
Research in Brief: Truancy Intervention programs in schools



Truancy is a significant problem in schools around the world. In a survey on student engagement, 26% of Canadian 15 year olds reported having been late, skipping class or missing school in the two weeks prior to the survey (Willms, 2003). While the definition of truancy varies greatly across schools and regions, it refers generally to “students who are absent without their parents’ knowledge” (Kearney, 2008).

Truancy negatively impacts the youth, family, school and community. Previous research has linked the following negative outcomes with truancy: additional delinquency, poor school performance, school expulsion and dropout, substance use, and other risky and problematic behaviors.

Are truancy interventions effective?

A recent systematic review sought to determine whether truancy programs have an impact on students’ attendance. The reviewers were also interested in whether certain types of programs are more effective than others.

There are several different types of truancy interventions, and they may target one or a combination of different factors related to the individual, family, and school. Interventions can be delivered in a variety of settings, including clinical settings, community agencies, schools, and courts. Levels of intervention include universal interventions for an entire population, selective interventions for at-risk students, and indicated interventions for students with chronic truancy problems. Programs may involve individual therapy, family therapy, group therapy, case management, rewards and incentives, fines and sanctions, school improvement strategies and school policy initiatives.

The authors found a significant positive effect of truancy interventions on student attendance. Because of the small number of studies included in the review, all of these findings should be interpreted with caution.

Why does this matter?

- ⇒ Truancy has significant negative consequences for youth, their families, schools, and the community
- ⇒ Truancy interventions can be effectively implemented in a variety of settings
- ⇒ Simple, non-collaborative interventions are just as effective as collaborative and multi-modal interventions



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What is a systematic review?

The purpose of a systematic review is to sum up the best available research on a specific question. This is done by bringing together the results of several studies. Studies included in a review are screened for quality, so that the findings of a large number of studies can be combined.

What did they do?

The researchers conducted a search of 18 electronic databases. The following criteria qualified a study for inclusion in the review:

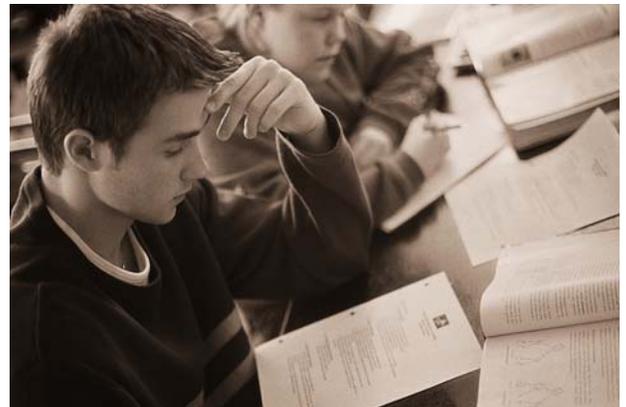
- Study design was randomized, quasi-experimental, or single group pre-posttest
- The primary goal of the program being studied was increasing attendance or decreasing absenteeism
- Studies were published between 1990 and 2009
- Studies were located in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia or Canada

A total of 28 studies were included in the review. The authors examined all studies to determine the effectiveness of their interventions in improving student attendance rates. In addition to being evaluated for overall effectiveness, the interventions were compared with one another based on the following moderating factors:

- Duration – how many weeks in length was the intervention?
- Setting – did it take place through a school, court, or in the community?
- Modality – was the intervention presented in a group, family, mentoring, contracting, or alternative education format?
- Collaborative – did the intervention involve multiple agencies?
- Multimodal – did the intervention use more than one modality?

What did they learn?

Overall, the interventions in the review had a significant positive effect on student attendance. The authors did not find any differences in effectiveness between school-based, court-based and community-based programs, nor between short-term and long-term programs. Multi-modal type interventions were not found to be more effective than simple, non-collaborative interventions. Because of the small sample size of this review, these results are not conclusive.



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Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.

Additional References

- Kearney, C. A. (2008). School absenteeism and school refusal behaviour in youth: A contemporary review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 28*, 451-471.
- Willms, J. D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

