

## MODULE 09: STRATEGIES FOR TRUANCY PREVENTION



Programs and activities designed to improve the overall school environment have proven to be effective in truancy prevention. Children are less likely to avoid school if they feel safe, comfortable, cared for, and engaged in productive and rewarding activities. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories (Railsback, 2004) suggests several programs and practices for improving the school environment. They include:

- Personalized learning
- Learning communities within schools (e.g., learning academies focused on particular topics; house plans; or magnet schools)
- Peer mentoring
- Student advisory programs

Interventions targeted at improving educational effectiveness in the classroom Beyond improving the school environment, there are practices specifically designed to prevent truancy. These practices address truancy at the universal, selective, and indicated levels of the student population, which can be seen using the Institute of Medicine framework (Railsback, 2004).



## **LESSON 01: UNIVERSAL PREVENTION – UNIVERSAL PREVENTION EFFORTS ARE FOR ALL STUDENTS.**

Attendance policies typically come from school and district regulations concerning student attendance requirements, excused and unexcused absences, and consequences for truancy. A review of the research reveals that the most effective attendance policies promote attendance rather than punish absences (primarily through expulsion). Students, parents, and staff must understand these policies, especially between excused absences and truancy (Railsback, 2004).

Some programs also promote a pro-attendance culture by rewarding students for consistent attendance and holding events and campaigns that reinforce its importance. Some of these efforts also reach out to parents and the community through public education campaigns and events to create pro attendance cultures in the family and community that reinforce the school efforts.

### **1. Selective Prevention**

Programs that include targeted support for students who are at risk of becoming chronic truants. Particular prevention efforts are for some students at elevated risk. Early intervention programs identify students who have started skipping school and working with these children and their families before becoming habitual truants. For example, early intervention programs would involve calling families after an unexplained absence, discussing the importance of consistent attendance at school, and helping them solve problems that might affect their child's presence in school (e.g., transportation issues).

Alternatives to adjudication for truancy allow students who are truant to avoid formal adjudication. Such options include community truancy boards that negotiate contracts between schools and absent students (and their families).



These contracts may consist of restrictions on student behavior (such as conning the student to the campus during lunch hours) and participation by the student and the family in specialized services when appropriate.

## **2. Indicated Prevention**

Programs that address students who exhibit persistent challenges and are not responsive to interventions at the universal or selective levels. Indicated prevention efforts are for a few students.

Court-based truancy reduction programs are established in juvenile or family courts but attempt to provide services to truants and their families as an alternative to adjudication (while acknowledging the possibility of adjudication as motivation to become involved with these services). Alternative education programs are designed especially for students whose truancy results from a divergence between the school's educational practices and students' learning styles. These might include occupational or career educational programs or advanced courses at local community colleges, depending on student interest and ability (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2012).

A yearly student survey is an excellent tool for school campuses to understand their current issues at the beginning of the school year. In addition, a survey can help identify students' needs and concerns and help reduce the number of truants students.



## LESSON 02: HOW TEACHERS CAN HELP

It is not unusual for teachers to feel under pressure to educate their students but to think that their hands are tied. Many teachers feel there is absolutely nothing they can do to influence their students to attend school every day. And often, many students have so many personal problems, dysfunctional homes, and psychological issues that this could be true. But for other students, it is the lack of belonging, importance, or worth in the classroom that could be causing an attendance issue.

Teachers have a more significant influence over student attendance than they even know. Some teachers have a substantial effect on individual students, and these are the students who show up for class. Brown University researchers found that students have 44% fewer unexcused absences in math class and 54% fewer in English with certain teachers (Whitney & Liu, 2017)

Teachers do not have the time to build relationships with every student in their class. If they found themselves in a parent-child attendance conflict during a scheduled parent conference, mediation will help resolve some issues and enhance their relationship. Teachers or staff at the school can be the liaison between parents and students by figuring out how to solve the problems at school. Listed below are some positive outcomes of teacher and family mediation.

- It can improve teacher/parent relationships.
- It can increase mutual understanding.
- It can improve personal understanding.
- It can promote trust.
- It can open the lines of communication.



Often, school personnel and themselves in the middle of the conflict between parent and student because they may not have the parental skills and knowledge to deal with their child's issue regarding school attendance adequately.

And it is not unusual to have some students who want to attend school regularly, but the parents constantly keep them out of school and bring them to school late because of their own needs. Mediation can offer parents and students an opportunity to work out their differences with the teacher or staff by providing guidance and ensuring that all voices are heard.

Below is a basic mediation model to use if teachers and the team and themselves in the middle of a conflict regarding the parent keeping kids out of school for reasons not excused or students finding excuses to stay at home. Teachers do not necessarily have to use the model formally or even indicate what they are mediating but keep the model in mind when working with a conflicting parent and student.

- Clarify the problem.
- Restate the issue, assuring that all parties understand.
- Brainstorm alternative solutions.
- Streamline the solutions.
- Agree and attempt to resolve the problem.

Teachers should be willing to be good listeners, stay calm, and provide good judgment to build a good relationship with parents and students. This will increase students' chances of attending class regularly.

## WORKBOOK SECTION

1. Explain what programs and activities designed for in school.

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2. What are the suggested programs and practices for improving the school environment?

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3. What is the impact of early intervention programs?

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4. What are the positive outcomes of teacher and family mediation?

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