Truancy Matters: Research, Policies and Practices

CASCAWA National Truancy Conference
October 13, 2006
National Center for School Engagement (NCSE)

- An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
- Launched in September 2003
- Promotes school success
Mission

To ensure school success for at-risk youth and their families by improving school engagement.
Strategies

- Identify and promote best practices that are evidence and research-based
- Collaborate with schools, families/communities, private/public agencies, courts and law enforcement
Strategies

• Utilize approaches that are culturally competent, family-centered, and strengths-based

• Implement methods to integrate the 3 A’s of School Engagement

ATTENDANCE
ATTACHMENT
ACHIEVEMENT
3 A’s of School Engagement

- **Attendance**—Schools, families, courts, and law enforcement use culturally-responsive, evidence-based strategies to improve student attendance.
- Includes reducing truancy, addressing barriers to attendance, and high mobility.
3 A’s of School Engagement

- **Attachment**—Schools establish meaningful connections with youth and their families through caring, support, and mutually-defined expectations.

- Includes after school programs, prevention and family support programs, parent/school collaborations, **welcoming school environments**...
3 A’s of School Engagement

- **Achievement**—Communities, schools, and families assure that students **have the tools and resources** to complete courses and graduate from high school.
- Involves **planning for success**, closing the achievement gap...
- Educators seek to **improve educational practices** to promote school success for all children.
Theory of Change

• School success is based on integration of attachment, attendance, and achievement.

• NCSE uses this *Theory of Change* to develop and implement strategies that ensure school success and school completion.
What the Research Says
Use dropout statistics as a proxy for truancy
Raging national debate on graduation/dropout rates
Many limitations of data
Varying definitions (event, status, promotion indices, etc.)
Dropout/Graduation Statistics

• Varying sources of data (U.S. Census Bureau, Common Core of Data, longitudinal studies)

• Result in a range of national rates
  – 87% (NCES) class of 2001
  – 69% (Swanson, 2004) class of 2001
  – 72% (Greene, 2006) class of 2003
Graduation Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Area</th>
<th>2002-2003</th>
<th>2003-2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov). Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate for Public High Schools From the Common Core of Data
NCES Common Core of Data

- School district and state level data
- Trend data (you can build your own table)
- Data available
  - 12th grade dropout rate
  - 12th graders received a diploma
  - 9th graders received a diploma

Site: www.nces.ed.gov
Dropout Statistics

- 5% of teenagers/young adults enrolled in High School left without successfully completing a high school program - 2001
- In 2001, 3.8 million young adults (about 11% of those age 16-24) were not in high school and had not completed high school or received a GED
- Youth in the lowest income families at greatest risk of dropout

Source: Census data (Current Population Survey)
Truancy Statistics

- Currently no national definition
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires state definition of truancy
- NCLB requires states collect truancy rates (not only attendance rates)
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

Title IV, Part A: Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act

• Uniform Management Information Reporting System (UMIRS)
Uniform Management Information Reporting System

**Intent:**

- Standardize reporting of data across the districts within a state
- Requires (among other things):
  Collection of school- and district-level student behavior-related data and public reporting
Truancy Data Sources

- Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBS)/CDC
- Health Behavior in School Age Children (WHO/SAMHSA)
- National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY/BLS)
- National Juvenile Court Data Archive (OJJDP)
Some Truancy Statistics

• Around 7% of students report they did not go to school on one or more of the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to/from school. (YRBS)

• Rate of 9-12 graders that report missing school due to safety concerns has grown 50% since 1993 (YRBS)

• A longitudinal study of youth ages 12-16 found that 38% reported being late to school without an excuse (NLSY).
The Denver Data

- Collected data from Denver Public Schools to assess prevalence of truancy
- Work sponsored by National Truancy Prevention Association
- Assessment gives a better indication than attendance rates or drop out statistics
DPS Average Unexcused Absences by Grade

![Graph showing the average unexcused absences by grade for different school years (2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005).](image)
Percent of Chronic Truants and Their Exit Status

- Approximately 60% of students who left DPS for juvenile incarceration or detention were chronically truant.
- Approximately 60% of students who were expelled from DPS were chronically truant.
- Approximately 16% of students who attended more than one school in a school year are chronically truant.
Percent of Chronic Truants Who Drop Out

- Approximately 20% of students who left to be home schooled were chronically truant.
- Approximately 13% of student whose exit code was “mutual consent (under the age 16)”, “runaway or other causes”, or “no trace of enrollment in another school” were chronically truant.
- Approximately 50% of students whose exit code was “dropout” were chronically truant.
Truancy Matters: A Close-up Look at Impacts
Linking Absence to Delinquency

**Poor Outcomes:**
- Lower Lifetime Earnings
- Adult Criminality
- Poor Outcomes for Offspring
- Family Dysfunction
- Unemployment
Effect of Truancy on Later Delinquency

Onset of Serious Assault Crimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Truancy</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Skipper</td>
<td>4.12 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Truant (1-3 days)</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Truant (4-9 days)</td>
<td>6.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Truant (&gt; 9 days)</td>
<td>12.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Henry and Huizinga, 2005
Truancy and Drug Use

Onset of Marijuana Use

• Class Skipper 4.11 times as likely
• Minor Truant (1-3 days) 7.17
• Moderate Truant (4-9 days) 12.37
• Chronic Truant (> 9 days) 16.08

Source: Henry and Huizinga, 2005
What Happens to Truant Youth?

• Educational failure/ Poor achievement
• Poor Employability, work stability
• Delinquency and adult criminality
• Unstable personal relationships
• Poverty
• Dependence on public assistance
What Happens to Their Families?

• Unsupervised children get into trouble
• Parents are called away from work to the school or truancy court
• Family conflict due to school absences and lack of academic achievement
Impact of Truancy

There are Systemic Effects

– School disruption
– School test scores suffer
– Operating revenue decreases
– Juvenile courts flooded
– Daytime crime escalates
– Later criminal behavior
Factors Impacting Truancy

Risk Factors
- Fear of harm in schools or neighborhood victimization
- Abuse in the home
- Low academic achievement
- Substance abuse
- Lack of parental involvement in school or homework
- Chronic health problems

Protective Factors
- Self esteem
- Positive school attitudes
- School attachment
- Activities such as sports, clubs and volunteer work,
- Sense of purpose in life
- Positive attitudes toward police officers
Family Influences

- Parents unaware of problem
- Domestic violence/abuse, neglect
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Substance Abuse
- Lack of awareness of the law
- Education not valued
Typical Characteristics for Families of Chronic Truants

• Poverty
• Working students
• Single parent homes
• High mobility rates
• Parents holding multiple jobs
• Families not engaged with school
What are the costs of truancy?

• **Short term costs**
  – School and court expenditures
  – Cost of sentencing options (detention)
  – Juvenile crime associated with truancy

• **Long term costs**
  – Adult crime later on
  – Lower income tax revenues
  – Increased social service expenditures
## Court: Results of Colorado Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adams</th>
<th>Denver</th>
<th>Pueblo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of truancy filings '00-'01</strong></td>
<td>217</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total court cost</strong></td>
<td>$90 K</td>
<td>$286 K</td>
<td>$55 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Per truant cost</strong></td>
<td>$413</td>
<td>$292</td>
<td>$694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential savings (30% success)</strong></td>
<td>$13.5 million</td>
<td>$63 million</td>
<td>$5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakeven success rate</strong></td>
<td>1/504</td>
<td>1/739</td>
<td>1/302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or one grad every...</td>
<td>2.3 years</td>
<td>.75 years</td>
<td>3.8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## TRP: Results

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<th>Denver</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of youths served '00-'01</strong></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total program cost</strong></td>
<td>$49 K</td>
<td>$54 K</td>
<td>$768 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Per truant cost</strong></td>
<td>$544</td>
<td>$640</td>
<td>$1,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential savings</strong></td>
<td>$7.8 million</td>
<td>$7.5 million</td>
<td>$38.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakeven success rate</strong></td>
<td>1/383</td>
<td>1/337</td>
<td>1/115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or one grad every...</td>
<td>4.2 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Truancy Reduction Saves Public Funds

Estimated Per Capita Savings in Public Spending and Income Taxes For Each Truant Student Who Completes High School

Adams County, CO - $208,371
Denver, CO - $215,649
Pueblo, CO - $209,550
Policy Matters: Issues and Leverages for Changes
Definition for “Habitually Truant”

What is your state law?

*Questions to consider:*

- In your state, is this law achieving what it intended to achieve?
- Is it being used to recapture kids or punish them?
- Are districts consistently following it?
- Has research been done on its implementation?
Levers for Policy Change

- Federal *No Child Left Behind* Law
- Attendance = School Funding
- High Stakes Achievement Testing
- Truancy Reduction → Day time crime
- Truancy Reduction → Court Costs
Community Contributions

- Set community standards that value going to school (involve retired persons)
- Work with businesses to promote school attendance
- Improve transportation access
- Increase awareness of the problem and the solutions
- Connect schools with law enforcement and youth services
State/County/Municipal Policies

- File CHINS/PINS
- File D&N
- Withhold TANF
- Daytime curfew
- Subpoena school records

- School revenue based on average daily enrollment
- Include school truancy rates in report card
- Claim revenues for students with truancy petition
Court Sanctioning Policies

- Fine parents & students
- Arrest parents
- Contempt citations
- Suspend driver’s license
- Detention
- Community service

- Court ordered family or individual therapy
- Court ordered tutoring or health services
- Waive fines with improved attendance
School Policies

- School “F” grading
- No Extra Curriculum Activities
- Suspension/expulsions
- Employ truancy officers
- Grading on participation

- Change Ed. Placement
- Appeals processes
- Consistent attendance policy and practice known by all (students, parents, staff, community agencies)
Policy Change

- End out of school suspensions for being truant
- Finance schools by average daily attendance not one day counts
- Document attendance and truancy by school & set goals
- Less use by courts of detention for truancy
- Remove attendance as a factor in grading
Other Policy Change Needs

- Start secondary schools later in the day
- Provide partial credit options for students
- Conduct a “push out “policy audit of rules and practices
- Raise compulsory attendance age to 18
Best Practices

Truancy Programs must be locally designed based on the needs of the community and starting with best practices
Truancy Reduction – Community Wide Approach

Who should be at the table?

- Schools
- Juvenile Justice (Courts & youth services)
- Law Enforcement (Police & prosecutors)
- Service Agencies
- Public health
- Parents
- Youth
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Local Business Representatives
A Continuum of Support

- Incentives
- Prevention
- Early intervention
- Intensive intervention
- Deep-end consequences
A Continuum of Support

Improving School Attendance

- Community Awareness
  - School Business Govt
- Parent Education
  - School Business Govt
- Student Incentives
  - School Community Business
- Early Identification
  - School
- Immediate, Meaningful Response
  - School Family Community
- Treatment Remediation
  - Court Diversion CBOs
- Sanctions
  - House Arrest Curfew Detention

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Principles of Effective Programs

• Include special attention to health and special education needs
• Data driven decision-making
• Community and Business involvement
• Focus on school transition years
• Include public awareness campaigns
• Meaningful parent involvement planning together toward solutions with school & agencies
Alternatives to Court

• Youth Court
• Mediation
• Quasi-judicial proceedings
• Diversion
• Truancy workshops
• Knock and talks
Jacksonville, FLA

- 22 Target schools, 180 Truancy Quasi-Judicial Hearings annually
- Varying degrees of case management for youth served
- Compliance with mandated attendance meetings tracked at target schools
- Result: increased attendance but little effect on achievement and engagement
King County, Seattle, WA

• Truancy mediation workshops as alternative to court
• Case managers assigned to students at court or after workshop
• Results: 75% reduction in truancy court petitions, lag time between behavior and consequence too long
Community Based Programs

- Community assessment center to help families access services (health, mental health, tutoring, mentoring etc.)
- Community workers such as probation officers or social workers act as liaisons between youth, school and JJ
- Case management services
Community Based Programs

• Walking school bus
• After school programs (recreation & educational)
• Home visitation
• Clothing and school supply drives
• School Attendance Awareness Campaigns
Count Me In For Learning!

Public Education Campaign for School Engagement

School Year Activity Cycle

Count Me in For Learning

I Count
Oct-Nov

I’ve Learned
May-June

I’m Learning
Jan-Feb

Aug-Sept
School Based Programs

- Attendance recognition awards
- Letters/voice/e-mails to parents
- Catch up classrooms or tutoring
- Student Attendance Review Boards (SARBs)
- Class letters home
School Based Programs

- School climate programs (anti-bullying, tolerance, school involvement activities)
- Attendance specialists in building
- Psych evaluations or social work services
Local Action
Where do we start?

• Know your attendance laws, local policies & their inconsistencies
• Develop a strategic plan across agencies
• Focus on attendance and engagement not just truancy
• Adopt promising practices that “fit” locally
Local Action
Where do we start?

- Create both incentives and graduated sanctions
- Involve students and parents in planning programs to improve attendance and engagement
- Take baselines and track progress
Visit NCSE’s Truancy Website

www.schoolengagement.org

Presentation by
Judith Martinez, NCSE Director
1888-272-0454 Ext. 105
jmartinez@coloradofoundation.org
Special Thanks

Contributions to this Presentation by:

Jodi Heilbrunn, NCSE
Janelle Krueger, Colorado Department of Education
Heather MacGillivary, NCSE
Gretchen Mann-Erickson, NCSE
Ken Seeley, EdD, NCSE