



A Center Policy & Practice Analysis Brief . . .

School Attendance Problems: *Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?*

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Preface

Every student absence jeopardizes the ability of students to succeed at school and schools to achieve their mission. Students who are not at school cannot receive instruction. Schools funded on the basis of average daily attendance have less resources to do the job. Some youngsters who are truant from school engage in behaviors that are illegal. And the correlates of school attendance problems go on and on.

Reducing school absences is one of the most challenging matters facing schools. In addressing the problem, it is important to begin by exploring two questions:

What factors lead to student absences?

How can schools more effectively address the problem?

This brief provides a quick overview of issues related to school attendance problems and then frames directions for policy and practice. As with all Center briefs, it is meant to highlight the topic and provide a tool for discussion by school policy makers and practitioners.

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School Attendance Problems: *Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?*

Students cannot perform well academically when they are frequently absent. An individual student's low attendance is a symptom of disengagement and academic difficulties. But when many students have low attendance in classes, such behavior undermines the capacity of all students and teachers to pursue high quality education.

From: *Habits Hard to Break: A New Look at Truancy in Chicago's Public High Schools*

Attendance Matters! – New Research supports the unquestionable link between attendance and student achievement. Students who attend school between 85 and 100 percent of the time pass the state tests in reading and math at much higher rates than students who attend school less than 85 percent of the time.

From Minneapolis Public Schools

<http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/attendance.html>

About the Problem

How important is attendance to school success? Why do students skip school? What do schools do when students have attendance problems? How effective are existing policies and practices?

School attendance is a constant concern in schools. Average daily attendance rates are a common determiner of school funding. Academic achievement scores are correlated with school attendance. Excessive school absence is a precursor of school dropout.

Each school, district, and state have statements of policy regarding attendance. They address such questions as: What is an excused absence? What should be done about unexcused absences? When are absences severe and chronic? When does the school team work with the legal system to address truancy? What are the interventions and consequences for truancy?

Prevailing policies that simply mandate attendance and spell out increasingly harsh punishments for unexcused absences fail to take into account the range of underlying causes of attendance problems and the range of prevention, early intervention, and ongoing support that might more effectively address the problems.

To highlight the topic and provide a tool for discussion by school policy makers and practitioners, this brief first provides some background and overview of issues related to school attendance problems. This is followed by an emphasis on policy and practice that goes beyond graduated sanctions.

What are the Numbers?

Data from the Condition of Education 2000-2006 indicate the following data for elementary and middle schools:

High school students in Denver Public Schools are missing an average of 25 days per school year and fully a third meet the legal definition of chronically truant - meaning they could wind up in court. The data, released Friday, shows how big a challenge DPS faces in meeting the attendance goal set by Superintendent Michael Bennet. His goal is a 97 percent attendance rate in high schools, or no more than six days missed per student during the year.

Rocky Mountain News
(4/29/06)

“In 2005, 19 percent of 4th-graders and 20 percent of 8th-graders reported missing 3 or more days of school in the previous month. . . . In both grades, students were more likely to miss 3 or more days of school if a language other than English was spoken at home, if the student was an English language learner, or if the student was classified as having a disability. Additionally, in both grades, a lower percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students and a higher percentage of American Indian students reported missing 3 or more days of school than their peers in other racial and ethnic groups. Students who were eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch were more likely to be absent from school for 3 or more days than those who were not eligible. This pattern among students eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch has remained stable for both 4th- and 8th-grade students between 1998 and 2005.”

The National Center for Education Statistics indicates the following data for 10th graders during the first half of the 2002-2003 school year:

- 14.3% of all students missed no days
- 35.4% missed 1-2 days
- 33.0% missed 3-6 days
- 17.2% missed more than 6 days

Why Don't They Come to School?

Routines for school attendance are established for most students at an early age. Families demonstrate the importance of regular school attendance by establishing routines that support students preparedness for school (have supplies, homework done, lunch ready, arranged transportation to arrive at school on time).

Some student miss school because they are *reacting* to stressors. Others *proactively* choose not to come to school in order to seek out other activities.

In a few cases, the first days of school for beginning students may include mild separation anxiety which is usually addressed by school staff and families working together on programs to increase youngsters' support networks at school.

In a very few cases, students may demonstrate school avoidance, and some students' health problems may disrupt school attendance.

For some students, school policies related to behavior lead to exclusion from school (suspensions and expulsions related to fighting, gang affiliation, drugs, or weapons}.

Data indicate that some students report missing school because they are the victims of threats and bullying. Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2005 reports the following:

For students over the mandatory age for school attendance and are chronically absent, many school district policies are to drop the students from the school rolls. This improves the attendance record, but doesn't do much for the dropout statistics.

“In the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, students ages 12—18 were asked whether they had avoided school activities or one or more places in the school because they were fearful. In 2003, 5 percent of students reported that they avoided school activities or one or more places in school in the previous 6 months because they were fearful: 2 percent of students avoided school activities (skipped extracurricular activities, skipped class, or stayed home from school), and 4 percent of students avoided one or more places in school (the entrance to the school, any hallways or stairs in the school, any parts of the school cafeteria, any school restrooms, and other places inside the school building).”

The U. S. Department of Education's online training document: “Truancy: a serious problem for students, schools, and society” puts the range of causes of school attendance problems into a framework. That document categorizes “Factors that Contribute to Truancy” as follows:

I. School Factors

- >School safety
- >School size
- >Attitudes of school staff and fellow students
- >Flexibility in meeting students' diverse learning styles
- >Failure to successfully notify parents/guardians about each absence
- >Lack of consistency and uniformity to attendance and attendance policy within schools and districts

II. Family Factors

- >Lack of parent supervision and/or guidance
- >Poverty
- >Substance abuse
- >Domestic violence
- >Lack of familiarity with school attendance laws
- >Varied education priorities

III. Economic Factors

- >Student employment
- >Single-parent households
- >Parents with multiple jobs
- >Families that lack affordable transportation and/or child care

IV. Student Factors:

- >Substance use
- >Limited social and emotional competence
- >Mental health problems
- >Poor physical health
- >Lack of familiarity with school attendance laws
- >Teen pregnancy
- >Truant friends

Transition Times & Attendance Problems

Periods of transition can increase school attendance problems for all students and especially for some. Students and their families are involved in important transitions every day and throughout the years of schooling. Examples of such transition periods include:

- >Entry into school at kindergarten
- >Moving to a new home and entry into a new school
- >Beginning a new year in a new class
- >Articulation from elementary to middle or middle to high school
- >Re-entry from suspensions, expulsions, juvenile detention
- >Inclusion from special education to regular education

Transitional failure can lead to school absences. Such failures can be viewed as stemming from factors related to the environment, person, or both. For example, school systems and individual schools are quite variable in the degree to which they are prepared to address the transitional needs of different subgroups of students, such as those who are highly mobile and recent immigrants. Some new students enter friendly and inviting settings; others encounter settings that are nonaccommodating or even hostile. And, of course, newcomers vary in terms of their capability and motivation with respect to psychological transition into new settings (e.g., some did not want to move, some are shy, some are uninterested in learning new ways).

Disengagement From School

From a psychological perspective, one way to understand truancy and dropouts is in terms of three psychological needs that theorists posit as major intrinsic motivational determinants of behavior (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985). These are the need to *feel competent*, the need to *feel self-determining*, and the need to *feel interpersonally connected*. From this perspective, truancy can be viewed as among the negative outcomes that result when these needs are threatened and thwarted. And, such needs are regularly threatened and thwarted by the prevailing culture of schools.

“It’s too hard;” “it’s unfair;” “You can’t win;” “No one seems to care” – all are common comments made by students (and staff) They are symptoms of a culture that demands a great deal and too often fails to provide essential supports. It is a culture that undermines motivation.

Each day students bring with them a wide variety of needs, and where these are not effectively met. They find themselves in situations where they chronically feel over-controlled and less than competent. They also come to believe they have little control over long-range outcomes, and this affects their hopes for the future. And, all too common is a sense of alienation from school staff, other students, and even their families. The result: not only don’t they experience feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to significant others, such feelings tend to be undermined. This leads to disengagement from school learning. And, it should surprise no one that disengaged students manifest a range of behavior, learning, and emotional problems and tend not to want to come to school.

When Does Lack of Regular Attendance Become Truancy?

Differences in definition have been a problem in clarifying truancy incidence and prevalence rates. This will soon change because of requirements in the federal No Child Left Behind Act. As of the 2005-06 school year, state education agencies are now required to report truancy “rates” on a school-by-school basis to the US Department of Education.

The National Center for School Engagement (2006) has generated a set of “Guidelines for a National Definition of Truancy and Calculating Rates.” They offer the following as a minimal set of considerations for formulating a complete truancy policy statement:

- 1) Truancy is any absence unexcused by the school. An absence that is excused by a parent but not by school officials is still a truancy.
- 2) Truancy applies even if only part of the day is unexcused. In secondary school, students often skip one or two periods but attend the rest of the day.
- 3) Truancy is determined only if a case is reviewed. There should be a review and determination by a school official that the absence was unexcused before it is labeled a truancy.
- 4) Truancy is a term reserved for cases that are referred to court: The “truancy” label should only apply to students who have so many unexcused absences that they have triggered a court referral. This level of truancy is often referred to in statutes as “chronic truancy”.
- 5) Truancy only applies to students between the ages of compulsory school attendance.

Truancy is a term applied only to absences accrued by students who are required by state law to attend school.

“The Chicago Public Schools defines a student as truant if s/he has an unexcused absence on any given day, and a chronic truant if s/he has unexcused absences more than 10 percent of the days in a school year. The CPS has two truancy problems – a problem of students who do not attend school and a problem of students who attend more or less regularly and then cut classes. These are two distinct behaviors which require different approaches by schools...Cutting classes and not going to school are vicious cycles. These behaviors become habits that are hard to break. A student may not go to class initially because he/she doesn’t like the teacher, is having academic difficulty, has friends who pressure him/her to stay at lunch, or didn’t do the homework for the day. Without immediate reaction from school staff or other adults, cutting becomes an option rather than facing that teacher or making-up homework. Eventually, when a student returns to class, he/she realizes that he/she is very far behind..”

“Habits Hard to Break: A New Look at Truancy in Chicago’s Public High Schools”

Examples of Current Policies and Practices Related to Attendance Problems

Districts policies and practices related to attendance problems focus mostly on truancy in spelling out procedures and interventions. Interventions include (1) incentives and disincentive, (2) efforts to provide supports to promote attendance, and (3) coordinated efforts involving school and community agencies, including juvenile justice. Below we highlight a few of these. Appendix A provides an example of formal statements of policies and procedures from one state and one district.

Disincentives and Incentives

Typically, the focus is on disincentives (punishment). For example, many schools take attendance into account in grading; also common is loss of privileges, such as participating in athletics or attending enrichment opportunities. In some districts, students who are chronically absent are required to perform community service. In some states students cannot get a drivers licence if school attendance is a problem. And, some districts have tried to fine parents or reduce public support if their children do not attend school on a regular basis.

Some places have been tempted to introduce zero tolerance policies for truancy. The irony is that students who are avoiding school are then denied an education through suspensions and expulsions or as the Advancement Project stresses, they are sent to inadequate alternative schools. The results seem to be lower achievement, higher dropout rates, an increase in the achievement gap, and “racial profiling of students.”

From: Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track (2005)

Wisconsin initiated its Learnfare experiment in 1987. The program denied aid to families with dependent children if their teenagers did not regularly attend school. A study released in 1992, showed no positive impact on school attendance in any of the six school districts evaluated. Further, in the largest district, Milwaukee Public Schools, there was a measurable worsening of attendance.

Reported by L. Quinn, (1995). Using threats of poverty to promote school attendance: Implications of Wisconsin's Learnfare experiment for families. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 1(2), 5-16.

“AND FOR PERFECT ATTENDANCE, JOHNNY GETS ... A CAR”

As reported in the New York Times (2/5/06)

“Across the country, schools have begun to offer cars, iPods, even a month’s rent to improve attendance. Many schools have been galvanized by the federal No Child Left Behind law, which factors attendance into its evaluations.... Some experts, however, say attendance incentives are a bad approach.... [and] whether the programs are working is an open question....”

Supporting Student Attendance

The Minneapolis Public School District has formulated and communicated to staff, students, and families a set of policies and procedures that include:

Zero tolerance policies are a controversial answer to making the school safer but often fail to change the behavior of students who exhibit the problems. In many schools and districts in-school or alternative setting suspensions have been instituted to address the problem while keeping the student attending school.

- >Conducting an audit of the practices throughout the district to assure consistency and equity, and identify needs for staff development
- >Strengthening current attendance monitoring systems
- >Working with students and families to intervene early and often when students are absent without an excuse
- >Working to engage students in the learning process with strong curriculum, instruction and relationships with staff
- >Involving the community through shared expectations and actions
- >Students with attendance issues are asked by school staff to sign a school site attendance contract.
(See <http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/attendance.html>)

Schools and Community Working Together

Many states and districts have developed collaborations with the juvenile justice system and other community agencies to address the problem of school absences, especially truancy. Appendix B provides brief summaries of few such programs. And, below is an example of one state's approach to policy and regulation.

From: California Department of Education's Sample Policy and Administrative Regulation (2005).

The Supervisor of Attendance and/or any Assistant Supervisor(s) of Attendance will conduct full and impartial investigations of all school attendance complaints or referrals and may forward cases of persistent irregular attendance or habitual truancy to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) for a proper disposition. (EC 48262, 48263, 48290)

School attendance is a community concern, and the Supervisor of Attendance must collaborate with all appropriate agencies, including law enforcement agencies, as partners in the SARB process to meet the special needs of pupils with school attendance or school behavior problems. (EC 48262, 48263, 48291)

Duties of the Supervisor of Attendance and/or Assistant Supervisor(s) of Attendance

The Supervisor of Attendance with any Assistant Supervisor(s) of Attendance shall have the following duties of monitoring attendance, developing strategies for truancy reduction, and coordinating the School Attendance Review Board.

Attendance Monitoring

Act as a resource to school or District staff regarding attendance issues, and provide training, as necessary, related to record keeping for student attendance, early identification of truancy, and data collection for truancy rates, graduation rates, and dropout rates.

Collect, analyze, and report truancy data, graduation-rate data, and dropout data as ongoing activities for appropriate school, District, and county personnel to inform decisions about site-level, District-level, and county-level attendance and behavior interventions.

Maintain data on the successful transfer of students from and to alternative school programs, charter schools, and other schools in the District.

(cont.)

Provide an opportunity for parents or guardians to challenge the accuracy of attendance records that could impact the determination of grades, CalWORKS benefits, or involuntary transfers (*EC 49070*).

For students in private schools, verify that the students' private schools have filed Private School Affidavits with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. If a complaint or referral has been submitted regarding the attendance of a minor in a school that has filed a Private School Affidavit, investigate the case by analyzing the student's private school attendance register. If the private school attendance record is not available or does not show regular school attendance during the days that the private school is maintained during the year, the student shall be referred to the SARB to determine the disposition of the case. (*EC 48290, 48222, 48223, 48290, 48291*)

Developing and Coordinating Strategies for Truancy Reduction

Coordinate truancy-prevention strategies based on the early identification of truancy, such as prompt notification of absences in the parents' native language, selective approval of work permits, assignments of weekend school instruction, and counseling for truants.

Assist school or District staff to develop site attendance plans by providing youth development strategies, resources, and referral procedures. Explain District and county policies, regulations, and procedures.

Maintain an inventory of local alternative educational programs and community resources, and employ those programs and resources to meet the differential needs of students with school attendance or school behavior problems. Inform parents/ guardians of truant students about alternative educational programs in the District to which the student may be assigned. (*EC 48322*)

Encourage and coordinate the adoption of attendance-incentive programs at school sites and in individual classrooms that reward and celebrate good attendance and significant improvements in attendance.

Coordinate site-level Student Success Teams (SSTs) or School Attendance Review Teams (SARTs) to reduce truancy and collect data on the outcomes of those meetings at each grade level.

SARB Responsibilities for Dropout Prevention

Review the school attendance record and other documentation to determine the adequacy of all cases referred to the SARB and to determine if special arrangements or experts will be needed for the meeting. If the case warrants the resources of the SARB panel, schedule a SARB meeting with the parent and the family. If the referral contains inadequate information or if appropriate school-level intervention has not been attempted, remand the case to the school for further work.

Ensure that SARB meetings maintain high expectations for all students, and ensure that families and youth are involved in selecting resources and services.

Refer students with attendance or behavior problems that cannot be resolved by the SARB to the appropriate agency, including law enforcement agencies when necessary. Also, refer parents or guardians who continually and willfully fail to respond to SARB directives or services provided to the appropriate agencies, including law enforcement agencies. (*EC 48290*)

Develop and submit follow-up reports to the SARB on all directives and agreements made at the SARB meetings, especially student agreements to attend school or improve school behavior.

Use age-appropriate habitual-truancy petitions to the courts when necessary, such as petitions to suspend or delay the driving privilege for students from 13 to 18 years of age. (*Vehicle Code 13202.7*)

Collect data and report outcomes on SARB referrals as needed for the annual report to the County Superintendent of Schools, with copies forwarded to the District Superintendent(s) and the Board. (*EC 48273*)

Toward Better Policies and Practices: The Key is Helping Students Feel Connected

From an intervention perspective, current policy is mainly reactive. There is a clear need for greater attention to prevention and intervening as early as feasible after attendance problems are noted. There is a need for a comprehensive, multifaceted and integrated approach that weaves together the resources of school and community. As the folks at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory have noted in discussing dropouts in their *School Improvement Research Series*:

“Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as preschool) so that early sustained intervention can be applied. Success in the elementary grades diminishes the possibility of later dropping out in high school. The key ... is helping youth to overcome their sense of disconnectedness. It is imperative not to isolate or alienate any students from the school. Not all factors related to dropout [and truancy] reduction are school controllable, and solutions to the complex problem[s] of dropouts [and truancy] cannot be achieved by the schools alone. ... It requires resources that go beyond the school, and solutions require a team approach – the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community-based organizations, and business, as well as the federal, state, and local governments.”

As noted above, periods of transition can increase school attendance problems. Greater attention is needed to designing potent interventions to ensure students are welcomed and connected with ongoing social supports during each of the following transition periods and special attention is paid to students identified as at risk:

- >Entry into school at kindergarten
- >Moving to a new home and entry into a new school
- >Beginning a new year in a new class
- >Articulation from elementary to middle or middle to high school
- >Re-entry from suspensions, expulsions, juvenile detention
- >Inclusion from special education to regular education

A second major area in need of attention is that of designing classroom and school-wide programs to re-engage students who have become actively disengaged from schooling.

Transition Interventions

In our work on support for transitions, we suggest the following:

Think in terms of general facets and intervention tasks related to supports for transitions. While the nature and scope of transitions vary, there are common features in planning and implementing interventions to support transitions. And, as with every intervention, considerations about time, space, materials, and competence arise at every step of the way.

Three Overlapping Facets

In planning and implementing supports for transitions, a major concern is developing a range of practices to address barriers that make it hard for students in transition to function effectively. The overlapping facets that encompass these practices are:

- > Broad-band practices (often designated universal approaches) to ensure support is in place for each identified transition where intervention is indicated.

- > Enhanced personalization to accommodate minor differences (watching for those having minor adjustment problems and providing just a bit more personalized assistance, e.g., aid in overcoming minor barriers to successful adjustment, a few more options to enable effective functioning and make participation more attractive).
- > Special assistance (identifying as early as feasible those who have not made an effective adjustment or who remain uninvolved due to major barriers, an intense lack of interest or negative attitudes, and/or lack of capability). This facet requires continued use of personalized approaches, as well as intensive outreach and special assistance.

*Key
Intervention
Tasks*

Each intervention facet encompasses four major intervention tasks:

- > Establishing a mechanism for prioritizing development, planning, implementation, and the ongoing evolution of the needed transition programs.
- > Developing specific strategies and activities related to each transition program (e.g., social supports, enhancing motivational readiness for involvement, capacity building)
- > Initiating each transition program
- > Ongoing maintenance and creative renewal of all programs designed to support transitions

The range of practices requires planning for personalizing the school schedule and providing interventions and monitoring until the student's problem is corrected. Assistance from student/learning support personnel can provide the safety net that allows these students to increase regular attendance.

*Planning
Programs to
Support
Transitions*

Every school needs to ensure the focus on all attendance problems includes planning and development of programs to support transitions. Most schools have teams that react when an individual student is identified (e.g., a student support team, an IEP team). These teams focus on such functions as referral, triage, and care monitoring or management. In contrast to this *case-by-case service* focus, some schools have a mechanism (e.g., a Learning Supports Resource Team) that takes responsibility for ensuring that needed *school programs* for addressing barriers to learning are developed. Sometimes this function is left to a school improvement planning team or a student support staff member.

To ensure programs to support transitions are fully integrated into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach for addressing barriers to learning, gap analyses must be made and resources (re)deployed. To ensure these programs are given a high priority, they must be fully integrated into school improvement plans. (A few examples of transition programs are provided in Appendix C.)

Mapping Transition Programs at a School

(self-study survey available at ><http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu><)

As a school sets out to enhance the usefulness of education support programs designed to address barriers to learning, it helps to clarify what is in place as a basis for determining what needs to be done. Special attention must be paid to

- >what is in place
- >what needs improving
- >what is missing

This provides a basis for resource analysis. Such analysis decides what is worth continuing as is, what is not worth continuing, how resources can be deployed to strengthen current activity, and what the priorities are for developing additional programs. In the process, recommendations can be made about (a) what procedures are in place for enhancing resource usefulness and (b) how to improve coordination of resources and better integrate activity.

The self-study survey provides a starting point for such efforts. Each item is rated in terms of whether the intervention currently exists if so, whether it needs enhancement if it doesn't exist, whether it is something that should be established. Based on the self-study, staff, families, and communities are in a better position to establish priorities and plan and implement essential supports for transition. In doing so, the emphasis is not to establish another piecemeal "add-on" or special project. The point is to take another step in developing a sustainable, comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach that addresses major barriers to students learning and teaching effectively.

Connecting with Students Who Are Becoming Disengaged

For motivated students, facilitating learning is a fairly straightforward matter and fits well with school improvements that primarily emphasize enhancing instructional practices. The focus is on helping establish ways for students who are motivationally ready and able to achieve and, in the process, maintain and hopefully enhance their motivation. The process involves knowing when, how, and what to teach and also knowing when and how to structure the situation so they can learn on their own. However, students who manifest learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems often have developed extremely negative perceptions of teachers, programs, and school in general. Any effort to re-engage these students must begin by recognizing such perceptions. That is, the first step in addressing the problem is for the school leadership to acknowledge its nature and scope. Then, school support staff and teachers must work together to pursue a major initiative focused on re-engaging those who have become disengaged and reversing conditions that led to the problem.

Given appropriate commitment in policy and practice, there are four general strategies we recommend for all working with disengaged students (e.g., teachers, support staff, administrators):

(1) ***Clarifying student perceptions of the problem*** – Talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged so that steps can be planned for how to alter the negative perceptions of disengaged students and prevent others from developing such perceptions.

(2) **Reframing school learning** – In the case of those who have become disengaged, it is unlikely that they will be open to schooling that looks like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach are required if they are even to perceive that anything has changed. Minimally, exceptional efforts must be made to have these students (a) view the teacher as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (b) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; reframe content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscore how it all builds on previous learning; and clarify why procedures can be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.

(3) **Renegotiating involvement in school learning** – New and mutual agreements must be developed and evolved over time through conferences with the student and where appropriate including parents. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. For the process to be most effective, students should be assisted in sampling new processes and content, options should include valued enrichment opportunities, and there must be provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.

The potential of small classes and schools – In a recent review of small schools in Chicago, the Consortium on Chicago School Research reports that students in the small high schools that are part of the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative “were absent fewer days than similar non-CHSRI students and were less likely to drop out of school.”

In all this, it is essential to remember that effective decision making is a basic skill (as fundamental as the three Rs). Thus, if a student does not do well initially, this is not a reason to move away from student involvement in decision making. Rather, it is an assessment of a need and a reason to use the process not only for motivational purposes but also to improve this basic skill.

(4) **Reestablishing and maintaining an appropriate working relationship** (e.g., through creating a sense of trust, open communication, providing support and direction as needed) – In applying the above strategies, maintaining reengagement and preventing disengagement requires a continuous focus on:

- > ensuring that the processes and content minimize threats to feelings of competence, selfdetermination, and relatedness to valued others, maximize such feelings, and highlight accomplishments (included here is an emphasis on a school enhancing public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)
- > guiding motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
- > providing continuous information on learning and performance
- > providing opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which students can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional support and direction)

(See Appendix D for information on student engagement research.)

Conclusions

It is often said that school attendance is both a right and a responsibility. Certainly, those of us who value education can readily agree with this. And, for students who are absent from school because of circumstances over which they have no control, society has to play a greater role in addressing barriers that are abridging their rights.

However, there are some students who do not experience school as not right for them and, therefore, see school not as a right or a responsibility but as an infringement on their self-determination. From a psychological perspective, the problem becomes motivational (e.g., avoidance motivation, reactance). Therefore, addressing the problem requires strategies that are more psychologically sophisticated than the prevailing ones used by most schools and the society in general.

Given the variety of factors that play a role in school attendance problems, it is essential to avoid lumping all youngsters together. A particular danger arises when the problem is truancy. Some truancy is *reactive* and some is *proactive*, and the underlying motivation for not coming to school can vary considerably in both cases.

Ideas for developing more sophisticated approaches can be adapted from current efforts. But, policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop approaches that reflect the complexity of attendance problems. The complexity demands moving to more comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated solutions. Focusing only on “What’s wrong with that kid!” often is tantamount to blaming the victim and contributes to policies and practices that are not making significant inroads.

School attendance problems provide another indication of the need to move forward in new directions for student support.

Resources and References

Online Resources

From the Advancement Project – <http://www.advancementproject.org/publications.html>

>Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track
<http://www.advancementproject.org/reports/FINALEOLrep.pdf>

From the Consortium on Chicago School Research – <http://www.consortium-chicago.org>

>Habits Hard to Break: A New Look at Truancy in Chicago’s Public High Schools (1997)
<http://www.consortium-chicago.org/publications/p0a09.html>

>Small Schools on a Larger Scale: The First Three years of the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (2006) – <http://www.consortium-chicago.org/publications/p85.html>

From ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education – http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/eric_archive/digest/186.pdf

>New Approaches to truancy prevention in urban schools (2003)

From the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center – <http://www.jrsa.org>

>Truancy: Summary description, state of evaluation, performance measures, evaluations, related resources

From the National Center for Education Statistics – <http://nces.ed.gov>

>Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2005

From the National Center for Schools Engagement/CO Foundation for Families and Children – <http://www.schoolengagement.org>

>Guidelines for a National Definition of Truancy and Calculating Rates (2006)

>School Policies that Engage Students and Families (2006)

>Youth Out of School: Linking Absence to Delinquency (2002)

From the National Dropout Prevention Center – <http://www.dropoutprevention.org>

>Planning, collaborations, and implementation strategies for truancy programs (2005)

>Legal and economic implications of truancy (2005)

>Best Practices and model truancy programs

>Guidelines for evaluating truancy programs

>Fifteen effective strategies for improving student attendance and truancy prevention (2005)

From the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory -- <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/9/c017.html>

>School Improvement Research Series, Reducing the Dropout Rate

From the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies – <http://www.national-academies.org>

>Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn

From the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention – <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp>

>Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School (2001)

From the U. S. Department of Education – <http://www.ed.gov>

>Truancy: A Serious Problem for Students, Schools, and Society

<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/truancy/problem.html>

> School Connectedness and Meaningful Student Participation

http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/connect/school_pg3.html

From Vera Institute of Justice -- <http://www.vera.org>

>Approaches to Truancy Prevention (2002)

A Few Published References on Enhancing Motivation for Learning at School

Adelman, H. & Taylor, L.(2006) *The School Leader's Guide to Student Learning Supports: New Directions for Addressing Barriers to Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H. & Taylor, L.(2006) *The Implementation Guide to Student Learning Supports: New Directions for Addressing Barriers to Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Aregalado, R.J., Bradley, R.C., & Lane, P.S. (1996). *Learning for life: Creating classrooms for self-directed learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Brophy, J. (2004). *Motivating students to learn* (2nd ed.) Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.

Fredricks, J.A., Blumenfeld, P.C., & Paris, A.H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59-109.

National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Passe, J. (1996). *When Students Choose Content: A Guide to Increasing Motivation, Autonomy, and Achievement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Tomlinson, C.A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. VA: ASCD.

Wehrmeyer, M. L. & Sands, D. J. (1998). *Making it happen: Student involvement in education planning, decision making, and instruction*. Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes.

*Related Center Resources**

Introductory Packet:

- >Transitions: Turning risks into opportunities for student support
- >Dropout Prevention

Resource Aid Packets & Tools

- >Addressing Barriers to Learning: A set of surveys to map what a school has and what it needs
- >Improving teaching and learning supports by addressing the rhythm of a year
- >Guidelines for a Student Support Component
- >Standards and quality indicators for an enabling or learning supports component

Technical Aid Packets:

- >Welcoming and involving new students and families
- >Resource mapping and management to address barriers to learning

Continuing Education Modules:

- >Enhancing classroom approaches for addressing barriers to learning
- >Developing resource-oriented mechanisms to enhance learning supports

Quick Training Aids:

- >Re-engaging students in learning

Fact & Information Sheets:

- >About school engagement and re-engagement

Guidance Notes:

- >Addressing school adjustment problems
- >Dropout Prevention

Practice Notes:

- >About motivation
- >Prereferral Interventions
- >Supporting successful transition to ninth grade
- >Welcoming strategies for newly arrived students and their families
- >Working with disengaged students

Also see the following topic pages on the Quick Find online clearinghouse (includes links to center materials, others online resources, and centers focusing on the specific topic)

- >Alternative schools
- >Barriers to Learning
- >Classroom focused enabling
- >Dropout Prevention
- >Environments that support learning
- >Motivation
- >Prevention for students “at risk”
- >School avoidance
- >Support for transitions

*all can be downloaded at no cost at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Appendices

- A. Examples of State and District Policies Related to Attendance
- B. A Sampling of Truancy Programs
- C. A Sampling of Transition Support Programs
- D. About School Engagement Research

Appendix A

Examples of State and District Policies Related to Attendance

From Washington state – **Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction**

WASHINGTON STATE’S “BECCA” TRUANCY REGULATIONS & POLICIES

In brief, Becca truancy laws *require schools to*

Inform parents in writing or by phone after *one* unexcused absence in one month.

Schedule a parent conference after *two* unexcused absences in one month.

Enter into a formal agreement with the student and parent regarding attendance; or, referral to a Community Truancy Board; or, file a truancy petition, if a student has *five* unexcused absences in a month.

File a truancy petition with the juvenile court if a student has *seven* unexcused absences in a month, or *ten* unexcused absences in a year.

File a contempt motion if a student is not in compliance with a court order resulting from a truancy petition.

Becca truancy laws also *require the juvenile court to*

Process petitions filed by school districts.

Schedule hearings alleging truancy, and notify parents and student of the hearing, their options and rights, and may require their attendance.

Grant petitions and assume jurisdiction for any period of time deemed necessary if the facts (by a preponderance of evidence) support the petition.

The court may order attendance at current school, alternative school, another public school, a skill center, drop-out prevention program, a private school or education center, referral to a Community Truancy Board, or completion of a drug assessment test.

Schedule hearings alleging non-compliance with court orders, requiring access to legal representation for the student. Parents may also request legal representation.

The court may order a student to report to county detention, impose alternatives to detention, or order parents to perform community service or pay a fine of up to \$25 per day for each unexcused absence, if the court rules that a student or parent violated the court order.

School districts, through their elected school boards, typically adopt policies and procedures relative to these requirements that are coordinated with local juvenile courts. Guidelines for school board policies are developed through the Washington State School Director’s Association (WSSDA) (www.wssda.org), wherein each board makes adjustments to these guidelines based on local priorities and resources. Each of Washington’s 296 school districts addresses the definition of unexcused absences and interventions in a manner consistent with school board policies. Similarly, local juvenile courts address the petition process in a manner consistent with local county juvenile justice priorities and resources. As a result of these local variations, there are significant differences in how each community approaches and resolves the issue of truancy in Washington State.

An Example from One Urban Schools District

The Minneapolis school board's attendance policy requires all students to attend school 95 percent of the time. This means that a student may not miss more than four days of school (unexcused absences) in a semester. Currently, the average daily attendance in Minneapolis is 91.9 percent.

In Minneapolis, excused absences include:

Illness, religious holidays when the school is notified in advance, recognized cultural observances when the school is notified in advance, funeral or other family emergency, family activity for up to 5 days when arranged in advance with the school, transportation problems cause by failure of the school district transportation system, appointments with health care providers or other professionals.

In Minneapolis, "If students miss seven or more unexcused days (full and/or partial days), legal action may be taken by the Hennepin County Attorney's Office or the Hennepin County Department of Human Services.

[Http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/attendance.html](http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/attendance.html)

Appendix B

A Sampling of Truancy Programs

Lists of “model” programs for truancy prevention are readily available on the internet. Such programs have been grouped in terms of those designed to prevent truancy, those for responding to occasional truancy, and those aimed at chronic truancy.

One such recent listing can be accessed on the website of the American Bar Association – see <http://www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/truancypreventionprograms.doc>

The following are taken from that list.

>Atlanta’s (GA) ***Truancy Intervention Project*** (TIP) – <http://www.truancyproject.org/>

A joint effort between the Fulton County (Atlanta) Juvenile Court and the Atlanta Bar Association begun in 1991. Potential volunteers are recruited through their local bar associations and law firms and are trained in a CLE seminar, in addition to undergoing a criminal background check and completing an application. The TIP process involves the following:

- A truancy petition is filed by a school social worker at the Juvenile Court.
- If the student is a first time truant with no history of other status offenses or delinquencies, the case is referred to the truancy project probation officer.
- The probation officer calendars the case and sends all pertinent paperwork to the truancy project referral coordinator.
- The TIP referral coordinator phones trained project volunteers until she/he finds a volunteer willing and able to take the case.
- Once the attorney officially accepts, the referral coordinator makes a copy of all case information and sends it to the attorney, keeping the original copies on file in the office.
- The TIP referral coordinator sends a letter to the child letting him/her know the attorney's name/work address, and work phone number, and asks the child to contact the attorney.
- When the attorney receives the file, s/he begins making the appropriate contacts (i.e. probation officer, school social worker, parents, child) to learn more about the case. At this juncture, non-attorney volunteers may be assigned by the referral coordinator if the attorney needs assistance.
- The assigned attorney represents the child in Court at the first scheduled hearing and at all subsequent truancy-related hearings.
- The attorney will not be required to represent the child in any delinquency or deprivation issues should they arise in the case.

After a truancy petition has been heard in Juvenile Court and the student has been placed on supervision, the volunteer attorney will:

- Maintain contact with the student, parent, and appropriate school personnel to monitor school attendance.
- Collaborate with probation officers to insure effective supervision of the Court order as it pertains to the student's school attendance.
- After the first hearing, the probation officer will notify the attorney of future hearings. (Ideally, the probation officers and attorneys are in contact and may arrange hearings based on the child's best interest and the attorney's schedule).
- After the first hearing, the attorney fills out the case update form and returns it to the referral coordinator to keep her informed of developments in the case.
- After the hearing, the attorney continues to advocate for the child, seeking appropriate incentives and services, and building a positive relationship with the child.
- The attorney continues involvement with all parties until the case is officially closed in Juvenile Court. The referral coordinator is available to provide help at any point.

>Kern County (Bakersfield, CA) **Truancy Reduction Program** (TRP) – <http://kcsos.kern.org/schcom/trp>

The program, created in 1989, is sponsored by the Kern County Probation Department and the Kern County Substance Abuse Prevention Education Consortium, composed of 39 districts representing 119 K-12 schools. Funded through Title IV Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act. Focus is on early intervention; stresses collaboration between schools and juvenile probation officers. Home visits and pooled resources foster mutual cooperation, producing significant results.

Components include assessment, home visits, weekly school contacts, counseling with the student and family, referrals to community resources, mentoring and evaluation. Students referred to the program are usually monitored for an entire academic year. The goal, however, is to stop truant behavior within four months. The program targets students in kindergarten through 10th grade who have at least four unexcused absences and/or incidents of arriving late to class by 30 minutes or more.

>Montgomery County (Dayton, OH) **Start Right Program** – Ph: 937-496-7750

This program of the Prosecutors Office and Montgomery County Juvenile Court processes and monitors school attendance for children kindergarten through 4th grade. The goal of this program is to provide a more concentrated effort toward what has been determined to be a very at risk population. The Court and the Prosecutors Office are attempting, through this program, to reach families faster and provide services earlier in the hope that the children will remain in school, receive their education, and in turn become productive citizens. Children who are chronically absent from school fall behind in their education, become embarrassed around their peers, and eventually drop out without finishing their education.

When the school determines that a child has missed an unacceptable amount of school days (according to standards that are set by the school), a referral is made to the court. These referrals are reviewed by the staff of the Start Right Program and then referred to the Montgomery County Prosecutors Office for the filing of charges against the parents for failure to ensure their children are being sent to school. The parents are brought before the Court and asked to explain why their children are not attending school. They are then provided with multiple services to assist the family in making sure the children's school attendance improves. Each family is assigned to an education advocate who monitors their case and acts as a liaison between the parents, and the school in an attempt to assist the parents in sending their children to school.

Children in grades 5-12, who are habitually truant, are also addressed by the Court, however, in those cases the children themselves are referred to the Court's Intervention Center to be handled as truants. The child is brought before the Court to answer why he/she has not been in school. If it is determined that it is lack of effort on the part of the parent(s), parent(s) could be referred to the Start Right Program.

>King County (Seattle, WA) **BECCA Bill** -- <http://www.metrokc.gov/proatty/truancy/becca.htm>

Washington State law, RCW 28A.225.030, referred to as the BECCA Bill, requires school districts to file truancy petitions with the Juvenile Court when students have accumulated seven unexcused absences in one month or ten unexcused absences in an academic year. Courts provide small grants to community agencies and school districts to improve early intervention, technical assistance to all schools and school districts in King County, community truancy board development, volunteer recruitment and training, attendance workshops and a formal court process. The BECCA Bill authorized the use of community truancy boards as an alternative to the formal court process. The boards are operated by school districts with the help of trained community volunteers and provide families with an opportunity to avoid appearing in court in truancy matters.

>Los Angeles County, CA **Abolish Chronic Truancy** (ACT) – <http://www.nal.usda.gov/pavnet/ye/yeaboltr.htm>

This program places prosecutors in elementary schools to work with administrators, teachers, parents and students to intervene at the very beginning of the truancy cycle. Prosecutors inform parents that it is their legal responsibility to ensure their children attend school and that education is as essential as food, clothing, and shelter in a child's life. If there are problems interfering with the ability of the child to go to school, prosecutors attempt to find community resources to help overcome those problems. If the child continues to be truant, the prosecutor can take legal action, prosecuting the student, the parent, or both.

While prosecution can one result, the focus of the program is not to punish parents and students, but to get truants off the streets and back in the classrooms.

>Hennepin County (Minneapolis, MN) **Truancy Intervention Project** (TIP) –

<http://www.hennepinattorney.org/truancy.htm>

The project is an effort by the Hennepin County Attorney's Office to improve school attendance by working with students, parents, schools and the community to ensure a faster, more effective response to truancy problems. Students are considered truant and subject to legal action if they miss at least seven full or partial days of school without a lawful excuse. Since the 1991-2000 school year, the County Attorney's Office has been working more closely with schools throughout the county to ensure early intervention with students who are missing school. Specific priorities of the project include:

- Improved Attendance Measurement. Schools need to know each day exactly who is missing from class and whether these absences are excused or not.
- Early Intervention. This means reaching students as soon as they start missing school and before they become chronic truants.
- Swift, Appropriate Consequences. For kids who continue to miss school and become legally truant, the County Attorney's Office is working with the schools to submit the formal referral more quickly. In turn, the legal process is being streamlined in order to get kids in front of a judge as soon as possible once those referrals are made.
- Accountability. To help ensure accountability to the school, the County Attorney's Office produces a report card twice during the year for schools that have made truancy referrals. This card lets the schools know the number and timeliness of referrals received and the outcomes of these referrals, including the reasons for any case dismissals.

>Oklahoma City (OK) ***Truancy Habits Reduced, Increasing Valuable Education*** (THRIVE) – <http://www.nal.usda.gov/pavnet/ye/yetrured.htm>

This initiative involves an ongoing community partnership of law enforcement, education and social service officials. It serves truant school aged youth, who might benefit from being removed from negative influences on the street and returned to a safe educational environment. Police take a suspected truant to a community-operated detention center. The centers are staffed by Oklahoma City police officers, a school system staff person on call, and a secretary. The district attorney's office provides additional staffing. Officials assess the youth's school status and release the youth to a parent/guardian or relative. The Oklahoma County Youth Services Agency takes the youths at the end of the day, if parents cannot be located. Information regarding the child's attendance is provided to the parents/guardians and referrals are made to social service agencies as needed. Each participating agency operates under a set of guidelines and signs a memorandum of agreement that specifies the resources each agency devotes to the project. Long-term follow-up is conducted for each child that passes through, using records from the center, school, juvenile bureau and police.

>Philadelphia (PA) ***The Stop Truancy and Recommended Treatment*** (S.T.A.R.T.) project – <http://courts.phila.gov/courterly/summer/start.htm>

This is a joint initiative between the family court and school districts designed to target the truancy problem in Philadelphia through early assessment and intervention. The court conducts truancy hearings in the school. The hearings are conducted by special truancy Masters (experienced attorneys in the field) in a court-like setting in the schools. The cases are initiated by school district personnel who identify parents whose children have been absent 25 or more days. A private complaint is filed against the child's parent or guardian who is subpoenaed to appear, with the child in the court. The presiding Master, working with school representatives and social workers from the Department of Human Services, assesses the problem causing the truancy and develops an action plan to address the problem, such as counseling, tutoring, parent effectiveness training, etc. Once the action plan is developed, parents and children are ordered to comply. Failure to do so may result in removal of the child from the home for residential schooling and/or fines or incarceration of the parent.

Appendix C

A Sampling of Transition Support Programs

>*School Transitional Environment Project (STEP)* -- designed to (a) reduce exposure to high risk circumstances and increase exposure to developmentally enhancing conditions; (b) reduce adaptive demands imposed by *school transitions* by reorganizing the regularities of the school environment to reduce the degree of flux and complexity; and (c) increase resources for students during transition by restructuring the roles of homeroom teachers and guidance staff so they provide greater support. Reported results indicate participation was associated with more favorable school experiences; more positive student adjustment; lower levels of school transition stress; greater school, family, and general self-esteem; less depressive and anxiety symptoms; less delinquent behavior; higher levels of academic expectations; more favorable teacher ratings of behavioral adjustment; and better grades and school attendance.

For more information, see:

Felner, R.D., Brand, S., Adan, A.M., Mulhall, P.F., Flowers, N., Sartain, B., & DuBois, D.L. (1993). Restructuring the ecology of the school as an approach to prevention during school transitions: Longitudinal follow-ups and extensions of the School Transitional Environment Project (STEP). In Jason, L.A., Danner, K.E., & Kurasaki, K.S. (Eds.) *Prevention and School Transitions: Prevention in Human Services, 10(2)*. New York: The Haworth Press.

>*The Transition Project* – A high school transition program designed to increase the levels of peer and social support during the transition to high school and to reduce the difficulties of mastering the transition tasks students encountered. This research project had two primary components: (1) restructuring the role of homeroom teachers to include guidance and counseling; and (2) reorganizing the regularities of the school environment to reduce the flux of the social setting confronting the student. By the end of ninth grade, participants showed significantly better attendance records and grade point averages as well as more stable self-concepts than controls. Further, by the final evaluation point, students also reported perceiving the school environment as having greater clarity of expectations and organizational structure and higher levels of teacher support and involvement than did non-project controls.

For more information, see:

Felner, R.D., Ginter, M. & Primavera, J. (1982). Primary prevention during school transitions: Social support and environmental structure. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 10*, 277-289.

>*The Bridge Program* – Designed to ease the transition between middle school and high school. It is a one-semester transitional program for all incoming ninth grade students and provides ninth graders with a variety of activities that promote academic achievement, responsibility, school spirit, fellowship, acceptance, and empowerment. An evaluative study showed that Bridge ninth grade students had 70.7% of their grades in core classes at or above C, whereas a non-Bridge ninth grade class had 68.5% of grades at or above C. As tenth graders, Bridge students averaged 75.8% of their grades above C, compared to the non-Bridge tenth graders who averaged 68% of grades above C. Also, non-Bridge ninth graders had a 22% withdrawal rate from school (dropouts and transfers) while only 5% of Bridge ninth graders withdrew. Regarding discipline, Bridge freshmen were disciplined less (22%) compared to non-Bridge freshmen (34%). The majority of students and staff supported the Bridge program and thought it was effective.

For more information, see:

Sheets, R.A., IZard-Baldwin, G., & Atterberry, P. (December, 1997). Bridge: A Program Designed to Ease the Transition from the Middle Level to the High School. *Bulletin, 81(593)*. The National Association of Secondary School Principals. For more information about the Bridge program, contact Gloria IZard-Baldwin at gizard@cks.ssd.k12.wa.us.

>*The ASPIRA Lighthouse Program* – addresses the transition period after school and the period from the end of school through the summer. It is an educational and recreational program, serving children in grades K-12 three hours a day, five days a week, and all day during the summer. In providing educational enrichment, cultural awareness, and recreational activities, the program offers children a range of options from karate and dance to reading skills and math and science programs. Volunteers, including parents, teach special classes, car-pool students, read with children, and help with homework. The program is well connected to the schools: each site coordinator is a teacher in the school. The principal, other teachers, and community agencies manage the program with the cooperation of families, students, school custodians, and security guards. The chief of police credits the Lighthouse program with the decrease in crime, especially in juvenile crime, throughout the city. Lighthouse children outperformed other students on standardized tests in reading and math, and they showed better attendance rates. Parents, teachers, and students also reported improved student self-motivation, higher levels of homework quality and completion, fewer disciplinary referrals, and better peer and teacher relationships.

For more information, see:

Safe and Smart: Making After-School Hours Work for Kids - June 1998. Which can be downloaded at: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/>

Contact: ASPIRA at CT Inc., 1600 State Street, Connecticut, Ph (203) 336-5762/ fx (203) 336-5803. URL: www.ctaspira.org/lighthouseprograms.html

>*Stay-in-School* – A Canadian government initiative launched in the early 1990s to encourage students to build a solid foundation for the future by finishing high school and by acquiring the skills needed for the labor force. Results indicate increased student retention. For example, in-school coordinators reported that 84% of students involved in dropout interventions completed their year. It is estimated that less than 25% would have finished the scholastic year if the program had not been in place. Fifty percent of school contacts noted enhanced academic performance in over half of the program participants. Improved life skills were reported by 70% of respondents. Students reported improvement in self-confidence, work habits, life and academic skills, and expressed a desire to continue with and succeed in school.

For more information, see:

Hackett, H. & Baron, D. (1995). Canadian Action on Early School Leaving: A Description of the National Stay-in-School Initiative. *ERIC Digest*. ED399481.

Renihan, F., Buller, E., Desharnais, W., Enns, R., Laferriere, T., & Therrien, L. (1994). "Taking Stock: An Assessment of The National Stay-In-School Initiative." Hull, PQ: Youth Affairs Branch, Human Resources Development Canada.

Appendix D

About School Engagement Research

Below is an excerpt from a recent review which concludes: *Engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure.* (See J. Fredricks, P. Blumenfeld, & A. Paris, "School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence," *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59-109, 2004.)

Engagement is defined in three ways in the research literature:

- *Behavioral engagement* draws on the idea of participation; it includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out.
- *Emotional engagement* encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work.
- *Cognitive engagement* draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

A Key Outcome of Engagement is Higher Achievement. The evidence from a variety of studies is summarized to show that engagement positively influences achievement

A Key Outcome of Disengagement is Dropping Out. The evidence shows behavioral disengagement is a precursor of dropping out.

Antecedents of Engagement. Antecedents can be organized into:

- *School level factors:* voluntary choice, clear and consistent goals, small size, student participation in school policy and management, opportunities for staff and students to be involved in cooperative endeavors, and academic work that allows for the development of products
- *Classroom Context:* Teacher support, peers, classroom structure, autonomy support, task characteristics
- *Individual Needs:* Need for relatedness, need for autonomy, need for competence

Measurement of Engagement

- Behavioral Engagement: conduct, work involvement, participation, persistence, (e.g., completing homework, complying with school rules, absent/tardy, off-task)
- Emotional Engagement: self-report related to feelings of frustration, boredom, interest, anger, satisfaction; student-teacher relations; work orientation
- Cognitive Engagement: investment in learning, flexible problems solving, independent work styles, coping with perceived failure, preference for challenge and independent mastery, commitment to understanding the work