

Helping Youth Stay in School in Your Community

*Vermont Agency of Human Services
Planning Division
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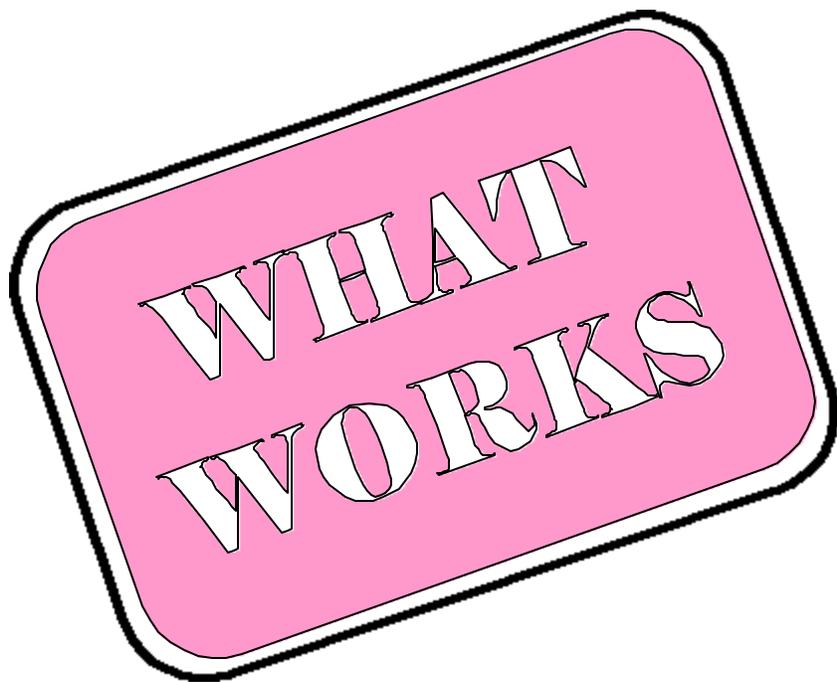
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Dedicated to the Well-Being of Children and Families



Helping Youth Stay in School in Your Community

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Much has been learned in recent years about the strategies and characteristics, the “best practices,” that underlie successful prevention programs.

This booklet is one of a series produced by the Planning Division of the Vermont Agency of Human Services to assist the work of its regional and local partners in achieving positive outcomes for Vermont’s citizens. The State Team for Children, Families, and Individuals has identified 10 **outcomes**, or conditions of well-being, that form the basis for these efforts. Those outcomes are listed in the box below.

These outcomes will be achieved only by the collective efforts, formal and informal, of individuals, families, organizations, and institutions; our communities, rather than any single program, “own” the outcomes. However, communities have expressed a need for guidance about which programs and practices are most effective. We need to learn from experience; and we sometimes need to make difficult choices between one program and another.

Programs that focus on **preventing** problems before they start, especially in childhood, as opposed to programs that focus on remediation or treatment, hold more potential, over the long term, for achieving these outcomes. In addition, in the long run prevention programs save resources because they stop conditions from growing into larger problems that lead to greater costs for a community. Prevention is not a “stop-gap” strategy, but addresses the long-term health and well-being of communities.

10 Outcomes

Conditions of Well-Being for Vermonters

- C Families, youth, and individuals are engaged in their community’s decisions and activities
- C Pregnant women and young children thrive
- C Children are ready for school
- C Children succeed in school
- C Children live in stable, supported families
- C Youth choose healthy behaviors
- C Youth successfully transition to adulthood
- C Adults lead healthy and productive lives
- C Elders and people with disabilities live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer
- C Families and individuals live in safe and supportive communities

The *What Works* series offers brief overviews of programs that research has shown to be effective in achieving the outcomes listed above—by preventing problem conditions and behaviors and promoting positive ones. As a practical matter, most booklets focus on programs addressing a particular aspect of our success (or failure) in achieving one of the outcomes. For example, preventing child abuse and neglect is an important measure, or indicator, of our progress toward the outcome, “Children Live in Safe and Supported Families.” Some programs have been shown to be effective in impacting multiple indicators, or even multiple outcomes; thus, descriptions of these may appear in more than one of our booklets.

Although the focus here is on specific *programs*, we also know that any program’s success—and the success of a community’s collective efforts—is dependent on the wider community

context. Thus, we identify (on p. 4) some key components of a coordinated community strategy.

Here, we call **Effective Programs** those for which research demonstrating success in changing the targeted behaviors has been published in peer-reviewed journals, or, if not so published, then those evaluated using a control group and follow-up assessment of results. **Promising Programs** are those that appear to be successful in changing the targeted behaviors, but which do not meet the criteria for Effective Programs—that is, they have not appeared in peer-reviewed journals, or do not have a control-group and follow-up in their design. Finally, **Noteworthy Programs** are prevention efforts that have demonstrated success in changing relevant attitudes and knowledge, but not the targeted behaviors themselves.

Many, probably most, prevention programs implemented at the community level have simply never been thoroughly evaluated, and some of these *may* be effective. However, our aim here is to identify those where we can say with some confidence, “it works.” On the one hand, our selection criteria (described above) are rigorous, so we run the risk of overlooking some worthwhile prevention activities. On the other hand, it can be useful to narrow the field to a few exemplary programs. Therefore, these booklets do not contain an exhaustive list of effective and promising programs; rather, they provide a number of illustrative examples.

Much has been learned in recent years about the strategies and characteristics, the “best practices,” that underlie successful prevention programs.

The best strategies are **intensive**, rather than brief or superficial; **comprehensive**, rather than focusing on a piece of the problem; and **flexible**, rather than assuming the same approach will work for everyone. There is also research that supports the importance of a strengths-based approach which recognizes, nurtures, and builds on the resiliency and strengths present in young people (Werner & Smith, 1992; Benson, 1997). A separate booklet in this series (*What Works: Promoting Resiliency and Youth Asset Development*) describes this approach in detail. Other common characteristics or approaches of successful programs are described in each booklet.

One word of caution: No program, however effective in its original setting, can be transplanted to a new setting without modification, although it is possible that such alteration could weaken its effectiveness. However, any program must be sensitive to the unique attributes and needs of a particular community; there are no “cookie-cutter” programs here. Rather, we hope the information presented in the *What Works* series will provide communities with inspiration for new efforts and validation for those that are ongoing.

Booklets in the *What Works* series will be published periodically as the steady stream of new research informs us. This is what we know today; we will know more tomorrow.

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and flexible.*

COMPONENTS OF A COORDINATED COMMUNITY EFFORT: AN OVERVIEW

Successful community strategies are likely to include some or all of the following components:

- ***Active participation by youth***, including involvement in the design and follow-through of individualized plans.
- ***School-based programs*** that reflect the research on “what works,” and for which teachers and staff receive specific, ongoing training. Successful programs generally have small class sizes, provide tutoring or other assistance on an individual basis, include social skills and life-skills components, and provide clear expectations and consequences for students’ participation.
- ***Consistently enforced policies*** that clearly communicate the importance of being in school.
- ***School- or community-based employment skills training***. Often this requires flexible scheduling and ongoing mentoring and/or counseling.
- ***Community-wide engagement*** (including businesses, faith communities, health care providers, law enforcement, and civic organizations) in developing youth assets, valuing education, and providing youth with links to opportunities in careers, further education, and service to community.

THE CONTEXT FOR HELPING YOUTH STAY IN SCHOOL

*What Works:
Helping Youth
Stay in School*

A solid education is a powerful protective factor that increases one's chances for success in many areas of life. As families, as communities, as a state and nation, we cannot afford to have any of our young people ill-prepared to join the world of work and economic self-sufficiency. This booklet presents some of the approaches shown to be effective in preventing and intervening with truancy and school dropout.

Research tells us that young people's engagement in school (a community where most spend a significant proportion of their time) is important to their doing well—not only academically, but in many areas of life. We also know there are a variety of reasons why some students are *not* engaged in school: they may have experienced early, and ongoing academic problems; they may have conflicts with particular teachers or classmates; their parents may not be supportive of education; there may be other family needs—caring for younger siblings or for someone who is ill or disabled, the need for extra income—that take precedence over school. It is important to understand that there are different reasons for students' failing to make a strong connection with school, and therefore individualized responses are required.

Neither truancy nor dropping out are isolated events. They are part of a process of disengagement from school that may start as early as elementary school. We treat these issues (truancy and dropout) together here, because many of their underlying causes are the same, and because truancy is a signal that is often followed eventually by dropping out. Indeed, both truancy and dropout can be seen as symptoms of broader conditions (National Research Council, 2000).

Characteristics of truants/dropouts, their families, schools, and communities

Truancy, dropout and other symptoms of school disengagement are related to a number of individual, family, school, and community characteristics (Baker et al., 2001; GAO, 2002; National Research Council, 2000). However, "risk-factors" do not allow us reliably to identify who will become truant, or drop out.

At a student level, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, mental health problems, poor physical health, inadequate social skills, and low academic achievement have been identified as related to disengagement from school. Students with disabilities are also more likely to drop out; the National Transition Study estimates that as many as 36.4 percent of disabled youth drop out of school before completing a diploma or certificate (Meyers, 1996). One review of the literature found that "academic achievement, educational aspirations and feelings of self worth are the most important factors in determining the likelihood for dropping out" (Meyers, 1996).

A solid education is a powerful protective factor that increases one's chances for success in many areas of life.

At a family level, poverty, race, high rates of transience (frequent changes in home and/or school), insufficient parental supervision, negative or indifferent attitudes toward education, parents' lack of involvement in the student's school, domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse, and lack of understanding of attendance laws are correlated with truancy and dropout. One study found that students from low-income families are more than twice as likely to drop out of school than children from middle-income families (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993).

School factors associated with these problems include characteristics of school climate (e.g., size, attitudes of students, teachers, and staff, and their socio-economic makeup), the practice of retaining students in grade, high rates of school disciplinary actions, high rates of special education eligibility, inconsistent procedures for dealing with absenteeism, and lack of appropriate consequences for truant youth.

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As one participant in a truancy prevention workshop remarked, "truancy is not a sign of a troubled youth, it is a sign of a troubled community" (Danny Michaelson, August, 2001). Community factors linked with truancy and dropout include lack of affordable transportation and childcare, prevailing economic conditions, and general attitudes toward education. Young people's perceptions of the economic opportunities available to them also play a role in their decision to drop out or stay in school.

The reasons young people themselves give for dropping out of school are less complex than those reflected in the research. In a large longitudinal study of dropouts, more than half said simply they "did not like school." More than a third of these students also said they "could not get along with teach "[were] failing school." Almost a third of this sample of dropouts said that pregnancy was a reason they left school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990). Interestingly, the reasons given by teachers and students for why youth drop out of school are quite divergent. Whereas students are likely to cite as primary reasons conflict (with teachers, with other students) and other school-related factors, teachers more often cite factors outside the school (Madden & Madden, 2001).

Knowing the kinds of conditions associated with truancy and dropout can help us develop a deeper understanding of how comprehensively to address these issues. However, using one or more of these factors to try to predict which students will be truant or dropout has not met with much success. This is probably because the pathways to truancy or dropping out vary so much from one student to another, with different combinations of factors contributing in each case. Because many factors interact over many years, experts recommend that prevention efforts begin in preschool or elementary school, rather than trying to identify likely dropouts when students are in their final years of school (National Research Council, 2000).

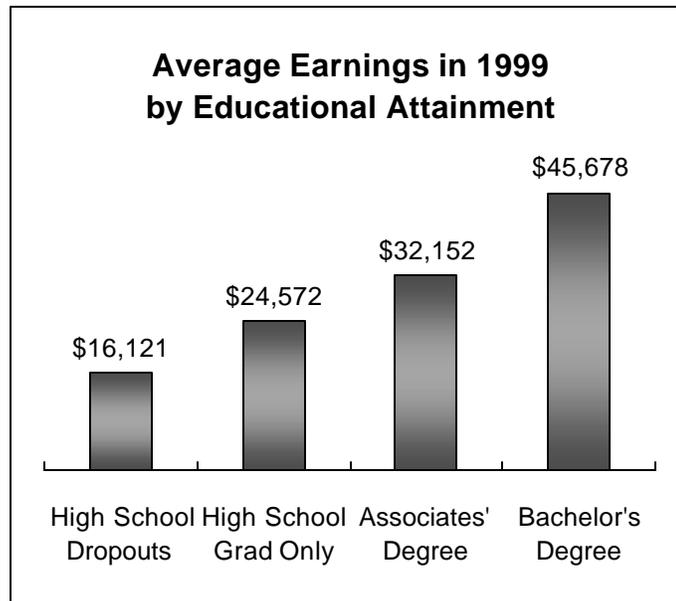
Consequences of truancy and dropout

What Works:
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Truancy and dropping out of school are associated with numerous negative consequences, including delinquency, violent behavior, and lowered earnings potential and actual income. Truancy is a leading risk-factor for academic failure and subsequent dropping out, but it is also as a stepping-stone to substance abuse, gang involvement, and other criminal activity (burglary, auto theft, vandalism). Teenagers who are frequent truants are more likely as adults to have health and mental health problems, dependence on welfare, and children who have problem behaviors; and to be incarcerated (Baker et al., 2001; GAO, 2002).

On average, in 1999 high school dropouts earned \$8,451 less per year than high school graduates (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

According to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1991), in October of 1989, only 35 percent of the individuals in their sample who had dropped out of school were employed. In Vermont, ninety percent of all prison inmates have not completed high school (Vermont Agency of Human Services, 2002).



Each year's class of dropouts will cost the country more than \$200 billion during their lifetime

The costs to the community in terms of lost human potential are also high. School districts lose out on state funds that are allocated on a per-pupil basis. Employers lose when they have to provide training to poorly educated workers. Each year's class of dropouts will cost the country more than \$200 billion during their lifetime in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue (Catterall, 1985). In Vermont, the dropout problem costs "more than \$150 million annually in lost income taxes and increased costs for welfare, health care and employment subsidies" (Vermont Dropout Prevention Policy Team, 1989).

The personal costs to dropouts themselves are high, too. One study indicated that dropouts have significantly lower self-esteem than students who finish school, and are more likely to believe they cannot influence how things turn out for them (National Research Council, 2000).

Measuring the Dropout Rate

There are several methods used to report on the school dropout rate, each of which is useful for different purposes.

- The **status** method reflects the percentage of students who, among a given age group at a given time, have not finished high school. For example, “In 1990, 6 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds in Anytown were high school dropouts.” This method is helpful for assessing needs for adult education and workforce development.
- The **event** method assesses the number of students who do not return to school in any given year and who did not transfer to another school (this is usually determined by whether or not the school received a transcript request). For example, “4.3 percent of students who were enrolled as of October of 1999 did not return to school in September 2000.” This usually reflects the average of the dropout rates for ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades, and provides a one-year “snapshot.” This method does not take into account students who leave school but come back later to graduate. However, it may be useful in tracking year-to-year performance of schools.
- The **cohort** method tracks the dropout rate within a particular class. For example, “Of the class entering ninth grade in 1990, how many failed to graduate four years later?” Usually, the “cohort” method is what community members have in mind when they refer to “dropouts.”

Efforts are underway nationally, and in Vermont, to change reporting methods so that they yield more informative data (National Research Council, 2000).

The scope of the truancy/ dropout problem

There are no reliable numbers on the extent of truancy in Vermont, or in other states. In part, this is because jurisdictions have different policies on what constitutes truancy, and there are no standard reporting requirements. Most national estimates put the numbers of truants on any given day in the hundreds of thousands (Garry, 1996; Baker et al., 2001). There are both “casual” and “chronic” truants. And truancy may be an issue at any stage of a youth’s school career. Interventions should be sensitive both to the age of the truant, and to the particular factors underlying his or her lack of engagement with school.

Dropout rates (as measured by the “event” method) in the U.S. and Vermont have changed very little in the past 10 years. The Vermont Department of Education reported that 4.7 percent of high school students (grades 9-12)

dropped out of school in the 1990-91 school year, and the rate was 4.7 percent for the 1999-00 school year (Vermont Department of Education, 2001). By way of comparison, the U.S. event dropout rate (grades 10-12) was 4.8 percent in 2000 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001).

*What Works:
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Types of programs/strategies

There are significant challenges facing any truancy or dropout prevention effort. As one commentator put it, “dropping out is as hard to prevent as it is to prevent a child from dropping out” (Leason, 1998). Communities wanting to maximize their chances of success in addressing these issues should adopt a comprehensive approach, rather than any single, stand-alone program (ERIC, 1997).

Although communities should ideally have an array of approaches in place, evaluated strategies or programs aimed at reducing truancy or dropout can generally be classified as one of the following types:

- *Early Prevention/Intervention Models*
- *Intensive Supports for Students and Families*
- *Alternative Educational Settings*
- *Schoolwide Restructuring Models*
- *State/Local Policy Initiatives*
- *Systemic (Community Development) Models*

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Early prevention/intervention models

A committee of the National Research Council that recently examined the dropout issue concluded that “identifying students with risk factors early in their careers (preschool through elementary school) and providing them with ongoing support, remediation, and counseling, are likely to be the most promising means of encouraging them to stay in school” (2000, p. 6). Several evaluated programs exemplify this approach (see pp. 15-16, 27-28).

Intensive supports for students and families

Because truants and dropouts (or those at high risk for becoming so) and their families typically have multiple areas where they need support, many successful programs provide a combination of positive and negative sanctions to help families gain strengths and assume greater responsibility for children’s school success. Often, these services include tutoring, counseling, and help with finances, food, shelter, health care, transportation, child care, adult basic education, and employment. They may also include helping parents develop reasonable expectations for their children, and effective monitoring and discipline. In addition, there may be involvement by the juvenile justice system to help ensure accountability; in some circumstances, the threat of legal prosecution carries a great deal of weight. Once the situation of the student and

family are stabilized, and the student is regularly attending school, “after-care” support may be continued indefinitely. (See pp. 17-20, 29-35.)

Alternative educational settings

Students at risk for truancy or dropping out are typically those for whom “school-as-usual” is not an effective learning environment. In particular, creating a smaller school setting, whether within a “regular” school or in a separate facility, can lead to greater student engagement. The curricular content offered in these alternative settings varies from the traditional course of studies (with smaller classes), to accelerated curricula, to a focus on preparation for the GED (General Educational Development) Test, to “career academies.”

However, some evaluators have cautioned that alternative settings face serious challenges, because of the inherent challenge they pose to the *status quo*. In particular, alternative *middle-schools* show some evidence of effectiveness in keeping students from dropping out, though not in improving attendance or grades. GED programs, which offer a more modest goal, but which also typically serve students with more difficult problems, have shown some success (Dynarski & Gleason, 1998). (See pp. 21-24, 36-37.)

Schoolwide restructuring

Some efforts at increasing students’ engagement in school have aimed at a far-reaching restructuring of schools, usually focused on changes in governance, curricula and instruction, and services for students. (Some examples are The Responsive Classroom [The Northeast Foundation for Children, undated], and Project GRAD [GAO, 2002]). This approach is most commonly found where there are many students who are at high risk for dropping out. Essential to the success of such efforts is having broad-based support from teachers, principals, and the general community. These stakeholders must share an understanding about the need for change (the issues underlying symptoms such as poor attendance), an agreement that restructuring is the appropriate response, and strong school leadership. Restructuring efforts that are successful in terms of improving outcomes for students have emphasized improvements in curriculum and instruction, by offering staff development opportunities (Dynarski & Gleason, 1998). (See pp. 25-26.)

State/local policy initiatives

Generally working as one component of a coordinated approach, policies can contribute to a clear community message regarding the value of staying in school. In some states, legislation has given communities added “1 dealing with truancy. In Vermont, the state Department of Education has adopted twelve principles to guide high school renewal:

Alternative middle-schools show some evidence of effectiveness in keeping students from dropping out

1. Engaged Learners: Students are engaged learners who are responsible for and actively involved in their own learning.

2. Challenging Standards: Each student is expected to demonstrate that he or she has met challenging standards based on Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities or national standards.

3. Multiple Pathways: The high school provides each student a variety of learning opportunities and multiple pathways to meet graduation requirements.

4. Personalized Learning: The high school creates small, personalized and safe learning environments, that enable students to get stable support from adults, have caring connections to mentors and have a sense of belonging.

5. Flexible Structures: The high school's schedule and organization are flexible to allow time for varied instructional activities and to provide an integrated learning experience. *Learning is the constant; time is the variable.*

6. Real Life Experiences: Students learn about careers and college opportunities through real life experiences and adult interaction including work-based learning, service learning, job shadowing, and career academies.

7. Instructional Leadership: Adults in the school are skilled leaders and teachers who utilize research based practices, and effective administrative and instructional strategies to support increased student performance.

8. Alignment: The high school aligns its curriculum, instruction and assessment with the Vermont School Quality Standards and is supported by research based professional development.

9. Shared Purpose: Every high school adopts and publicizes a compelling vision and mission that utilizes a results oriented approach to promote continuous improvement.

10. PK-16 Continuity: The high school is a member of a PK-16 education system and is a partner with middle schools, colleges and post graduation training programs to help student make successful transitions.

11. Parental Participation: Parents are active participants in their young adult's education and are provided varied opportunities to volunteer, serve on decision making groups, assist students to set learning goals and monitor results and to support learning at home.

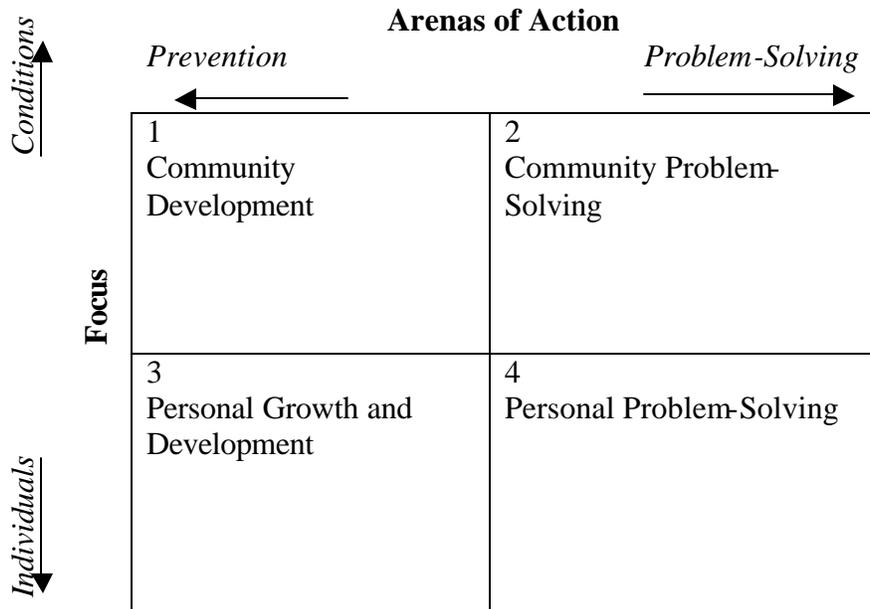
12. Community Partnership: Every high school forms active partnerships with community members, business people, civic leaders and policy makers to ensure fiscal support and to expand student learning opportunities.

In addition, many Vermont schools are adopting restorative justice approaches to dealing with conflicts among students, and between students and schools. Such approaches enhance the likelihood that students will feel positively engaged with their schools and communities, even when they “get into trouble.”

Systemic (community development) approaches

A community development model for prevention of truancy and dropout addresses the broad array of conditions that contribute to these problems, as well as the conditions that promote school engagement. Lofquist (1983) provides a framework for such work:

Being a resource means being a contributing member, being listened to, being valued



To identify and address conditions takes involving all members of the community and school, including the youth most likely to experience school-related problems. Using Lofquist’s (1983) model of community development, it is essential to engage truant youth in changing the conditions that give rise to the problem. As students work to change the conditions in the community or school that play a role in truancy, they move from being solely the recipients of services to being resources in that process. Being a resource means being a contributing member, being listened to, being valued, and that moves them forward in their own personal and educational growth. Rather than reacting to symptoms (*child is not in school*) and creating programs simply to reduce those symptoms (*return*

child to school), communities with their schools can alter the circumstances underlying the symptoms (*child feels valued and connected at school; child's total health and welfare are considered*).

Whether the focus on change is school policy, alternatives to the regular school program, individualized learning plans, or community based programs, youth involvement is a critical component. Community collaboratives that are addressing youth issues including truancy must have youth representation that is real and valued.

The Vermont Consortium for Successful High School Completion (2002) is piloting a community development model of truancy and dropout prevention based on these principles. The goals of the project are for communities to form sustained collaboratives to identify conditions that contribute to the local problem, to identify existing programs that address the conditions, and to create an action plan for how the community will respond to the identified conditions, including policy development, program development and sustainable support for the plan. While the long-range outcomes of this project will not be known for some time, the hypothesis is that truancy and dropout rates will decline as community-school collaborative efforts evolve. Initial anecdotal responses from youth and adults suggest that changes are occurring in how youth are perceived by adults in the school and community and that schools are partnering in new ways with community members.

A national, multi-site evaluation of eight community-based programs, each with a community collaborative component, is underway. Preliminary evidence indicates that these collaboratives need a great deal of time, support, and training in order to be effective (Baker, et al., 2001).

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Method of Search for Effective Programs

In order to identify effective programs, a computer-aided literature search was conducted. The Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) was searched using the following key words: dropout, prevention, evaluation research, and program effectiveness. The PsycLit database was searched with the following key words: school dropouts, prevention, and program evaluation.

The Internet offers a number of helpful resources.

- The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network:
www.dropoutprevention.org
- KidSource: www.kidsource.com/education/student.truancy.html
- National Truancy Project:
www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject/default.asp

Promising Practices Network:

www.promisingpractices.net/benchmark.asp?benchmarkid=7

Early prevention/intervention models

The Chicago Child-Parent Center (Chicago, IL)

Comprehensive education, family, and health services, including half-day preschool at ages three and four, half- or full-day kindergarten, and school-age services for ages six to nine, were provided to a selected group of low-income, mostly black families. A comparison group included children from similar families who participated in alternative early childhood programs (full-day kindergarten, but no preschool experience).

The results

Children were followed-up 15 years later. Those who had been in the preschool group for one or two years had higher rates of completing high school (50 percent versus 39 percent), more years of completed education (11 versus 10), and lower rates of school dropout (47 percent versus 55 percent). Effects on educational attainment were greater for boys than for girls. Participation in either preschool and school-age services was significantly related to lower rates of grade retention and receipt of special education services. Children who participated in preschool were also less likely to be arrested as juveniles.

For more information

Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D. L., and Mann, E. A. (2001). Long-term effects of an early childhood intervention on educational achievement and juvenile arrest: A 15-year follow-up of low-income children in public schools. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, No. 18, 2339-2346.

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Early prevention/intervention models

High/Scope Perry Preschool Project (Ypsilanti, MI)

The overall objective for this program was to prepare economically disadvantaged children for success in school. Children received two-and-a-half hours of “high quality early childhood education” five days a week for one or two years (depending on their age).

The program was designed to promote cognitive, social, behavioral, and language development, and to broaden each child's base of information and experience. The program involved a high degree of interaction between children and adults. Teaching strategies incorporated active learning opportunities within a problem-solving curriculum. Children set goals for themselves for each day. The preschool component was coupled with home visits for 90 minutes each week, with the goal of promoting parental interest in their child's learning. Children receiving services, and a comparison group, were followed for 23 years.

The results

By age 27, 84 percent of female preschool participants had graduated from high school (or equivalent) compared with only 35 percent of females in the comparison group. There was no difference in high school graduation between male program participants and males in the comparison group.

For more information

Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., and Weikart, D. P. (1993). Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27. Ypsilanti, MI: The High/Scope Press.

Program participants (girls only) had higher rates of high school graduation

*Intensive supports for students and families***Memphis Partners Collaborative (Memphis, TN)**

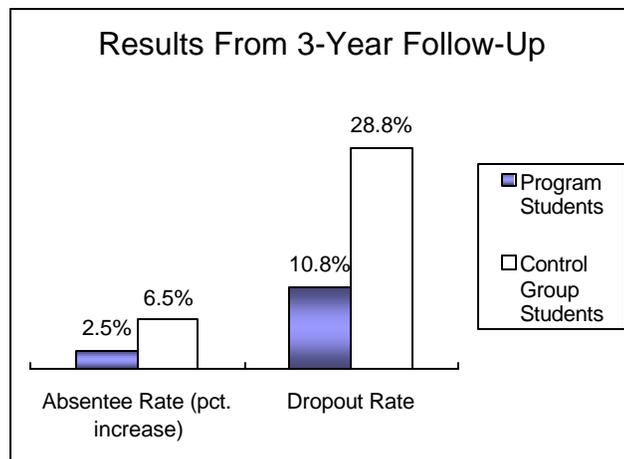
The program was designed for at-risk, urban tenth-grade students and dropouts. A six-hour, 17-week, Saturday program focused on academic enrichment and remediation in mathematics, reading, and test-taking skills. Instruction also included job readiness and employability skills; modules to increase motivation, self-esteem and stress management; and daily rewards to enhance participation. In addition, the program involved monitoring attendance, creating linkages with other community agencies, and health and drug-related counseling.

The results

A three-year follow-up found more ambitious plans for school completion, a lower dropout rate (10.8 percent vs. 28.8 percent), and better attendance records in the program students than in students in a comparison group (in the program group, an increase of 2.5 percent in days absent over earlier rates, vs. a 6.5 percent increase in the comparison group).

For more information

Rossi, R. J. et al. (1995). Evaluation of projects funded by the school dropout demonstration assistance program: Final evaluation report. Volume I: Findings and recommendations. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences. ERIC Document No. 389063.



Intensive supports for students and families

School-Based Mentoring Program

The program was designed for at-risk tenth graders. Trained mentors were paired one-to-one with students. Mentors' activities included frequent and consistent meetings throughout the period of the intervention (six months), mentor-initiated contacts, tutoring, referral to appropriate school personnel for specific problems, and recognition and celebration of achievements, holidays, and birthdays.

The results

Among students who were effectively mentored (as assessed by five mentor evaluation questions—not available) there were no dropouts in the school year following the program, in contrast to a 26-percent dropout rate for a group receiving no intervention, and a 31-percent dropout rate for an ineffectively mentored group.

For more information

Slicker, E. K. & Palmer, D. J. (1993). Mentoring at-risk high school students: Evaluation of a school-based program. *The School Counselor*, 40, 327-334.

Among effectively mentored students there were no dropouts in the year following the program

Intensive supports for students and families

Tri-School Project (San Antonio, TX)

The program is designed for at-risk middle and high school students. Small, pull-out classes provide remedial computer-assisted instruction with the focus on preparing students to pass state-mandated tests in academic subjects. Individual counseling is made easily accessible and separated from discipline functions. Cooperative learning strategies and peer tutoring are also components of the program.

The results

A three-year follow-up at two middle schools found a lower dropout rate for students in the project (20 percent), compared to a matched control group (38 percent).

For more information

Rossi, R. J. et al. (1995). Evaluation of projects funded by the school dropout demonstration assistance program: Final evaluation report. Volume I: Findings and recommendations. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences. ERIC Document No. 389063.

*A three-year
follow-up found
a lower
dropout rate
for students in
the project*

Intensive supports for students and families

Valued Youth Program (San Antonio, TX, and elsewhere)

The program was designed for middle-school students with limited English proficiency, and at risk of dropping out.

Program students were paid a minimum-wage stipend for providing tutoring to elementary school students four hours a week. Prospective tutors went through a training program focused on acquiring tutoring skills and improving students' reading, writing, and other subject matter skills.

Development of self-pride was also emphasized. The program provided students with positive adult role models, recognition for their achievements, and opportunities to go on field trips. Additionally, the program provided opportunities for parental involvement.

The results

A two-year follow-up of program participants and a comparison group showed that program students had a lower dropout rate (1 percent vs. 12 percent), better reading grades, increased competency test scores and self-pride, and a better attitude toward school and teachers. Also, at follow-up, the program students had fewer referrals for disciplinary action than measured at baseline (38 percent fewer referrals, vs. 16 percent *more* referrals for the comparison group).

For more information

Montecel, M.R., Supik, J.D., Montemayor, A. (1994). Valued Youth Program: Dropout prevention strategies for at-risk youth. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education Office of Bilingual and Minority Language Affairs. ERIC Document No. 372646.

Program students had a lower rate of dropout, increased test scores and self-pride, and a better attitude toward school

California Peninsula (Partnership) Academies

The program is open to tenth-twelfth grade students who are at-risk but show potential for graduation. The program combines academic and vocational courses in a small-class setting, with job-training in a high-demand field (such as culinary arts). Representatives of local employers participate in the program, which may include mentoring. The program is described as a school-within-a-school.

The results

A three-year follow-up found that students in the program had a lower dropout rate than students in a matched comparison group (7.3 percent vs. 14.6 percent). Also, half of those predicted to drop out as sophomores did not do so.

For more information

Dayton, C., & Stern, D. (1990). Graduate follow-up survey of the June 1988 graduates of the California Partnership Academies. Policy paper no. PP90-1-1. Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education.

*The program
combines
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courses with
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a high-demand
field*

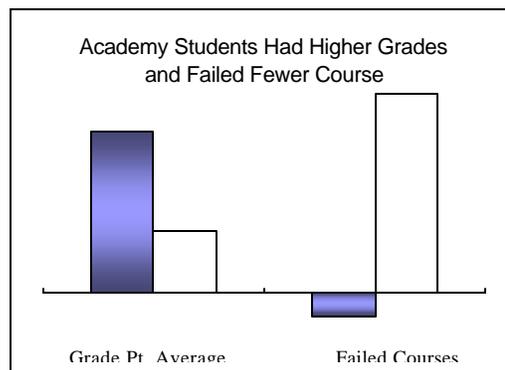
Alternative educational settings

Carlmont Business Technology Academy (Carlmont, CA)

The program is designed for high school students who are at moderate risk of dropping out. Only students who seem likely to succeed are accepted into the program, as judged by motivation to participate, reading level, and absence of serious behavioral or emotional problems. While at the academy, students participate in small classes scheduled in blocks, and extracurricular activities. Additionally, they have access to a career development specialist, a mentoring program, work experience, and internships.

The results

A three-year follow-up with a matched comparison group found that fewer Academy students dropped out of school (none vs. 19 percent). Additionally, Academy students had higher grade point averages (a 47-percent increase vs. an 18-percent increase for the comparison group) and failed fewer courses (a decrease of 7 percent vs. a 58-percent increase for the comparison group).



For more information

Hayward, B.J., & Tallmadge, G.K. (1995). Strategies for keeping kids in school: Evaluation of dropout prevention and reentry projects in vocational education. Final Report. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. ERIC Document No. 389063.

Alternative educational settings

New Horizons/School-Within-a-School (Des Moines, IA)

This program is designed for high school students who are at-risk, or who have dropped out of school. It combines an academic component with individual and group counseling, home visits, and linkages to other community agencies. The academic component includes life-skills instruction, career preparation, and paid work. Parental involvement, attendance monitoring, and flexible scheduling are emphasized. Smaller classes with self-paced, personalized instruction are provided in a school-within-a-school framework.

The results

A three-year follow-up found a lower dropout rate for program students, compared with a matched control group (17 percent vs. 30 percent).

For more information

Rossi, R. J. et al. (1995). Evaluation of projects funded by the school dropout demonstration assistance program: Final evaluation report. Volume I: Findings and recommendations. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences. ERIC Document No. 389063.

*The academic
component
includes life-
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and paid work*

Alternative educational settings

Project COFFEE Vocational Training Program (Turtle Mountain, ND)

The program was designed for at-risk Native American high school students who were working toward a GED. The program's key components included: "(1) employment of an academic instructor to provide academic tutoring in subjects with which students were having difficulty, with the instruction provided on a pull-out basis¹; (2) employment of a vocational instructor to provide career guidance and employability skills instruction and to arrange work experience slots for students to the extent possible; and (3) payment of students for school attendance."² Additionally, the academic instructor integrated culturally relevant content into the career-development curriculum.

The results

A two-year follow-up found that program students had a lower dropout rate than those in a comparison group (40 percent vs. 63 percent).

For more information

Hayward, B.J., & Tallmadge, G.K. (1995). Strategies for keeping kids in school: Evaluation of dropout prevention and reentry projects in vocational education. Final Report. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. ERIC Document No. 389063

¹"Pull-out" refers to the practice of providing individualized services to students outside of the regular classroom setting.

² Paying students to stay in school is based on the notion that, for students, school is equivalent to a "job", in that it is necessary for (eventual) economic self-sufficiency. In addition, payment for staying in school may reduce the likelihood that students will drop out because of family financial constraints that make paid work more attractive than school.

A two-year follow-up found that program students had a lower dropout rate than those in a comparison group (40 percent vs. 63 percent)

Schoolwide restructuring models

Pittsburgh Public Schools

Includes many programs. Pittsburgh Summer Academy is aimed at eighth graders who aren't promoted to ninth grade; these students attend intensive remedial reading and math classes for three weeks and afterwards are promoted. The Job Training Program is a summer employment program that gives eighth-grade students stipends, and includes counseling, teacher-mentors, and parent involvement. The Community Education Activity Program, available to low-income elementary students, includes summer and Saturday classes in reading and math, and involves parents by having them serve as program monitors and attend education seminars.

MAP (Monitoring Achievement in Pittsburgh) regularly tests students to diagnose problems in math, reading, writing, critical thinking, and science. MAP also includes an intensive science program linked to college scholarships for black students; an early education program for low-income areas; peer tutors; peer counselors; and "New Futures Community Schools," which offer an extended school day and year, a community health program, jobs for secondary students, and an infant care program.

The results

The dropout rate fell from 35 percent in 1980 to 25 percent in the 1987-88 school year for the schools in the Pittsburgh area. MAP increased the number of students passing national norms in reading—from 64 percent to 80 percent for first graders, and from 50 percent to 62 percent for fifth graders.

For more information

McCormick, K. (1989). *An equal chance: Educating at-risk children to succeed*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association. ERIC Document No. 307359.

Schoolwide restructuring models

School Transition Environment Program (STEP)

A transition program for students moving from junior high/middle school to high school, combining changes in school structure with peer supports. This transition has been identified as stressful for many students, because it often coincides with other significant “transitions” (related to puberty, greater responsibility, and greater sensitivity to peers). The STEP program involves grouping students into small, relatively self-contained “STEP” units within the larger school. Homeroom teachers serve as the primary administrative and counseling links between students and the school. The intent is to increase the sense of support students feel they have from the school, increase student accountability, and decrease anonymity.

STEP groups students into small, self-contained sub-units within the larger school

The results

After a five-year follow up, the dropout rate was reduced by 22 percent (21 percent for students in the STEP program, compared with 43 percent for comparison students). There were also significant reductions in substance abuse and delinquency rates.

For more information

Felner, R.D. and Adan, A.M. (1988). The School Transition Environmental Project: An ecological intervention and evaluation. In Price, R.H. et al. (eds.) 14 ounces of prevention: A casebook for practitioners. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Project Helping Hand (Atlantic County, NJ)

Elementary school students who are at risk of becoming chronic truants are referred to the program by school personnel, and sometimes by parents or social service agencies. Most referred students are in grades K-3. Students are eligible to participate if they have 5 to 15 days of unexcused absence. Counselors make an in-person assessment of the student and his or her family, through a home visit if necessary, then meet jointly with the family and school officials to develop a plan for improving school attendance and addressing family needs. Weekly counseling is offered for up to eight weeks.

Among the strategies used by counselors are signed agreements among parents, youth, and the school; telephone conferences; school resources such as study teams, tutoring, and parent-teacher conferences; and referral of families to housing, food stamp, day care, medical, substance abuse, and parent support programs. If parents do not cooperate with the counselor's efforts, or school attendance does not improve, a case may be referred to the Family Court. When the student's school attendance does improve and services to the family are underway, school personnel become responsible for monitoring attendance and communicating with parents, but counselors make phone or in-person contacts with the family and school at intervals of 30, 60, and 90 days, to reinforce positive efforts and encourage continued participation in referred services.

Counselors meet jointly with the family and school officials to develop a plan for improving school attendance and addressing family needs

The results

According to the County director of family counseling, among 290 children participating in the program in the 1994-95 school year, 83 percent had no recidivism. Similar results were obtained in 1995-96.

For more information

Sally Ann Williams, or Colleen Denelsbezk, Atlantic County Division of Intergenerational Services, 101 South Shore Road, Northfield, NJ 08225. (609) 654-5862.

Early prevention/intervention models

Rolling Hills Elementary School (Orlando, FL)

This is a school where 85 percent of students receive free or reduced-price school lunches—i.e., it has concentrated poverty. The school provides many supplemental academic and social services to address a number of risk-factors associated with dropping out of school. These services begin in preschool and kindergarten. They also include two “dropout prevention” classes for students who are below grade-level, after-school tutoring, counseling, and other social services. Three full-time therapists help students with social and emotional issues. Parents are kept informed of their child’s progress through regular reports. School personnel closely monitor students for their attendance and to identify other problems early on.

*Services begin
in preschool
and
kindergarten*

The results

School attendance has improved since the program was implemented, according to reviewers from the U.S. General Accounting Office.

For more information

U.S. General Accounting Office. (2002). School dropouts: Education could play a stronger role in identifying and disseminating promising prevention strategies. GAO-02-240. Washington, DC: Author.

Intensive supports for students and families

ACT Now Program (Pima County, AZ)

The Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) program is a cooperative effort between the county attorney's office, the schools, law enforcement, and community organizations/agencies that provide services to youth and families. The program includes three key elements:

- Enforcement of the mandatory attendance law by holding parents accountable.
- A diversion program that offers services to address the root causes of truancy.
- Sanctions for parents and youth for continued truancy or failure to complete the diversion program successfully.

Schools monitor attendance closely and, after the first unexcused absence, send a letter to parents advising them of possible prosecution. After the third unexcused absence, a truancy referral form and notarized affidavit certifying the unexcused absences are sent to a Case Management Team. Upon referral, parents are notified that they are subject to misdemeanor prosecution. Parents can accept a diversion program as an alternative. If they do, they are referred to community agencies that provide counseling, classes in parenting skills, and support groups for youth and parents. Successful completion of the diversion contract nullifies the prosecution order.

The results

Between the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years, there was a 64-percent decrease in truancy in the largest schools, and a 4-percent reduction in the smallest schools. In 1997-98, only 8 percent of referred youth were recidivists (i.e., repeat truants). Moreover, in the two largest school districts, the cumulative number of truancies and dropouts decreased, and the greatest decrease in dropouts was correlated with the largest decrease in truancy rates.

For more information

Baker, M. L., Sigmon, J. N., and Nugent, M. E. (2001). Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin, NCJ 188947. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

There was a 64-percent reduction in truancy in the largest schools, and a 4-percent reduction in the smallest schools

Intensive supports for students and families

At School, On Time, Ready to Work (Neosho County, KS)

Developed by workers from the Kansas child welfare department, along with court and school officials, this program was designed to improve students' school attendance, strengthen families, and prevent removal of children from their homes. Under Kansas law, children who are continually truant are often placed into state custody, an expensive and traumatic move. When schools refer a student, the county attorney invites the truant and his or her family to join the program. If they agree, they sign a 90-day contract for participation. During this time, the program provides intensive caseworker supervision of the child, including daily verification of school attendance, and several meetings per week with the child during the first 30 days. The caseworker acts as liaison among the child welfare department, the county attorney, the school, and the family.

The program also supports a family therapist who provides group treatment, and refers children to individual therapy if necessary. Parents are required to attend classes that teach effective parenting techniques and emphasize the importance of their child's education.

The results

Nine families and 12 middle-school children participated during the 1994-95 school year. Only one child was the subject of a court petition during that period. Families who participated in the program reported that they improved their communication and were more prepared to deal with children's behavior. The cost of serving the nine families was \$3,000—equivalent to the cost of 90 days' of state custody for one child.

For more information

Sheryl Beagley, Neosho County Attorney's Office, Judicial Center, P.O. Box 370, 102 South Lincoln, Chanute, KS 66720. (316) 431-5750.

The cost of serving nine families was equivalent to the cost of 90 days' of state custody for one child

Intensive supports for students and families

Burlington (VT) Truancy Project

The school district initiated the Burlington Truancy Project in the 1999-00 school year, based on a model developed earlier in Rutland, VT. The program requires parents to notify the school of a child's absences. In turn, the district alerts parents by phone or letter when their student misses 5, 10, and 15 days of school, respectively. Support services are provided if these are indicated by an assessment. After fifteen absences, parents are invited to a school-sponsored conference. If parents miss the meeting without cause, or their child misses 20 or more days of schools, their names are forwarded to the State's Attorney. A fine may be imposed, or the child can be placed in state custody. Two social workers are assigned to the schools, to address truancy issues specifically. The program has been successful in getting all nine schools in the district to participate, and in developing a consistent relationship with the Family Court.

The results

The program has seen improvements in school attendance by the second year of its operation. There were 55 percent fewer students missing 5-9 days of school, 69 percent fewer students missing 10-14 days, and 73 percent fewer students missing 15 or more days.

For more information

Betsy Liley, Burlington School District, 150 Colchester Avenue,
Burlington, VT 05401.

Intensive supports for students and families

Quantum Leap (Bennington, VT)

Quantum Leap is a mediation program aimed at reducing truancy and dropout rates and increasing the use of alternatives to suspension and expulsion. The program was piloted in 1999 by faculty at Bennington College working with schools in the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union. It works with elementary, middle, and secondary school children. Quantum Leap provides individualized educational and family-needs assessment and evaluation to determine why a student is truant. A variety of strategies are used following this assessment. For example, truants are introduced to mediation strategies and problem-solving techniques. In addition, the program provides mentoring, teaches anger management techniques, and provides referral and follow-up services with the community, schools, and parents when appropriate.

The results

The program has reduced truancy and dropout rates and increased alternatives to suspension and expulsion. The program has an 80-percent success rate at keeping truants in school or returning dropouts to school.

For more information

Dr. Susan Sgorbati, Bennington College, Bennington, VT 05201, (802) 440-4471.

The program provides mentoring, teaches anger-management techniques, and provides referral and follow-up services with the community, schools, and parents when appropriate

Intensive supports for students and families

TABS (Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression) (Milwaukee, WI, and elsewhere)

TABS was established in Milwaukee in 1993, as a collaborative effort of the county sheriff's office, the police department, public schools, and the Girls' and Boys' Club. Young people who are out in the community during school hours without a valid excuse are brought by law enforcement officers to a local Girls' and Boys' Club. While there, staff talk with the truant student, contact parents, and complete paperwork. With the parents and the student, a school counselor develops a contract with the student to attend school and, if necessary, the family is given a referral to community services.

For repeat truants, police may issue citations to parents and refer students to counseling and court diversion programs.

The results

In a recent sample of students who went through the TABS program, 73 percent returned to school the next day, 66 percent remained in school 15 days later, and 64 percent were in school 30 days later. As of the 1993-94 school year, daytime burglary rates declined by 33 percent, and daytime rates of aggravated battery decreased by 29 percent.

For more information

The Center for Learning Excellence at The Ohio State University
<http://cle.osu.edu/interactive/tabs.html>

Along with improved attendance, daytime burglary rates declined by 33 percent, and daytime rates of aggravated battery decreased by 29 percent

Intensive supports for students and families

THRIVE (Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education) (Oklahoma County, OK, and elsewhere)

Modeled after the TABS program (p. 33), THRIVE is a consortium of law enforcement, social service programs, and community agencies. It aims to fill gaps in services to youth by dealing with community problems that require a coordinated strategy.

Oklahoma has state anti-truancy legislation, which allows parents to be charged with a misdemeanor if their children miss more than ten consecutive days of school without valid excuses. The law also allows law enforcement personnel to act as attendance officers, detain truants, and transport them to a safe location after consultation with the school district.

After a truant student is interviewed, parents are contacted and community referrals and follow-up services are provided. In most cases, children are released to parents within an hour. If parents are unavailable, juvenile community service programs supervise the student. Subsequently, follow-up checks on the student's attendance are made. Serving 800-900 students per year, estimated costs are about \$90 per student.

The results

At the end of the 1996-97 school year, 874 young people were involved with the THRIVE centers. More than 4,470 youngsters have been served since 1989. 15 percent of the students were suspended from the school at the time of detention; seven percent were on probation or parole at the time of their intake, and 22 percent were not enrolled in school.

During the operation of the program, the Oklahoma City schools reported a 1.3-percent reduction in dropout rates and a 1.7-percent increase in daily attendance. Law enforcement officials noted a 30-percent reduction in daytime burglaries since the inception of the THRIVE program. More than three-quarters of truants are released to their parents.

For more information

Pam Harrell, Executive Director, P.O. Box 18674, Oklahoma City, OK 73154.
(405) 841-0675.

Serving 800-900 students per year, estimated costs are about \$90 per student

Intensive supports for students and families

Note: There are numerous exemplary programs that follow the “intensive supports” model. For more information see, for example:

Truancy Intervention Program (TIP). Ramsey County (MN) Truancy and Curfew Violation Center. Sgt. John Harrington, St. Paul Police Department, 100 East 11th Street, St. Paul, MN 55101. (612) 292-3612.

Truancy Reduction Program (TRP). Steve Hageman, Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office, 1300 17th Street—City Centre, Bakersfield, CA 93301-4533. (805) 636-4757.

Operation SAVE KIDS. Terry Bays Smith, City of Peoria, Assistant City Attorney, 8401 West Monroe Street, Peoria, AZ 85345. (602) 412-7347.

Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program.
www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject.

Alternative educational settings

Partnership at Las Vegas (PAL) Program
(Las Vegas, NV)

A school-within-a-school model, PAL offers a school-to-careers curriculum. By linking academic coursework with career-related courses and workplace experience, PAL seeks to increase students' motivation to stay in school, and their awareness of post-high school opportunities. Six teachers and about 150 at-risk eleventh and twelfth graders participate in the program. Students attend classes four days a week and a non-paid work internship the other day. The curriculum emphasizes business skills, and features frequent monitoring and evaluation of students' progress.

Students attend classes four days a week and a non-paid work internship the other day

The results

The program reports improved attendance and fewer discipline problems among PAL students, in comparison with non-PAL participants. The program also reports a dropout rate of around two percent for PAL students, in contrast to a rate of 13.5 percent for non-PAL students.

For more information

U.S. General Accounting Office. (2002). School dropouts: Education could play a stronger role in identifying and disseminating promising prevention strategies. GAO-02-240. Washington, DC: Author.

Alternative educational settings

Seahawks Academy (Seattle, WA)

A small (about 110 students) alternative school for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders, the academy is a partnership among the Seattle Public Schools, Communities in Schools, the Seattle Seahawks football team, and other corporate partners. Features of the school are smaller classes, tutors, mentors, free health care, and social services. Academy students must wear uniforms and abide by strict behavior contracts signed by parents and the student. Attendance, academic achievement, and appropriate behavior are emphasized.

The results

Academy students had improved test scores, fewer discipline problems, and no suspensions or expulsions for the past two school years, compared with rates at other schools in the district of around seven percent for suspensions, and 0.5 percent for expulsions.

For more information

U.S. General Accounting Office. (2002). School dropouts: Education could play a stronger role in identifying and disseminating promising prevention strategies. GAO-02-240. Washington, DC: Author.

Academy students had improved test scores, fewer discipline problems, and no suspensions or expulsions for the past two school years

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL TRUANCY AND DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

According to professionals and researchers in the field, there are a number of qualities that are common to successful truancy and dropout prevention programs. The most important of these appears to be well-trained teachers who have the time to give individualized attention and instruction. While staff successfully communicate caring and support, there are also clear rules governing students' behavior and consistent consequences for breaking the rules.

In general, successful programs are those that integrate academics with vocational training, have a flexible schedule (such as an extended or abbreviated school day, a weekend schedule, and/or a summer program), create and implement individualized education plans for each student, and offer support around issues both in and out of school through counseling and/or mentoring. Schools provide an environment that is free of disruption and violence, and one where cooperation is emphasized.

The following is a summary of additional program components that have been shown to be effective in preventing truancy and dropout:

- parent/guardian involvement
- meaningful sanctions or consequences for truancy, including court action if necessary
- meaningful incentives for school attendance
- small class sizes and/or tutoring help
- employment skills training
- counseling services
- education plans that provide alternative ways to earn credits needed to earn a high school diploma
- mentors
- activities that enhance self-esteem
- payment for school attendance or program participation
- social and life skills training

Finally, experienced consultants in this area reminds us that “one of the most important elements of any effective prevention effort is the existence of a collaborative partnership of public agencies, community organizations, and concerned individuals that interact with and provide services to truant youth and their families” (Baker, et al., 2001, p. 7).

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

*What Works:
Helping Youth
Stay in School*

Retention in grade

There is much evidence that being retained in grade is strongly linked with subsequent academic difficulty, including truancy and dropping out of school (GAO, 2002; National Research Council, 2000).

Tracking

Although students at risk for truancy and dropout are often doing poorly academically, placing them in “dead-end” curricular programs (i.e., courses that do not prepare them for high-level academic work) does them a disservice.

Out-of-school suspension

Sanctions for non-attendance, in order to be effective, must be appropriate. Clearly, excluding from school the very students who need most to be engaged with school is a bad idea.

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