



TRUANCY PREVENTION IN ACTION

# BEST PRACTICES AND MODEL TRUANCY PROGRAMS



BY MARY S. REIMER AND  
KAKI DIMOCK





Learn more about issues related to truancy prevention from all four monographs in this series.

## TRUANCY PREVENTION IN ACTION SERIES

*Legal and Economic Implications of Truancy*

*Best Practices and Model Truancy Programs*

*Planning, Collaboration, and Implementation Strategies for Truancy Programs*

*Guidelines for Evaluating Truancy Programs*

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The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success. NCSE was established as a result of a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children. NCSE promotes collaboration among courts, schools, and law enforcement to solve problems at the community level. Additional information is available on their Web site at [www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org).

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC), in collaboration with NCSE, is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of people, programs, and organizations to achieve positive results for our most vulnerable families. CFFC works closely with partners to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of those working directly with families, children, youth, and communities. CFFC services include training and





technical assistance, research and evaluation, strategic ventures, and information resources. The CFFC Web site is [www.coloradofoundation.org](http://www.coloradofoundation.org).

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Truancy has long been identified as an educational, social, and juvenile justice issue worthy of public and private attention. It has been linked to many problem behaviors in adolescence, school failure, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency, among others. Many national and local agencies are working to identify best practices for addressing truancy. In order to best contribute to this national conversation, this publication focuses on those programs, approaches, and strategies that have already demonstrated success.

Utilizing best practices is a sound investment strategy:

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

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

In this publication, six critical components of successful truancy intervention programs have been identified. Each component is discussed based on the research as well as practical considerations. Several program examples are provided at the end of each discussion. Approaches employed by these examples are designated model programs, promising programs, or emerging programs based on the level of evaluation. Contact information is provided for each program to encourage readers to gather additional information about implementation challenges and successes experienced by noted agencies or practitioners.



## CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF TRUANCY PROGRAMS

As a result of the research and assessment work conducted by the Department of Education, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Center for School Engagement, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy and others, a set of critical components linked to positive outcomes for children and families has been identified:

- **Collaboration**—Establish a multidisciplinary group to guide and implement truancy programming.
- **Family involvement**—Target family participation in school attachment activities, engage families in all truancy prevention and intervention efforts, and address family-based needs to support attendance.
- **Comprehensive approach**—The reasons for nonattendance are varied, and a community's response should be flexible and broad enough to take into consideration the specific issues experienced by students and families.
- **Use of incentives and sanctions**—A combination of motivating incentives and accountability-based sanctions works best with youth.
- **Operate in a supportive context**—To sustain programming, the program environment, including infrastructure and prevailing policies, must be a supportive source of energy and resources.
- **Rigorous evaluation and assessment**—Test the approach to see if the desired outcomes are produced and make midcourse corrections if necessary. Outcome data will help sustain funding for truancy programming and generate positive political will.

Programs that include each of these components are stronger and more successful. How these components are incorporated into existing approaches or developed from scratch should be determined by the needs and strengths of the local community. Creativity and determination are required for successful and lasting implementation of any new program. Information about funding options, resources for research results, and characteristics of effective program development are provided after the full discussion of the six critical components. A Truancy Program Checklist is included in the appendix which may prove helpful for programs wishing to adopt these six critical components into their truancy intervention or prevention approaches.



## INTRODUCTION

Truancy has long been identified as an educational, social, and juvenile justice issue worthy of public and private attention. It has been linked to many problem behaviors in adolescence, school failure, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency, among others. As a result of such links, federal, state, and local agencies are meeting to agree on effective strategies to respond to and prevent truancy. In December 2004, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) held its first national conference on the topic of truancy after six years of funding demonstration projects. In recent publications, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) has reviewed the legal and economic impact of truancy on schools, communities, and government agencies and the various factors that lead to truancy. In order to best contribute to this national conversation, this publication will focus on those programs, approaches, and strategies that have already demonstrated success in one or more areas. These approaches may be designated model programs, promising programs, or emerging programs.

## WHY USE BEST PRACTICES?

It is the intent of the NDPC/N to provide background information and guidance on what works in truancy prevention and intervention to help practitioners choose those approaches that may improve work they have already begun or to create a response to truancy from scratch. Much has been said about the need to use best practices, evidence-based practices, research-based methods, proven programs, promising practices, or successful strategies. Most technical assistance agencies have published lists with just this focus: The Department of Education maintains the Exemplary and Promising Programs list, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration publishes Effective Substance Abuse and Mental Health Programs for Every Community, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention supports the Blueprints Program at the Center for the Study of the Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and the NDPC/N maintains a Model Programs Database on its Web site. There are dozens of similar lists created by private foundations as well.

*Choosing a method that has already demonstrated its success improves a program's likelihood of achieving positive outcomes for students.*





Utilizing best practices is also a sound investment strategy. By studying those programs that have been proven to reduce or prevent truancy, practitioners and policymakers avoid re-creating the wheel and have more time to spend on implementation and evaluation issues. By taking advantage of the research and development efforts of others, staff have more time to spend on adapting a strategy to meet the demands of the local community. By financially supporting practices that have demonstrated success, public and private funders engage in prudent expenditure of limited monies. It is simply the most practical strategy for developing programming given the current and reasonable focus of policymakers and funders on clear outcomes and cost/benefit analyses. The use of proven practices does not necessarily limit local innovation, as is often feared. There are many practices and strategies that may be adapted and implemented within unique local structures.

### **Definition Review: Model Program, Promising Program, Emerging Program**

The use of the terms associated with proven programming can be confusing. Terms like model program, promising program, emerging program, evidence-based, and research-based are often used interchangeably without clearly defined meanings or with different meanings depending on whether they are used in the public, educational, private, or juvenile justice sector. Clarification of the definitions to be used in this publication is needed.

### **Model Program**

In the broadest possible definition, model programs are those that do a particularly good job and are worthy of replication. For example, in order to be identified as a proven program by the Center for the Study of the Prevention of Violence, a program must deter the use of violence, have a strong research and evaluation component, show sustained positive impact, and be replicated in multiple areas. Replication of these programs requires steadfast adherence to the specific approach in order to gain outcomes similar to the original program. In this publication, a model program refers to one that has shown consistent positive outcomes, has been subject to rigorous and scientific evaluation, and has been replicated with success by other sites.





## Promising Program

A promising program generally refers to an approach that has shown some degree of success, but does not meet the strictest definition of a model program. The same will be true here. A promising program identified here will be one that has shown positive outcomes for students, but has either not been widely replicated or evaluated in a rigorous or scientific manner.

## Emerging Program

This term has not been as widely used in other contexts but may be more immediately useful for practitioners in search of new ideas. This is particularly true in the area of truancy where rigorous research on approaches has just begun. An emerging program will be a specific tactic or approach that has demonstrated success in other contexts and may be borrowed for truancy prevention or intervention. An emerging program may be used in a variety of programmatic structures and contexts.

Programs described here may be identified as model or promising but emerging programs may be more easily or immediately adopted by practitioners in the pursuit of effective truancy programming. In addition, some discussion of overall guiding principles for effective programming will be provided to assist in successful implementation of the ideas presented here.

## Criteria Used to Identify Selected Programming or Approaches

Programs were selected for this publication based on two general criteria: demonstrated success and practicality of implementation in a variety of environmental realities and programmatic contexts. Programs or approaches selected for illustration in this publication were chosen among many programs that do similar work with similar positive outcomes and great dedication to youth at risk. Inclusion here was based on the authors' familiarity with the specific program or approach and is not meant to dismiss the excellent work being done by many others in the education, juvenile justice, and social service fields.





## Critical Components of Truancy Programs

As a result of the research and assessment work conducted by the Department of Education, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Center for School Engagement, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, and others, a set of critical components linked to positive outcomes for children and families has been identified:

- Collaboration
- Family involvement
- Comprehensive approach
- Use of incentives and sanctions
- Operate in a supportive context
- Rigorous evaluation and assessment

What follows is a detailed discussion of each of these components, a showcase of programs that demonstrate the component particularly well, and a list of practical strategies for successful application of the critical components.





## COLLABORATION

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

A multidisciplinary collaborative ensures that the program benefits from many different perspectives and areas of expertise including a variety of resources. A secondary benefit is the prevention of silo-building; the community commits to a common goal rather than developing multiple truancy efforts operating in isolation. Finally, a strong coalition is more likely to be successful in securing funding or pushing for changes in policy or legislation. While the need to develop a collaborative may seem obvious to many, creating and maintaining a successful collaboration can be difficult.

An effective collaboration may take many forms. Initial collaboration at the beginning of a project may simply mean that different agencies meet regularly to share information with each other about youth of concern. A fully developed collaboration might include joint decision making and financial support by the membership. It is also possible that more than one collaborative is necessary. One body may address policy and legislation while another focuses on daily operations and system coordination. In all, responsibility and credit for the truancy program success is shared. Because truancy does not fall into the domain of any one agency, it is appropriate that the response to truancy be as inclusive as possible. (See the publication in this series on collaboration, *Planning, Collaboration, and Implementation Strategies for Truancy Programs*, for a full discussion on the topic.)





## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

### **Model Program: Establishing a Collaborative Approach**

#### **Communities In Schools**

Communities In Schools, Inc., founded in 1977, has developed a model for reducing school dropout and increasing high school graduation. The model is based on the assumption that youth at risk of dropping out have both academic and nonacademic issues that must be addressed to improve their chances of school completion. Communities In Schools operates in school settings and coordinates with multiple community agencies to deliver needed services to youth and their families. This approach requires a partnership between schools, community health agencies, social service providers, government agencies, and local businesses. Communities In Schools has been widely replicated in many communities nationwide.

#### Contact information:

Communities In Schools, Inc.  
277 Washington Street, Suite 210  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
703-519-8999  
800CIS4KIDS  
cis@cisnet.org  
www.cisnet.org

### **Promising Program: Establishing a Collaborative Approach**

#### **Keeping Kids in School**

In 1998, the City of Newport News, Virginia, convened a Truancy Task Force to identify possible solutions to reducing truancy in that community. Membership on the Task Force includes representatives from school administration, the court services unit, juvenile service department, social service agencies, PTA, human affairs, local businesses, faith community, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, police department, and youth. The Task Force initially reviewed best practice research, solicited input from youth and adults in the community, and inventoried available services for truant youth before designing Keeping Kids in School. This initiative was developed with three goals in mind: creating a multifaceted approach to meet the needs of youth and their families by age and family need; increasing





and improving communication, collaboration, and cooperation among the agencies in Newport News; and continually evaluating existing programs to ensure that they are effectively responding to truancy.

Contact information:

City of Newport News Office of Youth Development  
 12284 Warwick Blvd., Suite 2A  
 Newport News, VA 23606  
 757-597-2801  
 Youth@nngov.com

**Emerging Program:  
 Establishing a Collaborative Effort**

**Jacksonville United Against Truancy**

Jacksonville United Against Truancy is a collaborative effort initially spearheaded by the State Attorney's Office in Jacksonville, Florida, as part of their Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project activities. Jacksonville United Against Truancy members include the State Attorney's Office, Duval County Public Schools, City of Jacksonville, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Youth Crisis Center, Atlantic Beach Police Department, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Jacksonville Housing Authority, Lutheran Social Services, Neptune Beach Police Department, Northside Community Involvement, and St. Paul's Community Empowerment Center. This collaborative has produced, translated, and distributed public awareness brochures; established Truancy Awareness Month in September to coincide with the beginning of the school year; and sponsored numerous community events in an effort to raise public awareness about and reduce truancy. In addition, they have received corporate sponsorship from Burger King and BellSouth.

Contact information:

Jacksonville United Against Truancy  
 State Attorney's Office  
 Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida  
 330 East Bay Street  
 Jacksonville, FL 32202  
 904-630-2169  
 sao4th@coj.net  
[www.coj.net/Departments/State+Attorneys+Office/  
 Jacksonville+United+Against+Truancy/default.htm](http://www.coj.net/Departments/State+Attorneys+Office/Jacksonville+United+Against+Truancy/default.htm)





## **Promising Program: Establishing a Collaborative Approach**

### **School Suspension Boot Camp**

In 1997, the Greer, South Carolina Police Department was awarded a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention through the South Carolina Department of Public Safety to establish a School Suspension Boot Camp. It is an intensive intervention that includes a week of one-on-one assistance with schoolwork; instruction on life skills such as conflict resolution; physical training; and structured, supervised community service. There is no corporal punishment. Students who successfully graduate from the Camp have the suspension expunged from their school records. Contact is maintained with graduates for the remainder of the school year via group and/or individual counseling sessions. A one-week Summer Police Camp is additionally offered for four different age groups. The program is operated by two police officers from the Greer Police Department who have volunteered for this responsibility. Community donations provide the required funding.

#### Contact information:

Officer Chris Forrester/Sgt. Fortenberry  
Suspension Boot Camp  
Greer Police Department, City Hall  
106 South Main Street  
Greer, SC 29650  
864-848-2454  
pfortenberry@cityofgreer.org  
[www.cityofgreer.org/Departments/  
Police\\_SuspensionCamp.aspx](http://www.cityofgreer.org/Departments/Police_SuspensionCamp.aspx)





## STRATEGIES FOR ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

- Be persistent. It may take some time and trial and error to bring the right people to the table.
- Resolve territorial disputes early and often.
- Focus on shared values and desired outcomes.
- Ask that each participant contribute to the process with knowledge or resources.

## EVALUATING COLLABORATION

Creating an effective and cohesive collaboration takes time and effort. To be certain that the time and energy have been well-spent, be prepared to include an assessment of the collaboration in your program evaluation. Measuring the effectiveness of your collaboration allows for midcourse corrections and improved chances of successful replication by others. The Working Together instrument is a survey tool developed by the OMNI Institute and used by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children in their evaluation of OJJDP's Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program ([www2.omni.org/instruments.php](http://www2.omni.org/instruments.php)). It measures progress and understanding in five areas: context for the collaborative work, structure of the collaborative, membership of the collaborative, process for decision making and participation, and results. Together with member interviews and site visits, a clear picture of the strengths and challenges of a collaborative may be created.





## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Involving parents/guardians and family members in truancy prevention and intervention is critical. There is a large body of research demonstrating the positive outcomes associated with increased parent/guardian involvement in school activities including improved academic achievement and reduced likelihood of dropout (McDonald & Frey, 1999; McNeal, 1999). The National School Safety Center identified the involvement of parents in all truancy and prevention activities as one of the five primary elements of a community and educational antitrucancy strategy. The NDPC/N has included family engagement on its list of 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention ([www.dropout-prevention.org/effstrat/effstrat.htm](http://www.dropout-prevention.org/effstrat/effstrat.htm)). Finally, the National Center for School Engagement lists meaningful parental involvement as a successful strategy for reducing truancy.

Involving parents/guardians in truancy programming is more than simply inviting their attendance at a school or court meeting. True participation means that parents/guardians are sought after for their advice, experience and expertise in the community, as clients of our public systems of care, and as experts in the lives of their children. The National Parent-Teacher Association has created a set of National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs:

1. Communication should be two-way, regular, and meaningful.
2. Parenting skills should be promoted and supported.
3. Parents play a substantial role in assisting student achievement.
4. Parents are welcome and pursued as volunteers.
5. Parents are full partners in decision making that impacts children and families.
6. Community resources are accessed to support children and families.

This means engaging parents/guardians as a natural course of events, not just when things are not going well.

While the causes of truancy are many, there are several family-based factors that contribute to student nonattendance. Family health, poverty, abuse and neglect, domestic violence, inflexible work hours, community safety issues, drug or alcohol use at home, and generalized lack of support by parents/guardians impact whether a student can or will attend school on a regular



### ***Variables that affect attendance***

- *Perception of school*
- *Lax or inconsistent parental discipline*
- *Parental control*
- *Family conflict*
- *Academic inferiority*
- *Social competence*

*Railsback, 2004*

basis (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). An effective truancy program will be prepared to assess and address the needs of parents/guardians and other family members when devising a community response or individualized treatment plan. For some families, intensive family-based counseling may be required while, for others, family-based social activities may result in improved school

attachment, attendance and achievement. Removing a child from his/her family for nonattendance has not been an effective method for reducing truancy (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002). It is costly and may cause additional harm to families and youth. A stronger strategy will focus on family-strengthening activities.

## **PROGRAM EXAMPLES**

### **Model Program:**

### **Responding to Family Needs & Increasing Family Attachment to School**

#### **Families and Schools Together (FAST)**

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) model is a two-year, school-based program based in elementary schools designed to improve family functioning and relationship to school. When implemented, FAST consists of one elementary school and two selected community-based partners—frequently public health and/or mental health agencies. At-risk youth and their families are invited to participate in eight weekly sessions with other at-risk children and their parents/guardians followed up by two years of monthly sessions. The three goals of the FAST program are to build bonds, trust, and supportive networks for families and children; increase parent involvement with children both at school and at home; and increase resiliency, attention span, and readiness to learn.

Contact information:

Wisconsin Center for Education Research  
 University of Wisconsin-Madison  
 1025 West Johnson  
 Madison, WI 53706  
 608-262-4405  
 mrtrahan@wisc.edu  
 www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast





## **Promising Program: Responding to Family Needs and Increasing Family Attachment to School**

### **Project Respect**

Project Respect uses family support practices to meet the academic and mental health needs of students facing truancy, suspension, or expulsion. Community agencies collaborate with schools to improve student achievement, coordinate community services, and promote healthy and safe learning environments. Community Advocates work in elementary, middle, and high schools encouraging parent participation in schools and coordinating family activities designed to improve family communication and functioning.

#### Contact information:

Pueblo School District #60  
315 West 111th Street  
Pueblo, CO 81003  
719-549-7100  
[www.pueblo60.k12.co.us](http://www.pueblo60.k12.co.us)

## **Emerging Program: Responding to Family Needs and Increasing Family Attachment to School**

### **Project PACT**

Project PACT, initiated by the University of Hawaii, operates in two targeted elementary schools with a strong philosophy of early intervention. When youth miss school, a case manager meets with the student and the family to provide information about the need to be in school and to assess the family's need for additional services. Due to the overwhelming amount of head lice concerns expressed by families and school officials, case managers provide workshops on head lice awareness, prevention, and treatment. In addition, pediatric interns provide additional medical and health related services to youth in the targeted elementary schools.

#### Contact information:

College of Education  
University of Hawaii  
1776 University Avenue, UA2-7  
Honolulu, HI 96822  
808-956-7989  
[www.hawaii.edu/WCCC/pact](http://www.hawaii.edu/WCCC/pact)





## **Emerging Program: Responding to Family Needs & Increasing Family Attachment to School**

### **PROJECT H.O.S.T.S. (Helping Out Students Transcend Successfully)**

PROJECT H.O.S.T.S. is a community-based program located in the St. Cyprian Catholic Church Fellowship Hall in Georgetown, South Carolina. It operates under the auspices of the Waccamaw Center for Mental Health, in collaboration with the Georgetown County Department of Juvenile Justice and the Georgetown County School District. The program serves truant students ages 8–16 with the primary goal of offering family intervention services for youth. Referrals are accepted from schools, social service agencies, parents, and faith communities. Counselors assess students to determine the cause of the truancy and any issues that contribute to their failure to attend school. Youth may participate in support groups, and referrals for individual counseling are made available to students and parents. Participating students complete behavioral contracts to encourage them to accept responsibility for their behavior.

#### Contact information:

PROJECT H.O.S.T.S.  
Waccamaw Center for Mental Health  
1915 Front Street/P.O. Box 901  
Georgetown, SC 29440  
843-545-9346/843-545-8238





## STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- Build relationships with parents/guardians before things go wrong.
- Invite parents to participate in school attachment activities.
- Communicate with families in their home language—use interpreters and translate documents.
- Be respectful of family-based culture and values and, when possible, incorporate these into the intervention.
- Assume parents want their children to succeed.
- Schedule meetings in consultation with parents' input and consider their transportation needs.
- Engage parents/guardians with meaningful opportunities for their involvement.
- Ensure that staff have been trained, are culturally competent, and are prepared to include parents/guardians in planning activities.





## COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

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

In order to qualify for Federal Title V Delinquency Prevention funding, OJJDP requires that communities create a comprehensive plan that addresses the target behavior at many points along the prevention-intervention continuum. The same rationale applies here. Effective programs simultaneously focus on prevention and intervention. True prevention, in the case of truancy, refers to school attachment activities. School attachment is a well-known protective factor against delinquency and the use of violence, but relatively little attention is paid to the need to ensure that youth feel an emotional connection to their school (Hawkins et al., 2000; Stegelin & Bailey, 2004). When the connection between youth and school is strong, and based on relationships with other students, teachers, or a significant adult, it can serve as a protection against the risk factors for truancy (Jenkins, 1995). Further, if parents/guardians also feel this attachment to the school, many of the causes of truancy may be eliminated or sharply reduced.

A comprehensive truancy program is, by necessity, flexible. Because student and family needs vary, the program responses must vary to match the individual set of circumstances presented. The National School Safety Center's (NSSC) list of five critical components of successful truancy programs includes responding to the unique needs of each child. The NSSC goes further to suggest that successful programs will also advocate for systemic change in order to address the root causes of truancy. Assessment of individual and system needs is required to identify the appropriate service or treatment. There are many known best practices related to assessment including communication with parents and



children individually, conducting home visits, and gathering information from other service providers serving a child or family.

To be comprehensive, an effective truancy program will be prepared to address truancy along the absence continuum including the very first and the very last unexcused absence; along the need continuum including severe mental health issues and parenting skills support; along the prevention-intervention continuum including school engagement efforts and deep-end intervention activities; and along the individual-system continuum including the unique needs of an individual and systemic issues that exacerbate that need. While this may appear, at first glance, like an impossible task, many programs operate along these principles naturally. Having a supportive, multidisciplinary collaborative dramatically improves a program's ability to respond to this variety of issues.

*Students need to connect to the seven foci of school support:*

1. *cultural,*
2. *social,*
3. *historical,*
4. *human-made resources,*
5. *natural resources,*
6. *plant and animal life, and*
7. *their own personal attributes*

*Stegelin & Bailey, 2004*

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

### **Promising Program: Comprehensive Approach to Building School Attachment**

#### **Check & Connect**

Created by the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, Check & Connect is an intervention model designed to promote student engagement with school, reduce dropout behavior, and increase school completion. Students who are truant or tardy on a regular basis and have a behavioral, emotional, or academic concern receive a monitor/mentor. This monitor/mentor serves as an advocate, mentor, and service coordinator for the referred student and his/her family for two years focusing entirely on preserving and enhancing the student's attachment to school. A regular check of engagement indices including attachment, achievement, and attendance targets the work of the monitor/mentor.



Contact information:

Institute on Community Integration  
University of Minnesota  
102 Pattee Hall  
150 Pillsbury Drive SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
612-624-6300  
[www.ici.umn.edu](http://www.ici.umn.edu)

**Promising Program:  
Comprehensive Approach to Building School  
Attachment**

**Project THRIVE  
(Truancy Habits Reduced, Interventions Via Education)**

Project THRIVE is a comprehensive truancy and substance abuse prevention program created in response to a multidisciplinary task force charged with designing a community response to truancy. Project THRIVE identifies decreased absences, juvenile complaints, drug-related suspensions, criminal activity, and substance abuse as program goals. Recognizing that one type of intervention is not sufficient, Project THRIVE engages youth and their families along the entire prevention-intervention continuum including activities focused on increasing awareness of truancy, prevention, early intervention, treatment, mediation, and case management.

Contact information:

Community Health Center  
725 East Market Street  
Akron, OH 44305  
330-315-2648  
[www.commhealthcenter.org/programs\\_&\\_services/  
Prevention\\_Education\\_&\\_outreach\\_Programs/  
Project\\_THRIVE.asp](http://www.commhealthcenter.org/programs_&_services/Prevention_Education_&_outreach_Programs/Project_THRIVE.asp)

**Promising Program:  
Family Court Responds to Truancy**

**Louisville, Kentucky, Truancy Program**

Initiated by a Family Court judge, the Louisville Truancy Program seeks to remove or resolve all family barriers to regular school attendance and academic success. A community team which may include a judicial officer, school personnel, a social service provider, a drug/alcohol treatment provider, and a mental





health counselor, is created to address these barriers through regular contact with the family and celebration of all successes. Case managers maintain contact with the families on a regular basis, and a court process is held weekly at the school. The approach is strengths-based and family-focused and has demonstrated success through evaluations measuring academic improvement and attendance.

Contact information:

Judge Joan Byer  
Jefferson County Family Court  
700 West Jefferson Street, #220  
Louisville, KY 40202  
502-595-4656  
joanb@mail.aoc.state.ky.us

## **Promising Program: Truancy Mediation**

### **Conflict Solutions, Inc. Truancy Mediation Program**

The Truancy Mediation Program, operated by Conflict Solutions, Inc., works to identify and understand the underlying causes of truant behavior through mediated discussions among school personnel, parents, and truant youth. Students in grades K-12 that accumulate excessive unlawful absences may participate in the program. Agreements address truancy and the circumstances that lead to youth avoiding school. Mediation improves communication between parents and youth and improves family relationships with schools. Mediators gather information about systemic issues that impact student attachment and attendance and advocate for change at the community level. Students averaged 9.7 unexcused absences prior to mediation and less than one (.9) post-mediation.

Contact information:

Conflict Solutions, LLC  
209 Waterville Drive  
Columbia, SC 29229  
803-865-0928  
www.conflictsolutions.org





## **Emerging Program: Responding to Truants at Many Points Along the Truancy Continuum**

### **At-Risk Youth Programs**

Originally a state-mandated, formal court process, the At-Risk Youth Program determined that truant youth could be diverted from the courthouse with a more meaningful set of interventions, that court-involved youth needed additional support, and that schools needed resources to prevent truancy. Students with a few unexcused absences are invited to participate in community-based attendance workshops with their parents. The workshops provide information about truancy laws, small group sessions with parents and students, and facilitated contract development. Students with unexcused absences whose relationship with the school district may be strained are invited to participate in community-based truancy boards. Students with excessive unexcused absences or who have been withdrawn from school are petitioned and appear in juvenile court. Court-involved students are assigned a case manager and may be referred to Functional Family Therapy services to address family issues.

Contact information:

King County Superior Court  
1401 East Jefferson Street, Suite 506  
Seattle, WA 98122  
206-296-9335  
[www.metrokc.gov](http://www.metrokc.gov)

## **Emerging Program: Comprehensive Approach to Building School Attachment**

### **ReSTART**

The ReSTART Program provides an early intervention for truant youth in grades four through eight in Pickens County. Students at the Rebound Alternative School work with a recreation therapist to resolve issues that contribute to their failure to attend school. In the first year, participants showed significant improvement in both academic achievement and behavior. Ninety percent of participants had fewer absences in the four months after they entered the program, and 93% improved their



grades by one letter or more. Additional data demonstrate that this intervention positively impacted substance abuse and referrals to the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Contact information:

Mary Ann Brookshire  
Rebound Alternative School  
School District of Pickens County  
133 Railroad Street  
Pickens, SC 29671  
864-898-5619/864-898-5623  
[www.pickens.k12.sc.us/rebound](http://www.pickens.k12.sc.us/rebound)

## STRATEGIES FOR ESTABLISHING COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMS

- Engagement and attachment activities for youth and parents should be continuous—from elementary school to the senior year of high school.
- Involve everyone at the school, court, or agency in the truancy effort.
- Truancy prevention is not a silo activity; it requires and benefits from the participation of many.
- Focus on school attendance, not just the legal or policy definition of truancy.
- Be prepared to ask students and parents/guardians about family context and to respond to the needs they identify.
- Build relationships with local service providers who naturally serve these families.
- Be clear about the costs of truancy and dropout and the fact that these costs are shared by the entire community.
- Reach out to small businesses to encourage them not to serve school-age children during school hours.
- Reach out to big businesses for funding and community support.
- Provide one point of contact for parents involved in a truancy program—someone who can provide practical assistance, advocacy, and information about other systems involved.
- Share information about students with service providers and other child-serving agencies.



## INCENTIVES AND SANCTIONS

Among the list of successful truancy practices identified by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), is the use of a continuum of approaches or a combination of incentives and sanctions to produce the desired behavior. Specifically, meaningful sanctions for truant behavior and meaningful incentives for school attendance are key components of promising and model truancy programs (Baker et al, 2001). Sanctions, traditionally used to respond to truancy, frequently mirror the punitive steps taken against other undesirable behaviors: detention, suspension, petition to juvenile court, denial of privileges, etc. Incentives tend to be recognition-based, but may include special experiences or even monetary rewards. The special trick in this area is to design sanctions and incentives that are meaningful to youth and their families.

In its work to list the best practices for reducing dropout behaviors, the NDPC/N has compiled a list of the characteristics associated with effective incentives:

1. Establish definite patterns for change in behavior.
2. Gear incentives towards the interests of students.
3. Make incentives attainable by most students.
4. Use consistent standards of implementation.
5. Make sure students and families understand how they can earn incentives.
6. Provide recognition to those who earn incentives.
7. Match different levels and types of incentives with different levels of achievement.

### *Examples of incentives:*

*Movie passes  
Food coupons  
Bicycles and helmets  
Car lottery  
Shopping spree  
Laptop computer  
Prepaid credit card*

Incentives should serve as motivators for school attendance and should be available to both parents and students. Further, incentives that provide access to pro-social activities and expose students to positive school attitudes may serve to protect against an erosion of school attachment (Dukes & Stein, 2001).

Sanctions for truancy work best when they are clearly related to the behavior and are imposed quickly. Students must be able to see how the sanction is connected to the behavior. For example, denying a student the opportunity to attend school through suspension or expulsion as a punishment for

failing to attend school carries with it an irony obvious even to the youngest of students. Sanctions focused on accountability are





more likely to yield positive results. In the pursuit of meaningful sanctions for juvenile offenders, OJJDP has supported an effort to identify the characteristics of accountability-based sanctions. These sanctions, among other things, are consistently attached to the behavior in question, flexible and diverse enough to be used in a variety of situations, sufficiently graduated to respond appropriately to each succeeding offense, and effective at reducing the behavior (Griffin, 1999).

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

### **Model Program: Mentoring as Incentive**

#### **Big Brothers Big Sisters of America**

This well-known program pairs at-risk youth with volunteer adults from their community. Staff members orient and screen volunteers, assess youth, and match caring adults with youth. Group activities and supervision are provided by the agency. This one-to-one relationship has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on youth behavior and decision making. Mentoring may be used as an incentive for students to attend school and as a school attachment activity.

Contact information:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America  
230 North 13th Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
215-567-7000  
[www.bbbsa.org](http://www.bbbsa.org)

### **Promising Program: Leadership Opportunity as Incentive**

#### **National Youth Court Center**

The National Youth Court Center provides technical assistance to jurisdictions interested in developing youth courts. Youth courts may be used as a pro-social incentive in truancy programs and as a sanction. Teens play most of the traditional roles in the court process and are responsible for determining appropriate outcomes. This provides youth with an opportunity to practice and be recognized for new competencies and skill areas and understand the judicial system.





Contact information:

National Youth Court Center  
P. O. Box 11910  
Lexington, KY 40511  
859-244-8193  
nycc@csg.org  
www.youthcourt.net

**Emerging Program:  
Denial of Privilege as Sanction**

**Rhode Island Office of the Attorney General**

In June of 2004, the Rhode Island legislature provided authority to family court judges to suspend the drivers' licenses of minors found to be truant or delinquent. Nineteen other states use this tactic as a behavioral deterrent and sanction for truancy.

Contact information:

State of Rhode Island  
150 South Main Street  
Providence, RI 02903  
www.riag.state.ri.us

**Emerging Program:  
Parent Arrest as Sanction**

**State Attorney's Office, Jacksonville, Florida**

Parents of habitually truant youth are held accountable through arrest and incarceration. While these arrests are infrequent, they are publicized and covered by local television stations. Staff at the State Attorney's Office report that school attendance is at its highest rate the day after these arrests.

Contact information:

Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida  
330 East Bay Street  
Jacksonville, FL 32202  
904-630-2400  
www.coj.net/Departments/State+Attorneys+Office+/  
About+the+Office/htm

**Emerging Program:  
Contract as Incentive**

**Lancaster County School District Truancy Project**

This project has a three-pronged approach using truancy councils, School on Saturday, and parent skills training. Members



of the Truancy Council at the high schools are students from the University of South Carolina-Lancaster while members of the Truancy Council at the middle school are students from the Lancaster County High School. Truant youth appearing before the council sign a written contract developed by council members to resolve the truancy problem and appear for a review of the contract two months after their initial appearance. They are additionally required to attend school on Saturday with a parent until they can demonstrate three weeks of perfect attendance. Their parents/guardians are required to attend a 14-week effective parenting program. This project has demonstrated a positive impact on attendance and grades.

Contact information:

Kathy Durbin  
Director of Outreach Initiatives  
Lancaster County School District  
P. O. Drawer 130  
Lancaster, SC 29720  
803-416-8833  
kdurbin@mail.lcsd.k12.sc.us

## STRATEGIES FOR CHOOSING INCENTIVES AND SANCTIONS

- Success is the best motivator—find a way for students and parents/guardians to experience success, no matter how small.
- Ask students and parents what is meaningful for them. What incentives actually motivate them, and what sanctions actually change their behavior.
- Guard against punitive sanctions that do not impact the targeted behavior or that act as disincentives.
- Apply sanctions consistently and fairly.
- Assess the impact of incentives and sanctions and eliminate those that are not effective.
- Create different incentives for different levels of achievement.
- Ensure that students and families understand how to avoid sanctions and how to attain identified incentives.
- Avoid threats and focus instead on accountability-based consequences.



## SUPPORTIVE CONTEXT

Programs that exist in a supportive context are more likely to survive and thrive than those that are fighting against system infrastructure or acting in isolation. While this may not be earth-shattering information, a supportive context is crucial to developing a sustainable and effective truancy program. Time spent nurturing a supportive context is well worth the effort. In this case, context refers to the environment in which the truancy program engages youth and their family. This can be an umbrella agency, a neighborhood, a set of laws and policies, and/or a political reality. It is in the truancy program's best interest to impact and influence this context to better serve families and to survive the inevitable changes and challenges that occur to even the best of programs.

When developing a truancy program in King County, Washington, program managers sought support from local school districts and community leaders only to find that while they were all aware of dropout prevention efforts, they were not aware of the need to respond to truancy. Indeed, even after legislation was passed requiring that schools file truancy petitions with the juvenile court, truancy was not well understood. Any programming in this context would have been short-lived. A wide-reaching public education campaign associated with the new legislation might have prevented this disconnect between practitioners and lawmakers. To support these activities, one of the required steps for the truancy programs receiving OJJDP funds in the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project was conducting a public awareness campaign. These programs engaged in activities to inform communities about the real cost of truancy. Posters, events at the local mall, golf tournaments, and contests were aimed at increasing the public understanding of truancy.

Another area of significant concern for developing a supportive context is policy. An excellent program using best practice approaches may yet fail in the face of unfriendly or unsupportive policies and laws. As part of a community needs assessment, a critical analysis of policies that do not encourage attendance will direct systemic advocacy efforts and identify focus areas for a collaborative. The NCSE has encouraged agencies and schools to adopt promising in-school suspension programs to avoid the need to isolate youth from school, prevent expulsions, actively re-engage expelled youth, and address policies that push out students at risk of school failure. An effective truancy program will review





existing policies at the school and community level to identify where changes are required to support school attachment efforts.

Areas of particular interest are:

1. Automatic withdrawal after a period of nonattendance
2. Automatic grade reduction or credit denial after a period of nonattendance
3. Zero tolerance policies focused on suspension and expulsion
4. Policies on bullying
5. Safety concerns at school, on the bus, or at the bus stop
6. Lack of affordable health care or child care in the community
7. Lack of alternative education or service-learning opportunities
8. Standardized testing and disproportionate emphasis on scores
9. School start times, particularly for adolescents
10. Open versus closed campuses
11. Law enforcement policy on contacting school age youth during school hours
12. Juvenile court and child welfare responses to truant behavior and/or legal petitions

Finally, a supportive context would include stable and sustained funding to avoid the need to reinvent programs with each new funding cycle and active support from local political leaders. By engaging funders and political leaders early on in the development of programming and/or in the collaborative, program staff are able to spend more time serving clients directly with financial support and political will.

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

### Emerging Program: Changing Laws, Policies and Practices

#### Cooperative Truancy Reduction Effort

In order to improve this community's response to truancy, members of the Eau Claire County Circuit Court, Eau Claire City Attorney's Office, Eau Claire Department of Human Services, Eau Claire Police Department, County Corporation





Counsel, Eau Claire School District, and a variety of local service providers met regularly to identify possible solutions. Each participant recognized that systemic changes would be required for a true coordinated response. Policies, procedures, and daily practices were reviewed and recommendations for changes made. City and county ordinances were changed to align with state law. School Board policy was revised to be consistent with state and local requirements, and court practice was adjusted to allow for a more timely consequence to truancy. By reviewing practice and policy before adopting a new truancy approach, this community has resolved many potential challenges in advance and created a supportive context for truancy work to begin.

Contact information:

Eau Claire County Children's Court Services  
721 Oxford Avenue  
Eau Claire, WI 54703  
715-839-5106

## **Emerging Program: Providing Assistance to Local Communities**

### **South Carolina Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention**

The South Carolina Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention serves as a clearinghouse for research and practice information for local jurisdictions responsible for responding to truant youth in South Carolina. This Center, operated by the South Carolina Department of Education, includes online access to required forms, links to relevant South Carolina law, and recommendations made by the South Carolina Truancy Steering Committee. The Center also provides training and funding opportunities to local communities. By providing best practice information and access to relevant and practical information, the South Carolina Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention provides valuable assistance to communities in the state designing local responses to truancy.

Contact information:

South Carolina Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention  
3710 Landmark Drive, Suite 206  
Columbia, SC 29201  
803-734-5487  
[www.myscschools.com](http://www.myscschools.com)





## **Emerging Program: Providing Assistance to Local Communities**

### **Attendance by Choice (ABC)**

Initiated by the city of Spartanburg in 2001, the ABC Program serves truant youth at risk of a contempt of court charge in Spartanburg County School Districts 1-7. Program objectives include improving school attendance, reducing the number of youth referred to Family Court for Contempt of Court charges, and reducing the number of youth receiving determinate sentences to the Department of Juvenile Justice because of Contempt of Court charges. The Department of Juvenile Justice serves as a coordinator between the Spartanburg County Department of Public Safety, the seven school districts, Carolina Counseling, and Family Court providing a process for making referrals to Carolina Counseling for psycho-education therapeutic group services for students and parents. Activities in group-based services include workbooks, videos, role-playing, and group discussion covering self-esteem, conflict resolution, recognizing depression, personal goal setting, and anger management.

#### Contact information:

Mickey White  
Carolina Counseling  
186 West Main Street  
Spartanburg, SC 29306  
864-583-5802  
cci@teleplex.net

## **Emerging Program: Providing Assistance to Local Communities**

### **Kentucky Center for School Safety**

The Kentucky Center for School Safety provides training and technical assistance to local school districts on issues related to truancy, dropout, and school safety. A comprehensive Web site provides links to information about the law and justice community in Kentucky, curriculum for a model school resource officer training program, order information for a video on truancy prevention and intervention, a consultant directory, and an information clearinghouse. An annual Truancy/ Dropout Prevention Symposium is offered in collaboration with the Kentucky Office of Family Resource/Youth Service Centers, the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice, and Kentucky Association of the Direc-





tors of Pupil Personnel. The Center provides networking services to connect those developing new programs with programs that have demonstrated success including family outreach programs, mediation interventions, and truancy courts through the state.

Contact information:

Cheryl Roberts  
Kentucky Center for School Safety  
Eastern Kentucky University  
105 Stratton Building  
521 Lancaster Avenue  
Richmond, KY 40475  
877-805-4277  
[www.kysafeschools.org](http://www.kysafeschools.org)

## STRATEGIES FOR CREATING AND MAINTAINING A SUPPORTIVE CONTEXT

- Begin relationship-building at the start of the program or practice.
- Become the local expert on truancy in your community.
- Allow local leaders to share in the success of the program or practice.
- Send leaders newsletters, updates, and program materials at regular intervals. Involve them in program graduations and ceremonies.
- Demonstrate how truancy prevention and intervention impact the financial bottom line.
- Hold regular public discussions about truancy at school board meetings, city or county council meetings, legislative sessions, etc.
- Create an ongoing public awareness campaign directed at students, parents, and the larger community.





## EVALUATION

One of the first questions any program manager will face in a public forum is whether they have outcome data for their program. In these lean financial times, government agencies and private funders are limiting their investments to those programs or practices that have clearly demonstrated some success. Further, the criteria used to identify whether program models and practice approaches are proven or promising rests largely on the rigor of their evaluation design. It is mandatory in this environment to collect and examine data on program outcomes.

Large-scale evaluation in the area of truancy is limited. However, the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) has been engaged in two large studies: one in Colorado and the other for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project (OJJDP TRDP).

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

### Emerging Program: Comprehensive Evaluation

#### Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE)

OJJDP designed the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program (TRDP) with evaluation in mind. Applications for funding required sites to consider how they would evaluate their approaches, and the National Center for School Engagement was contracted to provide evaluation design, implementation, and analysis services from the beginning of the project. NCSE provided a process evaluation for OJJDP based on each site's development experiences and is currently conducting an outcome evaluation on three of the original OJJDP TRDP sites.

Contact information:

OJJDP  
810 Seventh Street NW  
Washington, DC 20531  
202-307-5911  
[www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)

NCSE  
303 East 17th Avenue,  
Suite 400  
Denver, CO 80203  
303-837-8466  
[info@schoolengagement.org](mailto:info@schoolengagement.org)  
[www.truancyprevention.org](http://www.truancyprevention.org)





## Emerging Program: Cost-Benefit Analysis

### National Center for School Engagement (NCSE)

A cost-benefit analysis of three truancy programs in Colorado including the Denver Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project, the Adams County Court Truancy Reduction Project, and Pueblo's Project Respect, demonstrated that investment in truancy efforts is sound. With only a few successful completers, funders will break even (Heilbrunn, 2003). The NCSE published this information and makes it available without cost on its Web site so that others may use the same cost-benefit formula in their own evaluations.

Contact information:

NCSE  
303 East 17th Avenue, Suite 400  
Denver, CO 80203  
[www.truancyprevention.org](http://www.truancyprevention.org)

## STRATEGIES FOR GETTING STARTED ON AN EVALUATION

- Set measurable and realistic program goals.
- Decide who will conduct the evaluation—consider technical assistance or contracting with an independent evaluator.
- Build evaluation into the program from the beginning by having an evaluation design in mind.
- Collect benchmark data against which to measure change.
- Gather numbers to assess interim results, and make mid-course corrections.
- Gather contextual information during the evaluation to reveal problems with policy or program environment.



## TRUANCY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

The South Carolina Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention was established in 2004 to assist schools in addressing the truancy issue. The Center has awarded grants to five school districts as pilot sites to implement truancy prevention programs. Each site has been awarded a total of \$60,000 for three years from a \$2.48 million grant the State Department of Education received from the U.S. Department of Justice. The five pilot sites are:

- Berkeley County School District (Berkeley, Hanahan, and Stratford High Schools)
- Cherokee County School District (Blacksburg and Gaffney High Schools)
- Darlington County School District (Hartsville Junior High School)
- Orangeburg School District 3 (Lake Marion High School)
- Pickens County School District (Ambler, Holly Springs, and Pickens Elementary Schools)

### Berkeley County School District

Berkeley County School District is developing a districtwide intervention plan to ensure that schools have a uniform response when students are truant. The goal is to intervene as early as possible. The focus for the first year is on ninth grade students at the three high schools with the highest percentage of dropouts (Berkeley, Stratford, and Hanahan High Schools). Activities include the development of a system for documenting unexcused absences, written contacts with parents, the creation of Attendance Intervention Plans, access to a parenting program for parents of truant youth, make-up days at Saturday and Summer School, and a mentoring program in collaboration with local AME churches.

#### Contact Information:

Phyliss Thornthwaite, Coordinator for At-Risk Children  
Berkeley County School District  
229 East Main Street  
P.O. Box 608  
Moncks Corner, SC 29461  
843-899-8702  
thornthw@berkeley.k12.sc.us  
<http://www.berkeley.k12.sc.us/>



### **Cherokee County School District**

This program targets truant ninth graders with a standardized approach. The district has implemented Absentee Make-Up Days which allow students to erase absences from their record. Teachers take attendance using SASIxp during the first 10 minutes of each class period. Attendance letters are sent for absences of three, five, and 10 days. Attendance Intervention Plans are implemented with a success rate of approximately 45%. The schools have been able to expand the program to other grades.

#### **Contact Information:**

Jackie Queen  
Director of Transportation, Attendance, and Discipline  
Cherokee County School District #1  
406 East Frederick Street  
Gaffney, SC 29340  
864-902-3630  
jackie.queen@gw.cherokee1.k12.sc.us  
<http://www.cherokee1.k12.sc.us/>

### **Darlington County School District**

An on-campus suspension camp at Hartsville Junior High has been implemented by the Darlington County School District. Suspension camp allows students who would normally be suspended from school to stay at school. While two teachers teach the classes, all the teachers in the school provide assignments for their students in the camp. Students are provided with one-on-one assistance with school work, and receive instruction on life skills, conflict resolution, character education, and physical fitness. Support for the students and their families is provided through behavioral contracts, home visits, counseling, academic assistance, and summer enrichment activities. Darlington's camp is modeled after the Greer Suspension Camp. There has been a drop in violent offenses and an improvement in classroom behaviors. The number of students cutting class has also decreased.

#### **Contact Information:**

Dr. Willie E. Boyd, Sr.  
Darlington County School District  
303 Courthouse  
Darlington, SC 29532  
843-398-2269  
willieb@darlington.k12.sc.us  
<http://www.darlington.k12.sc.us/>





### Orangeburg School District 3

Students who have repeated ninth grade and have attendance problems are targeted by Orangeburg Consolidated School District 3 in this intervention. Students are given the STAR reading test, evaluated, and tutored to improve their attitude toward reading and reading skills. Workshops on study skills and careers are offered. Mentors are recruited from the school, local AME churches, and the Ministries Alliance. Guidance counselors and the School Resource Officer make home visits.

#### Contact Information:

Rose Pelzer-Brower  
Orangeburg Consolidated School District Three  
P.O. Box 339  
Holly Hill, SC 29059  
803-496-3818  
browerr@obg3.k12.sc.us

### Pickens County School District

Project Stay in School is designed to improve student attendance, student achievement, and student behavior in kindergarten through fifth grade. The Project Specialist serves all 15 elementary schools in the district. The Specialist is responsible for developing intervention plans for truant students. Tutorial and homework assistance is offered to students who need it. A portfolio is kept for each student served including records of supplemental services provided, samples of the student's work, nine-week grades, and attendance reports. Workshops for parents are offered on fostering student success in school, as well as options for career development and continuing education. The District partners with the School Intervention Program (Behavioral Health of Pickens County), the National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson Learning Center, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and the South Carolina Court System—Pickens County Family Courts, Department of Mental Health, Department of Social Services, and Guardian Ad Litem.

#### Contact Information:

Milton Ponder  
School District of Pickens County  
1348 Griffin Mill Road  
Easley, SC 29640  
864-855-8150 ext. 142  
www.pickens.k12.sc.us/Main.aspx



Although the South Carolina Center for Truancy and Drop-out Prevention is funding pilot programs, there are successful programs in the state that have been in existence for a number of years.

### **Attendance by Choice (ABC)**

Initiated by the city of Spartanburg in 2001, the ABC Program serves truant youth at risk of a contempt of court charge in Spartanburg County School Districts 1-7. Program objectives include improving school attendance, reducing the number of youth referred to Family Court for Contempt of Court charges and reducing the number of youth receiving determinate sentences to the Department of Juvenile Justice because of Contempt of Court charges. The Department of Juvenile Justice serves as a coordinator between the Spartanburg County Department of Public Safety, the seven school districts, Carolina Counseling, and Family Court providing a process for making referrals to Carolina Counseling for psycho-education therapeutic group services for students and parents. Activities in group-based services include workbooks, videos, role-playing and group discussion covering self-esteem, conflict resolution, recognizing depression, personal goal setting, and anger management.

Contact information:

Mickey White  
Carolina Counseling  
186 West Main Street  
Spartanburg, SC 29306  
864-583-5802  
cci@teleplex.net

### **Lancaster County School District Truancy Project**

This project has a three-pronged approach using truancy councils, School on Saturday, and parent skills training. Members of the Truancy Council at the high schools are students from the University of South Carolina-Lancaster while members of the Truancy Council at the middle school are students from the Lancaster County High School. Truant youth appearing before the council sign a written contract developed by council members to resolve the truancy, and appear for a review of the contract two months after their initial appearance. They are additionally required to attend school on Saturday with a parent until they can demonstrate three weeks of perfect attendance. Their parents/guardians are required to attend a 14-week effective parenting





program. This project has demonstrated a positive impact on attendance and grades.

Contact information:

Kathy Durbin  
Director of Outreach Initiatives  
Lancaster County School District  
P. O. Drawer 130  
Lancaster, SC 29720  
803-416-8833  
kdurbin@mail.lcsd.k12.sc.us

### **PROJECT H.O.S.T.S. (Helping Out Students Transcend Successfully)**

PROJECT H.O.S.T.S. is a community-based program located in the St. Cyprian Catholic Church Fellowship Hall in Georgetown, South Carolina. It operates under the auspices of the Waccamaw Center for Mental Health, in collaboration with the Georgetown County Department of Juvenile Justice and the Georgetown County School District. The program serves truants ages 8–16 with the primary goal of offering family intervention services for youth. Referrals are accepted from schools, social service agencies, parents, and faith communities. Counselors assess students to determine the cause of the truancy and any issues that contribute to their failure to attend school. Youth may participate in support groups and referrals for individual counseling are made available to students and parents. Participating students complete behavioral contracts to encourage them to accept responsibility for their behavior.

Contact information:

PROJECT H.O.S.T.S.  
Waccamaw Center for Mental Health  
1915 Front Street/P.O. Box 901  
Georgetown, SC 29440  
843-545-9346/843-545-8238

### **ReSTART**

The ReSTART Program provides an early intervention for truant youth in grades four through eight in Pickens County. Students at the Rebound Alternative School work with a recreation therapist to resolve issues that contribute to their failure to attend school. In the first year, participants showed significant improvement in both academic achievement and behavior. Ninety percent of participants had fewer absences in the four



months after they entered the program and 93% improved their grades by one letter or more. Additional data demonstrate that this intervention positively impacted substance use and referrals to the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Contact information:

Mary Ann Brookshire  
Rebound Alternative School  
School District of Pickens County  
133 Railroad Street  
Pickens, SC 29671  
864-898-5619/864-898-5623  
[www.pickens.k12.sc.us/rebound](http://www.pickens.k12.sc.us/rebound)

### School Suspension Boot Camp

In 1997, the Greer, South Carolina Police Department was awarded a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention through the South Carolina Department of Public Safety to establish a School Suspension Boot Camp. It is an intensive intervention that includes a week of one-on-one assistance with schoolwork; instruction on life skills such as conflict resolution; physical training; and structured, supervised community service. There is no corporal punishment. Students who successfully graduate from the Camp have the suspension expunged from their school records. Contact is maintained with graduates for the remainder of the school year via group and/or individual counseling sessions. A one-week Summer Police Camp is additionally offered for four different aged groups. The program is operated by two police officers from the Greer Police Department who have volunteered for this responsibility. Community donations provide the required funding.

Contact information:

Officer Chris Forrester/Sgt. Fortenberry  
Suspension Boot Camp  
Greer Police Department, City Hall  
106 South Main Street  
Greer, SC 29650  
864-848-2454  
[pfortenberry@cityofgreer.org](mailto:pfortenberry@cityofgreer.org)  
[www.cityofgreer.org/Departments/  
Police\\_SuspensionCamp.aspx](http://www.cityofgreer.org/Departments/Police_SuspensionCamp.aspx)





## THE SEARCH FOR FUNDING

Finding the money to implement a new program is a challenge. School budgets usually do not stretch far enough to offer extra services to students. Program planners need to identify a variety of funding sources. Your local community is a good place to start. Community members have a vested interest in their youth. The majority of national chain stores, supermarkets, and restaurants are required to support their local community by providing volunteers or funds. Faith-based communities are excellent resources for mentors and space for programs. Local police departments, mental health centers, and faith-based communities are often willing to collaborate with schools to provide services to at-risk students. They may also have access to funding streams that public schools do not. There may be foundations in your community that support education.

Your state Department of Education and Department of Juvenile Justice often have pass-through funding from the federal government. Other resources include foundations and Departments of Public Safety. The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) maintains several funding streams that can support a wide range of programs.

## EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR GENERAL PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

While the characteristics of successful program development may be obvious, they are worthy of repetition. Programs and agencies that do well concentrate on the following:

1. Having and using a clear mission and vision.
2. Creating flexible programming capable of adjusting to the changing needs of program clients.
3. Recruiting, retaining, and supporting highly competent staff.
4. Approaching families and children holistically (*Schorr, 1997*).





## CONCLUSION

Though the results of decades of exhaustive and rigorous research on truancy programs do not yet exist, it is not necessary to create new truancy programming in a vacuum. Good information about what works and how to replicate these approaches is available. Programs that focus on these promising practices are more likely to positively impact attachment, attendance, and achievement:

- **Collaboration**—Establish a multidisciplinary group to guide and implement truancy programming.
- **Family involvement**—Target family participation in school attachment activities, engage families in all truancy prevention and intervention efforts, and address family-based needs to support attendance.
- **Comprehensive approach**—The reasons for nonattendance are varied and a community's response should be flexible and broad enough to take into consideration the specific issues experienced by students and families.
- **Use of incentives and sanctions**—A combination of motivating incentives and accountability-based sanctions works best with youth.
- **Operate in a supportive context**—To sustain programming, the program environment, including infrastructure and prevailing policies, must be a supportive source of energy and resources.
- **Rigorous evaluation and assessment**—Test the approach to see if the desired outcomes are produced and make midcourse corrections if necessary. Outcome data will help sustain funding for truancy programming and generate positive political will.





## RESOURCES

Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools  
400 Maryland Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
202-260-3954  
[www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS)

International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention  
[www.iatdp.org](http://www.iatdp.org)

National Truancy Prevention Association  
[www.truancypreventionassociation.com](http://www.truancypreventionassociation.com)

National Center for School Engagement (NCSE)  
Colorado Foundation for Families and Children  
303 East 17th Avenue, Suite 400  
Denver, CO 80203  
303-837-8466  
[www.truancyprevention.org](http://www.truancyprevention.org)

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N)  
Clemson University  
209 Martin Street  
Clemson, SC 29631-1555  
864-656-2599  
[www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)  
810 Seventh Street NW  
Washington, DC 20531  
202-307-5911  
[www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)





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# APPENDIX

## TRUANCY PROGRAM CHECKLIST

These guidelines represent the critical elements necessary to ensure that your truancy prevention program is successful and sustainable. If you already have a program in place, these guidelines may help you improve your current practices. They may also be used as benchmarks for evaluating and refining your program.

If you are initiating a truancy prevention program, the first step is an assessment of needs and what assets are available to meet those needs. Another option is to conduct an environmental scan to identify community and state priorities, needs, and opportunities in the context of the economic environment.

This checklist will help you identify any missing elements and ensure that your program is effective. The presence of these critical elements will enable you to provide the most effective program to meet the needs of your students. You will find an in-depth discussion of each element in the body of this publication.

### Collaboration

- Have you identified the major stakeholders?
- Do you have the right people involved?
- Have you resolved territorial disputes?
- Do you have a mission statement and measurable outcomes?

### Family Involvement

- Are parents welcomed and encouraged to volunteer?
- Do you communicate with families in their native language, and is communication two-way, regular, and meaningful?
- Are parents full partners in decision making that impacts children and families?
- Have staff been trained to be culturally sensitive?

### Comprehensive Approach

- Do you provide continuous engagement and attachment activities from elementary to high school?
- Have you built relationships with local service providers who serve families?
- Have you reached out to businesses for funding and support?
- Do you have one point of contact for parents involved in your truancy program?

### Use of Incentives and Sanctions

- Do you cultivate a culture of success?
- Have you asked students and parents what sanctions and incentives are meaningful to them?
- Do you focus on accountability-based consequences?

### Supportive Context

- Have you done a community needs assessment?
- Do you have an ongoing public awareness campaign directed at students, parents, and the community?
- Have you built relationships with community leaders?
- Have you clearly explained how to avoid sanctions and attain incentives to students and families?

### Evaluation and Assessment

- Have you established measurable and realistic program goals?
- Have you collected benchmark data against which to measure change?
- Have you chosen an evaluation design?
- Have you chosen an independent evaluator?



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