



KEY FINDINGS

SCHOOL FUNDING BASED ON DAILY ATTENDANCE

Although the vast majority of States still provide funding to schools based on their annual student enrollment, several States have transitioned to funding based on average daily attendance, including California, Texas, Kentucky, Idaho, New York, Illinois, Mississippi, and Missouri—furthering the push to address truancy.⁴

GRANTEES BENEFIT BY KEEPING YOUTH IN SCHOOL

Two California grantees increased their combined funding by \$1.1 million by increasing their efforts to address truancy.

This is enough funding to pay 16 teachers* for the year or purchase new textbooks for more than 14,600 students.**

*Based on 2011 average California teacher's salary of \$67,871

**Based on estimated cost of \$75 per new textbook

SAFE SCHOOLS/HEALTHY STUDENTS GRANTEES USE RESOURCES TO PREVENT TRUANCY

Truancy is predictive of various delinquent behaviors, including drinking, drug use, and juvenile crime.¹ Social isolation and eventual academic failure through suspension, expulsion, and dropping out are also linked to truancy.² These results of truancy are costly to society in the form of medical expenses, criminal justice costs, work losses, and increased reliance on government programs.³ Truancy prevention is therefore a priority of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative. One measurable outcome of the initiative is improved student attendance.

While the risks and costs alone warrant targeting truant behavior, there may be even greater incentive for schools in States that fund districts based on average daily attendance (ADA). In ADA States, any average attendance rate below 100 percent results in a loss of funding for the school. The cost of each absence depends on the State and district, but the average daily cost of an absence across States is \$40.

Evidence shows that some SS/HS sites in ADA States have taken advantage of the initiative to address truancy and increase school funding for increased attendance. Two California grantees have improved attendance by applying SS/HS resources to truancy prevention and increasing coordination among relevant stakeholders, including SS/HS staff.

One 2006 grantee successfully increased average attendance through its Student Attendance Review Board, which involved regular meetings at the local police department with representatives from law enforcement, child welfare, social services, school administration, and truancy officers. The meetings created an opportunity for increased collaboration among all stakeholders and facilitated more accurate tracking of attendance and monitoring of truant students. The collaboration resulted in additional staff being provided to schools in need. The grantee cited this approach as a reason for an increase in attendance from 94.5 percent in Year 1 to 95.3 percent in Year 3, resulting in a funding increase of \$691,288 the following year. Another 2005 grantee found similar success when it provided high school

truancy officers with a list of middle school students with attendance issues and allowed

One grantee's increase in attendance saved \$691,288.

the officers to more quickly intervene once the students arrived at school. The site trained school staff to write and track truancy letters to students' families, a tactic it found especially effective. These efforts paid off as the attendance rate increased from 93.6 percent in Year 1 to 95.6 percent by the end of Year 3, resulting in an increase of \$436,835 in funding the following year.

Both grantees found significant savings through modest gains in classroom attendance once they had established effective means for collaboration among administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Such actions facilitated better tracking of truant students, improved understanding of the reasons for truancy, and helped establish an action plan to

get students back in class. The combined savings of over \$1 million was achieved without a large increase in attendance in part because of the large student populations. Smaller school districts would need to make a more concerted effort to tackle chronic truancy to achieve similar savings.

Truancy can be indicative of severe delinquent behavior with consequences regardless of the public school funding system. The grantee strategies identified here show that similar success is possible for other schools if they invest in truancy prevention using collaboration and best practices from the field.

REFERENCES

- ^{1,2}Baker, M., Sigmon, J., & Nugent, M. (2001, September). *Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- ³Cohen, M. A., Piquero, A., & Jennings, W. G. (2010, December). Estimating the costs of bad outcomes for at-risk youth and the benefits of early childhood interventions to reduce them. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 21(4).
- ⁴Fermanich, M., Rainey, T., & Silverstein, J. (2011, January). *Colorado Average Daily Membership Study*. Colorado Department of Education.
- ⁵Phillips, R., Linney, J., & Pack, C. (2008). *Safe school ambassadors: Harnessing student power to stop bullying and violence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The average daily cost of an absence is \$40 in ADA States.⁵