

THE TRUANCY PREVENTION THROUGH MEDIATION PROGRAM IS CONTINUING TO DEMONSTRATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS AT IMPROVING ATTENDANCE IN OHIO'S SCHOOLS, KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE TWELVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The link between truancy and future delinquent behaviors, such as illegal substance use, burglary, vandalism, and dropping out has been well documented (Cooper, 2000; Gabb, 2000; Garry, 2000). In addition to the immediate and short-term resource and fiscal strains on the legal and education systems, truants' subsequent inability to secure satisfactory employment with satisfactory wages, and the possibility of needing state assistance, make truancy an expense and a loss of tax revenue in the future as well. The *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program*, however, has consistently demonstrated positive results in the effort to combat truancy among elementary, middle, and high school age students, thereby making it a wise investment in Ohio's future.

The Program

The *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program* is unique in that it requires families, schools, juvenile courts, and social service agencies to work collaboratively to address the issue of chronic absenteeism and truancy. At participating schools, students with 3 to 5 unexcused absences are targeted for the program. Once a student has been identified, the school contacts the parent/legal guardian via letter to appear at a scheduled mediation. A parent/legal guardian, trained mediator, school representative, and in some cases, the student, participate in the mediation. At this meeting, the mediator serves as a neutral third party helping to facilitate a discussion of the issues surrounding the student's unexcused absences, and helps the family, school representative, and student if present, to develop a mutually agreeable resolution to the problems. Should the student incur subsequent absences after the mediation, the parents are referred to juvenile court and warned the child may be charged as an unruly or delinquent child, and the parents charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor and/or violation of the state revised code regarding compulsory education.

The Evaluation Method

In an effort to streamline the evaluative approach for schools in counties that had been participating in the *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program* for several years, a brief form was developed for use during the 2003-2004 school year. This form addressed basic demographic information about the student, number of absences and tardies, disposition, and agreement status. An additional brief form was also developed this year which mediators completed regarding the reasons for the absences, and the type of referral that was made by the mediator. These forms were to be completed for each scheduled mediation and submitted to the evaluator on a monthly basis.

Results

The following is extracted from Luminesce Consulting's report *Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program Evaluation Report 2003-2004 School Year*

During the 2003-2004 school year, the *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program* was utilized in nineteen counties and over 400 elementary, middle, and high schools. In total, over 3,000 mediations were conducted this school year. **In all but one of the counties submitting post-mediation data, statistically significant reductions in the number of absences or tardies was demonstrated for those students/families that participated in the program.**

Individual County Results

The following table represents the program impact on absences and tardies for each county participating in the *Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program*. The **Significantly Different** column indicates whether the differences in the average number of pre-mediation absences/tardies and average number of post-mediation absences/tardies were statistically significantly different.

	Average Absences			Average Tardies		
	Pre	Post	Sig Different	Pre	Post	Sig Different
Butler	16.07			7.95		
Clark	14.06	4.23	yes	9.66	4.08	yes
Cuyahoga	18.24	11.04	yes	14.57	6.18	yes
Delaware	14.45	3.43	yes	9.36	2.36	yes
Fayette	14.41	1.80	yes	3.95	1.20	yes
Franklin	18.29	11.68	yes			
Greene	17.32	10.08	yes	6.15	5.20	no
Hamilton	17.00			17.15		
Holmes	17.40			6.00		
Lucas	14.60	10.37	no	6.94	6.23	no
Morrow	15.80	1.98	yes	4.91	1.00	yes
Portage	18.30	8.64	yes	9.63	5.48	yes
Preble	11.16	2.54	yes	5.16	3.13	yes
Putnam	13.00			7.23		
Ross	14.03	3.03	yes	13.77	.75	yes
Sandusky	14.62	.43	yes	7.80	1.20	yes
Stark	20.45	8.25	yes	11.62	5.25	yes
Wayne	23.19			5.36		
Wood	20.58	5.17	yes	14.50	1.60	yes

For those counties in which post information is missing, this indicates county coordinators were unable to submit post-mediation data for their county. In discussing some of the reasons for this inability, most county coordinators stated a change in personnel severely hampered their ability to compile post mediation absence information. More specifically, the loss of project coordinators at schools was extremely detrimental to compiling the necessary statistics.

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