

Attendance Improvement Program

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Funding Sources:

The Attendance Improvement Program (AIP) is funded through the Illinois State Board of Education Truancy Alternative Optional Education Program (TAOEP) to serve 14 districts within Champaign-Ford counties.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

The salaries, program materials and resources are all included in the district's budget through the TAOEP grant. The AIP received \$97,000 dollars. The AIP team consists of the following five members:

- Director
- Lead Attendance Specialist
- Data Manager
- GED teacher
- Social Worker/AIP Consultant

Grant funds, in part, were used to provide salaries for the full time Lead Attendance Specialist, part-time Data Manager and a quarter of the funding is paid to the GED teacher.

The materials and resources necessary for the program to operate efficiently and effectively included program supplies such as student file folders, file cabinets, paper, printer, ink, incentive budget, GED books and test material, office supplies and a budget for travel mileage reimbursement.

Project Description:

The ROE's overall mission is to advance excellence in education by leveraging leadership, Knowledge, and services across communities. Leadership is the ability of individuals in an organization to provide excellent programs, have a commitment for improvement, and collaborate to serve and be visionary in recognizing its ultimate potential. Knowledge is a portal to maintain continuous improvement, apply research and data, implement innovative practices, and provide opportunities for active engagement and learning. Services are programs and activities that address the educational needs of all learners, leverage and support community partnerships and are quality, timely and appropriate. The purpose of AIP is to assist schools and families by identifying truant students, assessing the causes of truancy and providing intervention services. The Regional Office of Education offers a comprehensive Truancy Intervention Initiative complemented with a targeted research-based, three-tiered Truancy Intervention Program.

1. **Tier 1/Early Intervention (School requirements):** Basic early intervention strategies which address the needs of truants who have fewer than 10 unexcused absences. Tier 1 interventions is the school attempts and interventions used to address attendance of potential truants. Some schools will mail out 5 or 10 day notices to families, complete home visits, provide mentoring supports, schedule family meetings to address attendance concerns or they will consider involving the student in an incentive or other supportive programs to help motivate the student increase their school attendance.

2. **Tier 2/Prevention:** Monitoring of truant students. Students could be truant or chronic truant in this category (unexcused absent up-to 8 days or 9 or more days to be considered chronic truant). In the areas of daily attendance, punctuality, grades, and behavior to promote school engagement and improved attendance. Interventions used in this tier consist of attendance monitoring, home visits, building team support meetings and Individual Optional Educational Plan (IOEP). Each student will be assigned a caseworker that will monitor their weekly attendance, grades, behavior logs and all other goals outlined in their IOEP. Incentives are offered to students in Tier 2 & 3. Incentives consist of goodie bags/treats and/or lunch with the AIP team. At the conclude of the school year, each student who improved his/her overall attendance will receive a certificate of improvement and a gift card.

3. **Tier 3/Academic Support:** Academic counseling, credit retrieval, tutoring and academic placement. For a student to receive T3 services he/she must be chronic truant (9 or more unexcused absences, although students in this category are usually unexcused absent for 20 or more days), be a potential dropout and/or an at-risk youth for juvenile detention, substance abuse, mental health needs or involved in child welfare system, etc.

Initiatives include:

A: Attendance Improvement Service Plan

B: GED Instruction: RE-Engage Program (Grades 10-12)

Staffing Pattern:

- * Director of Alternative Services
- * Attendance Improvement Specialist
- * Social Worker/Program Consultant
- * Data Manager

Population Served:

Truancy Prevention services are provided to students that are truant, chronic truants, potential dropouts and/or dropouts grades K-12. Truants are defined as student's subject to compulsory school attendance who are absent for the entire school day or a portion of the school day without proper permission. Students are considered to be chronically truant when absent 5% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days without permission. Dropouts consist of those students no longer attending school, while potential dropouts are those students with an attendance problem (chronic truancy, truancy, tardiness, selective absenteeism or excessive absenteeism) that interferes with academic learning.

Population Served:

AIP Truancy Goal for 2017-2018 school year = serve 110 truant students.

- 12/14 school districts participated in AIP services.
- 133 Referrals submitted. 125 Served and submitted to ISBE.
- 31/125 students had one or more disabilities.
- 3/6 GED Re-engage students graduated.
- 52 students improved attendance overall with AIP services.
- 32 students were truants (absent up-to 8 days)

- 93 students were chronic truants (absent 9+ days)
- 70 of the referred students were in grades K-5
- 19 of the referred students were in grades 6-8
- 36 of the referred students were in grades 9-12

Project Origination:

Truancy intervention and support has been offered through the ROE for years. However, a new grant was written by the Assistant Superintendent in 2017 to offer a three-tiered approach with an additional focus on alternative education program (GED RE-Engage).

Issues Addressed:

The program addresses the issue of truancy and utilizes three tiers of strategies that are universal and are available to every student in a school building. Tiers are also aimed at early intervention and designed to help students who need slightly more support to avoid chronic truancy, and it offers intensive supports to the students facing the greatest challenges to get to school.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

The desired outcome and/or objectives of the AIP program is to offer support services, engage students and families, recognize good and improved attendance, provide personalized outreach, remove barriers and to monitor data.

Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:

The interventions used in this program are categorized by tiers. Tier 1 is for students whose attendance can be maintained and cultivated as long as the universal prevention-oriented supports are in place. Tier 2 is for students who have a past history of truancy (fewer than 5% unexcused absences during the past 180 days or face a risk factor (e.g. a chronic illness like asthma) that makes attendance more difficult and need a higher level of more individualized support in addition to benefiting from the universal supports. Tier 3 is for students who are chronically truant having more than 5% unexcused absences during the past 180 days and/or face a risk factor such as involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, homelessness or having a parent who is or have been incarcerated.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

Outcomes, results, and achievements of the project during year one consisted of getting the new program information to 14 school districts. We hosted several district meetings and visited several schools. Districts were happy to have the support and our program served 125 students across the districts (with a goal of serving 110 per school year). Approximately 60 % of the students referred to our program improved their overall attendance with our support.

Project Timeline:

This project is on-going and outcomes are reviewed yearly. The grant was issued for three years.

Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:

Our program showed an increase in student attendance, a decrease in tardiness and four dropouts/potential dropout students participated in our GED RE-Engage program and graduated successfully by the conclude of the 2018 school year.

Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:

The special conditions, expertise, and/or skills that are required to carry out this project are based on the 15 strategies for dropout prevention. It also includes hiring a staff with a history of working in social services, knowledge of the educational system and experience working with the at-risk population.

Current Status of Project:

We currently have 72 active truancy cases and 0 participants in the GED Re-engage program, to date. Students will be evaluated in December 2018 for improvements and, if attendance remains stable, those students will be dismissed from AIP services by mid-December.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

My role as a NDPS certification program participant and or a Lead Attendance Improvement Specialist is to provide services and support to families over two counties. The goal is to offer families a variety of resources to help address immediate needs and to eliminate any barriers that interfere with the education of all students.

Lessons Learned:

The lessons I learned from this project include the importance of paying attention to the “whole” child. Every family is unique and every student is different, therefore you can never use a one size-fits all approach.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

The advice I would give other dropout prevention practitioners about the project is to never stop looking for ways to improve your program. Research and review data from all across the world and never give up on any child. THEY NEED US!