EVIDENCE-BASED NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA TRUANCY AND ABSENTEEISM PROGRAMS

2015 to 2016

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Executive Summary

There are a wide variety of programs that address truancy and absenteeism across the state of Nebraska. This report is the first opportunity that we have had to quantify whether or not truancy interventions effectively encourage youth to improve school attendance. In the beginning of this report, we present three example program models that differ in the approach and interventions for addressing absenteeism. In the second part of this report, we present data on the youth served and the effectiveness of the interventions.

The Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program fund specifically outlines funding particular activities, including truancy prevention and intervention programs, and setting state policy. The philosophy of the fund is that youth who are having problems attending school regularly are best served in our communities, not through the court system. To measure effectiveness, data were collected using a pre-and-post design. That is, programs entered youth absences prior to enrolling in the truancy program and then after the youth enrolled. The Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) then calculated the change in attendance for these two time periods.

In FY 2015/2016, a total of twenty-nine programs addressing absenteeism were funded through Community-based Aid. Approximately 1,237 youth participated in these programs and remained out of the juvenile justice system, for at least a short period of time. Programs and schools worked diligently to gather the data required to calculate whether youth improved attendance. Overall, 21 programs were able to input sufficient data. Of those, 57% (12 of the 21 programs) showed a statistically significant ($p < .05$) improvement in absenteeism, and an additional seven showed measurable improvement in attendance while they were working with the youth. Furthermore, with the exception of absences for religious reasons—all absence types improved after a youth enrolled in a program, whether the youth was ill, truant, excused, or parent acknowledged. We then examined whether age, gender, race or other factors impacted change in attendance. Gender was the only youth demographic that affected attendance improvement. Although both males and females had improved attendance overall, females demonstrated a greater reduction in absences than males.

Although there were some challenges in this first year in gathering data for various reasons (e.g., not having access to data, not knowing what needed to be entered), programs have expressed that data collection will improve in the upcoming years as they learn the system. Although this initial report represents only two points in time, we hope to eventually capture youth attendance after they complete the program, in order to determine long-term effectiveness. We also plan to measure program impact on other long-term goals including graduation and future delinquency. JJI will continue to improve JCMS to capture informative data including measuring specific reasons for absences and specific interventions.

Introduction

A growing body of research illustrates that missing an excessive number of school days, regardless of reason, can place a child at risk of falling behind academically and may cause the child to become discouraged about school. As a risk factor, truancy and absenteeism have been associated with negative outcomes, including poor academic performance, substance abuse, gang activity, sexual promiscuity, involvement in criminal activities, and school dropout (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001; Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry, 1995; Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold & Cauffman, 2014; Sutphen, Ford & Flaherty, 2010).

In response to research linking negative outcomes to irregular school attendance, many states like Nebraska passed more stringent truancy laws to discourage excessive absenteeism. According to statute, schools "may report to the county attorney" when the school's efforts have not been successful, resulting in twenty or more absences (Neb. Rev Stat. § 79-209). Statute requires the schools to form collaborative plans to "reduce barriers to improve regular attendance" prior to referring a case to the county attorney. These include:

> (a) Verbal or written communication by school officials with the person or persons who have legal or actual charge or control of any child; and
> (b) One or more meetings between, at a minimum, a school attendance officer, a school social worker, or a school administrator or his or her designee, the person who has legal or actual charge or control of the child, and the child, when appropriate, to attempt to address the barriers to attendance. The result of the meeting or meetings shall be to develop a collaborative plan to reduce barriers identified to improve regular attendance. The plan shall consider, but not be limited to:
>
> (i) Illness related to physical or behavioral health of the child;
> (ii) Educational counseling;
> (iii) Educational evaluation;
> (iv) Referral to community agencies for economic resources;
> (v) Family or individual counseling; and
> (vi) Assisting the family in working with other community services. (Neb. Rev. Stat §79-209(a) and (b)).

Nebraska's Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program

Recognizing that unnecessary formal involvement in the juvenile justice system may be contrary to the best interests and well-being of juveniles, the state of Nebraska established a fund entitled the Nebraska's Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program (CBA) Fund, to support local programs and services for juveniles (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2404.02). The purpose of the Community-based Aid Fund is to assist counties with developing intervention and prevention activities "designed to serve juveniles and deter involvement in the formal juvenile justice system" (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2404.02(b)). This fund encourages the provision of appropriate preventive, diversionary, alternatives for juveniles, as well as better coordination of the juvenile services system. The statue specifically outlines funding particular activities, including truancy prevention and intervention programs. Specifically, lawmakers intended the CBA funding to be utilized for:

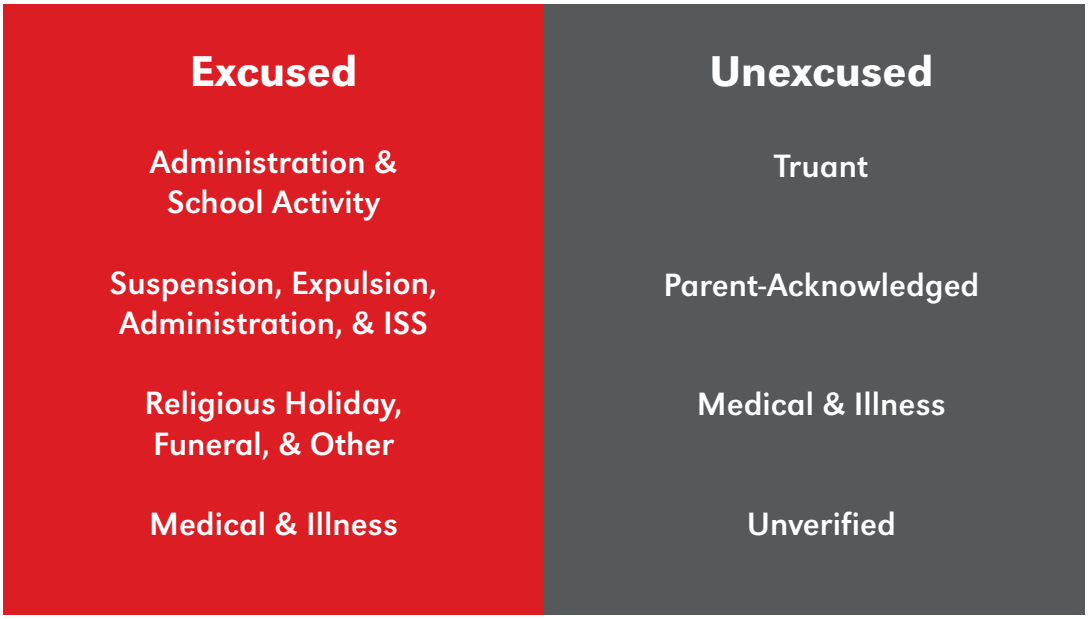
> "programs for local planning and service coordination; screening, assessment, and evaluation; diversion; alternatives to detention; family support services; treatment services; truancy prevention and intervention programs; pilot projects approved by the commission; payment of transportation costs to and from placements, evaluations, or services; personnel when the personnel are aligned with evidence-based treatment principles, programs, or practices; contracting with other state agencies or private organizations that provide evidence based treatment or programs' preexisting programs that are aligned with evidence-based practices or best practices; and other services that will positively impact juveniles and families in the juvenile justice system." (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2404.02(b)).

Reporting Data in JCMS

Programs funded through CBA, and more specifically, truancy and absenteeism programs are statutorily required to report data to the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (Nebraska Crime Commission or NCC) to receive the CBA funds. This requirement is fulfilled when programs enter youth information and attendance records into the Juvenile Case Management System (JCMS), which is a secure, web-based application. JCMS assists programs with meeting their statutory obligation to report, but it also established statewide definitions across programs. This provides for consistent measures across truancy programs, regardless of where they are located across Nebraska.

In order to establish consistent definitions across key data elements, like types of absences, the Juvenile Justice Institute held several webinars and in-person training sessions and gathered absenteeism codes from several school districts in Nebraska—both rural and urban. With these absentee codes, JJI created eight categories; four excused: (1) administrative/school activity, (2) suspension, (3) religious/funeral, and (4) medical/illness; and four unexcused: (5) truant, (6) parent acknowledged, (7) medical/illness, and (8) unverified (Figure 1). There are also field options to enter excused and unexcused tardiness. Programs were instructed and trained to enter absences in to JCMS according to how the school counted the absence. For instance, if the school counted the absence as excused, the program should document the absence under the most relevant excused absence category (i.e., Administration, School Activity; Suspension, Expulsion Administration, ISS; Religious Holiday, Funeral, Other; and Medical, Illness).

Figure 1. Absence Types in JCMS



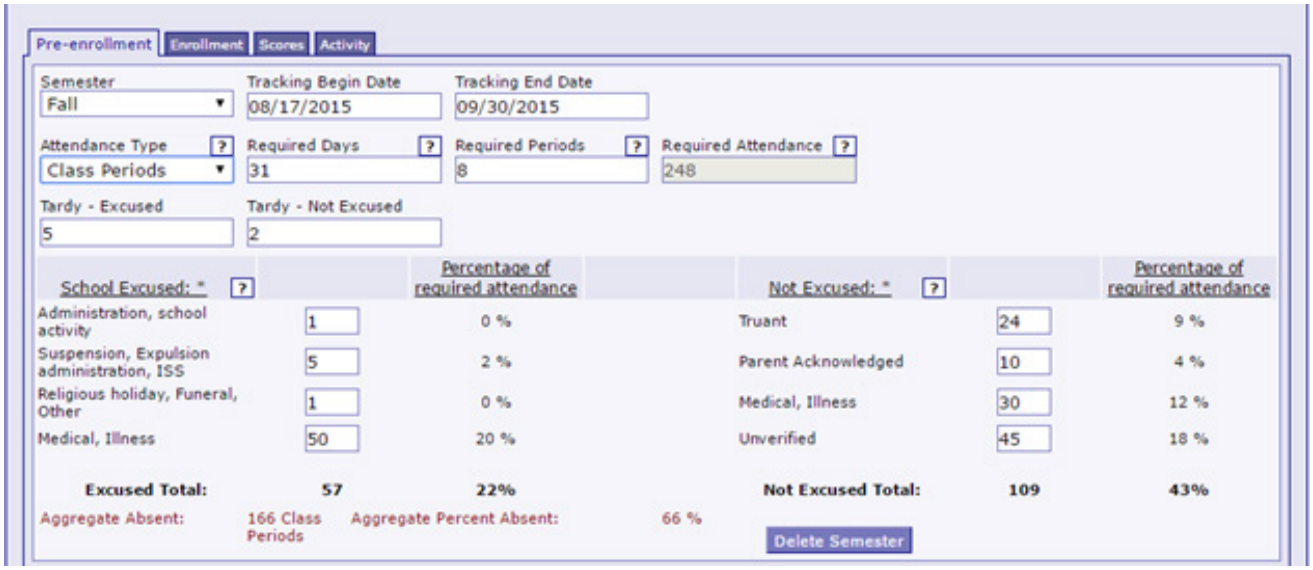
To measure whether their efforts have an impact, programs entered absence information prior to the youth's enrollment in the program – to document the pattern of absenteeism before the intervention. Based on the enrollment or case date, programs also entered absence information after the program's intervention. Figure 2 provides a snapshot of the pre-enrollment attendance fields within the JCMS screen.

It should be noted, however, that several programs have a "monitor only" option whereby a student does not officially "enroll" in the program but rather just receives a letter or warning from the county attorney or school official. In these types of cases, programs were asked to document pre-enrollment absences as prior to the case date (i.e., the date the family received the letter or warning) and enrollment absences after this date.

One noted benefit of JCMS is that programs are able to access youth outcomes instantly, once programs have entered both the required attendance for a given time period and the number of absences. Within each attendance time period, the following were required:

- the date range for the tracking period (e.g., from the first day of school until the day before enrollment);
- the attendance type for that school (days, half days, periods, or minutes);
- the number of required school days in that time period;
- if the school measures attendance in periods, the number of periods should be entered; if the school measures attendance in minutes, then the number of minutes in each period would also be entered; and
- the number of absences within the metric measured by that school (i.e., days, half days, periods, or minutes).

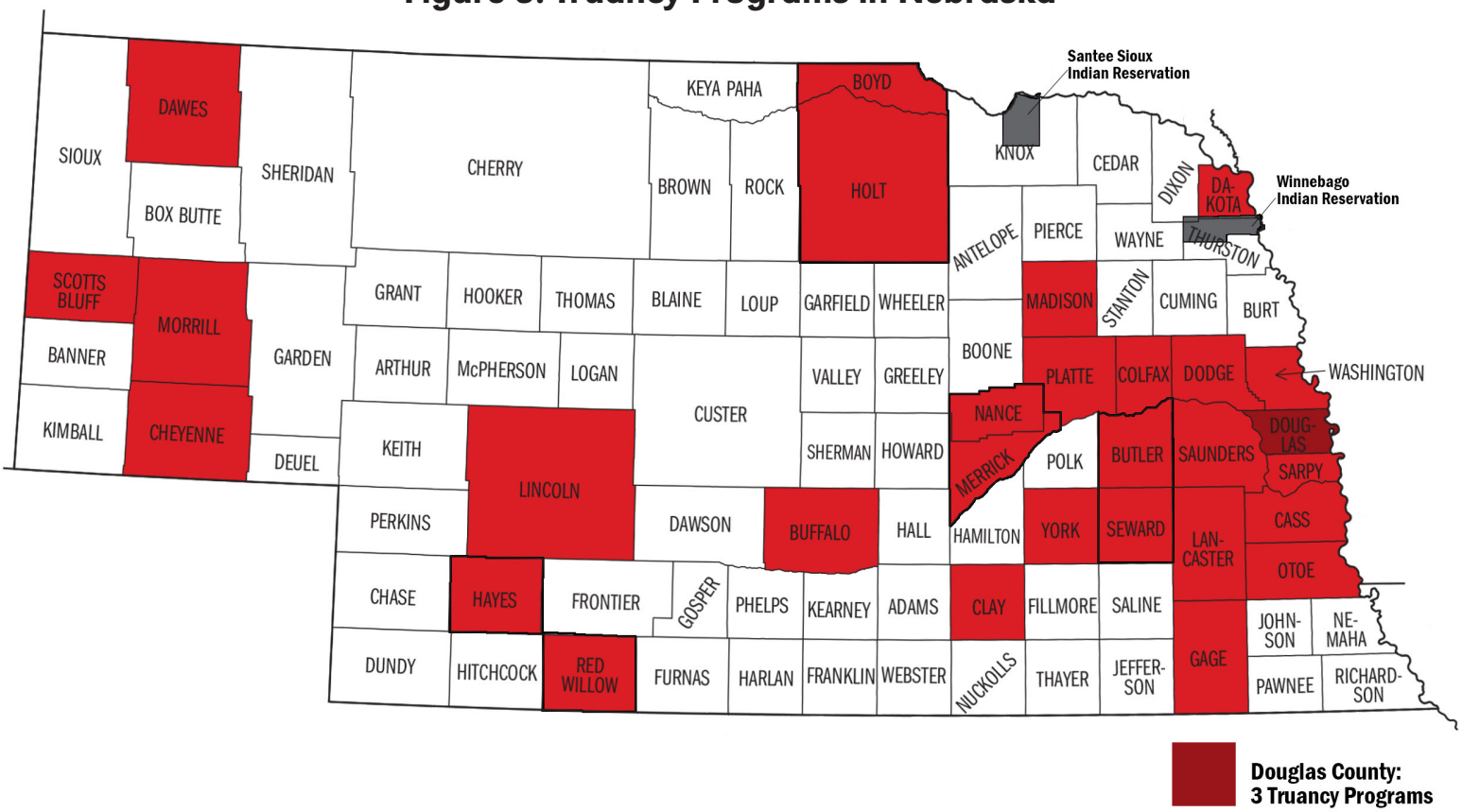
Figure 2. Pre-enrollment Example in the Juvenile Case Management System



If entered correctly, the required attendance automatically populates in the metric the school uses to measure attendance. As illustrated with the example above, the student was absent 66% of the time he was required to be in school. Once absences are entered, the percentage of required attendance the student was absent automatically populates within each category, by excused and unexcused absences, and an aggregate total. As such, programs may compare absences from pre-enrollment to enrollment or across tracking periods (e.g., fall to spring) to track students' progress.

Nebraska Programs Addressing Truancy and Absenteeism

Figure 3. Truancy Programs in Nebraska



During FY 2015/2016, approximately 29 programs (across 31 counties and tribes) that focused on issues related to truancy and absenteeism were funded through CBA. Some of these programs only work with truancy and absenteeism, while others are juvenile diversion programs that take referrals for truancy cases. Although we recognize that programs across the state address both truancy as well as other types of absenteeism (e.g., medical reasons, excused, etc.), for consistency within this report, we refer to all programs as "truancy programs."

The underlying reasons for absenteeism vary widely, consequently the most efficacious approach to absenteeism must be individualized to the youth. This is not to say the broad approaches cannot be tried first. For instance, schools generally send out a letter advising the youth and parents of the mandatory attendance law and the student's number of absences. For many students and parents, attendance is required and this letter may be enough to change the pattern of absences. If the letter does not improve absenteeism, programs then initiate some type of intervention. In our work across the state of Nebraska, we have found that programs use a wide range of approaches designed to increase school attendance. Below we have highlighted three of these programs.

Interview with Three Nebraska Programs

Colfax County Truancy Program

"Urban Issues in Small Town Nebraska"

Although it was classified as a truancy program, it was abundantly clear from our interviews that the Colfax County School attendance officer's duties extend far beyond school attendance. In the 2016/2017 calendar school year alone, the attendance officer has addressed safety, gang issues, domestic violence, student basic needs, and diverse cultural situations. Many of the issues faced in this small town of Schuyler are situations more commonly associated with our larger, metro areas.
The environment and industry within a region significantly impacts the educational system. A prime example of this is Colfax County. According to the 2000 census there were 10,441 people, 3,682 households, and 2,592 families residing in Colfax County. A little over one-third of the households had children under the age of 18 living at home. By 2010, the county had only 74 new residents, but experienced a 1,171.43% increase in minority population (http://censusviewer.com/county/NE/Colfax). The population has changed even more dramatically since 2010, with the growth of the meat packing industry in Schuyler.

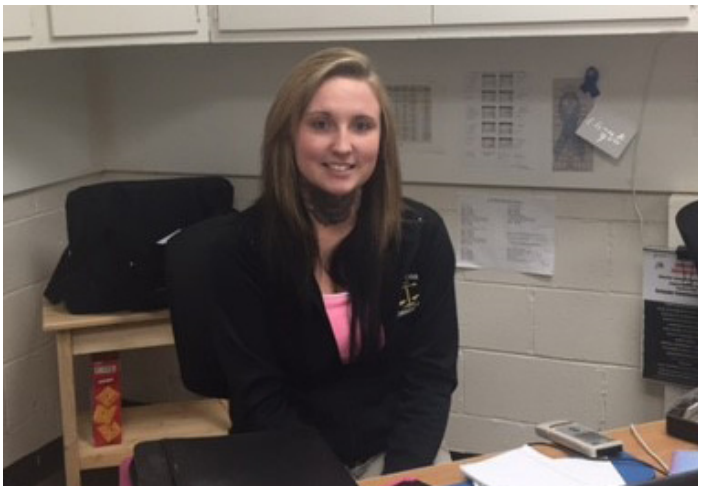
The influx of immigrants has had a seismic impact on the educational system in Schuyler, Nebraska. Notably, the school is past capacity, with 725 students in a school built to accommodate 600. The racial/ethnic composition of rural Nebraska is predominately a White. According to data from Schuyler High School, White youth make up only 13% of the 725 students in Schuyler High School. The majority of students (80%) are Hispanic and roughly 15% are from African countries, representing mostly Sudanese and Somalian cultures.

The meat packing industry is the predominant employer in this rural area of Nebraska. Cargill's largest operation in the United States is located in Schuyler, Nebraska, and locals refer to it as "the pack." The size of the company demands that workers be transported from elsewhere and many immigrants are willing to do the challenging physical labor of the meat packing plants. Consequently, the demographic breakdown of the town has changed significantly in the past decade.

The cultural influences dramatically impact the work of the attendance officer. For example, one individual missed 19 days for religious observances. With the large Muslim population in Schuyler, schools now dismiss at 1:30 p.m. every Friday to accommodate Muslim prayer time.

When the Truancy Program developed in 2014, the truancy officer was housed in the Colfax County Attorney's Office. In 2016, Ms. Pavel's title changed to School Resource Officer to reflect her changing duties. Her office is now located in a more private area in Schuyler High School where students can stop in to request help. When she was located in the county attorney's office, Ms. Pavel had less influence on the students, and was not able to be as strong of a resource to the school. By moving her office to Schuyler High School, she has been able to "be accessible to the kids and to form a better working relationship with the school." Unlike some other truancy programs, Ms. Pavel does not provide incentives, nor does she wake kids up and transport them to school. The program's model involves meeting students' basic needs for safety, hygiene, and relationships.

Figure 4. Sidnee Pavel, Colfax County



Although Ms. Pavel is sometimes called into Court, she starts her day by checking student attendance in Infinite Campus (a software used in schools for recording attendance). Using this system, she is able to quickly identify students that are not in school and not excused from school. Approximately every two weeks, she assists the school with drafting letters, notifying parents and guardians of the mandatory attendance laws in the U.S., and monitoring the number of absences. She often translates those letters into multiple languages including Spanish, Arabic, and languages native to African refugees (i.e., from Somalia and Sudan). Next, she has a meeting with the family to help identify the root of the issue and to brainstorm solutions.

Sometimes youth are afraid to come to school because of safety issues. Ms. Pavel routinely works on issues of safety and reviews school video tape of the school's perimeter. Some of the incidents that Ms. Pavel described involved groups of youth singling out a student; as well as individual students bullying multiple students. Gangs are a legitimate issue in the school, and Ms. Pavel identified four predominant gangs that operate in the school. At times, her involvement in school situations has caused concern for her own safety.

Figure 5. iPhone Stun Gun online $27.00

Ms. Pavel has worked with students who have been sexually assaulted, physically abused, and bullied. Students are clearly comfortable communicating about issues –and sometimes reach her on weekends and evenings to update her about an impending issue. Because of the trust she has developed, she often has a sense of what is going on in teen culture. For instance, she recently learned of Tasers that look exactly like an iPhone being purchased and sold on school grounds (Figure 5).

Sometimes, students fail to attend school because they do not have their basic needs met, like sleep and adequate clothing. When this is the situation, Ms. Pavel works with the family to secure clothing, shelter and food. She has a cabinet full of hygienic items and often reaches out to the faculty to ensure youth have adequate clothing for the winter months.

In one situation, Ms. Pavel was aware that a senior who was sleeping through his first few classes of the day was because he worked a 3rd shift at "the pack" in order to support his family. When Ms. Pavel learned of this, she was able to advocate for some schedule changes that allowed the student to get some sleep after his shift, while still obtaining the credits he needed to graduate.

Another hygiene and cultural issue that Ms. Pavel has encountered involves Muslim young women, who are often required to stay home during their menstrual cycle. Sometimes the young women attend school but do not use feminine hygiene products, because it is not part of their cultural habit.

Gender and cultural issues are another area of concern. In traditional Muslim culture, women are not allowed to communicate or make eye contact with men outside their family. Ms. Pavel relayed multiple situations where this comes into conflict with school policies and practices. For example, Muslim girls often will not communicate or make eye contact with a male teacher, which can impede learning. In another situation, two young female students were involved in a physical altercation and a male teacher separated them. This became a cultural situation when the father of the Muslim girl came to school upset that his daughter had been touched by a male teacher. When a conference is necessary due to unexcused and/or excessive absence from school, generally the father is the member that represents the family outside the home. However, in some conferences, the father would not speak to Ms. Pavel, because she is a single female, and speaking to a woman is viewed as inappropriate. Clearly this makes it difficult for her to discuss the attendance problem that the child is having.

Every year brings new efforts to working with the large immigrant and refugee populations. In fall 2016, Ms. Pavel, developed a proactive letter about mandatory school attendance to send out to parents from other cultures.

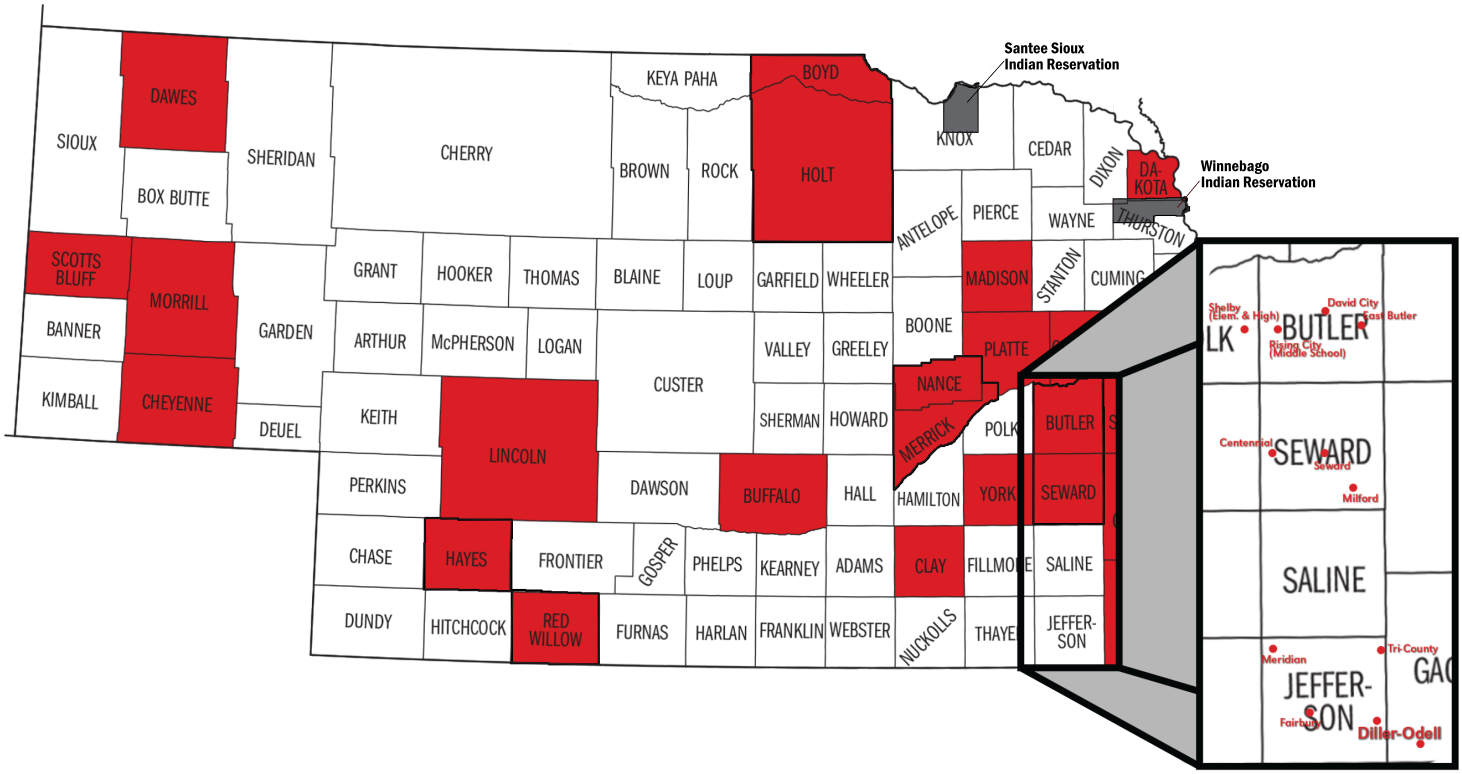
Ms. Pavel works to improve attendance by meeting students' basic needs, working closely with school officials and advocating for youth whenever possible. Often she serves as a cultural liaison across the 15 different cultures and 11 different languages spoken in Schuyler High School. She works passionately to make sure "that no kid is going to slip through the cracks" in our system.

Seward, Butler, and Jefferson Counties Attendance Support Program

"Serving Multiple Rural Towns Under a Single Program"

The Attendance Support Program is located in Seward, Nebraska, however, this program currently serves students across three counties, in 10 school districts, within 13 towns. The program, started in Seward County approximately 8 years ago, was expanded to meet the needs of students in Butler County approximately 4 years ago, and expanded in 2016 to include Jefferson County. One truancy officer, April Whitney, travels from the city of Seward to these towns to meet with students at their schools—sometimes an hour commute each way from Seward to Fairbury. Ms. Whitney does not consider the city of Seward to be rural, but the communities she travels to definitely feel more rural to her. To someone living in a metropolitan area such as Omaha, this would probably not be the case but when comparing Seward to the other towns she serves. Her point is well-made. In fact, in looking at Census.gov, the population of the city of Seward was listed as 7,167, while the populations for Fairbury and David City were unavailable because the site only publishes facts for cities and towns with a population of 5,000 or more. One of the criteria that contributes to a town feeling more rural, stated Ms. Whitney, was the number of services available in a town. While there are at least three mental health providers in Seward, the more rural communities may only have one or none at all.

Figure 6. Map of the Area Served by the Attendance Support Program



The availability of services is a barrier in and of itself, however, serving clients in small towns generates other issues as well. In smaller communities, clients have expressed not wanting to be seen walking in to "that office" because others would know they were seeking mental health or substance abuse treatment. The program has worked to establish relationships with larger cities nearby (e.g., Columbus, Nebraska) to help clients feel more anonymous, however, another barrier emerges with this—transportation to cities that could be 30 to 45 minutes away. Another barrier is that not all of the program's interventions may be feasible from a distance. For instance, it is less feasible for program

staff to visit homes first thing in the morning when a student is marked absent in cities or towns that are farther away.

When Ms. Whitney started working at diversion services, she and another staff person each worked half time with juvenile diversion and the other half time with the truancy program. After about a year, she asked if she could do the truancy program full-time because trying to do both often did not make sense. One of the key features of this program is accountability for students. Ms. Whitney checks attendance records for every youth in the truancy intervention program every morning using Power School (a software used in schools for recording attendance). If a student is not in school, she reaches out to the school, followed by the family and student (if high school aged) to find out the student's location. At times, she has gone to the home and worked with law enforcement to accompany the youth to school, if needed. By 10:00 am, her goal is to know who is absent, why they are absent, and what the plan is for getting to school. When doing both diversion and truancy work, at times, she was unable to troubleshoot a student's absence because of her schedule with the diversion program. Now that she is full-time with the truancy program, there is a noticeable difference because students and families receive instant accountability when they are absent.

Figure 7. April Whitney, Attendance Support Program

Most of the students who are referred to the program have not yet reached the 20 absences required in statute for truancy. As such, Ms. Whitney describes the program as more of a prevention program that seeks to address the underlying issues for why a student is missing school and connect that student with the appropriate services to address underlying issues. The majority of the referrals are from the school, with very few referrals coming from the county attorney and parents. The Attendance Support Program recommends that students be referred prior to reaching 8 absences, especially if they had chronic absence in the previous semester. The program has both a monitor only and truancy intervention options. When only being monitored, youth are notified by letter that they are being monitored, and provided a brochure about the program. Attendance for the monitor only youth is checked weekly for a duration of two semesters.

If absences continue, then the student and family are asked if they would like to enroll in the truancy intervention program. Each student begins as a monitor only case if they have fewer than 15 absences and is given the opportunity to correct the behavior before they are offered the intervention program. If a youth enrolls in the truancy intervention program, they begin with an assessment questionnaire that addresses why they are missing school and any other barriers they are experiencing. At this time, they agree to an attendance plan that includes academic requirements, as well as meeting with the truancy officer as needed. Other referrals are provided as needed, but because the program is voluntary, these are typically just referrals and not necessarily part of the attendance plan.

Most of the time, Ms. Whitney is not in her office and she spends the majority of her time visiting schools and checking in with the students in the program. Although Ms. Whitney's office is located in the same building as the county attorney and diversion, students do not often come to her office. When they do come to her office, she emphasizes that they are not in trouble with the law and tries to distinguish the Attendance Support Program from diversion. In fact, to emphasize this distinction, the name of the program was changed a couple of years ago from the Truancy Program to the Attendance Support Program in recognition that many students who are absent are not truant, but instead have underlying medical, mental health, or psycho-social issues that need to be addressed.

Students in the Attendance Support Program are offered incentives for adhering to their attendance plan. The approach Ms. Whitney subscribes to is to have students choose their own goals and choose from the options of small incentives. For example, students may set a goal to attend school every day for 2 weeks and receive a gift card to a nearby restaurant. Although it would be easiest to offer the same incentives for all youth across all three counties, Ms. Whitney recognizes that each student is motivated by different things. Similarly, gift cards need to be tailored to the particular area because not all towns have the same restaurant or shopping options. Surprisingly, one incentive that is popular amongst the students are notebooks. The program has a budget for incentive items and accepts donations.

Ms. Whitney identified poverty as the largest barrier to students attending school. When students live in poverty, transportation to school is sometimes difficult. Another issue is student employment or caring for other family members while parents work. Substance abuse amongst parents is another issue that seems to affect a lot of communities, especially in rural areas.

Ms. Whitney identified the program's greatest strength is accessibility. She carries a work cell phone and students and families can contact her as needed during business hours. If she is not available, then other office staff are familiar with the program to provide them feedback until Ms. Whitney is available. While the over-arching goal is to increase attendance, another primary goal is to have kids be more successful while in school. Families contact Ms. Whitney if they have issues with the school; similarly, the school contacts her if the student is having issues at school. As such, Ms. Whitney and the program often serve as mediators between the school and the family, addressing whatever needs the student may have to be successful.

Douglas County Truancy Diversion Program

"Collaborative Attendance Initiative in Metropolitan Nebraska"

The Truancy and Diversion Program in Douglas County was first developed in 2011 by the Douglas County Attorney's Office. The program was developed and administered by three full time attorneys. Douglas County shifted the program to a team of one attorney and two Assessment Specialists at the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) at the beginning of the 2015/2016 calendar school year. The program prides itself in the core mission of getting at the root of truancy and diversion issues in Douglas County. As of the 2010 census, the population of Douglas County consisted of 517,110 residents. The Truancy Prevention and Diversion Program reviews all Truancy Referrals received from Douglas County schools, an average of 1,200 annually in FY 2015/2016. Three individuals, Ms. Stirts, Ms. Moran, and Ms. Sanchez (Assessment Specialists), are vital to the successful implementation of the program in Douglas County. Ms. Stirts serves as the Deputy Douglas County Attorney in handling truancy cases for the Douglas County Attorney's Office. Ms. Moran and Ms. Sanchez are Assessment Specialists at the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC), which serves as a focal point for comprehensive assessment and case management.

All Truancy referrals that come to the attention of the Douglas County Attorney's Office are reviewed and processed by the truancy team. The decision to refer a youth to the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) for diversion assessment and eligibility is at the sole discretion of the Douglas County Attorney. The County Attorney considers several factors (i.e. risk, needs and circumstances of the youth) while considering how to proceed with each youth's case. Ms. Stirts refers cases to the Juvenile Justice Center (JAC), but there are two attorneys who handle truancy cases from the Douglas County Attorney's Office (DCAO). The second attorney is Sarah Graham who is in charge of filling cases once court involvement is necessary.

Figure 8. Photo taken at the JAC in Omaha, Nebraska

Once the County Attorney refers a truancy diversion case to the JAC, the Assessment Specialists assess the youth's risk, and the barriers and needs of the youth. Through collaboration with the JAC and County Attorney, an individualized plan of services is developed for the youth, which often includes school and community-based resources based on the youth's risks, barriers, and needs. The process is truly a collaboration. While the County Attorney has her office in the Douglas County Attorney's Office (DCAO), she makes frequent visits to the JAC to review the referrals and staff cases. This collaborative environment allows the DCAO and JAC to identify and address underlying causes of absenteeism for each student in order to effectively increase engagement between student, family, school and the community at large. The idea is that by facilitating earlier and more efficient prevention and intervention services, the youth has a higher likelihood of positive life outcomes and a life diverted from delinquency.

Most of the students who are referred to the JAC for truancy diversion have missed 20 unexcused days of school. This is only one component of the statute—there are other steps that must be completed by the school before they should refer a student, regardless of whether the 20 days have been missed. Eligibility is determined through the full assessment process, which includes information contained in the truancy referral, collateral information gained through the school and system information. Once this information is gathered, a truancy diversion eligibility meeting is held at the school with the youth, family, Assessment Specialist, and school representatives. If the youth is determined to be eligible, they will be offered diversion enrollment contingent upon approval by the County Attorney. At this time, the youth and his or her family have participated in development of the diversion plan, and are fully aware of their individualized plan and the available resources within the community to address their specific circumstances.

Ms. Stirts and the Attendance Specialists identified poverty, family issues, and transportation as some of the most difficult barriers to students being unable to attend school. Barriers to school attendance are often found in the home, so reducing truancy requires intervention with the family. As such, having the family included in the diversion intervention meeting is essential for creating a common agenda with the youth and his or her family to improve absenteeism. Obtaining transportation is difficult for some students—especially those that are not on bus routes who have to find alternative methods of transportation to school. Although some students do receive metro bus passes, the bus stops can often be far from the youth's house or in an unsafe neighborhood in which walking alone may be unsafe. One of the greatest strengths of the Douglas County Truancy Diversion Program is the ability to work on an individualized plan for each youth with a team approach. Ms. Stirts noted that the change of administering the diversion eligibility meetings from the courthouse to schools has made a tremendous difference in truly embracing a collective team approach (i.e. student, parent, teachers, attorney, and JAC representative). The team noted that the collaborative meeting allows the youth and family to leave the room with a plan and know exactly what is expected of them. Also, there are a tremendous amount of community services that youth can be referred to for specific reasons (i.e. Physical/home situations, cultural accommodations, mental health supports etc.).

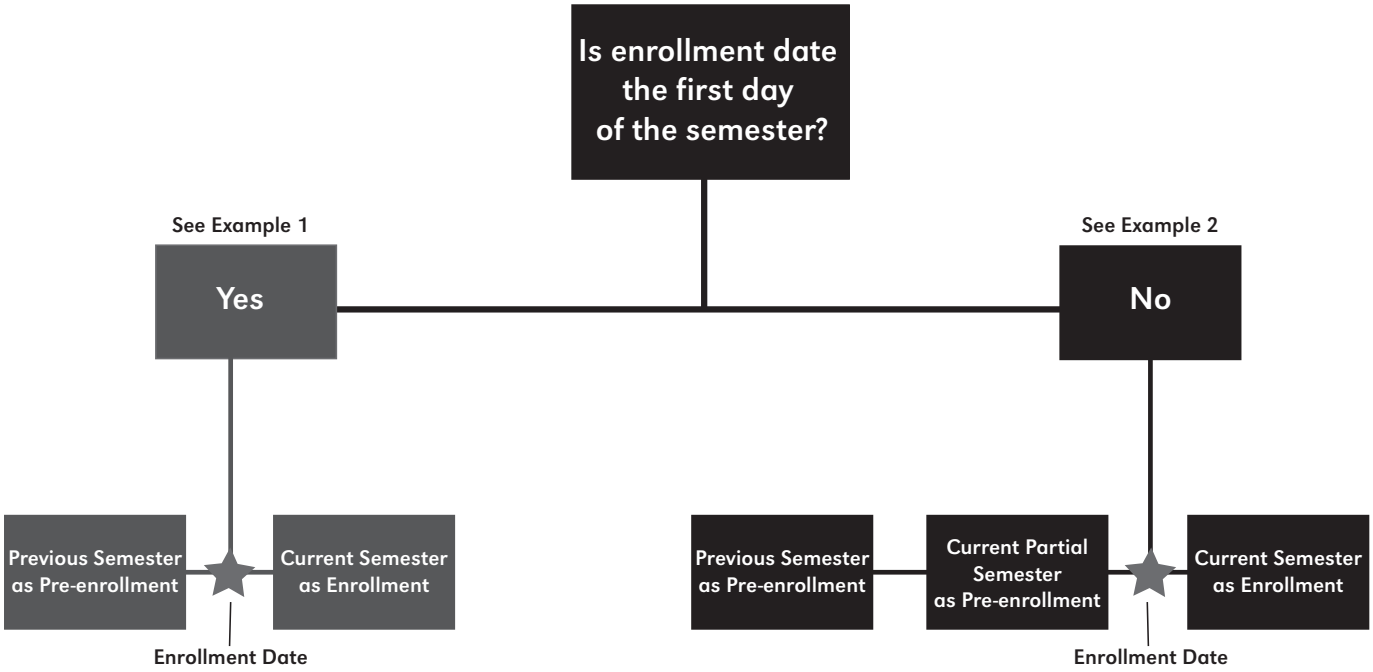
The County Attorney, the JAC Attendance Specialists and school professionals work to improve attendance through a common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities for the youth, and continuous communication. The key goal of the partnership between the County Attorney's Office and Juvenile Assessment Center are simple: intervention through collaborative efforts. It is only through collaboration between student, family, school and community that one can build connectedness and address underlying causes of absenteeism.

JCMS Truancy Data Entry Training: Site Visits

A statewide evaluation using one common metric was a challenge because of the variety of truancy programs. In August 2016, JJI researchers extracted data from JCMS to begin analysis. In first looking at the data, there were a number of gaps in the dataset and many programs were inconsistently entering data. An analysis of the data revealed a number of consistent errors: (1) incorrectly entering semesters based on enrollment, (2) incorrect calculation of required attendance based on school calendars, (3) missing absence data and (4) no discharge date or reason upon completion of the program.

JJI utilized funds available through the Nebraska Rural Futures Institute to send paid interns across the state of Nebraska to train programs one-on-one, on data entry and other issues related to CBA fidelity and quality. From October 2016 to November 2016, a total of four interns were assigned to work with truancy programs, which resulted in training 27 programs on effective data entry procedures. Interns also assisted programs in updating their data into JCMS and assisted in facilitating procedures for more effective data entry.

Figure 9. Decision Tree Provided to Programs for JCMS Training



To address issue (1), programs were provided the decision tree presented in Figure 9 to emphasize entering pre-enrollment data before the enrollment date and enrollment data after the enrollment date. To address issue (2) programs were trained on looking at school calendars and counting the number of days for required attendance (e.g., excluding holidays and snow days). To address issue (3), interns worked with program staff to look up absence information, update JCMS, and worked with programs to facilitate communication between programs and schools for gathering this data. To address issue (4) interns worked with programs to update discharge information.

Feedback from Interns on Data Entry Issues

The interns logged travel notes upon successful completion of their site visits. The notes included a general overview of the visit, obstacles encountered and supplemental information that was relevant. A few examples are listed below:

(1) Program 1 "is not able to easily obtain attendance records for past semesters for students. Without the correct data we were not able to enter any cases– however we spent a lot of time on the test certificate familiarizing the program with the correct process. By the end of the meeting I was confident with the type of questions being asked that they understood what needed to be done. Additionally, we discussed what they need to email the schools in order to obtain the correct data."

(2) Program 2 "had trouble with the system of entering in periods and required days. She wasn't putting in the amount of periods, so her numbers didn't match up in the system but once we entered in two cases she understood it. She had a couple of questions about diversion that I couldn't answer for her but told her I would ask and get back to her. She only had two truancy cases and one of them was previously diversion so she was just putting in information as she went. I left her with physical information about how to enter in case she forgets or something crashes within the system."

Youth Served in Truancy Programs

The total number of youth served in truancy programs from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016 was 1,237 across 29 programs (Table 1). It appears that all programs reported data into JCMS; however, there may still be diversion programs that are entering truancy cases into the diversion case management system. JJI continues to train programs in order to have an accurate account of the youth served and the programs they attended across Nebraska.

Table 1. Number and Percent of Truancy Juvenile Cases by County		
County/Tribe Program	**Number of Cases**	**Percent of Sample**
Buffalo County	92	7.4%
Butler/Seward Counties	139	11.2%
Cass County	3	0.2%
Cheyenne County	5	0.4%
Clay County	65	5.3%
Colfax County	20	1.6%
Dakota County	7	0.6%
Dawes County	26	2.1%
Dodge County	16	1.3%
Douglas County		
JAC	143	11.6%
Urban League	50	4.0%
Re Connect	23	1.9%
Gage County	59	4.8%
Holt/Boyd County	189	15.3%
Lancaster County	70	5.7%
Lincoln County	10	0.8%
Madison County	33	2.7%
Merrick/Nance Counties	13	1.1%
Morrill County	1	0.1%
Otoe County	4	0.3%
Platte County	7	0.6%
Red Willow/Hayes Counties	3	0.2%
Santee Sioux Tribe	22	1.8%
Sarpy County	54	4.4%
Saunders County	158	12.8%
Scotts Bluff County	1	0.1%
Washington County	12	1.0%
Winnebago Tribe	5	0.4%
York County	7	0.6%
Total	1,237	100.0%

Truancy Status Case Type

Table 2 displays the truancy status case type. The majority of cases (43.6 %) referred to truancy programs during FY 2015/2016 involved monitor only (n = 539); 11.5% for truancy intervention (n = 142); 14.9 % for truancy diversion (n = 184); and 30.1 % did not indicate a truancy status type (n = 243). Monitor only cases are those cases in which the program is monitoring attendance (but is not intervening) and the case is not under review by the County Attorney for filing. Truancy intervention cases are those cases in which the program has begun to take steps to intervene with the juvenile or family at the request of the school or parent. Truancy diversion cases are those cases in which the County Attorney has filed a truancy petition (or will file one if the youth does not complete the truancy intervention).

Table 2. Truancy Status Case Type		
Truancy Status	Frequency	Percent
Monitor Only	539	43.6%
Truancy Intervention	142	11.5%
Truancy Diversion	184	14.9%
Not Indicated	372	30.1%
Total	1,237	100.0%

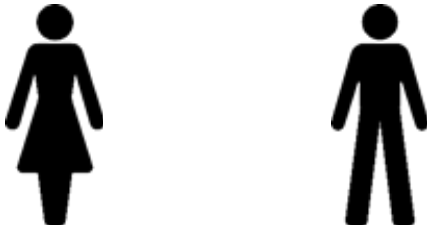
Referral Source

Table 3 displays the referral source for each case. As one might expect, schools are the most frequent referral sources (78.8%), followed by the county attorney (15.7%). A smaller number of cases came from other sources (1 %) or a parent (.08 %).

Table 3. Referral Sources for Each Case to Truancy		
Case Source	Frequency	Percent
School	975	78.8%
County Attorney	194	15.7%
Parent	10	0.1%
Other	12	1.0%
Missing	46	3.7%
Total	1,237	100.0%

Cases by Gender

Programs served a similar number of females and males. Approximately 49.6.3 % (n =601) of the cases during this time frame involved female youth and 51.3 % (n =634) of the cases involved male youth.



N = 601 N = 634

Cases by Age

Table 4 presents the frequency of cases by age. Age at the time of referral ranged from 5 to 19, with a mean age of 11.05 (SD = 33.93). The most frequent age at the time of case was 16 (19.8 %). There were 11 cases with missing information (either missing a date of birth or a referral date); thus, age could not be calculated for those 11 youth.

Table 4. Frequency for Age by Case		
Age	Frequency	Percent
5	6	0.1%
6	19	1.5%
7	22	1.8%
8	27	2.2%
9	19	1.5%
10	29	2.3%
11	48	3.9%
12	84	6.8%
13	125	10.1%
14	181	14.6%
15	200	16.2%
16	245	19.8%
17	184	14.9%
18	33	2.7%
19	4	0.1%
Not Specified	11	0.9%
Total	1,237	100.0%

Cases by Race and/or Ethnicity

Most youth referred to truancy programs were White (n = 816; 66.0 %), followed by Hispanic (n=198; 16.0 %) and Black/African American (n= 114; 9.2 %). For a few cases, race and/or ethnicity was not specified (n= 3; .02 %). Fewer youth were American Indian (n= 59; 4.8 %), Asian (n= 5; .04%), Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander (n=2; .02 %), Other Race (n= 7; .06 %) and Multiple Races (n= 33; 2.7 %).

When we compared the race of youth in truancy programs to the racial and ethnic composition of Nebraska youth of the same age (5-17), data indicated that White and Asian youth were underrepresented in truancy programs; while Hispanic, Black/African American and American Indian youth were overrepresented in truancy programs (Table 5).

Table 5. Nebraska Population Ages 5-19 Referred to Truancy Program

	Nebraska		Truancy Programs	
Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
White	245,725	73.0%	816	66.0%
Hispanic	47,791	14.2%	198	16.0%
Black/African American	26,182	7.8%	114	9.2%
American Indian	7,549	2.2%	59	4.8%
Asian, Pacific Islander	9,184	2.7%	7	0.6%
Other or Multiple Races	–	–	40	3.2%
Unspecified	–	–	3	0.2%
Total		100%	1,237	100.0%

Truancy Program Outcome Measures

Methodology

In order to measure change in school attendance patterns, programs entered attendance data for every youth who participated in their program. This was a fairly complex process and programs should be commended for their dedication to entering attendance data.
The Juvenile Justice Institute calculated attendance patterns for two time periods:

- Pre-enrollment: This period included any time period prior to the youth enrolling or being referred to the program (in cases of monitor only cases). Programs were asked to include at least one semester prior to enrollment date. In some circumstances, programs entered more than one semester. In other circumstances, programs entered pre-enrollment data from the same semester the youth enrolled if the enrollment date was later in the semester. All pre-enrollment data were combined across semesters or data blocks.
- Enrollment: This period included any time period after the youth enrolled in the program. Programs were asked to enter attendance until the student was discharged from the program. All enrollment data were combined across semesters or data blocks.

Programs entered data into JCMS for 8 absence types, categorized under both excused and unexcused absences (see Figure 1). It should be noted that for the purposes of analyses we did not include administrative and school activity absences because youth are actually in school those days, even if away. We also did not include excused or unexcused tardies because practices across the state vary widely on whether these are considered absences and the number of total tardies that becomes a single time absent.

Discharge Reason for Youth in Truancy Programs

First, we examined reasons youth were discharged from truancy programs. Of the 1,237 cases referred to truancy programs, discharge reason was included for 920 cases. In 317 of the cases (25.6%), a discharge reason was missing, which may have been due to failure to closed cases or cases that were still active. Table 6 displays the discharge reasons for all youth.

Table 6. Discharge Reason

Discharge Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Completed Program Requirements	541	43.7%
Did Not Complete Program Requirements	193	15.6%
Transferred Schools	82	6.6%
Transferred to GED Program	1	.01%
Transferred to Homeschool	8	.06%
Dropped Out	16	1.3%
Graduated	69	5.6%
Referred to Higher Services	2	.02%
Case Type Changed	8	.06%
Unspecified/Missing	317	25.6%
Total	1,237	100%

Discharge by County

The following three tables display the frequency of discharge reasons for each county (Table 7 and Table 8), and those where the discharge reason was unspecified (Table 9). For ease of presentation and analysis, we grouped the various discharge reasons into 4 categories: (1) Successful completion (completed program requirements and graduated), (2) Unsuccessful completion (did not complete program requirements and dropped out), (3) Other (cases with a discharge date but no reason indicated, transferred schools, transferred to GED program, transferred to homeschool, referred to a higher level of service, and case type changed), (4) Open cases (cases with no discharge date or reason indicated).

It should be noted that after working with programs, additional discharge reasons were added. These include: case type changed, referred to higher service, and other (moved away, death). Ten cases were closed as a case type changed or referred to a higher level of service, however, these discharge reasons were not readily available to all programs at the time we extracted the data.

Overall, programs had varying rates of successful and unsuccessful program completion (Table 7). One caveat that should be noted, however, is that programs may vary by how they define successful completion of the program. JJI will continue to train programs on uniform definitions and approaches, but regardless of how cases close—programs that are trying to improve school attendance should be able to demonstrate that they in fact improve school attendance—at a minimum while the youth is involved in the program.

Table 7. Successful, Unsuccessful, and Other Discharge Reasons by County					
County/Tribe Program	Successful	Unsuccessful	Other	Open	Number of Cases
Buffalo County	87.0%	7.6%	5.4%	0.0%	92
Butler/Seward Counties	66.9%	7.2%	19.4%	6.4%	139
Cass County	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	3
Cheyenne County	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	5
Clay County	10.8%	18.5%	21.5%	49.2%	65
Colfax County	0.0%	25.0%	5.0%	70.0%	20
Dakota County	42.9%	28.6%	0.0%	28.6%	7
Dawes County	11.5%	3.8%	26.9%	57.7%	26
Dodge County	56.3%	43.8%	0.0%	0.0%	16
Douglas County					
JAC	21.0%	48.3%	0.0%	30.8%	143
Urban League	26.0%	0.0%	2.0%	72.0%	50
Re Connect	43.5%	47.8%	0.0%	8.7%	23
Gage County					59
Holt/Boyd County	93.7%	2.1%	4.2%	0.0%	189
Lancaster County	27.1%	32.9%	7.1%	32.9%	70
Lincoln County	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10
Madison County	27.3%	15.2%	45.5%	12.1%	33
Merrick/Nance Counties	92.3%	0.0%	7.7%	0.0%	13
Morrill County	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1
Otoe County	25.0%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4
Platte County	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	7
Red Willow/Hayes Counties	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	3
Santee Sioux Tribe	18.2%	31.8%	4.5%	45.5%	22
Sarpy County	46.3%	25.9%	3.7%	24.1%	54
Saunders County	60.8%	4.4%	26.6%	8.2%	158
Scotts Bluff County	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	1
Washington County	58.3%	25.0%	16.7%	0.0%	12
Winnebago Tribe	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5
York County	28.6%	0.0%	28.6%	42.9%	7
Total					1,237

As we are in the middle of a school year, we anticipate that many programs have open cases. However, programs that are discharging a large percent of their cases unsuccessfully must examine why this is occurring. Perhaps the school is referring youth and expecting a different outcome. Perhaps the underlying reason for absenteeism are not getting identified and addressed. In the table above, many cases remain open, which impacts the overall success rate, but programs with higher than 25% of their cases closing unsuccessfully should examine the model they are using and determine whether their intervention matches the population they are serving. Borrowing an example from the medical model, if a patient has high blood pressure and is prescribed insulin, the blood pressure will not show

improvement. It is imperative to stop the intervention and determine whether a different model should be applied.

Programs with high rates of "other" discharges should review their cases to make sure they indicated a discharge reason if a youth was discharged. Perhaps one explanation is that the case management system did not have an appropriate discharge reason (prior to the new discharge reasons being added).

Time Spent in Truancy Program by County

For youth who had both an intake/enroll date and a discharge date (*n*= 943), we calculated the number of days in the truancy program from intake/enrollment to discharge. The fewest number of days a youth was in a truancy program was 1, and the most number of days a youth was in a truancy program was 859 (approximately 2 and half years).

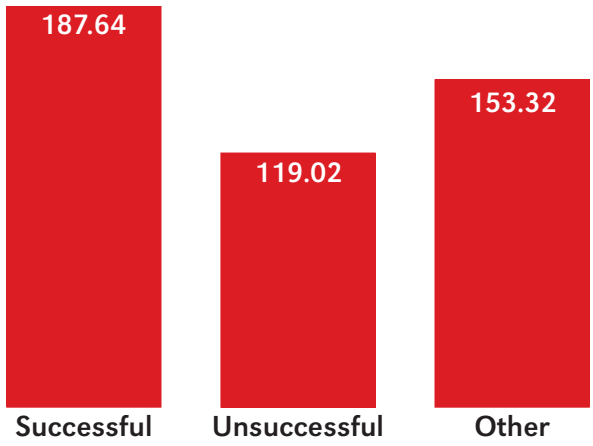
The number of days each youth spent in truancy programs varied by county. Table 8 includes the number of youth with both intake/enrollment and discharge dates, the mean number of days in the truancy program, the standard deviation, the minimum number of days and the maximum number of days. Larger standard deviations indicate more variability in the number of days each youth spent in the program, while smaller deviations indicate less variability in the number of days each youth spent in truancy programs. Standard deviations are not calculated when the *N* is one because there is no variability.

Table 8. Number of Days Youth Spent in Truancy Programs by Program					
Program	*N*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Buffalo County	91	143.86	85.29	22	294
Butler/Seward Counties	129	209.09	90.56	18	433
Cass County	2	131.5	184.56	1	262
Cheyenne County	2	137	42.43	107	167
Clay County	28	163.68	134.33	0	400
Colfax County	5	242.00	262.67	3	645
Dakota County	4	301.25	178.09	35	406
Dawes County	11	242.73	181.99	39	551
Dodge County	16	119.56	52.95	21	221
Douglas County					
JAC	99	79.79	41.20	6	190
Urban League	14	274.36	91.10	43	337
Re Connect	21	110.00	65.38	7	241
Gage County	11	124	93.64	16	366
Holt/Boyd County	188	121.56	52.58	0	241
Lancaster County	47	187.06	106.58	9	603
Lincoln County	10	118.00	89.02	14	290
Madison County	27	150.78	118.80	0	389
Merrick/Nance Counties	13	66.46	12.10	36	77
Morrill County	1	100.00	-	100	100
Otoe County	4	148.00	6.27	140	153
Platte County	7	138.00	76.99	61	295
Santee Sioux Tribe	12	66.25	81.35	13	230
Sarpy County	41	172.56	113.06	23	539
Saunders County	143	295.64	151.26	0	859
Scotts Bluff County	1	34.00	-	34	34
Washington County	12	55.42	50.03	9	172
York County	4	164.75	59.02	79	207
Total	943	168.10	119.83	0	859

Time Spent in Truancy by Discharge Reason

Using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), we examined how time in truancy programs might differ by discharge reason for youth. That is, do youth who are successful in the program stay in longer or shorter than youth who are unsuccessful? Results indicate that the time spent in truancy programs was statistically different by discharge reason [$F(2,940) = 27.50$, $p<.001$]; all three discharge reasons were significantly different from each other (Figure 10). As such, youth successfully discharged spent the most number of days in programs, followed by other reasons, and then unsuccessful cases.

Figure 10. Number of Days in Program by Discharge Reason



Impact on Attendance

Cases Included in the Attendance Analysis

To assess whether programs are having an impact on absenteeism, we compared pre-enrollment attendance patterns to enrollment attendance patterns. Cases that did not have correct data for either pre-enrollment or enrollment could not be included in the analysis. As such, program impact on attendance could only be calculated for 821 cases (66.4% of the total sample). This means that for some programs, we could not examine outcomes on attendance because they did not have any cases with sufficient data. The reasons a case may not have been included are listed below:

- Youth transferred in and out of school districts and attendance information was not available;
- Youth were new to a program and only enrollment data was available;
- Programs were not able to accurately enter data during the training/data quality assurance period so the absence data was not split by enrollment date or absences were missing;
- Cases had obvious data entry error that could not be reconciled for analysis;
- Cases did not have the data required to calculate required attendance.

Table 9. Reasons a Case is Not Included in Analysis

Reason not Included	Frequency
Only enrollment data	70 (5.7%)
Only pre-enrollment data	235 (19.0%)
No required attendance	31 (2.5%)
Did not split by enrollment date	61 (4.9%)
Multiple reasons	9 (0.7%)
Data entry error	4 (0.3%)

Successfully Closed Cases

We employed a Repeated Measures ANOVA to determine if there were significant mean differences between absences from pre-enrollment and absences from enrollment. A Repeated Measures ANOVA compares mean values at time 1 (pre-enrollment) to mean values at time 2 (enrollment) to estimate significant change between those two time periods. Table 10 displays the number of cases included in analysis, % absent pre-enrollment, % absent enrollment, % change, and the effect size of this change. Effect sizes measure the magnitude of effects, so even if a % change is not significant, effect sizes greater than .10 indicate there are likely effects that are not apparent because of small sample sizes.

Table 10. Change in Overall Absences from Pre-enrollment & Post-enrollment for Successful Case Closures					
County/Tribe Program	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	N	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	%	n^2
Buffalo	46	23.55% (2.74)	14.55% (2.51)	-9.00%**	.16
Butler/Seward	91	12.40% (0.81)	7.88% (0.79)	-4.52%***	
Cheyenne	0	–	–	–	–
Clay	4	10.03% (5.06)	8.01% (2.44)	-2.02%	.06
Colfax	0	–	–	–	–
Dakota	3	21.46% (3.32)	10.21% (1.61)	-11.26%	.81
Dawes	3	9.32% (3.71)	6.81% (2.97)	-2.51%	.35
Dodge	9	34.27% (7.74)	7.64% (1.03)	-26.63%**	.60
Douglas - JAC	29	38.36% (2.62)	23.37% (2.62)	-14.99%***	.42
Gage	2	26.58% (2.21)	38.82% (6.25)	12.24%	.68
Holt/Boyd	51	8.58% (0.99)	3.92% (0.53)	-4.67%***	.28
Lancaster	19	19.58% (1.95)	8.48% (1.03)	-11.11%***	.61
Lincoln	0	–	–	–	–
Madison	5	13.83% (2.02)	4.28% (2.01)	-9.55%**	.74
Merrick	12	14.84% (1.14)	1.40% (0.75)	-13.44%***	.90
Otoe	0	–	–	–	–
Platte	2	28.00% (12.70)	18.72% (8.55)	-9.28%	.83
Sarpy	21	40.42% (2.89)	15.47% (2.51)	-24.94%***	0.73
Santee Sioux	1	–	–	–	–
Saunders	92	11.08% (0.69)	6.88% (0.41)	-4.20%***	.32
Washington	7	21.71% (2.40)	15.21% (5.35)	-6.50%**	.24
Note. **=p<.01; ***=p<.001. Significance tests or means for programs with only 1 case could not be calculated.					

Youth Characteristics on Attendance within Successful Program Cases

Next, we examined whether changes from pre-enrollment to enrollment significantly differed by age, gender and race/ethnicity. In other words, demographic information (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity) accounted for whether students who improved attendance throughout their involvement in the program.

Attendance Change and Age

Overall, there were not any significant differences in total attendance by age $F(1,395) = 0.01$, $p = .92$, $n^2 = .00$. This means that across all ages, youth were absent roughly the same amount, regardless of age. In addition, there was not a significant effect between age and pre/post enrollment $F(1,395) = 0.20$, $p = .66$, $n^2 = .00$. This means that age is not a significant predictor for the percent change from pre-enrollment to enrollment.

Attendance Change and Gender

Overall, there were not any significant differences in total attendance by gender $F(1,400) = 0.30$, $p = .58$, $n^2 = .01$. This means that for both males and females, youth were absent roughly the same amount. There was, however, a gender effect that significantly affected the percent change from pre-enrollment to enrollment absences $F(1,400) = 4.12$, $p < .05$, $n^2 = .01$. Specifically, females (9.43% reduction) demonstrated a greater reduction in absences compared to males (6.49 % reduction). Table 11 displays the values for male and female youth.

Table 11. Significant Interaction Effects of Gender & Pre/Post-enrollment

Gender	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change
	N	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	
Female	197	17.90% (1.01)	8.55% (0.75)	-9.35%
Male	201	17.16% (1.01)	10.67% (0.74)	-6.49%

Attendance Change and Race/Ethnicity

Overall, there were significant differences in total attendance by race/ethnicity $F(1,395) = 5.91$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .06$. This means that the total amount absence across both time periods was statistically different based on race/ethnicity. These differences, however, did not affect the percent change from pre-enrollment to enrollment absences $F(1,396) = 0.67$, $p = .64$, $n^2 = .01$. This means that there was not a racial or ethnic group that improved more than another, but that some groups did have more absences overall. Table 12 displays the values for all youth.

Table 12. Significant Interaction Effects of Race and Pre/Post-enrollment

Race	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change
	N	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	4	31.66% (6.99)	16.36% (5.18)	-15.29%
Black/ African American	16	31.50% (3.49)	19.03% (2.59)	-12.47%
White	319	16.15% (0.78)	8.81% (0.58)	-7.35%
Hispanic	49	19.77% (1.99)	10.39% (1.48)	-9.38%
Other races	3	17.45% (8.07)	12.51% (5.98)	-4.94%
Multiple races	7	26.18% (5.28)	14.57% (3.92)	-11.60%

Change in Specific Attendance Types within Successful Program Cases

For successful cases, the change in absences was compared by absence type from pre-enrollment to post-enrollment. Table 13 shows that all types of absences depicted a significant effect, excluding religious excused absences. This stands to reason because religious absences would not necessarily be the types of absences that could be affected by a program.

Table 13. Change in Absences by Absence Type from Pre-enrollment to Post-enrollment for Successful Case Closures

Absence Type	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	M (SE)	*M (SE)*	%	n^2
All Excused Absences	8.27% (0.42)	5.81% (0.40)	-2.46% ***	.07
Suspension	0.42% (0.08)	0.85% (0.24)	+0.43%***	.01
Religious	0.27% (0.07)	0.22% (0.04)	-0.05%	.01
Medical	7.58% (0.41)	4.74% (0.30)	-2.84%***	.11
All Unexcused Absences	9.29% (0.65)	3.81% (0.31)	-5.49%***	.20
Truant	3.39% (0.51)	1.31% (0.29)	-2.08%***	.12
Parent Acknowledged	2.16% (0.18)	1.25% (0.13)	-0.91%***	.09
Illness	1.49% (0.24)	0.92% (0.18)	-0.57%***	.03
Unverified	2.23% (0.34)	0.95% (0.16)	-1.28%***	.05

Unsuccessfully Closed Cases

We also compared whether there was any change from pre-enrollment to enrollment for unsuccessful cases. There were no significant differences from pre-enrollment to enrollment. In this report, absences neither significantly improved, nor got significantly worse while enrolled in the programs.

Table 14. Change in Overall Absences from Pre-enrollment and Post-enrollment for Unsuccessful Case Closures

County/Tribe Program	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	N	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	%	n^2
Buffalo	2	26.67% (0.00)	44.47% (18.39)	+17.81%	.48
Butler/Seward	10	37.43% (11.23)	17.44% (3.85)	-19.99%	.26
Cheyenne	1	–	–	–	–
Clay	0	–	–	–	–
Colfax	2	14.05% (3.73)	68.42% (46.39)	+54.38%	.62
Dakota	1	–	–	–	–
Dawes	1	–	–	–	–
Dodge	7	25.49 % (5.04)	23.43 % (6.55)	- 2.07 %	.01
Douglas - JAC	69	48.43 % (2.06)	52.33 % (2.66)	+ 3.90 %	.03
Gage	5	28.49 % (9.46)	42.52 % (19.74)	+ 14.03 %	.13
Holt/Boyd	3	10.62 % (2.69)	13.20 % (2.51)	+2.58 %	.11
Lancaster	23	24.85 % (2.20)	26.45 % (2.57)	+ 1.60 %	.02
Lincoln	4	14.38 % (8.30)	8.77 % (2.82)	- 5.61 %	.14
Madison	5	13.11 % (3.00)	24.85 % (7.94)	+ 11.74 %	.33
Merrick	0	–	–	–	–
Otoe	2	38.81 % (13.98)	92.85 % (7.15)	+ 54.05 %	.98
Platte	1	–	–	–	–
Sarpy	13	33.11 % (5.35)	28.12 % (5.85)	- 4.99 %	.12
Santee Sioux	0	–	–	–	–
Saunders	92	19.57 % (7.44)	19.70 % (9.50)	+ 0.14 %	.01
Washington	2	31.52% (8.11)	5.00% (5.00)	-26.52%	.99

Note. **=p<.01; ***=p<.001. Significance tests or means for programs with only 1 case could not be calculated.

Limitations

Data collection was the most serious obstacle to the evaluation of truancy programs. All of the programs indicated that data collection was an issue. Many had multiple data entry personnel, which set forth some obstacles (i.e. standardization, definitional inconsistencies, etc.). Given that our data entry database is relatively new, these challenges were expected. The Juvenile Justice Institute provided interns to enter data, and extensive individualized training, to fix inconsistencies in reporting for a majority of the programs. Many programs expressed that now that the system is available and they are aware of what the system requires, coupled with extensive training, that data collection will improve moving forward.

In addition to limitations from users, there are also systematic limitations that should be noted. Programs rely exclusively on schools to report their data. Programs that were not embedded in the schools may have had more difficulty in obtaining data. In some instances, program staff were granted access to the school's online attendance reporting software. Programs have expressed that this has greatly improved their ability to gather data. Furthermore, some school superintendents felt that reporting data might be a violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). JJI produced a memo and trained programs on why this data collection effort is exempt from FERPA. It seems that after this last year of initial data collection, all programs are not on board with providing data to JCMS.

Missing data was also an issue as entering information into JCMS was complicated. When JJI realized the obstacles, the data entry screens were rebuilt for ease of use. Users have reported that the new screens are more user-friendly and this should aid in future data entry. There were some variables that were inconsistently entered into JCMS and could not be examined as control variables. For instance, there were only approximately 11 youth who had any assessment scores reported in to JCMS (e.g., The School Refusal scale). Without assessment information, we are unable to control for a youth's level or kind of risk. For instance, it is possible that some programs appear to have had less of an impact than other programs. One reason for this may be the risk level of the youth or the type of truancy issues he or she may be having. Other variables not entered consistently were variables related to income and family size. With this information, we could evaluate program effects based on information other than age, gender and race/ethnicity.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Based on our qualitative and quantitative research, we have reached three main conclusions. We found that school attendance was significantly improved while a youth was enrolled in a truancy program; however, our data does not tell us whether these improvements will continue over time after a youth has been discharged from the program until graduation. Second, we found that each truancy program encounters various obstacles in addressing truant behavior. Coordination between attorneys, schools, districts, and counties varies widely. Formal, ongoing partnerships with community organizations, county attorneys, schools, and social workers is essential to helping families address the underlying factors contributing to truancy (Chang, Leong, Fothergill, & Dizon, 2013). Even relatively small efforts, like notifying immigrant and refugee families that attendance is required, can lead to improved school attendance.

Other examples that can lead to increased student attendance include phone calls, meeting with guardians, monitoring and intervention. These findings underscore the consistent research consensus of the importance of intervention at the earliest possible point in a truant student's academic career (Schoeneberger, 2012). Truancy and chronic absenteeism is a solvable problem. Small, manageable changes and practices can improve school attendance; when school attendance improves, academic achievement does as well (Gottfried, 2015). The truancy programs funded by Community-based Juvenile Services Aid are found to produce statistically significant impact on school attendance. In the future, JJI plans to update JCMS to include fields that measure identified reasons a youth is absent and specific interventions for each youth. By indicating the reason(s) the youth is having attendance issues (e.g., substance abuse, teen parenting, transportation, major medical illness, etc.), it will provide a richer picture of the types of truancy reasons and the type of students for which truancy programs work best. By indicating the specific interventions that programs used with each youth (e.g., phone calls, rides to school, substance abuse counseling, etc.), we will be able to evaluate what interventions may be working best for the type of truancy issues and to assess whether matching the intervention to the truancy issue (i.e., primary reason for absence is substance abuse, therefore the youth must go to substance abuse counseling) is effective. To date, there is very little research on specific interventions for truancy. Nebraska is in a unique position to contribute to that research as a result of the data entry requirements of CBA into JCMS.

The short-term goal of truancy programs is to improve school attendance, grades, and attitudes toward school while the youth is enrolled. The long-term goals are for students to maintain regular school attendance after the completion of the program and for students to eventually graduate from high school. This report focuses only on the short-term goal, but in subsequent years, the Juvenile Justice Institute plans to examine which interventions appear to be having the highest impact on long-term goals as well. We also hope to track student enrollment and outcomes beyond involvement in the program. With this information, we will glean whether youth who have participated in a truancy program show improved attendance until graduation, even post-discharge. We will also examine whether participating in truancy programs affects more long-term secondary goals. For instance, we will examine whether a youth is more likely to graduate after participation and whether a youth is less likely to engage in future delinquency.

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Appendix

Truancy Site Visit Questionnaire

1. How do cases get referred to you?

2. What is the process you have for identifying youth with attendance issues? (For example, do you get a referral from the County attorney and then you start working on a case?
    a. Do your cases start with monitoring? (always)
        i. Do you have cases that you just get a letter?
    b. Do they start with an intervention (always?) Do your cases start with truancy diversion (always?)
3. What school personnel are involved?

4. Do you assist with any of the following?
    - Wake up
    - Rides
    - Medical situations
    - Cultural conditions
    - Family Crisis
    - Other (please describe)

    If yes, please answer part A: If so, please elaborate how you assisted..).

5. Do you offer incentives for attendance? If yes, what are they?

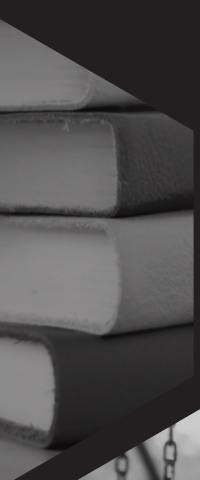
6. What do you think it the most effective element of your program? (Is there something unique about your program?)

7. Does a unique population exist within your program that accounts for a majority of the students that are truant? If so, describe.
    If yes, please answer part A: If so, does the program have adequate resources for that unique population?

8. Can you use three adjectives to describe the students that are truant in your program? (straggler, unmotivated, inactive etc).

9. Other than attendance issues, do you have anything else you would like to share with us?

10. Have there been any policy changes?



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