Effective Strategies & Programs to Address Truancy

October 2011

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Background…
➢ Truancy is defined as an unexcused absence from school (NCSE, Truancy Resource Kit, 2007)
➢ Factors contributing to truancy/poor attendance often stem from three main areas:
   ➢ Family/community issues (this may include – violence, neglect or abuse [drug, alcohol, physical] at home/in the community, poor role models [lack of parental interest/value of education, peers who are truant or delinquent], monetary pressures to work instead of attend school, teen pregnancy;
   ➢ School issues (which may include poor relationships with teachers/school administrators, lack of effective policies [poor record keeping of student attendance, not notifying parents of absences, zero-tolerance programs where students earn failing grades or are suspended/expelled], unwelcoming or unsafe school environment, inadequate identification of special education need of students;
   ➢ Student issues (e.g. poor academic performance, lack of vision/goals for future, unmet mental health needs, alcohol/drug use or abuse).
➢ Programs addressing truancy most often fall under the following three categories: school-based, community-based and court-based (NCSE, 2007)

Key Findings…

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Components of Effective Truancy Programs:
➢ **Truancy programs that include a collaborative approach, and are delivered in a supportive environment are more effective and last longer** (NCSE, 2007). Active involvement of and collaboration between teachers, administration, parents/guardians, and the community (law enforcement personnel, mental health workers, community support agencies) is key.
   ➢ Parents/guardians should be involved as part of the school team in addressing their child's truancy. True participation means that they are sought after for their advice, experience and expertise in the community, as clients of our public systems of care, and as experts in the lives of their children.
   ➢ **A comprehensive approach is important**. Effective truancy programs focus on prevention and intervention simultaneously.
   ➢ Effective programs discover and address the underlying reason behind truancy / non-attendance.
   ➢ Early intervention is an important aspect of reducing truancy.
   ➢ **Use of incentives and sanctions are effective in some cases**
   ➢ Incentives and sanctions should be appropriate and meaningful to students and their families
   ➢ Examples of sanctions include: suspensions, detentions, denial of privileges. Zero-tolerance or harsh penalties (e.g. expulsion, failing grades) have been shown to be in-effective because they disengage youth and push them further away from the school
   ➢ Incentives tend to be recognition-based and can include special experiences / rewards (e.g. recognition at assemblies, gift certificates, parties). Evidence of the effectiveness of providing incentives is mixed.

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➢ **Regularly assess and evaluate the truancy program / initiative.** Truancy programs should be evaluated in order to determine program impact. Changes to program delivery should be made to improve impact and effectiveness.

Strategies for Promoting Attendance at School:
➢ Determine and communicate clear rules for student attendance (through school/community/family collaboration) and enforce the rules quickly and consistently when not followed;
➢ Publicize the relationship between regular attendance and school success;
➢ Ensure school processes allow for proper tracking of and follow through on absences;
➢ Relationships are key in promoting regular attendance:
   ➢ Creating safe, welcoming and nurturing learning environments where students' have positive relationships with caring adults is important (NWREL 2004);
   ➢ Programs that provide opportunities for students to build relationships have been shown to have a positive impact on attendance (e.g. after-school programs, high-interest extra-curricular activities, student advisory and adult mentor programs) (NWREL, 2004)

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Many programs addressing attendance/truancy are available to schools. Although the evidence-base in this area is limited, some emerging best-practices exist. Effective truancy programs are: delivered in a collaborative and supportive environment; focus on prevention and intervention simultaneously; use appropriate incentives / sanctions which are meaningful to students; and are regularly evaluated to ensure the program is working effectively. For attendance, clear rules should be collaboratively set and effectively communicated to students; proper tracking of absences and consistent follow through need to exist; and healthy student-school relationships are key in encouraging attendance at school.

BOTTOM LINE ACTIONABLE MESSAGE

The following search terms were used to retrieve articles:
- Truancy
- Student Absenteeism
- Dropout Prevention
- Attendance
- School Avoidance
- School Refusal

The following databases were searched:
- Campbell Collaboration
- Education Northwest Library
- EPPI Centre
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center
- Google Scholar
- National Drop Out Prevention Centre
- PsychInfo
- What Works Clearinghouse

# of articles found: 8

The following selection criteria were used to select pertinent articles:
- Only articles published between 1990 & 2011 were considered for this review
- Programs/strategies that aim at increasing student attendance or reducing truancy
- Effectiveness of modalities in increasing attendance
- Common characteristics of successful student attendance programs for high school

List of Truancy Programs:
- National Centre for School Engagement, Truancy Program Registry, retrieved October 20, 2011 from:
  http://www.schoolengagement.org/truancypreventionregistry/index.cfm?fuseaction=programlist

- National Drop Out Prevention Centre, Model Programs Database – Attendance/Truancy, database findings retrieved October 19, 2011 from:
  http://www.dropoutprevention.org/modelprograms/get_programs.php?desc=3

- U.S. Department of Education, W.W.C Intervention Report. (2006). *Check & Connect: Report Summary*. Retrieved on October 14, 2011 from:
  http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=78

- U.S. Department of Education, W.W.C Intervention Report. (2006). *Project ALAS: Report Summary*. Retrieved on October 14, 2011 from:
  http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=22

- ALAS, University of California, Staying in school/Progressing in school, effect size: small; size of body of evidence: 1 review

- Check and Connect, Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, Staying in school/Progressing in school, effect size: small; size of body of evidence: 6 reviews

➢ Attendance Audits, Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Student attendance, effect size: not stated; size of body of evidence: not stated

➢ Project Adelante, Oregon Council for Hispanic Achievement, Student attendance/Academic support, effect size: not stated; size of body of evidence: not stated

➢ People Helping People Program, Freshman transition/Student attendance, effect size: small, size of body of evidence: 1

References:

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The articles summarized below were reviewed in preparation of this BLAM.

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➢ National Centre for School Engagement, Truancy Toolkit (2007) , retrieved October 19, 2011 from: https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/pr/217271.pdf

The National Centre for School Engagement, based out of Denver, Colorado, focuses on three areas they believe are critical for student success at school: attendance at, attachment to and achievement in school.   They have developed several resources for educators to use to implement evidence-based strategies related to the 3As of student success. Their 2007 Truancy Toolkit contains a literature review on current programs aimed at reducing truancy, provides suggestions for best-practice, and includes hands-on activities for educators to try in their own settings. Starting on page 98, the report contains a section called "Using a Typology for Truancy Prevention". This section synthesizes "best practices" in truancy and displays the information in a succinct and easy-to-read manner. Page 213 contains a list of 10 recommended practices for encouraging regular attendance at school.

➢ Maynard, B., Tyson-McCrea, K., Kelly, M., & Pigott, T. (2008). Interventions Intended to Increase School Attendance in Elementary and Secondary School Students. *Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review Protocol*. Retrieved on October 14, 2011 from: http://campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/118/

The Campbell Collaboration has issued a protocol for a proposed systematic review about programs targeting student truancy and attendance. The main objective of the review is to examine the effects of intervention programs on school attendance behaviour in both elementary and secondary school students. They've set their study inclusion criteria as: (1) Include studies which look at whether programs that had a goal of increasing student attendance affected (either positively or negatively) actual school attendance behaviours of elementary and secondary students; (2) Include studies which explore the impact of origin of program (school-based, community-based, court-based and police-based) and service(s) on effects on student attendance. (3) Lastly, include studies that explore the level of impact that different modalities have on increasing student attendance. A total of 22 papers were found for the systematic review, but none met the criteria for inclusion and thus the systematic review has been put o hold until the body of evidence is more solid. This article however is helpful because it details the many initiatives that are happening in the area of student attendance and truancy.

➢ Sutphen,R.D.; Ford, J.P. ; Flaherty, C. (2010) Truancy Interventions: A Review of the Research Literature, Research on Social Work Practice Journal, 20(2), pg 161-171.

This article presents a systematic review of the literature on evaluative studies of truancy interventions. It includes studies evaluating truancy interventions appearing in peer-reviewed academic journals from 1990 to 2007. In total, 16 studies were assessed. Eight studies used group comparison designs and eight studies used one-group pretest/posttest designs. Studies varied on sample sizes, definitions of truant behavior, focus of interventions, and dependent measures. Six studies produced useful and promising interventions including contingency management, school reorganization, punitive measures, community partnerships, and family-oriented activities. The substantial methodological shortcomings, inconsistent definitions, and lack of replication demonstrate a need for more and better evaluation studies to provide a more definitive knowledge base to guide effective truancy interventions for practitioners.

➢ Johnston, H., (2004) Student Attendance: Research and Strategies. Research in Brief. *Education Partnership Inc.* Retrieved on October 14, 2011 from: http://educationpartnerships.org/pdfs/Attendance.pdf

This report summarizes NWRELs 2004 report "Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies from Research and Practice". As well, it asks the question, "What are the characteristics of successful student attendance programs for high school?" This review includes references from 16 sources and compiles them based upon positive and negative strategies to deal with truancy. The article points out policies that are both effective and ineffective in dealing with truancy.

➢ Railsback. J, (2004) Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies From Research and Practice. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved on October 19, 2011 from: http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/302

Strategies based upon research in truancy are examined in this review. Included are some of the reasons for student truancy and effective steps that can be taken to help reduce truancy and promote long-term progression through school. Reports from schools that have implemented these strategies are also included.

Additional Resources:

➢ Eastman, G., Cooney, S.M., O'Connor, C., Small, S.A. (July 2007) Finding Effective Solutions to Truancy, What Works: Wisconsin Research to Practice Series, University of Madison Wisconsin, Retrieved on October 20, 2011 from: http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/families/whatworks_05.pdf

➢ Maynard, B. (2009) Power Point: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Indicated Interventions to Increase Student Attendance. Retrieved on October 20, 2011 from: http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/artman2/uploads/1/Maynard_SREE_Attendance_Presentation.pdf

➢ Washington State Institute for Public Policy (June 2009) What Works? Targeted Truancy and Dropout Programs in Middle and High School. Retrieved on October 20, 2011 from: http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/09-06-2201.pdf