

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

Fort Worth Independent School District Comprehensive Truancy Intervention Program

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Funding Source

This initiative is jointly funded by general funds from the FWISD and revenue from City of Fort Worth. It was the first dedicated attendance court established in the State of Texas with the sole purpose of serving FWISD students and families. The Student Attendance Court was established in 2000.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

These funding sources pay for the staff and administrative costs of running the Comprehensive Truancy Intervention Program - Student Attendance Court.

FWISD: \$308,394

FWISD provides funding for the salaries and benefits of the following essential courtroom personnel: a municipal court judge and two deputy city marshals. In addition, FWISD pays for the salaries and benefits of an Assistant Director, 13 Stay-In-School Coordinators, two Court Coordinators, and two clerk personnel. These funds come from the General Revenue Budget of the District.

City of Fort Worth: \$232,509

The City of Fort Worth uses monies from the Juvenile Case Manager Fund and Truancy Prevention and Diversion Fund to pay the full salary and benefit costs for one customer service representative, Truancy Court Prosecutor, one senior customer service representative, and one senior human services specialist.

Scope and Setting

The Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD), in collaboration with the City of Fort Worth and other Tarrant County and city social service agencies, established the Comprehensive Truancy Intervention Program (CTIP). Fort Worth ISD's CTIP is based on a concept of prevention, intervention, and wraparound services to address the needs of students and their families as it relates to truancy. The program's primary goals are to increase student attendance and decrease student dropouts.

The CTIP is separated into two functions: (a) prevention and intervention and (b) Student Attendance (truancy) Court interventions. Each of our designated Stay-In-School Coordinators (Truancy Officers) are housed at the traditional high school campuses in FWISD with an additional Program Specialist housed at our high school alternative campus. The Student Attendance Court (SAC) address is 5701 Meadowbrook Drive, Building 3, Fort Worth, Texas 76112.

The first function of the program is to provide prevention and intervention services targeting the following objectives:

- Reducing truancy districtwide
- Improving attendance districtwide
- Decreasing student dropout rates
- Centralizing and expediting court proceedings for students and families
- Individualizing disposition plans for students and families (Behavioral Management Plans)

The second function of the program involves the Student Attendance Court which provides the following:

- Consistent and equitable disposition of truancy cases
- Timely referral of students to the court for disposition and interventions
- Competent jurisdiction based on knowledge of applicable laws
- Consistent and equitable sanctions from the one court
- Expedient resumption of regular school attendance
- Early intervention in juvenile behaviors that is a precursor to other juvenile crime activities

Staffing Pattern

Fort Worth ISD Personnel

- Thirteen Stay-In-School Coordinators (truancy officers) assigned to traditional high school campuses and all feeder middle and elementary campuses
- One Intervention Specialist assigned to both the middle school and high school Alternative Campuses
- One Assistant Director assigned to the Student Attendance Court
- Two Court Coordinators assigned to the Student Attendance Court
- Two Clerical Clerks assigned to Student Attendance Court

Student Attendance Court Personnel:

- One Municipal Judge
- Two City Marshals
- Three Court Managers

Population Served

Fort Worth ISD has a student enrollment of approximately 87,000 students. The student enrollment includes students from pre-kindergarten through high school. The CTIP provides preventive services to all students and their families enrolled in the District. This preventive measure consists of outreach in the form of annual informational letters, campus presentations, and warning letters. Intervention services are initiated when students exhibit emerging truancy behaviors and continue to serve those who are severely chronically truant. These services include home visits; student conferences; parent conferences; mediation services; administrative conferences; Student Attendance Review Team (SART) meetings (student, parents, administrators, student support personnel, and Stay-In-School Coordinator); and district and community referrals. The chronic to severely chronic students receive individualized behavior management plans.

Project Origination

In the 90's, FWISD began experiencing a growing truancy issue. The CTIP program was developed in 1995. The challenge of processing court actions in a timely and consistent manner brought about the Student Attendance Court in 2000. In 2003, the District began hiring Stay In School Coordinators. The initial partnership included Fort Worth ISD, City of Fort Worth, Tarrant County District Attorney's Office, and Tarrant County Juvenile Probation Department. The current interlocal agreement is between the City of Fort Worth and Fort Worth ISD.

Issues Addressed

FWISD is an urban school district with a 77% economically disadvantaged population and a 31% English Language Learners population. There are numerous challenges that our students must overcome. These challenges tend to manifest themselves as truant conduct. These issues run the gamut including academic deficiencies, poverty related issues, mental health issues, substance abuse issues, family of origin issues, etc. The Comprehensive Truancy Intervention Program provides an extensive approach to addressing truancy from a restorative justice perspective. It addresses the underlying reasons for which students become truant.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

The desired outcomes of this project were to improve attendance rates and decrease dropout rates districtwide. A 2015 research evaluation of the program by the Applied Research and Program Evaluation Department of the FWISD determined that since the conception of the CTIP program the average daily attendance rate has consistently increased. The average daily attendance rate began at 93.6% and has been as high as 95.1%. The same evaluation confirmed that interventions at all levels were impactful in reducing truancy and the dropout rate districtwide. Across the district, graduation rates continue to increase. Having a truancy court solely dedicated to the district has both centralized and expedited court proceedings.

Strategies and/or Interventions

In an effort to sustain the Comprehensive Truancy Intervention Program engaging the community and reaching out to community providers were essential elements to success of the program. Additional strategies included:

- Developing a holistic approach to addressing truancy
- School and Community Collaboration
- Relationship Building
- Student and Family Engagement
- Continuity of Services
- Dedicated Truancy Court
- District's and City's and County's Commitment to the Students and Families
- Professional Development

Project Timeline

The CTIP is ongoing. It was conceived in 1995 and continues to grow.

Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project

To carry out this program leadership within the district and within our collaborative partners was essential. The district and community created a vision that focused on resolving the impact of truancy and its long-term implications.

Outcomes and Achievements

A well-known independent school district in Texas indicated that their comprehensive truancy intervention program benefitted students in both the short and long term.

Further, common knowledge indicates that student truancy is a result of a number of causes. An effective truancy intervention program benefits students, teachers, and the community. Focusing on underlying issues of truancy means that student performance issues are addressed at their root. Regular attendance patterns equate to an increase in classroom time, which may lead to higher grades and success

in school. Inadvertently, students are better prepared for success in college, career, and community leadership. Because school attendance is directly related to student risk, CTIP's efforts also reduce school dropout rates.

Data for School Years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 (3 years Period) indicates the following:

- Graduation rates have increased each of these years ending in 84.3% districtwide.
- Attendance rates for the same period of time have increased each of those three years ending in 93.1% districtwide
- Dropout rates have decreased based on grade span 7-12 from 3.2% in 2011-2012 to 1.9% in 2013-2014
- Court filings have steadily decreased from a high of 1,263 ending in 855 for the 2013-2014 school year

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Stay In School Coordinators had 271,924 contact minutes and 17,167 contact interventions. In the 2013-2014 school year, the Stay-In-School Coordinators had 194,285 contact minutes and approximately 13, 000 contact interventions. This represents a consistent increase in both categories.

Outcomes Related to School Completion and Graduation Rates

The Comprehensive Truancy Intervention Program's hypothesis states that as the number of contact minutes and interventions increase, there is a positive impact on the attendance rates and graduation rates in the district. These contact minutes and interventions will also negatively impact the number of students who require court interventions and will directly impact the district dropout rate.

Current Status of Project

Texas has joined the rest of the nation in decriminalizing truant conduct with the passing of House Bill 2398 entitled Omnibus Truancy Reform Bill. The new law also focused on prevention and intervention measures. Its impact on the Comprehensive Truancy Intervention Program is minimal. CTIP has a restorative justice approach that emphasizes prevention and intervention.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

My title is Director of Student Engagement and School Completion. My role is to oversee the entire CTIP. This includes program design and adjustment, staff development, collaboration initiatives, and all other administrative responsibilities.

Lessons Learned

- Be patient—it is imperative that the program engages all stakeholders.
- Be informed and inform—it is important to be aware of latest trends in the field and then communicate these trends to the community.
- Be flexible—a program like this requires a great deal of hands-on attention. Understanding the climate and culture that you are engaging requires flexibility.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

Look at things with the end results in mind.