

Executive Summary

Although the *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program (TPMP)* has consistently demonstrated positive results in the effort to combat truancy, absent from these evaluations has been an examination of the impact of the program on the academic performance and behavior of the children whose families participate in the program. To fill this void, the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and the Supreme Court of Ohio collaborated to commission an independent evaluation to ascertain answers to these questions.

Because changes in academic and social/emotional performance may not be completely demonstrated through quantitative measures within the specified timeframe, a qualitative approach to discern these nuances was warranted. For this phase of the project, teachers, administrators, and counselors in two counties (Portage, Stark) were solicited to participate in a focus group discussion of the impact of the *TPMP* on student participants, specifically with regard to their academic performance and social/emotional behavior.

One group in each school district was conducted by a trained facilitator, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and was audiotaped. Overall, 17 school personnel participated in the two group interviews. Eight participants were elementary school teachers, one was a middle school teacher, one was a guidance counselor, one was a principal, and six were community workers. Participants were compensated \$50 for their time and insights. Questions posed during the groups were:

- What changes in academic performance have you seen in students identified for the program? In what areas? Why do you think this is so?
- What changes in social/emotional behaviors have you seen in students identified for the program? How has this impacted your classroom?
- What other changes do you see in students identified for the program?
- How can the program better affect change in academic performance and/or social/emotional behaviors?
- Overall, what do you think of the *TPMP*? What about it do you like/dislike?

Overwhelmingly, the teachers stated the *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program* had a dramatic effect on the improved academic performance of the students whose families participated in the program. Many of the teachers remarked that simply having them in the classroom made the biggest difference in that they were in class doing the work and not having to make it up later and that there was no “catching up” as they were working at the same pace as their classmates.

The *TPMP* does not have as great an impact on behavior as academic performance largely because social/emotional issues are not a primary concern for those students identified for the program. The school personnel did identify some behavior changes in the parents—more comfortable talking to teachers, more willing to check on the status of their child---which was positive.

Unintentional consequences of the *TPMP* for students were enhanced self-confidence, improved organization skills, and thriving on the attention. In most instances, the students who were mediated were fulfilling their potential and becoming model students. The *TPMP* is having the unintended benefit of bridging some of the gaps between parents and school personnel.

School personnel value the time spent with parents, understanding some of the auxiliary issues going on in their families and reinforcing the message that their child's education is important. Seemingly, after mediation the parents understand the school cares about their child and they are willing to work with them to foster his/her education.

Overall, these school personnel were quite supportive and positive about the *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program*. They appreciated the opportunities it afforded in bridging some communication gaps with parents and feeling more connected with parents about the students they serve.

Luminesce Consulting
June 2005