		
	Mental health evaluation for the student and/or parent	Support
	Counseling for the student	Support
	Drug testing	Support
	Substance treatment program	Support

The second table presents a list of more generic sticks and carrots. They do not necessarily support any specific goal, and some of the incentives are more appropriate for truancy reduction program use than court use, but they serve to motivate young people.

Alternative sanctions – Sticks	**Alternative rewards – Carrots**
Restrict student's driving privileges	Gift certificates to local stores or restaurants
Take away cell phone	Tickets to sports events
Ankle monitoring	Recreation center coupons
Community service	Movie coupons
Curfew	After-school activities or parties
Probation	For younger children, a trip to the zoo
Saturday school	A rewards ceremony
	Lots of encouragement
There are many more possibilities – be creative!	

Hopefully, this document has served to inspire other creative ideas that fit individual children's needs and local capacities. The list of creative ideas is unending; most important for the child is ongoing support and encouragement. Young people with severe challenges cannot resolve those issues during several weeks of a truancy reduction intervention, let alone in a weekend detention stay. They need continuous monitoring, encouragement, and reminders of how important an education will be to their futures.

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State Level

- Build and maintain the health and productivity of a School Attendance Task Force.
- Clarify and share information at the state level among schools, courts, probation, social services, mental health, faith, business, and law enforcement regarding school attendance law, system flow among agencies, services, supports, and gaps.
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding among agency partners to commit to the improvement of school attendance.
- Develop a public education and awareness campaign targeting parents/guardians, youth, and the general community about state law, consequences for non-attendance, and importance of staying in school.
- Form a group to target key legislators for support in passing statutes that will support the goals of the coalition.
- Educate and empower community members to write their legislative representatives about the need for supporting prevention programs.

Law Enforcement

- Provide outreach to the community about the importance of school attendance—show an interest in youth that are out of school during the day—let them know you are aware.
- Make routine visits to schools to inform school personnel and students about attendance law and consequences.
- Established procedures and protocols should be put in place for reporting of nonattendance by the community and escorting students to school or to a community center.
- Law enforcement should be integrally involved in the community-level programs that improve school attendance. Several community policing models are in existence nationally that use the cooperation of law enforcement to significant advantage, including documented reductions of daytime crime.

Juvenile Courts

- The court should consider a variety of sanctions for non-attending youth, such as community service, denied driving privileges, required school attendance of parents/guardians, and other consequences prior to detention.
- Judges and magistrates need to be made aware of existing community programs to positively engage youth in school.
- The juvenile court needs to be represented in any state or local-level efforts targeting re-engaging youth in school.

Department of Juvenile Justice

- Develop standard protocols for intake and processing of cases of violation of attendance law. Train staff on the proper procedures and use of these protocols.
- Forge an information sharing agreement among agencies to reduce duplication of services for multiple-issue youth and their families.
- Access local universities for assistance in data collection and interns to assist with direct services in local pilot communities.

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SCHOOL ATTENDANCE TRACKING:
Challenges and Effective Practices

National Center for School Engagement

June 2005

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Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

School Attendance Tracking: Challenges and Effective Practices

Tracking school attendance is a challenge at best, a nightmare for many. The No Child Left Behind Act holds states accountable for reporting attendance. However, there are a variety of reasons why attendance data are often misleading. Misleading data have financial ramifications for the schools and safety issues for students. For instance, if a child is known not to be in school, parents and school officials can follow-up to find out why the child is missing and if he or she is in danger. The most daunting challenge is *consistency*. Attendance tracking is wildly inconsistent, often between classrooms, schools, and districts.

Teachers within the same schools track attendance differently even when provided with sophisticated tracking systems (e.g., electronic classroom tracking, like Campus). Many track attendance only at the beginning of class which can lead to tardies being counted as absences. Some teachers believe it is the students' responsibility to correct the inaccuracies but students rarely know this or go out of their way to do so. Some teachers are non-compliant with tracking absences, especially if there is no motivation to do so. In addition, counselors and other staff who may be meeting with a student during his/her class period, may not report the whereabouts of the student which again leads to inflating the absence rate.

Inflation of the absence rate is not usually the main concern when tracking attendance. Schools are motivated to *look good* when it comes to attendance. The State School Attendance Review Board in California revealed that schools report truancy rates (unexcused absences) between 0% and 2000% with little relation to the size of the school[1]. One reason for the underreporting is the desire to mask truancy as something else. Over and under reporting is often a result of how truancy is defined, especially as it relates to tardiness and period absences. Again, this reflects the inconsistency with which schools define truancy[2] and their willingness to report it. Districts suffer from similar inconsistencies.

In addition to these inconsistencies, the practices of what to do when attendance is a problem vary, depending on the seriousness with which the school or district takes attendance, and the resources available to deal with it. If the school falls short on following up with absent students, attendance tracking becomes even more difficult. This can result in "losing" a student in the system, assuming a chronic truant has transferred, or simply applying a code that means "unverified" to the attendance records. Consequently, the school no longer records the student as non-attending, just unknown or non-existent. These codes are not necessarily included in drop out rates.

Some view software programs as the key to successful attendance tracking. There are numerous data tracking programs which are helpful aids, such as SASI, StarBase or StarStudent, Campus, STI, and many more. The greatest benefit in using these databases is seen when there is alignment among districts within a state. Consistency in reporting can be improved if all districts use the same database. Of course, the data are only as good as what is entered. Coding systems, attendance definitions, and personnel practices may still vary widely.

There are solutions to the challenges in attendance tracking. Challenges are based upon coding and follow-up on absence data. Solutions need to address how to improve coding and the

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[1] For more information on this and related reports contact David Kopperud, Education Programs Consultant, California Department of Education, Counseling and Student Support Services, 1430 N. Street, Sacramento, CA. email at DKopperu@cde.ca.gov.

[2] For more on this topic click on the web publication entitled "National Definition of Truancy" at www.schoolengagement.org

process by which attendance data are verified once initial absences are identified. Table 1 outlines both the challenges and the solutions.

Table 1: Challenges and Solutions to Attendance Tracking

Challenges	Solutions
Teacher inconsistencies in reporting attendance	• Motivation by principals including consequences of non-compliance. • Clear school policies. • Create a serious school culture of tracking attendance. • Evaluate teachers on attendance tracking practices. • Attendance tracking training for substitute teachers.
Inflating absences	• Replacing tardy status with wrongful absence reporting at the end of class. • Encourage other staff (counselors, etc) who meet with students to be responsible for those students' attendance data.
Inconsistent/Incorrect coding	• Well defined absence codes, i.e., defining how many tardies or period absences = a daily absence. • Eliminate using a single period absence as an indicator of daily absences. • Period tracking (e.g., track in every class or 2 + times a day in elementary). • Enter all absences as unexcused until there is evidence of a legitimate excuse. • Use software that allows for easy updates/corrections of attendance data.
Meaningless Codes	• Eliminating unverified and "unknown" codes
Incorrect codes on chronic truants/drop-outs	• Immediate follow-up with truants. • Eliminate transfer or drop-out status "assumptions" – insist on evidence of attendance at the transferred school. • Create a common student number that identifies the student regardless of transfer status. • Employ dedicated staff to address truancy, such as truancy officers and community advocates. • Eliminate automated parental notification processes – personalize the process via phone and home visits. • Provide attendance data on report cards. • Encourage personal relationships between parents and teachers, such that teachers follow-up with parents when a student is missing.
Inconsistencies between schools and districts	• Implement district-wide and state-wide tracking and reporting policies. • Provide incentives to schools. • Use common database systems.

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