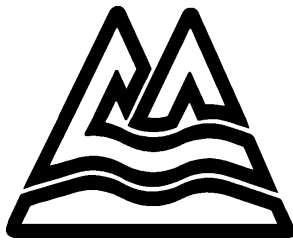


Best Practices for School Attendance

School Success Benchmark Analysis
Multnomah County, Oregon



Department of Support Services

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www.co.multnomah.or.us/budget/erw/

Most states have increased the mandatory school age to 18 years old; some have even gone further by demanding that anyone under the age of 20 without a high school diploma be considered of school age and subject to the mandatory school attendance.

The minimum mandatory age is 5 to 7 years old.

Additional findings suggest more females are truants than males.

1: QUESTION 1: How is eligibility for referral determined—both attendance and grades?

Procedure Currently Being Considered by SAI:

Attendance: students will be referred to the project when they fall below 80% attendance over a 15 school day period. The principal can deny a referral (in case someone broke their arm or is to a funeral, etc.).

Grade: the project will do 4-9th--everyone sees the need for K-3 but you have to make choices. (Note: Since changed to K through 9).

- The definition of truancy varies from ½ a day of unexcused absence to 5 days within a certain period of time. A great number of school districts follow their state rules and statutes regarding what constitutes truancy, while other districts have developed even stricter definitions.
- Tardiness is an issue in most school districts, such that a student is considered truant after a number of tardiness, or exceptional tardiness (30 minutes or more).
- Most school districts, but not all, have clear statutes and rules regarding what constitutes excusable and non-excusable absences.
- The majority of states apply truancy laws to students K-12, but others concentrate on a special group or grade level.
- Of the school districts examined no mention of grades as a standard for truancy was made.

QUESTION 2: Do attendance initiatives consider a natural history of absences before waiting to intervene?

That is, if we were not to intervene, would students continue to slide in their attendance or would they naturally get better? (Are our results a regression to the mean?)

Procedure Currently Being Considered by SAI:

We intervene when we get a referral

- We have not yet found any school district that waits to intervene. When the districts are ready for a program, school absences and drop out problems are usually reaching alarming proportions and prompt intervention is the pattern.

QUESTION 3: Do attendance initiatives use a letter to the parents/guardians?

What is the effect of a letter regarding non-attendance?

For what group of people/grades do they work?

For what group of people don't they work (parents don't read/interception by student)? Should the letter be from the school principal or from the SAI?

Procedure Currently Being Considered by SAI:

Send a letter, then intervene (do not wait to see effect of the letter).

- The first step taken by most school districts is communication with the parents/guardians, or the student, by letter or phone call.
- Schools send from one, to three letters. In some cases (above a certain grade level) the letter is sent to the student.
- In addition to the use of a letter some schools send someone to the home (e.g. a truancy officer, attendance clerk).
- Some schools starts by phoning on the same day of the absence then follow up with a letter, and possibly a visit to the home.
- Some schools invite parents to an informal meeting at school with the student, the truant officer (if they have one) or another authority involved in the program.
- If the problem doesn't improve or parents don't follow through, the student is referred to another agency: SABR (Student Attendance Review Board), Juvenile Court, Truant Officer, etc.

QUESTION 4: What are the best practices for home visits: content; tone, number of contacts; use of contract; when to refer; which parents/issues not to intervene with?

Procedure Currently Being Considered by SAI:

Positive tone "we are here to help" ask for reason why truant, cite the parental responsibility law, what do you need, document suggested referrals and give to parent. After 3 visits refer family to a case manager.

- The intent of the call is 'to inform parents' of the problem, and to assess the home situation.
- The caller identifies if there are there other problems in the home such as drugs, alcoholism, unemployment, lacking food or clothes?
- When letters, phone calls, meetings and interventions are not successful, the student is deferred to the SARB (Student Attendance Review Board) and if the problem is not corrected the parents receives a citation in most cases.
- A citation to the parent might range from classes for the family in the Juvenile Court to the parent found in contempt of court, or even incarceration.

QUESTION 5: What are the best practices in Multi-Agency Cooperation, and their evaluation?

- At the onset, most programs started by involving civic leaders, parents, school officials and law enforcement people
- One School District in North Carolina started a very successful program in 1990, involving the social workers in their county. Nancy, when you say very successful do you mean it was evaluated? I have a call to the director of the Program regarding evaluation.
- In a small community of Washington State an Assistant Principal's vision involving the teachers mentoring incoming freshman class has reduced the truancy and dropout rate from 21% to only 6% (1996-97 was the first year of the program)

QUESTION 6: What do people consider to be successful?: How attendance measured (especially if there may be ongoing intervention for a while)?

Procedure Currently Being Considered by SAI:

Measure success from the first date of person to person contact--compare pre and post attendance where student is his/her own control. We have discussed several options and this one seemed to have the least flaws.

- Of those schools where interventions were in effect the biggest factor determining a successful program, as judged by program stakeholders, were those where the program involved several other community organizations.
- Community groups and organizations such as:
 - Children Protective Services,
 - District Attorney or Juvenile officers,
 - Judges in the Juvenile Court,
 - Business people,
 - Teachers who are able to provide extra time and help
 - Religious leaders
- In some school districts the student is put on "probation" for the remainder of the school year. If no other problems show in that time, the record is closed.

QUESTION 7: What are best practices regarding ideas/incentives for booster interventions (When the attendance is still good after the initial intervention)-- a positive letter? A gift (certificate)--worth how much?

- One school district uses savings bonds for perfect attendance, pizza parties for homerooms with perfect attendance