



Addressing Truancy

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/addtruancy.pdf>)

Too many truancy programs mainly threaten students and parents. Many reflect little understanding of the broad range of factors that result in chronic absences and truancy. The result seems to be increased numbers of students who are “pushed-out” of school.

We all need to learn from reviews of relevant research such as the 2003 report from the **Wilder Foundation** entitled: *Effective truancy prevention and intervention*.

<http://www.wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=1100>

The report from Wilder notes:

Much research has focused on factors outside of the individual truant child, such as factors that motivate youth to attend school. ... Many researchers conclude that schools need to make systemic changes in order to re-engage students who have poor attendance. These systemic changes promote improvements in school climate and practices that can have a positive impact on all students.

From Wilder: *What Works*

>Relationship-building: Students need individualized attention at school ... and build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Students need strong, positive relationships with teachers and other adults at school. In addition, research has found that older youth need strong and healthy relationships with peers, and that these can be a motivator for attending school.

>Contacting parents re-absenteeism (works best with 10th grade and younger), creating meaningful incentives for parental responsibility, and including parents in all truancy prevention activities.

>Strong and clear attendance policies.

>Family counseling that recognizes and builds on the family’s own strengths and resources, with the overall goal of increasing attendance. (The study that found impact included up to six months of family counseling.)

>Intensive school interventions (examples include a mix of the above strategies and also mentors, individualized plans, a team approach, and “learning circles” efforts by teachers to provide education relevant to the cultural background of the community and to provide a controlled environment that emphasize academics and discipline).

>Establishing ongoing truancy prevention programs for school, rather than a one time effort or an effort that only targets high risk students.

>School staff that are trained, committed, and supported to provide high quality, responsive services and keep at-risk youth in the educational mainstream.

>With every approach taken, it is necessary to include ongoing, rigorous evaluation to measure the impact of the program.

From Wilder: *Strategies with Inconclusive Results*

>Rewards and/or incentives for attendance (i.e., fast food coupons or prizes from local businesses). Some studies found increases in the number of students with perfect attendance. Studies are mixed on the benefit of this approach for chronically truant youth.

>Peer group counseling (in-school group sessions with other truant youth). Two studies found increases in school attendance for group counseling participants. However, both studies had very small samples (less than 20 participants).

>Probation officers devoted to truancy cases. This approach looks promising in reducing truancy, but the studies are limited by lack of a comparison sample of truant students who did not receive these services, and lack of clear delineation of the services youth receive through the program.

From Wilder: *What Doesn't Work*

>School uniforms did not have an impact on truancy.

>Financial sanctions against families who use TANF, tying their benefits to their child's school attendance, did not have an impact on truancy.

Also see

- *New Approaches to Truancy Prevention in Urban Schools* (2003). An ERIC Digest. http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/eric_archive/digest/186.pdf
- *Tools for Truancy* (including “Best Practices in Developing Truancy Reduction Programs” and “Model Truancy Prevention Programs”) on the website for the National Center for School Engagement: Promoting Truancy Prevention and Schools Success. <http://www.truancy prevention.org/downloadsPage.html>
- *Approaches to Truancy Prevention* online report describing several model programs prepared by the Vera Institute of Justice http://www.vera.org/publications/publications_5.asp?publication_id=197
- *Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program* from the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution & Conflict Management www.disputeresolution.ohio.gov/cc/truancysummary.htm
- “School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence” (2004) by J. Fredricks, P. Blumenfeld, & A. Paris. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59-109.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS at UCLA

The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Department of Psychology at UCLA.

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