
Improving Student Attendance in Indiana's Schools

Synthesis of Existing Research related to Student Absenteeism and
Effective, Research-Based Interventions

Prepared for the Indiana Department of Education

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Introduction

Chronic absenteeism and habitual truancy are important predictors of school performance, including high school graduation. Average daily attendance rates often mask the number of students who are chronically absent – which equate to missing ten percent of the school year or approximately 18 school days for any reason. Recent research completed by the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at Indiana University indicate that students in Indiana's public school corporations who are chronically absent from school perform at lower levels on Indiana's student learning assessments. Further, students who are routinely absent are also more likely to drop out of high school prior to earning their high school diploma (Spradlin, Stephanie, Chen, Shi, Chen, Han, & Cierniak, 2012; Spradlin, Shi, Ciernack, Chen, & Han, 2012). Several factors appear to influence student attendance in schools across the state; however, socioeconomic status appears the most significant (Spradlin, et al., 2012).

During the 2013 legislative session, state lawmakers enacted new legislation that redefined chronic absenteeism and habitual truancy in Indiana. The legislation also introduced new requirements for all of the state's schools. Effective July 1, 2013, IC 20-19-3-12.2 requires all schools with a 'B-grade' or lower must develop a chronic absence reduction plan as a component of their school improvement plan. The plan must include an analysis of school-level attendance data as well as a description of the prevention and intervention activities that will be used to improve student attendance. The legislature directed the Indiana Department of Education to develop resources for school districts that assist them in deploying evidence-based interventions that have been shown to effectively reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy. One of the primary goals for this synthesis is thus to provide resources to educators that can be used to improve student attendance in accordance with Senate Enrolled Act 338-2013 and IC 20-19-3-12.2.¹

The importance of consistent school attendance

Research demonstrates that chronic absenteeism and truancy result in numerous negative consequences for students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Chronic absenteeism and truancy negatively impact academic performance (Gottfried, 2009). Moreover, chronic absenteeism also impacts students' personal and social well-being. While students miss school for a variety of reasons, Balfanz and Byrne (2012) suggest that the reasons for student absenteeism can be grouped into three categories. First, students miss school because they *cannot attend* school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work, or involvement with the juvenile justice system (p. 4). These students face significant barriers to attending school. Second, students are absent

¹ Senate Enrolled Act 338-2013 clarified the State of Indiana's existing definition for chronic absenteeism and requires schools to identify a multi-modal approach to improving attendance as part of their school improvement plans. The Act defines chronic absence as "absent from school for ten percent (10%) or more of a school year for any reason" and habitual truancy as "absent ten days or more from school within a school year without being excused or without being absent under a parental request."

because they *will not attend* school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment, or embarrassment. These students avoid school or refuse to attend to school because of the way that they perceive the school environment. Finally, students are absent because they simply *do not attend* school. These students choose not to attend school “because they, or their parents, do not see the value in being there, they have something else they would rather do, or nothing stops them from skipping school” (p. 5).

Given the consequences of chronic absenteeism and its prevalence in the nation's schools, researchers from education, counseling, and health fields have invested substantial energy identifying factors that predict student absenteeism as well as estimate the cost of missing school for students both short- and long-term. The research suggests that individual, family, and school characteristics can all influence student attendance. Existing research suggests that the effect of missing school may include course failure, disengagement from school, lower test scores, persistent patterns of chronic absenteeism or truancy in subsequent grades, as well as the increased risk of dropping out (Chang & Romero, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Additionally, students who are chronically absent or truant are more likely to develop serious mental health issues, engage in drug and alcohol use, and become violent or participate in criminal behaviors (Kearney, 2008).

The research base regarding the effectiveness of specific interventions for students is limited (Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christensen, 2003). This review revealed numerous descriptive accounts of individual programs as well as evidence of promising practices but very few of these studies represent the kind of rigorous evaluation or research that supports claims about the widespread efficacy of the interventions. In fact, one discussion of the research suggested that are “minimal differences in effects across program types and modalities, [with] no one program type of modality [standing] out as being more effective than any other” (Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2012, p. 7). This review reveals that research about interventions that have been shown to decrease the rate of chronic absenteeism and habitual truancy are far-reaching, encompassing approaches that focus on students, families, schools, and communities. What is clear from the literature is that a single strategy is unlikely to fully address student attendance issues. Research suggests a combination of prevention and intervention is most likely effective (Gandy & Schultz, 2007; Smink & Reimer, 2005). Effective strategies must include prevention and intervention activities at four levels, including: (1) the student; (2) parents and family; (3) school or community; and, (4) the courts (John W. Gardner Center, 2012).

Purpose of this report

This review focuses on research related to predictors of student absenteeism and truancy, the effects of the student absenteeism and truancy, and research-based interventions that improve student attendance and reduce truancy as reported in the literature between 2000 and 2013. The report also proposes a model attendance plan that schools and school corporations in Indiana can adapt to comply with the requirements of Senate Bill 338-2013 and IC 20-19-3-12.1. Finally, at the end of the

report, appendices containing resources for educators are included as is a compilation of a recent superintendent survey that captures information about the current state of truancy diversion programs in the State of Indiana.

PREDICTORS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY

Predictors of absenteeism and truancy can be found inside and outside of the school environment. Bimler and Kirkland (2001) indicated that there may be as many as 10 different 'hot spots' that can predict student absenteeism and truancy. These 'hot spots' broadly include: school conditions; home-based behavioral issues; psychological issues; family background; school-based behavioral issues; peer issues; as well as lack of motivation or interest in school. These issues align with more recent reviews of literature regarding student absenteeism, truancy, and school avoidance behavior (Kearney, 2008). As Kearney's (2008) comprehensive review of literature related to school absenteeism and school refusal behavior suggests absenteeism can be linked to physical conditions, psychiatric conditions, classification and proximal variables, contextual risk factors, as well as cross-cultural variables. Each of these variables has been shown to influence student attendance.

The literature related to predictors of chronic absenteeism and truancy has been grouped into four broad categories in this review. First, research regarding student predictors of attendance is presented. This discussion reflects the most developed research base and broadly explains the individual characteristics that influence student attendance. Next, parent and family predictors are reviewed. These factors have received increased attention in recent years but continue to be an area where more research is needed. School-level predictors are discussed next. The discussion of school-level factors includes structural, cultural, and social conditions in the school. These factors also relate to the physical condition of the school. Finally, community predictors are discussed. Community-level predictors have only recently received attention from researchers and are thus an area of research that requires further elaboration.

Individual Predictors of Student Attendance

Researchers have focused extensively on student-level predictors related to chronic absenteeism and truancy. Predictors at the student-level relate to the student's physical and mental health; perceptions of school; as well as the availability of family and community resources. These predictors offer the most direct link to student attendance whereas other predictors that will be discussed are often mediated. Student predictors broadly include the student's physical and mental health as well as their perceptions of school.

Physical health

Issues related to the student's physical and mental health appears directly related to student attendance (Kearney, 2008). Chronic health conditions are among the most significant predictors of

student absenteeism. This review found that asthma is one of the leading predictors for student absenteeism (Center for Disease Control, 2009; Kearney, 2008). The Center for Disease Control estimates that 9.1% of children under 17 years of age have been diagnosed with asthma (Akinbami, Moorman, Garbe, Sondik, 2009). The CDC estimates that nearly 14.7 million school days were missed in 2002 because of asthma-related illness (Meng, Babey, & Wolstein, 2012). Researchers estimate that students with asthma miss between 1.5 and 3.0 times more school days than their peers without the condition (Bonilla, et al., 2005; Dey & Bloom, 2005; Moonie, Sterling, Figgs, & Castro, 2006). According to Kearney (2008), absenteeism related to asthma can be exacerbated by numerous factors, including age, poverty, medical care, as well as the student's living environment.

Research suggests that other health issues influence student attendance, as well. For example, obesity, chronic illness, and chronic pain all appear to significantly predict higher levels of student absenteeism (Palermo, 2000; Sato, et al., 2007). Geier and colleagues (2007) studied 1,069 fourth and sixth graders attending nine elementary schools in Philadelphia and found that students who had a higher than normal Body-Mass-Index (BMI) were more likely to miss school than students whose BMI was within normal range. They concluded that obesity was thus a significant predictor of student absenteeism after adjusting for the student's age, race or ethnicity, and gender. Taras and Potts-Datema (2005) reviewed literature related to chronic health conditions in children and disclosed that the literature associates student attendance with diabetes, sickle cell anemia, epilepsy, among other chronic illnesses. This research builds on related work suggesting that other chronic conditions have also been attributed to increased student absenteeism, including migraines, abdominal pain, musculoskeletal pain, and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (Chan, Piira, & Betters, 2005). Roth-Isigkeit and colleagues (2005) conducted a large-scale study of children who experienced chronic pain. They concluded that "30 to 40 percent of children and adolescents with pain reported moderate effects of their pain on school attendance" (p. 153). In addition, researchers have found that teen pregnancy (Kirby, 2002) and drug/alcohol use (Roebuck, French, & Dennis, 2004) are also significant predictors of student absenteeism. Drawing upon survey data from the 1997 and 1998 National Household Surveys on Drug Abuse, Roebuck, French, and Dennis (2004) found that among 15,168 adolescents age 12 to 18, marijuana use was strongly associated with truancy and increased likelihood of high school dropout.

Mental health conditions

Mental health conditions have also been attributed to student attendance. Researchers suggest that mental health conditions often manifest themselves in the form of school refusal or school avoidance behaviors (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003; King & Bernstein, 2001). Egger, Costello, and Angold (2003) examined the association between mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder, etc.) and both school refusal and truancy. They found that school refusal was typically associated with depression and separation anxiety. Truancy tended to be associated with oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder. In children who exhibited a combination of school refusal and truancy, 88.2 percent of the 4,500 school aged children included

in the study had a specific psychiatric disorder. A smaller study conducted by Kearney and Albano (2004), found that among 143 youths the most common psychiatric conditions associated with school refusal were separation anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and depression. The findings obtained by Kearney and Albano mirror those obtained in a smaller study conducted McShane, Walter, and Rey (2001). As Kearney (2008) noted, there is “remarkable consistency with respect to the type of diagnosis most commonly seen in youths with problematic absenteeism, which essentially involves depression, anxiety, and disruptive behavior disorder” (p. 457).

While underlying mental health conditions contribute to school avoidance or refusal behaviors, Kearney (2008) suggested that these conditions are often overlooked. It may also be due to a lack of diagnosis for many psychiatric conditions believed to be influencers or causes of the avoidance behavior, including depression, separation anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, and substance abuse (King, Heyne, Tonge, Gullone, & Ollendick 2001; Kearney 2008). Certain other risk factors may also increase anxiety or school-refusal behavior, leading to absenteeism or truancy, such as homelessness and poverty, teenage pregnancy, school violence and victimization, school climate and connectedness, and parental involvement (Kearney 2008).

Student perceptions of the school

Student perceptions of the school have also been associated with student attendance. Research strongly associates the student perceptions of the school culture and rigor of the academic program with student attendance (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Researchers find that students are less likely to attend school when they perceived their classes are boring or irrelevant; feel unsupported or disrespected by teachers and other school staff; feel uncomfortable or bullied by other students; or feel targeted for discipline and behavioral issues (Wagstaff, Combs, & Jarvis, 2000). The same research also noted that were less likely to attend school when they perceived that they had fallen behind on their school work or could not balance the competing demands of work and school (Wagstaff, et al., 2000). These factors broadly reflect the degree to which a student is engaged in their school experience. Decreased levels of student engagement have been associated with reduced attendance (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007).

Parent and Family Predictors of Student Attendance

Parent and family factors (i.e., whether the student resides in a single-parent household, family socioeconomic status, parental unemployment, homeownership, etc.) have also been shown to predict school attendance. Gottfried (2011) noted that it has traditionally been difficult for researchers to disassociate student and family characteristics in analyses that examine school attendance. Indeed, in his analysis of data obtained from Philadelphia, he discovered that past research may have underestimated the influence of parent and family predictors may have been

under-estimated in previous research. Despite this assertion, existing research suggests that there are specific family-related factors that influence school attendance.

Family socioeconomic status and place of residence

Research suggests that the family's socioeconomic status wield a significant influence on the likelihood that students will attend school regularly (Crowder & South, 2003; Henry, 2007; Reid, 2005). Students who reside in urban neighborhoods are more likely to miss school and/or become chronically absent due to the myriad of factors that distract students from school (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). Students who are homeless or reside in temporary housing are also more likely to miss school. Citing reports from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Coalition for the Homeless (2007) reported that while 87% of homeless youth are enrolled in school only 77% attend school regularly. The National Coalition for the Homeless (2007) report that children who are homeless are also more mobile than their peers making regular school attendance more difficult. They estimated that half of homeless youth change schools two or more times each academic year. Forty percent change schools at least one time. Thus, the child's home status significantly predicts whether the child will attend regularly.

Composition and involvement of the family

Past research has suggested that family characteristics such as the number of parents in household and parental practices all influence student attendance, as well. For example, students from single-parent families are more likely to miss school than students from two-parent families (Finlay, 2006). Parents who are actively involved in their child's school experience and monitor their child's participation in school – these behaviors include talking with their child about school, checking homework, and participating in school-based parent organizations. Sixty-four percent of students who responded to the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement indicated that they attended school because of their parent or guardian (Yazzi-Mintz, 2009). However, it bears noting that the existing research also suggests that parental “over-involvement” can be detrimental to student attendance (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998). Corville-Smith and her colleagues (1998) found that students who perceive their parents as controlling were less likely to attend school than those who perceived their parents as supportive.

Placement in protective services

Children who are supported by protective services, including foster care, frequently miss more school than children who are not served by these programs. Conger and Rebeck (2001) analyzes records from 17,000 New York City children in foster care and disclosed that approximately three-quarters of children placed in foster care attended school. Heilbrunn (2004) studied 30 truant students in Colorado and found that the students were frequently in the care of child protective services and had been removed from their homes. Heilbrunn (2004) also reported that informal

tallies collected by the juvenile justice system revealed that truant students frequently experiences issues such as child neglect, abandonment, mental and physical health concerns, as well as previous placement in programs operated by health and human services.

School Predictors of Student Attendance

Researchers have also evaluated whether school-level factors influence student attendance. Research suggests that a variety of school-level factors influence student attendance. The factors relate to the culture and climate of the school; the condition of the school facility, particularly the school's ventilation system; as well as the rigor and relevance of the school's instructional program (Barnham, 2004; Lauchlan, 2003; Schendell, et al., 2004; Simons, Hwang, Fitzgerald, Kielb, & Lin, 2010). These factors shape student perceptions of the school environment and thus shape the desirability they feel to attend school. Moreover, the physical condition of the school impacts student health and thus influences whether the child feels well enough to attend school.

School culture, climate, and safety

The culture and climate of the school, particularly as it relates to teacher-student relationships and more broadly to issues of student safety, has been moderately associated with student absenteeism. The likelihood that a student will not attend school increases when students feel unsafe or threatened by the school community. Stewart (2008), drawing upon National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) data, disclosed that student outcomes were related to the student's sense of belongingness or connection to the community. Similarly, Rumberger and Palardy (2005) reported that students who perceived that their school was unsafe had higher rates of attribution. In particular, students who experience bullying and victimization by peers or their teachers tend to miss more school than peers who do not experience these conditions (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005). Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009) reported that seven percent of students age 12 to 18 who participated in the 2007 National Crime Victimization Survey reported that they "avoided school activities or one or more places in school because they thought someone might attack or harm them" (p. 56). The same survey revealed that "approximately five percent of students ages 12-18 reported that they were afraid of attack or harm at school, compared with three percent of students who reported that they were afraid of attack or harm away from school" (p. 54). The prevalence of fear and avoidance among students appeared greatest among middle school students and high school freshman and sophomores (Dinkes, et al., 2009). These are also the grade levels which research suggests are most likely to predict student absenteeism, truancy, and high school dropout (Balfanz & Byrne, 2012; Gottfried, 2013).

Bullying appears to be a significant predictor of student absenteeism and, at the high school level, a significant predictor for students who ultimately drop out of school. Recent research indicates that bullying (including adversarial relationships with education professionals) is now widely recognized as a significant factor in student academic performance and student attendance as manifest through

school avoidance behaviors (Kearney, 2008; Roberts, Zang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010).

Nature of the academic program

The academic program also influences whether students attend school. There is a growing body of research that suggests that school culture influences student learning, engagement, and achievement (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Researchers note that disengagement can lead to a significant increase in 'deviant behavior' – including truancy (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). Klem and Connell (2004) noted that “Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school” (p. 270). Higher-levels of student engagement reduce the risk of students missing school or dropping out of school (Appleton, et al., 2008). This perception can be achieved through lower student-to-teacher ratios (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004) as well as other school-based programs (i.e., Check and Connect) that increase student-teacher contact through mentoring (Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003).

Condition of the school facility

Researchers have also associated the conditions of the school facility, particularly the school's ventilation system, with student attendance. Poor ventilation systems introduce students – particularly those with respiratory health challenges including asthma – to conditions that promote chronic illness (Shendell, et al., 2004). In one study that examined indoor CO2 concentrations in traditional and portable classrooms, Shendell and colleagues (2004) disclosed that student attendance in portable classrooms was 2 percent lower than students who attended class in traditional classroom settings. More broadly, Branham (2004) analyzed data for 226 schools in the Houston Independent School District using a Tobit analysis, he determined that students were less likely to attend schools that were in need of structural repairs, used temporary structures (i.e., portables), and had understaffed janitorial services (presumably impacting the cleanliness of the school facility). Studies using similar data have not been conducted nor have the results of Branham's (2004) analysis been replicated in other settings.

Community Predictors of Student Attendance

Community characteristics and resources can also influence student attendance; however, these factors have received less attention in the literature. Conceptual discussions provide hypotheses that community-based characteristics potentially mitigate the benefits of school-based reforms and academic interventions that could contribute to improved student attendance (Berliner, 2006). While not directly associated with student attendance, these conditions might influence whether students attend school.

Recent empirical analysis suggests that neighborhood attributes shed light on student attendance patterns. Gottfried (2013) suggests that poverty, family structure, homeownership status, and race all influence student attendance. Drawing on data obtained from the Philadelphia School District, Gottfried (2013) found that “neighbor measures of poverty, family, [home] ownership, and race do significantly predict changes in student absences” (p. 19). Further, his analysis revealed that neighborhood poverty and student attendance were related to one another. Students in neighborhoods with higher socioeconomic status attend school more regularly (consistently) than students who reside in neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status. Gottfried also found that these neighborhood factors had greater power to predict student absences when focused exclusive on unexcused absences. This matches previous research that suggest that families who reside in lower socioeconomic status community are less likely to attend school (Chapman, 2003; Crowder & South, 2003; Henry, 2007; Reid, 2005). Further, students who reside in urban neighborhoods are more likely to miss school and/or become chronically absent (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001).

EFFECTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY

Students who are chronically absent from school are more likely to experience significant personal, academic, and social costs. As Gottfried (2013) noted, “Increased patterns of school absences have been shown to have a pervasive, detrimental relationship to multiple areas of student development” in particular, decreased student attendance has been shown to have important academic, sociological, and economic ramifications (p. 2). Furthermore, the research indicates that there is an important *tipping point* for students who are chronically absent that occurs in fifth or sixth grade. Balfanz and Byrne (2012) noted that “Chronic absenteeism begins to rise in middle school and continues climbing through 12th grade” (p. 5).

Effect on Academic Performance

Reducing the number of absences of students early in their education are associated with higher test scores, the ability to perform at grade level, and a decreased likelihood that those students will experience high or chronic absence later on in their education (Romero & Lee, 2007). Students in kindergarten who were chronically absent were found to have lower academic performance in first grade, maintain lower performance with language arts scores in third grade (Applied Survey Research 2011), and experience lower reading and math scores in fifth grade (Chang & Romero, 2008). The negative effects of absenteeism are amplified in kindergarten through third grade for Latino students and students with a lower SES (Chang & Romero, 2008).

Effect on High School Graduation

Chronic absence and truancy in the later years also have detrimental effects on the educational success of students as measured by high school graduation. Higher rates of absenteeism and truancy

have been shown to correlate with higher rates of a student dropping out or not graduating on time (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Those chronically absent in sixth grade have lower graduation rates than their attending counterparts (BERC, 2011), and ninth grade attendance has been shown to more accurately predict the likelihood of graduating when compared to eighth grade test scores (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Effect on Behavior

Chronic absence and truancy can also lead to a myriad of other behavioral issues, including suspension, expulsion, and higher rates of drug use, violent behavior, and delinquency (Alarid, Sims & Ruiz, 2011; BERC, 2011; Dembo & Gullede, 2009). Researchers have found that students who are chronically absent from school or truant are more likely to engage in risky behaviors (e.g., sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, etc.) or experience serious mental health challenges (Guttmacher, Weitzman, Kapadia, & Weinberg, 2002; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Kearney, 2008; Kogan, Luo, Murry, & Brody, 2005).

Effect on Economic Status

Economically, researchers have also suggested that truant students are more costly for society. Long-term economic effects also result from chronic absence, truancy, and the associated dropout rate, including higher unemployment rates among dropouts, higher cost of social programs, as well as higher cost of funding for prisons due to the increased likelihood of dropouts being incarcerated (Alarid, Sims & Ruiz, 2011; Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001; Maynard, Tyson-McCrea, Pigott & Kelly, 2011). Smink and Heilbrunn (2005) estimate that truant students who drop out of high school cost society as much as \$800,000 (in constant dollars) over the course of the individual's lifetime. They also note that truant students are more costly to educate – requiring more counseling support, before and after school programming, as well as other services that students who regularly attend school do not require. Further, students who are chronically absent from school face an increase chance of future unemployment (Broadhurst, Paton, & May-Chahal, 2005; Kane, 2006). Last, there is an economic impact on schools themselves. As most schools are funded on the basis on average daily membership, having students miss school ultimately reduces the resources available to schools (Smink and Heilbrunn, 2005). The performance and graduation rates of other students in the school population, general school performance, and attendance-based school funding also suffer in the presence of chronic absenteeism and truancy (Spradlin, Cierniak, Shi & Chen, 2012). A recent analysis by the State Attorney General in California indicated that students who are chronically absent cost the state's school as much as \$1.4 billion because the state funds school partly basis on student attendance (California Attorney General's Office, 2013).

Given the significant costs – personal, academic, and economic – associated with chronic absenteeism families, schools, districts, and communities can seek out innovative ways to prevent and/or reduce absenteeism. In the next section, evidence-based strategies for reducing absenteeism

are discussed. The section includes strategies related to monitoring, prevention, and intervention. The aim the next section is to provide readers with information that can be used to develop effective, research-based programs and attendance plans.

PREVENTING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM & TRUANCY

The literature provides numerous recommendations to prevent and/or reduce chronic student absenteeism. Many of these strategies have been implemented in small settings. These programs show considerable promise. However, evidence that these programs are effective at scale (i.e., implemented across a school corporation or across the state) remains limited. Based on the existing research, it does not appear that any single strategy is *the most* effective strategy (Maynard, et al., 2012). Broadly, the review suggests that strategies to reduce student absenteeism generally involve some form of monitoring, prevention, intervention, and as a final step some type of truancy or legal intervention. Within this broad framework, research identifies specific strategies that can be used by schools, parents, and communities to improve student attendance. Given the limitations of the existing research, it is likely that a combination of strategies must be leveraged to fully address student attendance issues.

Based on the results of this review of the existing literature, it is assumed that an effective student attendance program includes monitoring, prevention, and intervention activities. Monitoring activities should provide schools with *accurate and timely* information to effectively identify students who are most at-risk of becoming chronically absent. That is, these systems should provide educators with information about student attendance *before* the student becomes chronically absent. Second, schools and school corporations can take steps to prevent student absenteeism. These prevention activities should be broad-based and designed to educate students, parents, families, teachers, and communities about the importance of consistent school attendance while also creating conditions that incentive perfect or near-perfect attendance. More importantly, prevention measures should also include efforts to provide education and information to students – particularly in the elementary grades - so that they develop an understanding of the importance of regular school attendance. Intervention activities should be strategically focused on students whose attendance is not improving. These interventions should include immediate communication with parents about their son or daughter's attendance as well as follow-up supports that effectively assist students in arriving at school on-time, ready-to-learn. As a final measure, the research indicates that school corporations may benefit from partnerships with community agencies that offer broader access to social services and juvenile justice programs than schools alone can provide. These partnerships enable schools to reach students who are chronically absent, truant, or stopped attending school altogether.

In the following pages, strategies to support improved student attendance are described and illustrative programs are highlighted. Reference to additional information and resources has also been provided.

National Organizations Supporting Improved Student Attendance

While this synthesis presents considerable information about various strategies and programs designed to reduce chronic absenteeism. There are numerous resources online to inform educators. Below, a list of the most widely cited organizations has been provided for the reader's convenience. A brief description of the organization, often drawn directly from the organization's website, and a website address is provided.

Attendance Works

www.attendanceworks.com

Attendance Works is a national organization aimed at reducing absenteeism and truancy through the promotion of better practices, both in legislation as well as in schools. Their three initiatives aim to (1) build public awareness and political will, (2) foster state campaigns, and (3) encourage local practice. Available on their website are evidence-based examples of absenteeism-reducing practices, numerous articles and research showing the causes and effects of absenteeism and truancy, the influence of and suggestions for policy-making, as well as tools for schools and districts to utilize in their efforts to reduce absenteeism.

Everyone Graduates Center

new.every1graduates.org

The Everyone Graduates Center at John Hopkins University's School of Education focuses on enabling all students to graduate high school and be fully prepared for entering college for the workforce. The center has identified school attendance and chronic absenteeism as an early indicator of students being at-risk of dropping out and supplies tools and models to increase student engagement in order to decrease the dropout rate.

National Center for Student Engagement

www.schoolengagement.org

The National Center for School Engagement was established based on over a decade of educational research conducted by Colorado Foundation for Families and Children. NCSE has generated many resources about school attendance, attachment, and achievement. NCSE provides training and technical assistance, research and evaluation to school districts, law enforcement agencies, courts, as well as state and federal agencies.

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

www.dropoutprevention.org

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) was begun in 1986 to serve as a clearinghouse on issues related to dropout prevention and to offer strategies designed to increase the graduation rate in America's schools. Over the years, the NDPC/N has become a well-established national resource for sharing solutions for student success. It does so through its clearinghouse function, active research and evaluation projects, publications, and through a variety of professional development activities. In addition, the NDPC/N conducts a variety of third-party evaluations and Program Assessment and Reviews (PAR).

ATTENDANCE MONITORING

One of the first steps toward improving student attendance requires developing some form of effective monitoring system. Schools, parents, and communities cannot act to improve student attendance unless they understand which students are missing school. Effective monitoring helps educators and communities effectively identify students who are most at-risk of becoming chronically absent. Researchers and policy-makers have increasingly focused on early-warning systems as an important measure in preventing student absenteeism and truancy. Early-warning systems “use routinely available data housed at the school that are good predictors of whether a student is likely to drop out of school” (Heppen & Therriault, 2008, p. 2). Attendance data is most often incorporated in these systems as they are easily accessible to school personnel and routinely collected (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). As Neild and Balfanz (1006) have previously reported, student absences early in the academic term predict whether a student will graduate (at the high school level) or encounter academic challenges (at the elementary and middle school level). The National High School Center indicates that attendance in the first 20 days of an academic period serves as high yield indicator for students who are likely to dropout or fail to graduate. They further indicate that students who miss 10% of instructional time in their first year of high school are more likely to dropout. Thus, early warning systems that monitor student attendance and identify when students have missed a specific number of days provide essential information to administrators, teachers, and support personnel that can be used to determine when (whether) to intervene to improve student attendance.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS

The research literature provides important indications about the efficacy of specific interventions. The literature is expansive and covers issues related to student physical and mental health, school facilities, academic programs, and community-based initiatives. A comprehensive review is thus beyond the scope of this document. Instead, the discussion of prevention strategies attempts to distill from the research those strategies that are most clearly supported by existing empirical research. Generally, the literature suggests that efforts to improve awareness among parents and the community, health-related improvement programs, as well as school-based advising/counseling structures are among the most effective ways to improve student attendance.

Health-related efforts

The literature provides numerous recommendations related to improving attendance by improving student health. Reducing the transmission of common illnesses through aggressive hand washing programs and improving the quality of school ventilation appear to be two of the most valuable steps that schools and districts can take to improve student attendance.

Reducing Common Illnesses through Hand washing

Absenteeism due to common illnesses and health issues is largely confined in elementary-aged students, with most research efforts focusing exclusively on this age group. A study performed by Guinan, Gucken, and Ali (2002) showed the effectiveness of reducing absenteeism by implementing a personal hygiene program, “Buddies Handwashing Program,” in five elementary schools. The program included instruction on proper hygiene and hand washing by the classroom teacher, an age-appropriate video on the importance of hand washing, as well as a pamphlet distributed to students with age-appropriate activities with a hand washing focus. The outcomes of implementation of the “Buddies Handwashing Program” showed a 50.6% decrease in absences in the test group compared to the control group. Similar results have been obtained using the same program in Detroit (Master, Longe, & Dickson, 1997). Similar research performed by Sandora, Shih, and Goldmann (2008) showed comparative results in the effectiveness on educating students on the importance of hand washing and encouraging a culture of hygiene through the use of hand sanitizer and disinfectant surface wipes. This study also found a significantly lower number of absences due to gastrointestinal illness in the test group compared to the control group. Additionally, the study found a reduced amount of bacteria and viruses present on classroom surfaces. The effectiveness of instituting a program focused on hand and general hygiene is further supported by the 34% decrease in absenteeism after multi-week instruction on hand washing done in a study by Tousman, Arnold, Helland, Roth, Heshelman, Castaneda, Fischer, O’Neil, and Bileto (2007). A more recent study of more than 750 elementary-aged school children in Chicago, found that students who received instruction about effective hand-washing had significantly lower rates of absenteeism compared with students who did not receive the instruction (Lau, Springston, Sohn, Mason, Gadola, Damitz, & Gupta, 2009). Taken together, research indicates that school-level hand washing programs (particularly those that include an instructional component) result in improved student attendance.

Improving Respiratory Health through Improved Ventilation

School districts and school personnel can improve student attendance by increasing classroom ventilation and taking steps to improve student respiratory health. Given asthma is one of the leading predictors of student absences (CDC, 2004), improvements in classroom and school air quality have been closely associated with improvements in student attendance (Schendell, et al., 2004).

Similarly, school districts can improve student attendance by providing educational opportunities for students and their families designed to provide information and raise awareness about the effects of respiratory conditions. Kelly and colleagues (2000) conducted a controlled-trial with Black children. The children were provided with one-on-one education/training by an outreach nurse. The outreach resulted in a decrease in emergency department visits as well as hospitalizations – both important factors in improving student attendance. Jones and colleagues (2004) conducted a before and after study with Hispanic children in their homes and found that education/awareness efforts resulted in

increased knowledge about asthma, the importance of using maintenance medications. They also observed a significant decrease in environmental triggers.

Schools can also improve attendance by ensuring that maintenance medications for asthma, such as inhaled corticosteroids, are provided to students on a regular basis. Halteman and colleagues (2004) conducted a randomized control trial with urban children. Inhaled corticosteroids were provided to students on a daily basis at school. The study reported that providing this medication resulted in fewer school absences and more days without symptoms.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides resources to schools and districts related to indoor air quality as part of the *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools* program. The program provides strategies for schools that are experiencing indoor air quality issues caused by inadequate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems and moisture/mold. Both HVAC and moisture/mold have been linked to respiratory health issues in children. The program provides schools with a step-by-by approach based on six key drivers. These drivers include: organizing for success, communicating with everyone, assessing the environment, planning short-term and long-term activities, acting to address structural, institutional and behavioral issues, and evaluating your results for continuous improvement. According to the EPA, the program is based on lessons learned from more than 800 schools who participated in a national survey focused on Indoor Air Quality Practices.

Improving Student Mental Health

In order to reduce absenteeism and truancy due to avoidance and refusal behavior, Kearney (2008) proposed the use of medical and clinical intervention. Medical intervention is used for those with a diagnosis, commonly anxiety or depression that contributes to school avoidance or school refusal behaviors. The rate of effectiveness in medical treatment was dependent on the diagnosis and type of pharmaceutical used, with lower rates of success for those suffering from anxiety-based disorders and higher rates of success for those being treated with imipramine (Layne, Bernstein, Egan, & Kushner 2003). Kearney (2008) alternatively suggests looking for behavioral traits or reasons that students may be missing or avoiding school instead in attempts to recognize those that may be suffering from a medically or clinically treatable diagnosis that amplifies school avoidance behavior. Comparatively, clinical intervention with a cognitive-behavioral approach has additionally been found empirically supported in treating school avoidance, especially in students with anxiety-based disorders (Kearney 2008; King, Tonge, Heyne, & Ollendick 2000). These clinical treatments include the use of meditation, teaching of stress and anxiety reduction methods, and exposure-based practices based on reasons why the student was avoiding or refusing school based on information obtained through interviews, observation, and score on School Refusal Assessment Scale (Kearney 2008). In both medical and clinical treatments, the aim is to address underlying mental health issues that contribute to lower levels of student attendance caused by school avoidance or school refusal behaviors.

Examples of Health-related Programs

- **Creating an Asthma-Friendly School:** An education and outreach tool kit developed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for use with parents, teachers, administrators, central office administrators, and community members. The program provides information about asthma, its effect on student attendance, and provide strategies to help students learn to better manage their asthma. The program is designed persuade school staff about the detrimental effects of asthma as well as the steps that can be taken to create school environments that are asthma-friendly. Further information is available online at: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/asthma/creatingafs/index.htm>
- **Healthy Schools, Healthy People – It's a Snap:** The program introduces students in elementary grades to the importance of personal hygiene. The program combines classroom instruction focused on personal hygiene with activities designed to raise awareness among elementary-aged students. Further information is available online at: <http://www.itsasnap.org>
- **Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools (EPA):** Provides schools and school districts with a comprehensive approach to improving air quality in schools by raising awareness among school-level stakeholders, identifying causes and contributing factors to poor air quality, and initiating efforts to improve air quality. Further information is available online at: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/>

Enhancing school culture and community

School culture is related to school avoidance behaviors as well as student perceptions of the school. As stated previously, school-avoidance and refusal behavior has a noticeable effect on rates of chronic absenteeism and truancy (Kearney, 2008). The school's culture often serves as a catalyst for school avoidance behaviors. The presence of bullying, fights, discriminatory practices or language, as well as poor student-teacher relationships all contributes to the student's reluctant to attendance school. Research suggests that efforts to improve school and community should focus on teacher-student relationships as well as the learning environment.

Increasing Student Engagement

Changing instructional practices and emphasizing greater personalization and student engagement might also improve attendance as it results in increased levels of student engagement. The literature on student engagement indicates that there are five strategies classroom teachers can adopt to promote higher levels of student engagement (Ramaley & Zia, 2005). First, teachers can work to promote learning that is relevant to the students and the world that they live in. Second, teachers can improve student engagement by introducing various forms of instructional technology. This includes computers, as well as scientific equipment, multi-media, interne resources, industrial tools, and other forms of portable communication equipment. Third, Ramaley and Zia (2005) suggest that students are most engaged in classrooms what are positive, challenging, and open. They refer to these

classrooms as 'transparent learning climates' which describes conditions that promote risk-taking in learning. Fourth, classrooms that feature positive 'peer-to-peer' relationships between students and teachers promote improved student engagement. Finally, teachers can facilitate student engagement by modeling 'learning' for the students – showing them that they, too, are learners.

Mentoring Students for Academic Success

Mentoring is also viewed as an important strategy for improved student attendance. Research on national mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Across Ages, demonstrate that mentoring has a positive influence on student attendance (Herrera, et al., 2007). Dubois and colleagues (2002), however, conducted a meta-analysis of research on mentoring programs and found that on the whole these programs have only a small effect on students. This claim appears to be an anomaly in the research as several studies identify positive effects on student attendance from mentoring programs. For example, claims regarding the efficacy of Big Brothers/Big Sisters have been consistent across multiple studies and years (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Big Brothers/Big Sisters has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement (Herrera, et al., 2007). Similarly, the Check and Connect Program, which pairs adult mentors with middle and high school students, has undergone rigorous evaluation and been found to improve attendance among student participants (Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christensen, 2003).

Examples of School Based Attendance Program

- **Across Ages:** A comprehensive program designed to provide mentoring support to youth and adolescents and to create opportunities for older adults (age 55+) to maintain an active role in their communities. According to the program's website, the program aims to: "increase the protective factors for high- risk students in order to prevent, reduce or delay the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and the attendant problems associated with such use." More specifically, the program seeks to: (1) Increase the knowledge of health/substance abuse issues and foster healthy attitudes, intentions and behavior regarding drug use among targeted youth; (2) Improve school bonding, including academic performance, school attendance and behavior and attitudes toward school; (3) Strengthen relationships with adults and peers; and (4) Enhance problem-solving and decision-making skills. (Retrieved from <http://acrossages.org/acrossageshome.htm>)
- **Big Brothers/Big Sisters:** One of the best known programs for youth mentoring, Big Brothers/Big Sisters matches adult mentors with children. Big Brothers/Big Sisters matches children age 6 to 18 with adult mentors in communities across the country. We develop positive relationships that have a direct and lasting effect on the lives of young people. (Retrieved from <http://www.bbbs.org>)
- **Career Academies:** A Career Academy is a school within a school that links students with peers, teachers, and community partners in a disciplined environment, fostering academic success and mental and emotional health. Originally created to help inner-city students stay in school and obtain meaningful occupational experience, academies and similar programs

have evolved into a multifaceted, integrated approach to reducing delinquent behavior and enhancing protective factors among at-risk youths. These academies enable youths who may have trouble fitting into the larger school environment to belong to a smaller educational community and connect what they learn in school with their career aspirations and goals. (Retrieved from <http://casn.berkeley.edu/>)

- **Check and Connect:** Check & Connect is a research-based intervention used with students who are disengaged from school and learning. The core of Check & Connect is a trusting relationship between the student and a caring, trained mentor. This mentor both advocates for and challenges the student and partners with the family, school, and community to keep education salient for the student. Check refers to systematic monitoring of student performance variables (e.g., absences, tardies, behavioral referrals, grades). Connect refers to personalized, timely intervention focused on problem solving, skill building, and competence enhancement. Students are referred to Check & Connect when they show warning signs of disengaging from school, such as poor attendance, behavioral issues, and/or low grades. Mentors work with caseloads of students and families for at least two years. They function as liaisons between home and school, striving to build constructive family-school relationships. (Retrieved from <http://checkandconnect.umn.edu>)
- **Coping and Support Training (CAST):** CAST is a school-based prevention program that targets young people in either middle school or high school. CAST is a 12-session, small group skills training intervention designed to enhance personal competencies and social support resources. CAST may be implemented as a "selective" or an "indicated" prevention program, targeting groups or individuals at higher risk for school dropout (and/or suicide). The CAST program goals are to decrease suicide risk and emotional distress, drug involvement, and school problems. When implemented with fidelity, the program is likely to be effective for 1) increasing school satisfaction and attendance, and decreasing potential for dropout; as well as 2) decreases in multiple, co-occurring problems common among high-risk youth, including depression and suicide-risk behaviors, drug involvement, and anger control problems; while 3) enhancing protective factors, such as personal control, problem-solving coping, and family support. (Retrieved from <http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/>)

Parent and family outreach and partnerships

Scholars have also suggested that it may be effective to engage parents as part of the team working in support of improved student attendance (Sheverbush, Smith, & DeGruson, 2000). Sheverbush and colleagues (2000) specifically note the importance of emphasizing solutions that come from families as opposed to schools. Implementation of strategies aimed at developing family, school, and community partnerships has proven effective in increasing daily attendance rates as well as decreasing chronic absence. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) identified key program elements in building partnerships to reduce absences, including:

- Making home visits to families of chronically absent students;
- Rewarding students for improved attendance;
- Establishing a contact person at school for parents to work with;

- Calling home when students are absent;
- Conducting workshops for families about attendance;
- Referring chronically absent students to counselors;
- Using a truant officer to work with problem students and families.

Schools that focused on increasing attendance by implementing strategies with these key elements showed a more substantial increase in daily attendance rates from one year to the next for participating schools, as well as a two percent decrease in chronic absence. Additionally, schools that offered after-school programs also had larger increases in daily attendance and larger decreases in chronic absence than those schools that did not offer after-school programs.

Later research by Sheldon (2007) on the effectiveness of implementing a community partnership program created by the National Network of Partner Schools (NNPS) to increase attendance and reduce chronic absence reinforced the research done by Epstein and him in 2007. NNPS member schools were given tools and guidelines in creating effective community partnership building programs as well as a framework of six key elements in increasing involvement, targeted at (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision-making, and (6) collaborating with the community (Epstein 2001). When comparing the rates of attendance for schools that were members of NNPS and schools that were not, Sheldon found that, after controlling for variables, schools implementing the NNPS partnership program had higher rates of student attendance.

Examples of Parent/Family Programs

- **Communities in Schools:** CIS has become one of the nation's leading dropout prevention organization. We have a unique model that positions a coordinator inside schools to assess needs and deliver necessary resources that remove barriers to success. Their mission is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. Our network is comprised of nearly 5,000 passionate professionals in 25 states and the District of Columbia. We serve the most vulnerable students in the most dropout-prone school districts, nearly 1.3 million young people in more than 2,700 schools. (Retrieved from <http://communitiesinschools.org>)
- **Families and Schools Together (FAST):** A prevention/early intervention after-school program that has dramatically changed the learning climate at schools and communities all over the world. The program was founded by researcher and social worker, Dr. Lynn McDonald in 1988 and has been implemented in over 2,000 communities in 46 states and 8 countries. FAST has changed the way many people think of parent Involvement, interventions, and how to keep kids safe, drug-free, and in school. (Retrieved from <http://www.familiesandschools.org/>)
- **National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS):** A well-research program designed to provide schools, districts, and states with research-based models to connect families,

communities, and other partners into the work of schools. The program rests on the formation of an Action Team for Partnerships. The team provides support to students, their families, and communities. The teams spur involvement related to parenting, communication, volunteering, home-based learning, school-based decision-making, and community collaboration. (Retrieved from <http://www.csos.jhu.edu>)

Truancy and legal intervention

Truancy and legal intervention should represent the final step in a school or district's effort to improve student attendance. This step often requires a combination of efforts from schools, school districts, as well as the juvenile justice system and juvenile courts. As a summary from the National Center for Student Engagement reports, effective truancy reduction programs involve collaboration between schools, government agencies, communities, and families; family involvement; a comprehensive approach that focuses on prevention and intervention; use of incentives and sanctions; a supportive context; as well as ongoing evaluation of the program's effectiveness and consistent reference to current best practices. The National Center for State Courts (NCSC, 2002) asserts that truant students require supports from programs that address scholastic difficulties, psychological programs, and mediate dysfunctional family factors. A meta-analysis completed by the Washington Institute for Public Policy indicated that alternative education programs, mentoring programs, and behavioral programs all were positively associated with improvements in attendance among truant students (Kilma, Miller, & Nunlist, 2009).

Despite recommendations for program structures, empirical research reporting the efficacy of truancy programs and interventions is limited. Only a few programs have been evaluated with methods that allow for causality to be determined (Institute for Education Sciences, 2009; Kilma, et al., 2009; Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christensen, 2003; Tyler, 2008). In fact, one team of researchers abandoned their effort to conduct a meta-analysis of truancy programs because the research base proved seriously under-developed and estimates of programmatic effect size could not be calculated (Lehr, et al., 2003). A more recent analysis suggests that attendance interventions achieve similar results regardless of their design (Maynard, et al., 2012).

Despite these limitations, the National Center for School Engagement (2007) recommends that the following structures truancy services must be part of the existing student support services structure, focus on early intervention services, and enlist community services and partners in supporting improved attendance. The last point related to the engagement of community partners is particularly important as many existing truancy programs focus primarily on "sanctions" and fail to consider the importance of other non-punitive interventions (Dembo & Gullede, 2009). This review reveals that truancy interventions can be found at the school, district, and community level with the structures for truancy related initiatives most commonly being held in centers or programs dedicated to student 'recovery and reconnection' as well as in law enforcement models whereby truant students are 'collected and returned' to school. Research indicates that centers and programs tend to be the more effective of these models (Smink & Reimer, 2005).

Tuancy Centers and Programs

The existing research tends to locate truancy programs at the school level or in partnerships between schools and other social service agencies. For example, the research suggests that Truancy Assessment and Service Centers (TASC) “provide children in kindergarten through fifth grade early identification, assessment, and prompt delivery of coordinated interventions to prevent continued unexcused absences from school” (Smink & Reimer, 2005, p. 9). Based on evaluation research, Smink & Reimer (2005) noted that TASC involvement 68% of children referred had five or fewer unexcused absences with 27% having no unexcused absences after referral. These programs are often located outside the school.

In a more recent analysis, Marvul (2012) studied a truancy program located in a small, transitional high school. This program represents the second type of program whereby the truancy intervention is provided within the context of the school. Marvul’s (2012) study involved treatment and control groups with 40 randomly assigned male students. The program combined attendance monitoring, emphasis on participation in club sports, and moral character education to improve attendance and student engagement. According to the results of the study, Marvul concluded that the number of absences dropped from 21.85 days in the control group to 7.35 days in the treatment group indicating that the intervention was effective in improving student attendance.

In both programs, truant students were connected with other personal, social, and academic services that enabled them to attend school. This reflects the core message in research – truancy interventions must be integrated with services and supports that enable the student to attend school when they cannot.

Court-Based & Law Enforcement Interventions

Court-based interventions have also been shown to reduce the incidence of truancy (Mueller, Giacomazzi, & Stoddard, 2006). These programs bring truant students before a judge or representative of the juvenile justice system. In most cases, the judge or juvenile justice official informs the student’s parents of their child’s attendance and works with the parents to develop an agreement between the parents and the court to improve the child’s attendance. In some cases, these conversations also provide opportunities to identify needed social and family supports without which the student has been unable to attend school. Alternatively, law enforcement agencies have adopted models that are similar to crime prevention. Bazemore, Stinchcomb, & Leip (2004) studied an initiative operated by the sheriff’s department in a large, urban county that was designed to reduce truancy rates by utilizing a crime control model. As reported by Dembo and Gullledge (2009),

Truant students were picked up by policy officers and taken to a central Truancy Unit. Once at the unit, students were processed by

police officers and assessed by social services personnel. While at the truancy unit, students received a basic assessment and interview, brief informal counseling with a school social worker, and are under enforced silence. The students cannot spend more than 6 hours at the center and must be picked up by a parent or guardian (p.7).

While the model resulted in modest short-term reductions in student absenteeism. Long-term the program actually proved detrimental as it resulted in higher levels of student absenteeism and disengagement. (Bazemore, et al., 2004). Thus, while research indicates that programs designed to 'collect' truant students may improve attendance by bringing the students back to school they do little to impact the underlying personal, emotional, health-related, social, or academic factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism and truancy in the first place.

Examples of Court-Assisted Truancy Programs

- **Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program (formerly Preventive Intervention):** 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.
- **Chronic Truancy Initiative:** 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.
- **Positive Action through Holistic Education (Project PATHE):** 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 program 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.

- **School Transition Environment Program (STEP):** 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.

Summary

Looking across the preventive measures discussed in the research, it appears that three common practices yield the most significant improvement in student attendance. First, establishing effective monitoring practices enable educators to routinely evaluate student attendance and intervene *before* the student becomes chronically absent (Balfanz & Byrne, 2012). These systems need not be complicated. A simple spreadsheet indicating the number of days absent and the type of interventions provided to a student can provide schools with information they need to begin improving student attendance. Second, establishing a multi-pronged prevention *and* intervention strategy is key to effectively decreasing student absenteeism. The majority of resources and activities should be focused on prevention (e.g., school-based hand washing efforts; incentives and rewards for good or perfect attendance; information sent to parents and families; etc.). Third, intervention mechanisms should augment preventive measures and be applied to students whose attendance does not improve or fails to improve. Intervention programs and practices should be individualized to the student and aim to connect them with the supports they (or their family) need to attend school regularly.

TRUANCY PREVENTION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A MODEL FOR INDIANA'S SCHOOLS

Building on the resources presented in this guide, the following prevention model is proposed as a guide for Indiana's school corporations. While each school will need to adjust various elements of the model depending on the availability of resources and partnerships, the model demonstrates the ways that effective early-warning systems, prevention programs, and intervention programs can be blended to improve student attendance. The program model is based on the assumption that a greater investment in prevention will reduce the need for expensive interventions.

Elements of the Proposed Attendance Plan

The proposed model has six components. First, the plan includes an analysis of the school's attendance data. Second, the plan includes a description of the school's attendance goals. Third, the plan includes a description of the monitoring and parental notification strategies that will be employed by the school. Fourth, the plan includes a description of the school's prevention program. Fifth, the plan includes a description of the school's intervention program for students who are chronically absent or truant. Finally, the plan includes a description of the measures that will be used to monitor the effectiveness of the attendance effort.

Analysis of school attendance data

While some schools may have access to centralized data systems that enable them to easily obtain attendance information, the assumption is that schools will need to work with data that they collect at their school site. This might involve a blend of information available in district sources as well as additional information collected directly from classroom teachers.

Key questions to be addressed in this section...

- *What does our school's attendance data tell us about our students' current attendance patterns?*
- *Which students (i.e., student groups) appear to be missing school and how frequently are the absences occurring?*
- *How does student attendance differ by student, family, and other characteristics that might inform our prevention and intervention efforts?*
- *Where might interventions be most helpful given our students' current attendance?*

Description of the school's attendance goals

In much the same way that a school improvement plan identifies specific sub-groups or student populations, the attendance plan addresses the group or groups that are most in need of support. To identify this group, the school or district will need to review relevant attendance data. This data may be obtained from the school district's student information system or from school-based records.

Key questions to be addressed in this section...

- *Which of our current school improvement goals most depend on improved student attendance?*
- *What are we (as a school) willing to commit to in order to improve student attendance this year and throughout the next three years?*
- *What are we (as a school) able to do to improve student attendance given the resources (i.e., people, money, and time) that we currently have?*
- *What do we (as a school) believe would result in improved student attendance?*

Description of the school's monitoring and parental notification plan

Before explaining the prevention and intervention measures that will be used by the school to improve attendance, the plan should explain how attendance data will be collected and analyzed. Additionally, the plan should identify how (at what point) the school will communicate with parents about their son or daughter's attendance.

Key questions to be addressed in this section...

- *At what stage (number of days) should we notify parents that their son or daughter has missed school?*
- *How will our communication with parents be made, how many times, and to what extent will different methods of communication be used?*
- *How will communication progress in the event that student attendance does not improve?*
- *What resources (e.g., people, money, & time) will our communication strategies require?*
- *How can we ensure that our communication with parents is sustained as student attendance changes throughout the school year?*

Description of the school's planned prevention activities

The plan must provide a description that explains the prevent activity and describe the evaluation plan for the intervention.

Key questions to be addressed in this section...

- *Which activities will our school provide to improve student and parent awareness about the importance of consistent school attendance?*
- *How will the activities be provided and by whom?*
- *What will our school do to inform parents who are unable to attend school functions or events?*
- *How will we differentiate our strategies to educate, inform, or impact different students, groups of students, or school constituencies?*

Description of the school's intervention plan

Interventions are distinguished between school-based interventions and those provided by external partners such as truancy programs or the juvenile justice system. The plan should identify interventions available to students in the school and briefly identify any interventions available to students from the school district or surrounding community.

Key questions to be addressed in this section...

- *How will our school respond when student attendance becomes a serious concern?*
- *At what stage (number of days absent) and in what form will interventions be provided? By whom? At what cost?*
- *Which agencies, organizations, or partners will we enlist to support our efforts to improve student attendance?*
- *What resources do these agencies, organizations, or partners bring and how might they be leveraged to support our school-based efforts?*

Description of the evidence used in evaluating the plan

The plan must also state what evidence (measures) the school will use to evaluate the impact that the attendance program is having on students. These measures should be summative (i.e., yearly measures indicating what happened over time) as well as formative (i.e., routinely reviewed measures that are designed to assist the school in modifying the attendance effort).

Key to be addressed in this section...

- *What measures or metrics do we collect monthly or yearly that can serve as a measure of the program's effectiveness?*
- *What measures or metrics do we collect monthly that can be used to inform the delivery of the program?*

The proposed models adhere closely to the requirements outlined in IC 20-31-5, which defines what schools must do in order to establish a comprehensive plan to improve student attendance. Prior to each model, a descriptive account of a prototypical school is provided.

Sample Elementary School Attendance Plan

The following attendance plan is illustrative and was developed to represent how a prototypical elementary school might create an attendance improvement plan that is consistent with IC 20-31-5. The plan was developed to address (1) students who are routinely late for class and (2) prevalence of chronic illness among students. As illustrated, the plan provides an example of targeted interventions that research suggests effectively improve student attendance. More importantly, the plan demonstrates how a school can move from existing data about student attendance to a clear, concise plan that not only improves student attendance but provides documentation that can be used to refine these efforts from one year to the next.

School-wide Attendance Goals

Section describes the school's attendance goals for the next school year. The goals described should be specific statements that provide justification for the school's prevention and intervention measures described below.

Sample Elementary School will improve student attendance by:

- Reducing the number of students arriving late for class by 20%.
- Decreasing the number of students who miss five or more days of school during Fall Semester by 50%.
- Decreasing the number of students who miss 10 or more days during the school year by 50%.
- Increasing parental awareness about the importance of school attendance, arriving on-time, and the resources/supports available.
- Rewarding students who achieve perfect (no absences) or near perfect (less than 2 absences) attendance each semester.

Analysis of School Attendance Data

Section describes who was involved in the development of the plan, how the data was collected, and what the analysis of the data suggested. While not required, it is assumed that principals will engage teachers and other stakeholders in developing the attendance plan for their building and engage them in the analysis and interpretation of the school's attendance data.

Attendance Monitoring Team

The principal, her secretary, the counselor, and three grade level teachers form the school's Attendance Monitoring Team (AMT). The team meets monthly to review student attendance and serves as the primary point of contact for students who miss school. The team contacts parents when their students begin missing school, meets with parents to discuss student attendance, and conducts interviews/home visits to identify barriers to regular school attendance, and serves as a resource for other teachers and staff who are dealing with students who fail to attend class regularly.

Analysis

The analysis section should describe what information was collected and an overall interpretation of the school's attendance patterns. In particular, the analysis should identify the students who arriving late to class, the students who are chronically absent, and possible explanations for their attendance behaviors. The purpose of citing this information is to ensure that prevention and intervention activities are "data-driven."

The Attendance Monitoring Team downloaded attendance data from the school corporation's student information system on a monthly basis. The data includes the student's name, the number of days they have been absent or late to class, and the reason that the student was late or absent. In addition, for any student who missed five or more days of school, the Team collects additional data

through interviews with the student and their parents.

The school's attendance data indicate that students are arriving late to class. In the first month of school, 37 students arrived late three or more times while 58 students arrived late at least once. First and second graders appear to arrive late to school most frequently. Fourteen first grade students and seven second graders arrived late three or more times during the first month of school. The Attendance Team found that students who arrived late to class during the first 30 days often missed entire school days. Among students who were late in the first month of school, the Team found that half of these students ended up missing three or more days of school by the end of the semester. The Team also found that 35 students missed three or more days of school during the fall semester while 40 students missed three or more days of school during the spring semester. In fall semester, three students missed ten or more days of school. In spring semester, five students missed ten or more days of school. According to the attendance data, the most common reason for a child missing school was because they were home sick.

Notification

The section describes how the school will notify parents when/if their son or daughter misses a specified number of school days. The notification system may be standardized across the school district or tailored to each school.

Sample Elementary School will adopt a tiered series of notifications for students who are missing an increasing number of school days. The school will use a variety of communication measures (e.g., meetings between the principal and student; phone calls; letters; etc.) to connect with parents. The communications will occur as students miss two, five, seven, or ten days of school.

# of days absent	Notification
2	Phone Call - Parent will receive a phone call from the school indicating that the student has missed two days of school. The student will be required to meet with the principal or school counselor to discuss his or attendance.
5	Phone Call and Letter - Parent will receive a phone call and letter from the school explaining that the student has missed five days of school and reminding the parent of the importance of regular school attendance. The parent will be encouraged to meet with the son or daughter's counselor to discuss attendance issues.
7	Phone Call, Certified Letter, and Meeting - Parent will receive a phone call from the school informing them that their son or daughter has missed seven days of school. A certified letter will be sent home from the school requiring that the parent meet with the school's principal or counselor to discuss supports that can be provided to

	facilitate improved attendance as part of an “attendance contract.”
10	Home Visit – The school principal and counselor will conduct a home visit to the meet with the student’s parents, assess barriers to school attendance, and develop a plan to improve the student’s attendance.

Prevention Activities

Sample Elementary School will provide parents and families with information about the importance of attendance as one of the primary prevention strategies. Moreover, the school will also introduce school-wide incentives to encourage students to strive for good or perfect attendance as well as ‘Healthy Hands Program’ that will emphasize the importance of

- ***Open-house presentation to parents and families***
 - The assistant principal will provide a presentation to parents attending the school’s fall and spring open house. The presentation will summarize the risk factors associated with chronic absenteeism, note the resources available at the school to improve student attendance, and describe the risks associated with attendance.
- ***Fall and spring newsletter***
 - The contents of the presentation given to parents during the open house will be presented in a, “Did you know?” article in the school newsletter. The newsletter will be mailed to parents at the end of the first month of each semester.
- ***School-wide incentive program***
 - With support from a nearby fast food business, students who have perfect attendance at the end of each semester will receive a \$10 meal voucher. Students who have good attendance (missed fewer than two days of school) will receive a \$5 meal voucher. The principal will present the vouchers in-person in each classroom.
- ***Rise and Shine!***
 - To increase the number of students who arrive late to class, the school will develop a program called “Rise and Shine” that will encourage students to be in-class on-time. Students who arrive on-time each day will be entered in a drawing for one of two Apple iPods. The drawing will take place at the end of the Fall and Spring semester.
- ***Healthy Hands program and curriculum***
 - During flu season (October to January), posters will be hung throughout the school reminding students of the importance of washing their hands and covering their coughs. Teachers will be provided with anti-bacterial hand wash for use in class rooms. A science or health lesson will be devoted to explaining how germs spread from hands and how this causes illnesses to begin.

Community and Legal Intervention

The community and legal intervention section is designed to describe the strategies that the school will use to address students with the most severe absence patterns. This section should describe how the school will utilize truancy, community, or legal interventions to improve attendance.

Sample Elementary School has partnered with the Community Resource Office for the Sample City Police Department. Students who miss 11 or more days of school will be referred to the Community Resource Office. The Community Resource Office will work with the student and their family to identify potential barriers to school attendance and connect them with social services and/or other support services to enable regular school attendance.

Evaluation and Assessment

The final section describes the steps that the school will take to evaluate the effect of their absenteeism and truancy initiatives. This evaluation need not be sophisticated. It should, however, provide evidence that clearly supports that the efforts are working and are having a positive impact on schools.

To evaluate the absenteeism and truancy reduction efforts at Sample Elementary School, the principal and her secretary will gather the following information.

- Total number of days absent for each student enrolled through the school year
- Number of parental notifications sent
- Number of parental meetings held to discuss student attendance
- Number of phone calls made to inform parents about their son or daughter's attendance

Sample High School Attendance Plan

The following attendance plan is illustrative and was developed to represent how a prototypical high school might create an attendance improvement plan that is consistent with IC 20-31-5. The plan was developed to address (1) students who exhibit behaviors consistent with low levels of student engagement and (2) students who are disengaging from school because they do not perceive their academic courses as worthwhile or engaging. As illustrated, the plan provides an example of targeted interventions that research suggests effectively improve student attendance. More importantly, the plan demonstrates how a school can move from existing data about student attendance to a clear, concise plan that not only improves student attendance but provides documentation that can be used to refine these efforts from one year to the next.

School-wide Attendance Goals

Section describes the school's attendance goals for the next school year. The goals described should be specific statements that provide justification for the school's prevention and intervention measures described below.

Sample High School will improve student attendance by:

- Increasing student attendance among ninth and tenth grade students;
- Increasing personalized learning opportunities for eleventh and twelfth graders;
- Increasing student attendance for all students in core academic classes (Math, Language Arts, and Science);
- Decreasing the number of students who miss five or more days of school during Fall Semester by 50%.

Analysis of School Attendance Data

Section describes who was involved in the development of the plan, how the data was collected, and what the analysis of the data suggested. While not required, it is assumed that principals will engage teachers and other stakeholders in developing the attendance plan for their building and engage them in the analysis and interpretation of the school's attendance data.

Student Connections Team

The principal, an assistant principal, department chairs from core academic subjects, and the school counselor meet monthly to review student attendance data as well as current course grades for students who are missing classes.

Analysis

The analysis section should describe what information was collected and an overall interpretation of the school's attendance patterns. In particular, the analysis should identify the students who arriving late to class, the students who are chronically absent, and possible

explanations for their attendance behaviors. The purpose of citing this information is to ensure that prevention and intervention activities are “data-driven.”

The Student Connections Team (STC) downloaded data from the school corporation’s student information system and obtained grade information from teachers collected by the department chairs. The team found that ninth grade students missed 4.8 days in the Fall Semester and 11.9 days by the end of the school year. Tenth grade students missed 5.2 days in the Fall Semester and 12.3 days by the end of the school year. Eleventh grade students missed 9.2 days in the Fall Semester and 13.1 days by the end of the school year. Twelfth grade students missed 11.9 days in the Fall Semester and 13.4 days by the end of the school year.

Thirty percent of students who missed five or more days in a core academic class earned a B or lower on their semester report card. Fifteen percent of students who missed ten or more days failed the class. Students were most likely to fail a math class.

The STC also noted that eleventh and twelfth grade students were more likely to miss class or skip class in the afternoon, particularly following the lunch period. The team found that 40 percent of students who missed a class did so after lunch. Math and Language Arts classes were the most frequently missed.

Notification

The school will adopt a tiered series of notifications for students who are missing an increasing number of school days. The school will use a variety of communication measures (e.g., meetings between the principal and student; phone calls; letters; etc.) to inform parents about their son or daughter’s attendance and to connect students and families with resources that support improved attendance.

# of days absent	Notification
2	Phone Call - Parent will receive a phone call from the school indicating that the student has missed two days of school for any reason.
3	Letter – Parent will receive a letter from the school indicating that the student has missed three days of school. The student will be required to meet with the assistant principal or school guidance counselor to discuss their attendance and to identify any supports that are needed.
5	Phone Call and Letter - Parent will receive a phone call and letter from the school explaining that the student has missed five days of school and reminding the parent of the importance of regular school attendance. The parent will be encouraged to meet with the son or daughter’s counselor to discuss attendance issues.

7	Phone Call, Certified Letter, and Meeting - Parent will receive a phone call from the school informing them that their son or daughter has missed seven days of school. A certified letter will be sent home from the school requiring that the parent meet with the school's principal or counselor to discuss supports that can be provided to facilitate improved attendance as part of an "attendance contract."
10	Home Visit – The school principal and counselor will conduct a home visit to the meet with the student's parents, assess barriers to school attendance, and develop a plan to improve the student's attendance.
11+	Attendance and Truancy Center – Students who miss 11 or more days of school are automatically referred to the Attendance and Truancy Center. The Center works with students and their parents to identify supports that would enable the student to attend class regularly, it also serves as a site to 'collect' students who are absent and re-connect them to their studies.

Prevention Activities

Sample High School will complete the following activities to improve on-time arrival for classes and reducing the incidence of chronic absenteeism.

- **Close campus at lunch**
 - To reduce the incidence of students skipping afternoon classes, the school will move to a closed campus for lunch. Students will be required to eat lunch on campus.
- **Open-house presentation to parents and families**
 - The assistant principal will provide a presentation to parents attending the school's fall and spring open house. The presentation will summarize the risk factors associated with chronic absenteeism, note the resources available at the school to improve student attendance, and describe the risks associated with attendance.
- **Institute the Check and Connect Program for freshman and sophomores with attendance concerns**
 - The principal will pay for a team of freshman and sophomore teachers to participate in the Check and Connect Program. Teachers will be assigned to monitor students who demonstrate frequent absences and assist the student in securing additional resources or supports that enable their attendance.
- **Promote Dual Credit Courses and Career/Technical Education Courses for juniors and seniors to improve engagement**
 - Working with teachers, the school will promote dual credit and career/technical education course offerings to promote greater engagement among students. Dual credit courses will be offered in concert with a nearby community college.

Career/technical education courses will be promoted and enhanced through the integration of Project Lead the Way engineering and biomedical health sciences program.

Community and Legal Intervention

The community and legal intervention section is designed to describe the strategies that the school will use to address students with the most severe absence patterns. This section should describe how the school will utilize truancy, community, or legal interventions to improve attendance.

Sample High School is located in a district that has established a partnership with the Juvenile Justice Department and Sample City Police Department. Students who are absent 10 or more days are required to meet with representative from the Attendance and Truancy Center to discuss their attendance and identify necessary supports. The Attendance and Truancy Center requires each student and their parents to sign a contract that stipulates what each part will do to improve attendance. In the event that the student violates the contract and misses school, they are brought to the Truancy Center and held until their parent is able to pick them up. During the student's time in the center, they meet with a counselor and are required to work on homework or other assignments. To ensure that the students are engaged in productive work, the Center maintains copies of core academic course syllabi and textbooks. These materials are provided in the event that the student does not have his or her homework.

Evaluation and Assessment

The final section describes the steps that the school will take to evaluate the effect of their absenteeism and truancy initiatives. This evaluation need not be sophisticated. It should, however, provide evidence that clearly supports that the efforts are working and are having a positive impact on schools.

To evaluate the absenteeism and truancy reduction efforts at Sample High School, the STC will collect and monitor the following data. This data will be reviewed each semester.

- Total number of days absent for each student enrolled through the school year
- Number of parental notifications sent
- Number of parental meetings held to discuss student attendance
- Number of phone calls made to inform parents about their son or daughter's attendance

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Appendix A. Illustrative Government Websites

The following websites provide resources regarding state-level policies, programs, and initiatives designed to improve student attendance.

California Department of Education

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/>

The California Department of Education's website has tools and resources for people to identify what is chronic absence, published data and information on absenteeism, effective practices for reducing absenteeism, as well as sample verification forms schools may require parents to use.

Connecticut Department of Education

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/>

The Connecticut Department of Education compiled a PDF document, linked above, in order to help schools and districts adjust to a change in the definition of absenteeism and truancy as well as to help combat the issue. The PDF supplies useful attendance definitions; samples and suggestions for required absence documentation; and universal, targeted, and intensive absence interventions.

Georgia Department of Education

<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/>

The Georgia Department of Education's website has a list of resources available for download, including a presentation on attendance, a list of best practices to combat attendance and truancy, programs at the state and local levels, research on the effects of absenteeism and attendance, as well as a resource on reducing suspensions.

Kansas State Department of Education

<http://www.ksde.org/>

The Kansas State Department of Education's website briefly outlines the academic effects absenteeism and poor attendance can have on a student, then lists web resources for evidence-based programs as well as helpful websites related to attendance and school engagement.

New Jersey Department of Education

<http://www.state.nj.us/>

The New Jersey Department of Education's website lists a number of resources for those dealing with absenteeism and truancy, including a list of relevant government agencies, state statutes, initiatives, professional organizations, as well as independent reports and agencies.

New York City Department of Education

<http://www.nyc.gov/>

<http://schools.nyc.gov/>

The New York City Department of Education websites, one designed for the general public and one designed for schools and teachers, respectively, provide information on NYC's numerous anti-absenteeism and truancy initiatives as well as helpful information and resources for what students, families, teachers, and members of the community can do to combat truancy and absenteeism.

Ohio Department of Education

<http://education.ohio.gov/>

The Ohio Department of Education provides a brief informational framework on developing partnerships between the school and families in order to reduce truancy and increase attendance.

Oklahoma State Department of Education

<http://education.ohio.gov/>

The Oklahoma State Department of Education website lists a parent engagement toolkit for download that contains information on the effects of poor attendance, as well as a list of what parents, schools and communities can do to help solve the problem of poor attendance.

Vermont Agency of Education

<http://education.vermont.gov/>

The Vermont Agency of Education's website lists an overview of the importance of attendance and reducing absenteeism, numerous state policies, as well as effective truancy reduction models, chosen by the state commissioner.

Virginia Department of Education

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/>

The Virginia Department of Education supplies a thorough attendance resource guide for download. This guide outlines the importance of attendance, risks and factors of truancy and absenteeism, a multiple tiered approach at combatting truancy and absenteeism, community approaches, as well as sample policies, forms and paperwork for schools.

Appendix B. Survey of Indiana School Superintendents (Summer 2013)

Survey Summary

The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at Indiana University administered a short survey to Indiana school superintendents in Summer 2013. The survey was administered online. Invitations were sent to Indiana school superintendents via the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents (IAPSS). The executive director sent an invitation to superintendents on July 26. The survey received responses through August 9. A reminder message was sent to all superintendents on August 6, 2013. The survey was closed on August 10. The survey collected information from superintendents the state's 289 school corporations about the truancy reduction programs in their school district. In total, of those 181 superintendents responded, representing a 62.6 percent response rate.

Participants

The survey participants included 181 superintendents from school corporations across the State of Indiana. The majority of superintendents (127 of 181 participants) who responded to the survey invitation indicated that their school corporation did not currently operate a court-assisted truancy diversion program. The remainder, 54 participants, indicated that their school corporation operated a court-assisted diversion program. The superintendents who indicated that their school corporation currently operated a court-assisted program were asked to complete the survey. More than half of the survey respondents were located in school corporations outside the state's urban areas. Nearly a third (29%) of respondents were located in rural school corporations, 24% of respondents were located in suburban school corporations, and nine percent were located in school corporations located in towns. Further, the majority of school corporations represented in the sample served fewer than 5,000 students. Thus, responses to the survey most likely reflect those of rural/small district superintendents and may not reflect the views of superintendents statewide.

Table 1.
Survey Respondents

Survey Sample	Frequency	Percent
Number of Superintendents Invited	289	
Number of Superintendents Who Responded	181	62.60%
Total Respondents without Attendance Programs	127	71.16%
Total Respondents with Attendance Programs	54	29.84%
School Corporation Characteristics		
<u>School Corporation Locale</u>		
Urban	4	7.41%
Suburban	13	24.07%
Town	5	9.26%
Rural	16	29.63%
No response	16	29.63%
<u>School Corporation Enrollment</u>		
Less than 1,000 students	5	9.26%
1,001 to 2,000 students	11	20.37%
2,001 to 3,000 students	5	9.26%
3,001 to 4,000 students	4	7.41%
4,001 to 5,000 students	3	5.56%
More than 5,000 students	7	12.96%
More than 10,000 students	3	5.56%
No response	16	29.63%

Does your school corporation have access to a court-assisted diversion or resolution programs, including alternative education program?

Of the 181 superintendents who responded to the survey, 54 respondents (29.84%) indicated that their school district operated a court-assisted diversion, resolution, or alternative education program designed to improve student attendance.

How long has the program existed?

Twenty superintendents representing 37% of the survey respondents indicated that their court-assisted truancy program began within the past five years. This suggests that court-assisted truancy programs are a relatively new phenomenon in Indiana. Twelve respondents representing 22% of the respondents indicated that their program was between 6 and 10 years old. Seven respondents representing approximately 13% of respondents indicated that their program was more than ten years old. Only one of respondents indicated that their program had started in the past year while

another indicated that they were unsure of the longevity of the program. In all, 14 respondents provided no response to the question.

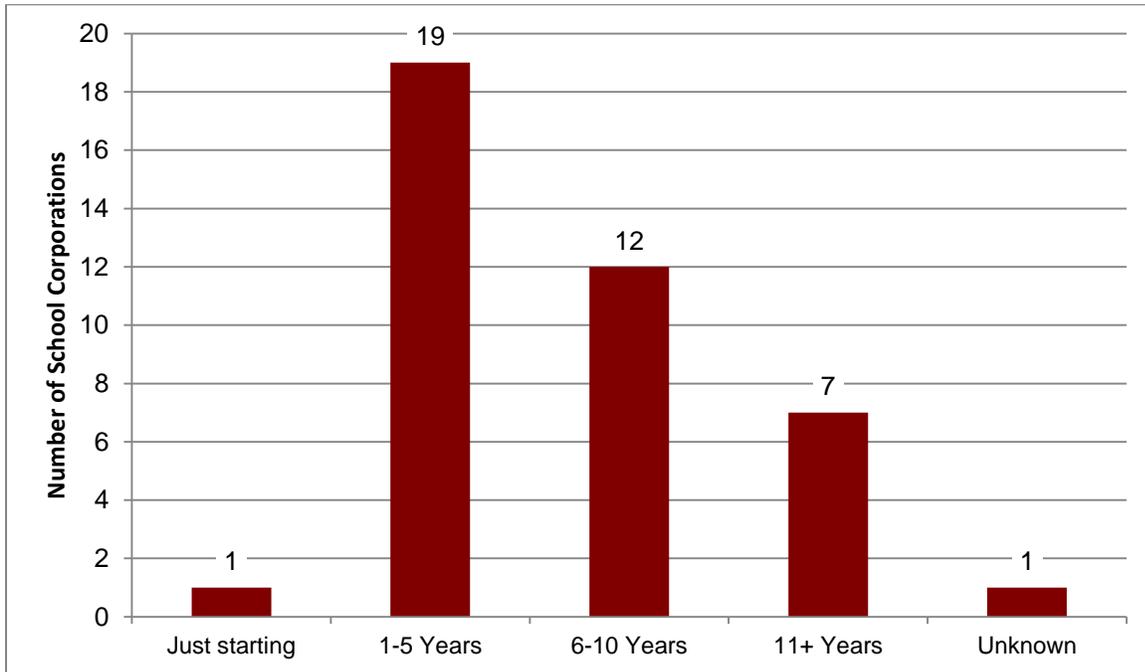


Figure 1. Number of truancy programs by length of operation

How many students does the program serve per semester?

The majority of court-assisted programs appear to serve a relatively small proportion of students in Indiana's school corporations. A majority of respondents, sixty-one percent representing 22 individual respondents, indicated that their court-assisted program served fewer than 30 students per year. Fourteen percent representing five respondents indicated that their program served between 31 and 50 students per year. Eleven percent representing four respondents indicated that their program served more than 50 students per year. Fourteen percent representing five respondents did not know how many students were served by the program. Eighteen respondents provided no response to the question.

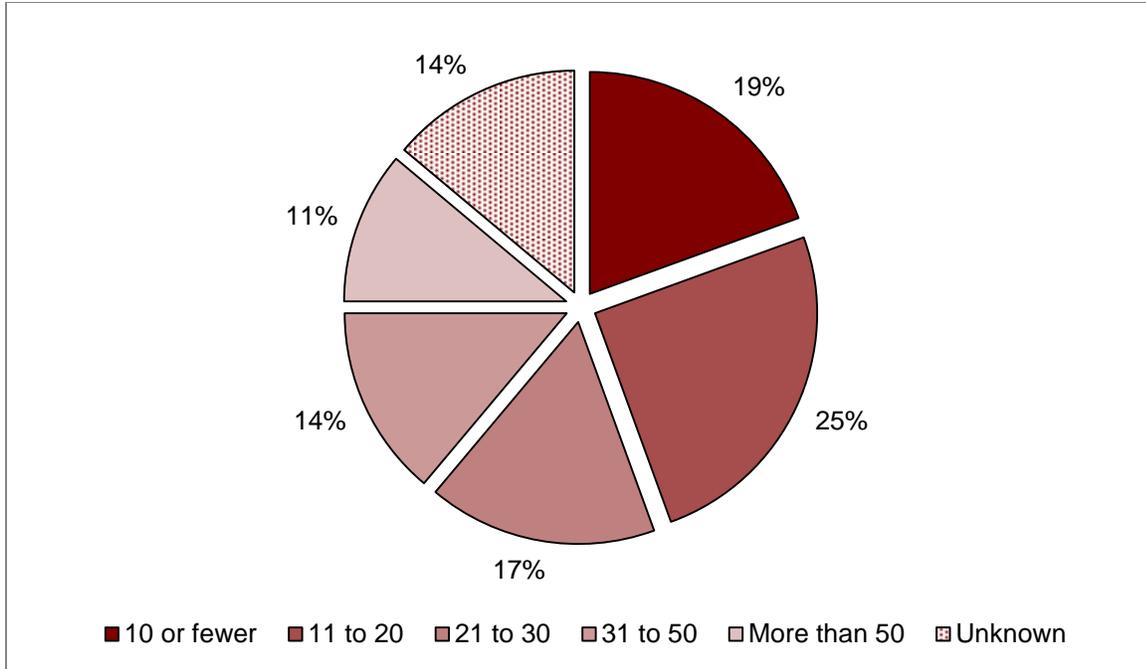


Figure 2. Proportion of truancy programs by population served

What are the primary objectives of the program?

Respondents were asked what the primary objective(s) were for the diversion program in their school corporation. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one option. Of the superintendents who responded, 42% or 32 respondents indicated that the primary objective for their program was to provide “Diversion services to students in lieu of suspension or expulsion.” Thirty-seven percent or 28 respondents indicated that the primary objective for their program was to provide “supervision and educational services to students who are habitually truant from school or who have been suspended or expelled.” Twenty percent of respondents representing 15 individual responses indicated that the primary objective for their program was to provide students with instruction by a licensed classroom teacher.

Table 2.
Primary objective(s) for truancy program

Primary objectives for the program...	Frequency	Percent
Diversion services to students in lieu of suspension or expulsion	32	42.00%
Resolution programs to provide supervision and educational services to students who are habitually truant from school or who have been suspended or expelled	28	37.00%
Alternative education programs with instruction by a licensed classroom teacher	15	20.00%
Other	1	1.00%

Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple options.

What are the primary features of the program?

Superintendents were asked to describe the primary features of the truancy program operating in their school district. A majority indicated that primary feature of the program involved student counseling (24 responses, 21%). In addition, superintendents indicated that subject specific curriculum and instruction (19 responses, 16%), parent and/or family counseling (18 responses, 15%), credit recovery (17 responses, 15%), and academic advising (14 responses, 12%) were among the most common program features.

Table 3.
Primary features of the truancy program

Primary features of the program...	Frequency	Percent
Student counseling	24	21.00%
Parent and/or family counseling	18	15.00%
Academic advising	14	12.00%
Credit recovery	17	15.00%
GED or continuing education	8	7.00%
Subject-specific curriculum and instruction	19	16.00%
Transportation services	2	2.00%
Food service	5	4.00%
Other	10	9.00%

Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple options.

Which students are served by the program?

Superintendents were also asked about the populations that their truancy programs served. The majority of respondents indicated that the truancy program served students who were suspended (27

responses, 21%) or expelled (27 responses, 21%). Additionally, superintendents indicated that the programs served students who were habitually truant (i.e., missed 10 or more days of school per year). Twenty-four respondents (19%) indicated that their program served habitual truants. Nineteen respondents (15%) indicated that their program served students who were “at-risk” of suspension from school. Just 16 respondents (13%) indicated that their program served students who were chronically absent (defined as missing 10% more of the school year for any reason).

Table 4.
Characteristics of students served by program

Students served by the program...	Frequency	Percent
Students who are chronically absent (missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason)	16	13.00%
Habitual truants (10 days or more of unexcused absences)	24	19.00%
Students who are at-risk of suspension from school	19	15.00%
Students who have been suspended from school	27	21.00%
Students who are at-risk of expulsion from school	27	21.00%
Students who have been expelled from school	11	9.00%
Other	3	2.00%

Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple options.

What is the average length of participation?

The majority of respondents indicated that students participated in the diversion program for less than 10 days. Six respondents indicated that students typically participated in the diversion program for less than two months. Five respondents indicated that students participated in the diversion program for 3 to 4 months. Two respondents indicated that students participated in the program for five or more months. And four respondents, representing seven percent of responses, indicated that students participated in the diversion program approximately one school year.

Table 5.
Typical Length of Participation in Truancy Program

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 10 days	15	28.00%
10 days to 1 month	1	2.00%
1 month to 2 months	5	9.00%
3 months to 4 months	5	9.00%
5 months or more	2	2.00%
A complete school year (180 days)	4	7.00%
Unknown	1	2.00%
No response	21	39.00%

Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple options.

