Abstract and Keywords

This article presents an overview of school absenteeism, truancy, and school refusal behaviors.

The various definitions of school truancy and absenteeism are described along with prevalence rates and correlates with school absenteeism. The article also discusses interventions and strategies that are empirically demonstrated as effective in helping school professionals increase school attendance. The article concludes by discussing ways to improve school attendance through multilevel interventions.

Keywords: school, attendance, RTI, truancy, dropout, school refusal behavior, absenteeism

Definition and Descriptions

Improving student attendance is a major preoccupation for many schools across the country. Though little educational research has focused on the relationship between attendance and student performance, some studies suggest that school attendance and student academic performance are closely associated (Borland & Howsen, 1998). The assumption is that when students are not in school, they cannot learn (Gottfried, 2010). Though this assumption seems plausible, the implied causal ordering of the relationship is not always clear. For example, does school attendance improve academic performance, or does academic performance serve as an incentive for successful students to regularly attend school? Whatever the association, it has led many school districts, school administrators, and state governments to spend tremendous resources to carefully monitor, document, and report school attendance data.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) suggest that improving school attendance is as important as any issue that schools face today. Concern about school attendance may focus on truancy and chronic absenteeism, as when students fail to come to school on any given day. But class cutting, where students come to school to be counted but then selectively skip one or more classes each day, is seen by some as a symptom of alienation and disengagement from schools and a serious issue for many urban school districts today (e.g., Fallis & Opo...
Strategies and Interventions for Improving School Attendance

Either way, school attendance is a serious school and social problem that should involve a multilevel approach to effectively address it.

The term truancy is used in many different ways in the scholarly literature (Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2013). As a general descriptive term, truancy is used to refer to students who are absent from school for any reason without their parents’ knowledge (Kearney, 2008). Truancy is typically defined as a certain number of unexcused absences. However, definitions of what constitutes truancy may vary considerably from one school district to another, and from state to state as it is encoded into compulsory education laws (Garcia-Garcia, 2008).

Chronic absenteeism is not the same thing as truancy. According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) chronic absenteeism means missing 10% of the school year for any reason. Again, the threshold number or percentage can vary from school to school. They point out that a school can have average daily attendance of 90% on any given day and still have 40% of its students chronically absent because on different days, different students make up that 90%. Chronic absenteeism generally refers to some level of excessive absence from school, and the consequences can be severe, especially for students in early grades (McCluskey, Bynum & Patchim, 2004; Romero & Lee, 2007).

School refusal behavior has been defined as “difficulty attending school associated with emotional distress, especially anxiety and depression” (King & Bernstein, 2001, p. 197). It is the focus on emotional distress, along with parental awareness of the problem, that distinguishes school refusal behavior from truancy (Fremont, 2003). While depression and anxiety are most frequently associated with school refusal behavior, many factors can contribute to a student’s refusal to go to school, including bullying or cyberbullying, school safety concerns, and pressures associated with high-stakes testing and demands for academic achievement (Lingenfelter & Hartung, 2015).

No matter what the cause, reluctance to attend school often means students are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and educational failure (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Loeber & Farrington, 2000). Poor attendance means that students are not developing the knowledge and skills needed for later success. In addition, when not in school, many students become involved in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, sexual activity, and other activities that can lead to serious trouble within the legal system (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993). For many youths, chronic absenteeism is a significant predictor of dropping out of school (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). Beyond its immediate consequences for students, truancy can have significant long-term implications for youths in terms of their becoming productive members of the community. For decades, research has shown a correlation between poor school attendance and problems later in life, such as criminal activity, incarceration, sexual activity, marital and family problems, trouble securing and maintaining stable employment, substance (tobacco, alcohol, drugs) use, and violent behavior (Catalano, Arthur, Hawkins, Berglund, & Olson, 1998; Dryfoos, 1990; Dube & Or-
Though individual students are often blamed for truancy, school attendance may be seen as an important indicator of how well the school is functioning and the kind of educational environment created within the school. For example, large schools with limited staff and resources might be easier environments in which students can be more anonymous, and thus often have more attendance problems than small schools where a missing student is more likely to be noticed (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). In addition, students are more likely to skip school when the school environment is perceived to be boring or chaotic, when students don’t feel they are being intellectually challenged, or when there are no consequences for being truant.

For schools, the consequences of truancy can be significant as well. Not only is student attendance seen as one indicator of school performance, in most states money is tied directly to student attendance. Because funding formularies often include student attendance, fewer students in the classroom means fewer resources for academic programs. School administrators and all those involved with schools have a vested interest in getting children to school and keeping them there all day (Sutphen, Ford, & Flaherty, 2010).

Truancy has important consequences for the community, too (Baker et al., 2001). These include a workforce that lacks the basic knowledge and job skills needed to fully participate in the labor market and contribute to the economy. This can result in increased costs of social services and higher rates of poverty. Local businesses are often concerned about direct losses incurred from truants’ shoplifting and indirect losses from their hanging out near their businesses and fighting, using drugs and alcohol, and intimidating customers (Baker et al., 2001).

Truancy and chronic absenteeism have both immediate and far-reaching consequences for individual students, families, schools, and communities. Effective interventions must understand the problem from multiple perspectives and address it at multiple levels. This is especially the case for poor, minority students in urban neighborhoods (Spencer, 2009).

Student Attendance Literature Review

Although there are numerous research studies on school absenteeism, truancy, and school refusal behaviors, estimating the national prevalence of these school attendance problems has been difficult. Many states use differing reporting standards and definitions of truancy, which limits the ability to aggregate state-level data and present a clear national picture on this problem (National Center for School Engagement, 2006; Vaughn, Maynard, Salas-Wright, Perron, & Abdon, 2013). Despite these challenges, Vaughn and colleagues (2013) used the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) study to estimate prevalence and correlates of truancy in the United States. Using the 2009 adolescent sample data, this study found that 11% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 reported skipping school in the past 30 days. Furthermore, the study reported 9% hav-
Most of the research literature on low school attendance and truancy has focused on either its causes or its relationship to academic performance (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Lamdin, 2001). Despite the fact that absenteeism is a concern for school administrators, teachers, parents, social workers, and counselors, limited research has been done to examine ways to improve school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Lamdin, 2001). This is especially the case when looking for rigorous, randomized-controlled trial (RCT) research design studies evaluating the efficacy of various interventions or programs focused on addressing absenteeism and school attendance. A study by Sutphen, Ford, and Flaherty (2010) reviewed the research literature on truancy interventions. The authors found only 16 studies to review between the years 1990 and 2007, with only half the studies using group comparison designs. Their review found only 6 studies that produced promising interventions, which highlights the lack of evidence-based truancy programs currently available.

Recently, Maynard and colleague (2013) conducted a meta-analysis that examined interventions aimed to increase school attendance for elementary and secondary school students who were identified as having chronic attendance problems. This meta-analysis included 16 experimental design studies—5 RCT and 11 quasi-experimental design—that met their criteria for inclusion in their quantitative systematic review. Results showed a medium effect size estimate with a random effects mean of 0.46 and a 95% confidence interval of 0.30 and 0.62. This pooled effect size estimate was statistically significant (p < 0.05) and positive, indicating students who received the various indicated truancy interventions did better than those that did not on attendance outcomes (by an average of 4.69 days). This meta-analysis study also found no differences on programs that were school-based, community-based, or court-based on student attendance, as well as if the interventions were individual, family, group, or multimodal. One of the key findings from the meta-analysis study by Maynard and colleagues (2013) was “. . . the lack of evidence to support the general belief that collaborative and multimodal interventions are more effective than simple, noncollaborative interventions” (p. 17). These findings are encouraging in that various types of programs (settings and modality) can be just as effective in helping chronically absent students, which allows schools more options and choices.

Some research studied schools that offer rewards or monetary incentives to improve school attendance. Sturgeon and Beer (1990) examined 14 years of data from a rural high school in the Midwest to see if an attendance reward of exemption from taking semester tests had decreased absenteeism. They examined the school’s student attendance records from 1976 to 1979, when there was no attendance reward policy, and compared them with student attendance records from 1980 to 1989, when the attendance reward policy
Strategies and Interventions for Improving School Attendance

was in effect. Results showed a statistically significant decrease in the number of absences after the attendance reward was adopted. During the years 1976–1979, the average total absent days was 1750.5, which decreased to 912.5 during the years 1980–1989.

Reid and Bailey-Dempsey (1995) randomly assigned junior high and high school girls with academic or attendance problems to either a program that offered financial incentives for improving school and attendance performance, a program that offered social and educational services to the girls and their families, or a control group. Both the financial incentive program and case management program modestly improved school attendance over the control group, but similar results were not seen the next year. Though there was no statistically significant difference between the financial and case management programs in terms of school attendance, academic improvements were better for students receiving case management services than for students receiving only financial incentives.

Miller (1986) conducted a study to see if participation in a therapeutic discipline program would improve students’ attitudes on attendance, increase attendance, and provide greater insight into solving attendance problems among students at a large suburban high school. Students who were truant were randomly assigned to either the therapeutic discipline program or to a control group. The therapeutic program required students to work through a bibliotherapeutic learning packet and attend a follow-up exit conference with the dean to go over the packet. Traditional methods were used on the control group: threatening students with further disciplinary measures and in-school suspension in which students were required to do schoolwork. Both programs required students to participate in a written exercise to measure insight into ways they could help solve their truancy problems. Results from this study showed students in the therapeutic program increased class attendance, had fewer absences from classes, and listed a greater number of insights into resolving their attendance problems. These differences were statistically significant when compared to the control group.

Multilevel Interventions to Improve School Attendance

Across the country, hundreds of thousands of students are absent from schools each day. In order to effectively address attendance problems, school administrators, teachers, and staff must understand the problem from a multilevel perspective. Within education research, school social workers, counselors, psychologists, and administrators have looked at an approach known as Response to Intervention (RTI), which involves three tiers of intervention services. Tier 1 services are delivered to the entire school, while Tier 2 intervention services are delivered to a classroom or small group of students who are at risk for certain problems. Tier 3 intervention services are individual services offered to students with more severe levels of risk (Franklin, Kim, Ryan, Kelly, & Montgomery, 2012). While Tier 3 targeted interventions that focus only on individual students may improve attendance in the short term for that one student, it is unlikely that such interventions will have a widespread effect on attendance across the school. In addition, school attendance...
must be viewed as everyone’s responsibility, not just that of the school’s attendance officer. Figure 1 emphasizes the point that although the individual student is at the center of our concern about truancy, an effective response should involve the school, the family, and the community in a multisystem approach.

![Figure 1. Student-centered multisystem approach to improve school attendance.](image)

School attendance can be influenced by a number of factors specific to the student. These might include drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, poor physical health, teen pregnancy and family responsibilities, student employment, and a lack of understanding of the long-term consequences of school failure. Incorporating Tier 2 or 3 interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy (Ginsburg & Drake, 2002; Harris & Franklin, 2003) for these at-risk groups of students can help to address these influential factors.

Sometimes the school itself is largely responsible for truancy. School factors often include the school climate, such as school size and attitudes of teachers and administrators, lack of flexibility in meeting the needs of students with diverse learning styles and different cultural experiences, inconsistent policies and procedures for dealing with chronic truancy, inconsistent application of those policies, lack of meaningful consequences, a chaotic school culture and/or unsafe school environment, and a curriculum that is perceived as boring, irrelevant, or unchallenging. In these instances, Tier 1 interventions that target the whole school environment, such as the Positive Action Program (Flay, Allred, & Ordway, 2001; see Table 1 for details), are necessary to address school-level factors that influence school attendance. Family factors that can affect student attendance include domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, inadequate parental supervision, poverty and low-wage jobs that require the parents to work long hours, lack of awareness of attendance laws, and parental attitudes toward education and the school. Therefore, school-based family interventions such as Project SAFE (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Tait, & Turner, 2002) are necessary to address family factors that affect attendance. Project SAFE is a prevention program that seeks to prevent risking behaviors that can lead to substance misuse and composed of the I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) program and Strengthening Families (SF)
program. The overall goal of Project SAFE is to teach problem solving, critical thinking, and communication skills to parents, children, and families.

Communities, too, can influence school attendance. They can hurt attendance when they present few opportunities for young people or lack affordable childcare or accessible transportation systems. Communities with high mobility rates and large numbers of single-parent households tend to have high truancy rates. Also, differing cultural attitudes toward education can make a difference in whether a child wants to attend school (Baker et al., 2001).

### Applying Interventions Within a Response to Intervention Framework

#### Individual Student Strategies

Tier 2 or 3 intervention strategies that focus on the individual student tend to focus on psychoeducational interventions and cognitive restructuring (Kearney, 2003). School social workers and other counselors assess reasons a student is absent, focusing on school- and family-related issues. Cognitive and behavioral strategies can help such a student deal with anxiety, stress, and frustrations. Behavioral strategies include relaxation, imagination, and breathing exercises the student can do in class to reduce worry and nervousness (Kearney, 2003). Cognitive strategies include the use of solution-focused and cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques. School social workers and mental health professionals should also focus on increasing students’ self-esteem and social skills, since most students who frequently cut school have little self-confidence academically or socially (Corville-Smith et al., 1998). After-school tutoring programs and mentoring programs can be effective strategies for students who avoid coming to school because of academic problems (National Center for School Engagement, 2007). Tier 3 targeted intervention strategies that focus on students who don’t like school or don’t get along with a teacher or with other students are more complex and require a multilevel approach. Perhaps the strategy might focus on the student or family or evaluate whether mental health services or drug/alcohol treatment services are needed. It could be that the focus should be on academics: Would these students gain more from school if it incorporated technology into the learning process and integrated vocational and school-to-work materials into the curriculum? Career internships might provide valuable hands-on experience that also further stresses the importance of attending classes. Or perhaps the focus should be on the social aspect of school: Is the school one that makes students feel safe, respected, and welcomed? This can be accomplished by knowing students by name and recognizing their successes—no matter how small they may seem (Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 2004).

This sort of multidisciplinary strategy—addressing truancy from three different sides, i.e., student, family, and school—is the only way to make long-term strides in improved school attendance. Though traditional approaches such as punishments and forcing attendance
through parental involvement and truancy officers may be effective in increasing daily student attendance in the short run, the gains don’t last, because these activities weren’t associated with changes in chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

**Family Strategies**

Family involvement is an integral part of reducing school absenteeism, and schools need to collaborate with families in order to improve student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Family problems spill over into the classroom and can affect student attendance and academic performance. A study by Corville-Smith and colleagues (1998) found that absentee students, when compared with students who attended school regularly, perceived their families as being less accepting of them, less cohesive, less consistent and effective in discipline, and more conflicted and controlling.

School social workers and other school-based practitioners are in a unique position to help families deal with their child’s attendance problem. One way practitioners can assist families is by providing resources for families and students. Family problems such as unsteady employment, lack of reliable transportation, divorce, and family conflict all affect student attendance and performance. Providing resources and connecting families with appropriate social services will help reduce family problems and improve the student’s attendance.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) provide a list of three effective family strategies available to school-based practitioners:

1. **Communicate with families when students are absent.** Collaboration between the school and the family begins with frequent and open talks about the student’s attendance problem. An increased effort needs to be made by practitioners to provide parents with information and resources from the school. This can be done by including the parents in school meetings with teachers, administrators, school social workers, and others either at the school or via conference call. Bowen (1999) recommends that practitioners solicit the parents’ perceptions of and insights into their child’s attendance problem. Bowen also recommends that school staff give parents ideas about activities and techniques they can use at home to improve their child’s academic and behavioral problems. Having a specific school contact person for attendance problems can also help increase communication between the school and families if the families have that person’s name and phone number (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). This designated school employee should have resources and strategies available to help parents deal with the attendance problem.

2. **Hold workshops for parents.** School-based practitioners should conduct workshops that deal specifically with attendance problems. These workshops can provide parents with new strategies and tools to improve school attendance. Workshop topics might include reasons for absenteeism, strategies for improving attendance, advice on getting students up and ready for school on time, information on transportation resources, and tips for dealing with resistance. Workshops should include specific in-
formation about attendance policies, procedures, and penalties to better inform families.

3. **Visit the home.** Some school social workers, nurses, and others use home visits and phone calls to parents as part of their family-based intervention to increase parental involvement in their child’s schooling (Ford & Sutphen, 1996). Making home visits is an effective strategy for reducing rates of chronic absenteeism and is usually used when students have severe attendance problems. Home visits allow school personnel to gain a more ecological perspective on the student and her or his home environment; they can see if family problems may be contributing to the attendance problem. Based on the home visit assessment, practitioners can develop a contract with the family detailing specific goals that need to be met in order to avoid legal sanctions.

**School Strategies**

Changes in schools’ organizational structure, curricula, and culture are needed if attendance problems are to be effectively addressed (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Schools should promote an environment where students feel connected to the school and invested in their learning. One way to accomplish this is to improve teacher–student relationships and engage students as active members of the school community. Reducing class sizes, if possible, will increase the interactions between student and teacher and give students the attention they need. Schools can involve students in coming up with Tier 1 universal intervention strategies and programs aimed at reducing absenteeism. By involving students and seeking their perspectives, schools help students feel important and allow their voices to be heard (Fallis & Opotow, 2003).

Some of the more common approaches schools take to address attendance problems involve referring students to school social workers and/or truant officers. This strategy can help improve attendance rates but may not be effective with chronic absenteeism. Providing attendance awards can also be helpful, but they should be given as incentives for improved attendance and not just for perfect attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Another strategy is to provide after-school programs that motivate students to attend school in order to participate. These after-school programs can also be educational, covering topics on improving student self-esteem and building social skills because, as we said above, absentee students more often suffer from these deficits.
Model Truancy Prevention Program

In 1998, The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) developed a bulletin report that highlighted some of the major research findings regarding the problem of truancy and chronic absenteeism. Various programs aimed at individual, school, and community levels were funded in 1999 through OJJDP in an effort to develop evidence-based programs aimed at improving school attendance. Reimer and Dimock (2005) identified several critical components for effective truancy prevention programs:

- broad-based multidisciplinary collaboration of community agencies such as schools, social services, juvenile courts, and law enforcement
- family involvement that values parents “for their advice, experience, and expertise in the community, as clients of our public systems of care, and as experts in the lives of their children” (p. 14)
- comprehensive approach that addresses all of the factors that affect truancy, including transportation, mental health issues, academic issues, and school climate
- combine meaningful sanctions for truancy and appropriate incentives for attendance to promote pro-school attitudes and change the behavior of student
- create a supportive context for learning that includes organizations, community cultures, and policies
- rigorous evaluation and assessment

The National Center for School Engagement (2007) produced a report of model programs that address truancy, school attendance, and student achievement concerns. Eighteen programs were identified as “Blueprint” Model Programs based on a set of standards of program effectiveness developed by the Center for the Study of the Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Table 1 provides an overview of 10 of these programs. A detailed description of all programs can be found in the NCSE report (NCSE, 2007), and more information on the Blueprint Model Programs is available at the Center for the Study of the Prevention of Violence website.
### Table 1. Blueprint Model Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Program Summary</th>
<th>RTI Level &amp; Minority Sample</th>
<th>Effec- tiveness Ratings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program</td>
<td>A school-based program targeting middle school students designed to prevent school failure among high-risk adolescents. It strives to reduce school and community delinquency, including school-based problems, unemployment, criminal behavior, and drug and alcohol abuse. The two-year program consists of four components: (1) collecting information about students’ actions; (2) providing systematic feedback to students and/or parents; (3) rewarding positive student behaviors; and (4) helping students determine strategies to modify their behavior and thus earn more rewards.</td>
<td>Indicated 42% African American sample</td>
<td>Promising Rating by CSAP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Indicated &amp; targeted sample info unavailable</td>
<td>Effective-ness Rating by OJJDP Title V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Academy</td>
<td>A school-based program designed to reduce dropout rates as well as improve school performance and career readiness among at-risk high school youth. Organized as a school within a school, students work in small learning communities to integrate academic and vocational curricula to build connections between school and work and provide students with a range of career development and work-based learning opportunities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comer School Development Program</td>
<td>Addresses various aspects of school climate related to the prevention and reduction of violence in the school setting. Three program components include (1) a school planning team involving parents and school staff; (2) a student and staff support team including mental health and child development experts; and (3) a parent involvement program that engages parents in meaningful ways in the life of the school.</td>
<td>Universal 66–94% African American sample across 3 studies; one study also had 4% Asian-American &amp; 6% other ethnic background</td>
<td>Unrated</td>
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<td>Positive Action Through Holistic Education (PATHE)</td>
<td>Seeks to increase bonding to the school, reduce school disorder, and increase student educational and occupational attainment through broad-based structural changes. Changes might include adopting different disciplinary procedures, management practices, or school activities.</td>
<td>Indicated &amp; targeted 68-100% African American sample</td>
<td>Promising Rating by OJJDP Blueprints &amp; Title V</td>
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<td>School Transitional Environment Program (STEP)</td>
<td>Seeks to ease major adolescent life transitions, especially the transition from junior high school to high school. The program focuses on increasing the availability of social support to adolescents experiencing this transition and reducing the complexities involved in making the transition.</td>
<td>Universal 17% non-Caucasian sample</td>
<td>Promising Rating by OJJDP Blueprints &amp; Effective Rating by OJJDP Title V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Charge</td>
<td>A task-centered, cognitive-behavioral, school-based group intervention developed specifically for helping adolescent Mexican-American mothers improve problem-focused coping behavior, social problem-solving skills, and school achievement. The main objective of this 8-week program is to teach skills critical to long-term self-sufficiency of pregnant and parenting teenagers.</td>
<td>Indicated 96% Mexican/Mexican-American sample</td>
<td>Unrated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA)</td>
<td>Provides adult support and friendship to youth (aged 6–18) from single-parent homes. Services are delivered by volunteers who interact regularly with a youth in a one-on-one relationship. Agencies use a case management approach to screen applicants, make and supervise the matches, and close the matches when eligibility requirements are no longer met or either party decides they can no longer participate fully in the relationship.</td>
<td>Indicated 71% African American, 18% Hispanic, 3% Native American, &amp; 3% other ethnic background sample</td>
<td>Model Rating by OJJDP Blueprints &amp; Exemplary Rating by OJJDP Title V; Effective Rating by CSAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Power!</td>
<td>Seeks to reduce the incidence of substance abuse and related risk factors while increasing the resiliency skills of girls. The program also aims to increase school bonding and achievement through school-based activities. The program includes prevention efforts and activities at the individual, community, and policy levels.</td>
<td>Universal sample info unavailable</td>
<td>Unrated</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
LA's BEST | A comprehensive, community-based after-school program designed to foster a safe environment in which interpersonal skills and self-esteem can be developed. Provides an educational support structure to enhance children’s opportunities and supplement and enrich regular educational programming with new educational and recreational activities. | Indicated 74% Hispanic | Unrated

* OJJDP, Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency; CSAP, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

### Implications and Conclusion

This chapter recognizes the challenges that school administrators, teachers, and families face in trying to improve school attendance. Research has shown a correlation between poor school attendance and problems later in life, such as criminal activity, incarceration, marital and family problems, trouble securing and maintaining stable employment, and violent behavior. Though the individual student is at the center of our concern about truancy, an effective response must involve the school, the family, and the community. Strategies that focus on the individual student include psychoeducational interventions, cognitive restructuring, after-school tutoring programs, and mentoring programs. School social workers and others may also need to encourage the use of mental health and drug/alcohol treatment services for either the student or a family member of the student. Family interventions include providing resources and connecting families with appropriate social services to help reduce family problems, increasing communication with families when students are absent, holding workshops for parents, and visiting parents at their home. Changes in schools’ organizational structure, curricula, and culture are needed to address serious attendance problems.

Improving school attendance is a social problem that needs to be addressed from a multi-level approach involving not only the student and the school but also the family and community. It is also not enough just to get students to show up at school by using punitive measures such as truant officers and suspensions. Schools must work to engage the student by creating a school environment that is welcoming and by addressing academic difficulties that may deter the student from attending school.
Further Reading


References


Strategies and Interventions for Improving School Attendance


Strategies and Interventions for Improving School Attendance


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