

Preventing Chronic Absenteeism & Truancy

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The literature provides numerous recommendations to prevent and/or reduce chronic student absenteeism. Many of these strategies have been implemented in small settings. These programs show considerable promise. However, evidence that these programs are effective at scale (i.e., implemented across a school corporation or across the state) remains limited. Based on the existing research, it does not appear that any single strategy is the most effective strategy (Maynard, et al., 2012). Broadly, the review suggests that strategies to reduce student absenteeism generally involve some form of monitoring, prevention, intervention, and as a final step some type of truancy or legal intervention. Within this broad framework, research identifies specific strategies that can be used by schools, parents, and communities to improve student attendance. Given the limitations of the existing research, it is likely that a combination of strategies must be leveraged to fully address student attendance issues.

Based on the results of this review of the existing literature, it is assumed that an effective student attendance program includes monitoring, prevention, and intervention activities. Monitoring activities should provide schools with accurate and timely information to effectively identify students who are most at-risk of becoming chronically absent. That is, these systems should provide educators with information about student attendance before the student becomes chronically absent. Second, schools and school corporations can take steps to prevent student absenteeism. These prevention activities should be broad-based and designed to educate students, parents, families, teachers, and communities about the importance of consistent school attendance while also creating conditions that incentive perfect or near-perfect attendance. More importantly, prevention measures should also include efforts to provide education and information to students – particularly in the elementary grades - so that they develop an understanding of the importance of regular school attendance. Intervention activities should be strategically focused on students whose attendance is not improving. These interventions should include immediate communication with parents about their son or daughter's attendance as well as follow-up supports that effectively assist students in arriving at school on-time, ready-to-learn. As a final measure, the research indicates that school corporations may benefit from partnerships with community agencies that offer broader access to social services and juvenile justice programs than schools alone can provide. These partnerships enable schools to reach students who are chronically absent, truant, or stopped attending school altogether.

Attendance Monitoring

One of the first steps toward improving student attendance requires developing some form of effective monitoring system. Schools, parents, and communities cannot act to improve student attendance unless they understand which students are missing school. Effective monitoring helps educators and communities effectively identify students who are most at-

risk of becoming chronically absent. Researchers and policy-makers have increasingly focused on early-warning systems as an important measure in preventing student absenteeism and truancy. Early-warning systems "use routinely available data housed at the school that are good predictors of whether a student is likely to drop out of school" (Heppen & Therriault, 2008, p. 2). Attendance data is most often incorporated in these systems as they are easily accessible to school personnel and routinely collected (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). As Neild and Balfanz (1006) have previously reported, student absences early in the academic term predict whether a student will graduate (at the high school level) or encounter academic challenges (at the elementary and middle school level). The National High School Center indicates that attendance in the first 20 days of an academic period serves as high yield indicator for students who are likely to dropout or fail to graduate. They further indicate that students who miss 10% of instructional time in their first year of high school are more likely to dropout. Thus, early warning systems that monitor student attendance and identify when students have missed a specific number of days provide essential information to administrators, teachers, and support personnel that can be used to determine when (whether) to intervene to improve student attendance.

Prevention Strategies and Programs

The research literature provides important indications about the efficacy of specific interventions. The literature is expansive and covers issues related to student physical and mental health, school facilities, academic programs, and community-based initiatives. A comprehensive review is thus beyond the scope of this document. Instead, the discussion of prevention strategies attempts to distill from the research those strategies that are most clearly supported by existing empirical research. Generally, the literature suggests that efforts to improve awareness among parents and the community, health-related improvement programs, as well as school-based advising/counseling structures are among the most effective ways to improve student attendance.

Health-related efforts

The literature provides numerous recommendations related to improving attendance by improving student health. Reducing the transmission of common illnesses through aggressive hand washing programs and improving the quality of school ventilation appear to be two of the most valuable steps that schools and districts can take to improve student attendance.

Reducing Common Illnesses through Hand washing

Absenteeism due to common illnesses and health issues is largely confined in elementary-aged students, with most research efforts focusing exclusively on this age group. A study performed by Guinan, Gucken, and Ali (2002) showed the effectiveness of reducing absenteeism by implementing a personal hygiene program, "Buddies Hand Washing Program," in five elementary schools. The program included instruction on proper hygiene and hand washing by the classroom teacher, an age-appropriate video on the importance of hand washing, as well as a pamphlet distributed to students with age-appropriate activities with a hand washing focus. The outcomes of implementation of the "Buddies Hand Washing

Program" showed a 50.6% decrease in absences in the test group compared to the control group. Similar results have been obtained using the same program in Detroit (Master, Longe, & Dickson, 1997). Similar research performed by Sandora, Shih, and Goldmann (2008) showed comparative results in the effectiveness on educating students on the importance of hand washing and encouraging a culture of hygiene through the use of hand sanitizer and disinfectant surface wipes. This study also found a significantly lower number of absences due to gastrointestinal illness in the test group compared to the control group. Additionally, the study found a reduced amount of bacteria and viruses present on classroom surfaces. The effectiveness of instituting a program focused on hand and general hygiene is further supported by the 34% decrease in absenteeism after multi-week instruction on hand washing done in a study by Tousman, Arnold, Helland, Roth, Heshelman, Castaneda, Fischer, O'Neil, and Bileto (2007). A more recent study of more than 750 elementary-aged school children in Chicago, found that students who received instruction about effective hand-washing had significantly lower rates of absenteeism compared with students who did not receive the instruction (Lau, Springston, Sohn, Mason, Gadola, Damitz, & Gupta, 2009). Taken together, research indicates that school-level hand washing programs (particularly those that include an instructional component) result in improved student attendance.

Improving Respiratory Health through Improved Ventilation

School districts and school personnel can improve student attendance by increasing classroom ventilation and taking steps to improve student respiratory health. Given asthma is one of the leading predictors of student absences (CDC, 2004), improvements in classroom and school air quality have been closely associated with improvements in student attendance (Schendell, et al., 2004).

Similarly, school districts can improve student attendance by providing educational opportunities for students and their families designed to provide information and raise awareness about the effects of respiratory conditions. Kelly and colleagues (2000) conducted a controlled-trial with Black children. The children were provided with one-on-one education/training by an outreach nurse. The outreach resulted in a decrease in emergency department visits as well as hospitalizations – both important factors in improving student attendance. Jones and colleagues (2004) conducted a before and after study with Hispanic children in their homes and found that education/awareness efforts resulted in increased knowledge about asthma, the importance of using maintenance medications. They also observed a significant decrease in environmental triggers.

Schools can also improve attendance by ensuring that maintenance medications for asthma, such as inhaled corticosteroids, are provided to students on a regular basis. Halteman and colleagues (2004) conducted a randomized control trial with urban children. Inhaled corticosteroids were provided to students on a daily basis at school. The study reported that providing this medication resulted in fewer school absences and more days without symptoms.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides resources to schools and districts related to indoor air quality as part of the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools program. The program provides strategies for schools that are experiencing indoor air quality issues caused by inadequate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems and

moisture/mold. Both HVAC and moisture/mold have been linked to respiratory health issues in children. The program provides schools with a step-by-by approach based on six key drivers. These drivers include: organizing for success, communicating with everyone, assessing the environment, planning short-term and long-term activities, acting to address structural, institutional and behavioral issues, and evaluating your results for continuous improvement. According to the EPA, the program is based on lessons learned from more than 800 schools who participated in a national survey focused on Indoor Air Quality Practices.

Improving Student Mental Health

In order to reduce absenteeism and truancy due to avoidance and refusal behavior, Kearney (2008) proposed the use of medical and clinical intervention. Medical intervention is used for those with a diagnosis, commonly anxiety or depression that contributes to school avoidance or school refusal behaviors. The rate of effectiveness in medical treatment was dependent on the diagnosis and type of pharmaceutical used, with lower rates of success for those suffering from anxiety-based disorders and higher rates of success for those being treated with imipramine (Layne, Bernstein, Egan, & Kushner 2003). Kearney (2008) alternatively suggests looking for behavioral traits or reasons that students may be missing or avoiding school instead in attempts to recognize those that may be suffering from a medically or clinically treatable diagnosis that amplifies school avoidance behavior. Comparatively, clinical intervention with a cognitive-behavioral approach has additionally been found empirically supported in treating school avoidance, especially in students with anxiety-based disorders (Kearney 2008; King, Tonge, Heyne, & Ollendick 2000). These clinical treatments include the use of meditation, teaching of stress and anxiety reduction methods, and exposure-based practices based on reasons why the student was avoiding or refusing school based on information obtained through interviews, observation, and score on School Refusal Assessment Scale (Kearney 2008). In both medical and clinical treatments, the aim is to address underlying mental health issues that contribute to lower levels of student attendance caused by school avoidance or school refusal behaviors.

Examples of Health-related Programs

- **Creating an Asthma-Friendly School:** An education and outreach tool kit developed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for use with parents, teachers, administrators, central office administrators, and community members. The program provides information about asthma, its effect on student attendance, and provide strategies to help students learn to better manage their asthma. The program is designed persuade school staff about the detrimental effects of asthma as well as the steps that can be taken to create school environments that are asthma-friendly. Further information is available online at: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/asthma/creatingaafs/index.htm> (link is external)
- **Healthy Schools, Healthy People – It's a Snap:** The program introduces students in elementary grades to the importance of personal hygiene. The program combines classroom instruction focused on personal hygiene with activities designed to raise awareness among elementary-aged students. Further information is available online at: <http://www.itsasnap.org> (link is external)

- Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools (EPA): Provides schools and school districts with a comprehensive approach to improving air quality in schools by raising awareness among school-level stakeholders, identifying causes and contributing factors to poor air quality, and initiating efforts to improve air quality. Further information is available online at: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/> (link is external)

Enhancing school culture and community

School culture is related to school avoidance behaviors as well as student perceptions of the school. As stated previously, school-avoidance and refusal behavior has a noticeable effect on rates of chronic absenteeism and truancy (Kearney, 2008). The school's culture often serves as a catalyst for school avoidance behaviors. The presence of bullying, fights, discriminatory practices or language, as well as poor student-teacher relationships all contributes to the student's reluctant to attendance school. Research suggests that efforts to improve school and community should focus on teacher-student relationships as well as the learning environment.

Increasing Student Engagement

Changing instructional practices and emphasizing greater personalization and student engagement might also improve attendance as it results in increased levels of student engagement. The literature on student engagement indicates that there are five strategies classroom teachers can adopt to promote higher levels of student engagement (Ramaley & Zia, 2005). First, teachers can work to promote learning that is relevant to the students and the world that they live in. Second, teachers can improve student engagement by introducing various forms of instructional technology. This includes computers, as well as scientific equipment, multi-media, internet resources, industrial tools, and other forms of portable communication equipment. Third, Ramaley and Zia (2005) suggest that students are most engaged in classrooms what are positive, challenging, and open. They refer to these classrooms as 'transparent learning climates' which describes conditions that promote risk-taking in learning. Fourth, classrooms that feature positive 'peer-to-peer' relationships between students and teachers promote improved student engagement. Finally, teachers can facilitate student engagement by modeling 'learning' for the students – showing them that they, too, are learners.

Mentoring Students for Academic Success

Mentoring is also viewed as an important strategy for improved student attendance. Research on national mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Across Ages, demonstrate that mentoring has a positive influence on student attendance (Herrera, et al., 2007). Dubois and colleagues (2002), however, conducted a meta-analysis of research on mentoring programs and found that on the whole these programs have only a small effect on students. This claim appears to be an anomaly in the research as several studies identify positive effects on student attendance from mentoring programs. For example, claims regarding the efficacy of Big Brothers/Big Sisters have been consistent across multiple studies and years (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Big Brothers/Big Sisters has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement (Herrera, et al., 2007).

Similarly, the Check and Connect Program, which pairs adult mentors with middle and high school students, has undergone rigorous evaluation and been found to improve attendance among student participants (Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christensen, 2003).

Examples of School Based Attendance Program

- **Across Ages:** A comprehensive program designed to provide mentoring support to youth and adolescents and to create opportunities for older adults (age 55+) to maintain an active role in their communities. According to the program's website, the program aims to: "increase the protective factors for high- risk students in order to prevent, reduce or delay the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and the attendant problems associated with such use." More specifically, the program seeks to: (1) Increase the knowledge of health/substance abuse issues and foster healthy attitudes, intentions and behavior regarding drug use among targeted youth; (2) Improve school bonding, including academic performance, school attendance and behavior and attitudes toward school; (3) Strengthen relationships with adults and peers; and (4) Enhance problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- **Big Brothers/Big Sisters:** One of the best known programs for youth mentoring, Big Brothers/Big Sisters matches adult mentors with children. Big Brothers/Big Sisters matches children age 6 to 18 with adult mentors in communities across the country. We develop positive relationships that have a direct and lasting effect on the lives of young people. (Retrieved from <http://www.bbbs.org> (link is external))
- **Career Academies:** A Career Academy is a school within a school that links students with peers, teachers, and community partners in a disciplined environment, fostering academic success and mental and emotional health. Originally created to help inner-city students stay in school and obtain meaningful occupational experience, academies and similar programs have evolved into a multifaceted, integrated approach to reducing delinquent behavior and enhancing protective factors among at-risk youths. These academies enable youths who may have trouble fitting into the larger school environment to belong to a smaller educational community and connect what they learn in school with their career aspirations and goals. (Retrieved from <http://casn.berkeley.edu/> (link is external))
- **Check and Connect:** Check & Connect is a research-based intervention used with students who are disengaged from school and learning. The core of Check & Connect is a trusting relationship between the student and a caring, trained mentor. This mentor both advocates for and challenges the student and partners with the family, school, and community to keep education salient for the student. Check refers to systematic monitoring of student performance variables (e.g., absences, tardies, behavioral referrals, grades). Connect refers to personalized, timely intervention focused on problem solving, skill building, and competence enhancement. Students are referred to Check & Connect when they show warning signs of disengaging from school, such as poor attendance, behavioral issues, and/or low grades. Mentors work with caseloads of students and families for at least two years. They function as liaisons between home and school, striving to build constructive family-school relationships. (Retrieved from <http://checkandconnect.umn.edu> (link is external))
- **Coping and Support Training (CAST):** CAST is a school-based prevention program that targets young people in either middle school or high school. CAST is a 12-session, small group skills training intervention designed to enhance personal competencies and social support resources. CAST may be implemented as a "selective" or an

"indicated" prevention program, targeting groups or individuals at higher risk for school dropout (and/or suicide). The CAST program goals are to decrease suicide risk and emotional distress, drug involvement, and school problems. When implemented with fidelity, the program is likely to be effective for 1) increasing school satisfaction and attendance, and decreasing potential for dropout; as well as 2) decreases in multiple, co-occurring problems common among high-risk youth, including depression and suicide-risk behaviors, drug involvement, and anger control problems; while 3) enhancing protective factors, such as personal control, problem-solving coping, and family support. (Retrieved from <http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/> (link is external))

Parent and family outreach and partnerships

Scholars have also suggested that it may be effective to engage parents as part of the team working in support of improved student attendance (Sheverbush, Smith, & DeGruson, 2000). Sheverbush and colleagues (2000) specifically note the importance of emphasizing solutions that come from families as opposed to schools. Implementation of strategies aimed at developing family, school, and community partnerships has proven effective in increasing daily attendance rates as well as decreasing chronic absence. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) identified key program elements in building partnerships to reduce absences, including:

- Making home visits to families of chronically absent students;
- Rewarding students for improved attendance;
- Establishing a contact person at school for parents to work with;
- Calling home when students are absent;
- Conducting workshops for families about attendance;
- Referring chronically absent students to counselors;
- Using a truant officer to work with problem students and families.

Schools that focused on increasing attendance by implementing strategies with these key elements showed a more substantial increase in daily attendance rates from one year to the next for participating schools, as well as a two percent decrease in chronic absence. Additionally, schools that offered after-school programs also had larger increases in daily attendance and larger decreases in chronic absence than those schools that did not offer after-school programs.

Later research by Sheldon (2007) on the effectiveness of implementing a community partnership program created by the National Network of Partner Schools (NNPS) to increase attendance and reduce chronic absence reinforced the research done by Epstein and him in 2007. NNPS member schools were given tools and guidelines in creating effective community partnership building programs as well as a framework of six key elements in increasing involvement, targeted at (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision-making, and (6) collaborating with the community (Epstein 2001). When comparing the rates of attendance for schools that were members of NNPS and schools that were not, Sheldon found that, after controlling for variables, schools implementing the NNPS partnership program had higher rates of student attendance.

Examples of Parent/Family Programs

- Communities in Schools: CIS has become one of the nation's leading dropout prevention organization. We have a unique model that positions a coordinator inside schools to assess needs and deliver necessary resources that remove barriers to success. Their mission is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. Our network is comprised of nearly 5,000 passionate professionals in 25 states and the District of Columbia. We serve the most vulnerable students in the most dropout-prone school districts, nearly 1.3 million young people in more than 2,700 schools. (Retrieved from <http://communitiesinschools.org> (link is external))
- Families and Schools Together (FAST): A prevention/early intervention after-school program that has dramatically changed the learning climate at schools and communities all over the world. The program was founded by researcher and social worker, Dr. Lynn McDonald in 1988 and has been implemented in over 2,000 communities in 46 states and 8 countries. FAST has changed the way many people think of parent Involvement, interventions, and how to keep kids safe, drug-free, and in school. (Retrieved from <http://www.familiesandschools.org/> (link is external))
- National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS): A well-research program designed to provide schools, districts, and states with research-based models to connect families, communities, and other partners into the work of schools. The program rests on the formation of an Action Team for Partnerships. The team provides support to students, their families, and communities. The teams spur involvement related to parenting, communication, volunteering, home-based learning, school-based decision-making, and community collaboration. (Retrieved from <http://nnps.jhucsos.com/> (link is external))

Truancy and legal intervention

Truancy and legal intervention should represent the final step in a school or district's effort to improve student attendance. This step often requires a combination of efforts from schools, school districts, as well as the juvenile justice system and juvenile courts. As a summary from the National Center for Student Engagement reports, effective truancy reduction programs involve collaboration between schools, government agencies, communities, and families; family involvement; a comprehensive approach that focuses on prevention and intervention; use of incentives and sanctions; a supportive context; as well as ongoing evaluation of the program's effectiveness and consistent reference to current best practices. The National Center for State Courts (NCSC, 2002) asserts that truant students require supports from programs that address scholastic difficulties, psychological programs, and mediate dysfunctional family factors. A meta-analysis completed by the Washington Institute for Public Policy indicated that alternative education programs, mentoring programs, and behavioral programs all were positively associated with improvements in attendance among truant students (Kilma, Miller, & Nunlist, 2009). Despite recommendations for program structures, empirical research reporting the efficacy of truancy programs and interventions is limited. Only a few programs have been evaluated with methods that allow for causality to be determined (Institute for Education Sciences, 2009; Kilma, et al., 2009; Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christensen, 2003; Tyler, 2008). In fact, one team of researchers abandoned their effort to conduct a meta-analysis of truancy programs because the research base proved seriously under-developed and estimates of programmatic effect size could not be calculated (Lehr, et al., 2003). A more recent analysis

suggests that attendance interventions achieve similar results regardless of their design (Maynard, et al., 2012).

Despite these limitations, the National Center for School Engagement (2007) recommends that the following structures truancy services must be part of the existing student support services structure, focus on early intervention services, and enlist community services and partners in supporting improved attendance. The last point related to the engagement of community partners is particularly important as many existing truancy programs focus primarily on "sanctions" and fail to consider the importance of other non-punitive interventions (Dembo & Gullledge, 2009). This review reveals that truancy interventions can be found at the school, district, and community level with the structures for truancy related initiatives most commonly being held in centers or programs dedicated to student 'recovery and reconnection' as well as in law enforcement models whereby truant students are 'collected and returned' to school. Research indicates that centers and programs tend to be the more effective of these models (Smink & Reimer, 2005).

Truancy Centers and Programs

The existing research tends to locate truancy programs at the school level or in partnerships between schools and other social service agencies. For example, the research suggests that Truancy Assessment and Service Centers (TASC) "provide children in kindergarten through fifth grade early identification, assessment, and prompt delivery of coordinated interventions to prevent continued unexcused absences from school" (Smink & Reimer, 2005, p. 9). Based on evaluation research, Smink & Reimer (2005) noted that TASC involvement 68% of children referred had five or fewer unexcused absences with 27% having no unexcused absences after referral. These programs are often located outside the school.

In a more recent analysis, Marvul (2012) studied a truancy program located in a small, transitional high school. This program represents the second type of program whereby the truancy intervention is provided within the context of the school. Marvul's (2012) study involved treatment and control groups with 40 randomly assigned male students. The program combined attendance monitoring, emphasis on participation in club sports, and moral character education to improve attendance and student engagement. According to the results of the study, Marvul concluded that the number of absences dropped from 21.85 days in the control group to 7.35 days in the treatment group indicating that the intervention was effective in improving student attendance.

In both programs, truant students were connected with other personal, social, and academic services that enabled them to attend school. This reflects the core message in research – truancy interventions must be integrated with services and supports that enable the student to attend school when they cannot.

Court-Based & Law Enforcement Interventions

Court-based interventions have also been shown to reduce the incidence of truancy (Mueller, Giacomazzi, & Stoddard, 2006). These programs bring truant students before a judge or representative of the juvenile justice system. In most cases, the judge or juvenile justice official informs the student's parents of their child's attendance and works with the parents to develop an agreement between the parents and the court to improve the child's

attendance. In some cases, these conversations also provide opportunities to identify needed social and family supports without which the student has been unable to attend school. Alternatively, law enforcement agencies have adopted models that are similar to crime prevention. Bazemore, Stinchcomb, & Leip (2004) studied an initiative operated by the sheriff's department in a large, urban county that was designed to reduce truancy rates by utilizing a crime control model. As reported by Dembo and Gullledge (2009), Truant students were picked up by police officers and taken to a central Truancy Unit. Once at the unit, students were processed by police officers and assessed by social services personnel. While at the truancy unit, students received a basic assessment and interview, brief informal counseling with a school social worker, and are under enforced silence. The students cannot spend more than 6 hours at the center and must be picked up by a parent or guardian (p.7).

While the model resulted in modest short-term reductions in student absenteeism. Long-term the program actually proved detrimental as it resulted in higher levels of student absenteeism and disengagement. (Bazemore, et al., 2004). Thus, while research indicates that programs designed to 'collect' truant students may improve attendance by bringing the students back to school they do little to impact the underlying personal, emotional, health-related, social, or academic factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism and truancy in the first place.

Examples of Court-Assisted Truancy Programs

- Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program (formerly Preventive Intervention): The intervention consists of four components: (a) collecting up-to-date information about students' actions from interviews with teachers and records of daily attendance, tardiness, and disciplinary action; (b) providing systematic feedback to students and/or parents about the students' actions; (c) attaching value to students' actions (e.g., students could earn points toward a special field trip by coming to school, being on time to class, receiving no disciplinary action); and (d) helping students determine strategies for modifying their behavior and thus earning more points. The program lasts for two years, with booster sessions available during the following year.
- Chronic Truancy Initiative: The CTI aims to decrease absenteeism among those identified as chronic truants. School attendance records are reviewed by school staff. Students who miss 20% or more days of school in a six-week period are defined as chronic truants. To reduce chronic truancy, attendance records are reviewed regularly. After truants are identified, a variety of increasingly serious measures are taken. Upon first being identified as truant, a letter is sent to the parents. If no improvement in attendance is observed, then the student is referred to a school attendance officer. Attendance records are reviewed again after the student is referred to the attendance officer; if improvement does not occur, then the child and family are referred to a social service agency. If the student remains truant after these interventions, then a uniformed police officer visits the family's home, along with the attendance officer. Finally, if attendance has not improved after these interventions have taken place, the family may be prosecuted under state compulsory attendance laws.
- Positive Action through Holistic Education (Project PATHE): The school-wide intervention has six major components: (a) staff, student, and community participation in revising school policies and designing and managing school change; (b) organizational changes aimed at increasing academic performance; (c) organizational changes aimed at increasing school climate; (d) vocational preparation; (e) academic

and affective services for high-risk individuals; and (f) special academic and counseling services for low-achieving and disruptive students. Individualized treatment plans addressing academic or behavior objectives were implemented with high-risk students by specialists. The program mostly calls for counseling or tutoring sessions. Other activities include peer counseling, rap sessions, field trips, and referrals to other agencies when necessary. Target students are closely monitored, and parents are called after three absences. Specialists also meet with parents following disciplinary incidents.

- School Transition Environment Program (STEP): The School Transitional Environment Program (STEP) seeks to mediate the negative effects for adolescents that are associated with making the transition from junior high to high school. Specifically, the program focuses on increasing social support and decreasing the task-oriented difficulties for adolescents who are experiencing this transition. The program uses two components in order to accomplish these goals. First, the program restructures the role of homeroom teachers, who take on additional roles as counselors and school administrators to the program participants. Second, the program seeks to reorganize the social system the student is entering. STEP students are assigned to classrooms in four of their classes only with other program participants in order to keep a constant peer group in a relatively fixed location of the school.

Summary

Looking across the preventive measures discussed in the research, it appears that three common practices yield the most significant improvement in student attendance. First, establishing effective monitoring practices enable educators to routinely evaluate student attendance and intervene before the student becomes chronically absent (Balfanz & Byrne, 2012). These systems need not be complicated. A simple spreadsheet indicating the number of days absent and the type of interventions provided to a student can provide schools with information they need to begin improving student attendance. Second, establishing a multi-pronged prevention and intervention strategy is key to effectively decreasing student absenteeism. The majority of resources and activities should be focused on prevention (e.g., school-based hand washing efforts; incentives and rewards for good or perfect attendance; information sent to parents and families; etc.). Third, intervention mechanisms should augment preventive measures and be applied to students whose attendance does not improve or fails to improve. Intervention programs and practices should be individualized to the student and aim to connect them with the supports they (or their family) need to attend school regularly.