

What research tells us about effective truancy prevention and intervention programs

A WHAT WORKS, WISCONSIN FACT SHEET

BY SIOBHAN M. COONEY & GAY EASTMAN

University of Wisconsin–Madison/Extension

January 2008

Effective truancy prevention and intervention programs follow two basic principles:

- (1) Families, schools, and communities work together to set rules for school attendance and to enforce the rules quickly and consistently.
- (2) Schools are places where students want to be.

Program Design and Content

- ◆ **The most effective prevention programs are comprehensive** – Because the causes of truancy are multi-faceted and diverse, the most effective programs target risk and protective factors at the individual, family, school, neighborhood, and community levels.
- ◆ **Effective programs never use sanctions that increase school absence** – Out-of-school suspensions or juvenile detention placements only decrease school engagement and make it harder for students to succeed when they return.

Program Relevance

- ◆ **Interventions for chronic truants are tailored to the individual** – Because students are truant for a wide variety of reasons, effective interventions will be different for each student. Depending on their situation, students may need more academic tutoring, help strengthening a poor relationship with a teacher, an alternative school setting, or an independent study more relevant to future goals, among other things.
 - ◆ **Communication with parents occurs in their preferred language** – A school's communication with parents should be a two-way endeavor that includes clear explanations of school rules and the consequences of truancy. To this end, effective programs find ways to communicate with parents in a way that is understandable to each of them.
-

Program Delivery

- ◆ **Sanctions are applied fairly and immediately, and are clearly tied to the truant behavior** – Effective programs apply sanctions each and every time a student is truant. Sanctions that focus on making up missed work, such as same-day after-school sessions or Saturday sessions, can be effective when immediately applied.
- ◆ **Supportive relationships and safe environments are key to school attendance** – Effective programs provide an emotionally and physically safe school setting so that students aren't afraid to attend. In addition, fostering positive relationships between teachers and students and among students is necessary for giving students a meaningful incentive for attending school.

References

Eastman, G., Cooney, S.M., O'Connor, C., & Small, S.A. (2007). Finding effective solutions to truancy. *What Works, Wisconsin Research to Practice Series*, 5. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin – Madison/Extension. http://whatworks.uwex.edu/attachment/factsheet_5truancy.pdf

WHAT WORKS, WISCONSIN FACT SHEETS

This is one of a series of Fact Sheets prepared by the *What Works, Wisconsin* team at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, School of Human Ecology, and Cooperative Extension, University of Wisconsin–Extension. The fact sheets and other related resources can be downloaded from: <http://whatworks.uwex.edu/Pages/1factsheet.html>

This publication may be cited without permission provided the source is identified as: Cooney, S.M., & Eastman, G. (2008). What research tells us about effective truancy prevention and intervention programs. *What Works, Wisconsin Fact Sheet*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison/Extension.

This project was supported in part by Grant Award No. JF-04-PO-0025 awarded by the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance through the Wisconsin Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission with funds from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

