Early Truancy Prevention Project

Improving Attendance in the Early Grades with Enhanced Teacher-Parent Communication

Truancy is common among at-risk elementary school students and is predictive of lower reading and math achievement, later truancy and school dropout. Early chronic truancy is also associated with problems that emerge in adolescence, such as substance abuse and delinquency.

Anti-truancy programs have traditionally targeted older students, but derailing truancy at a young age is crucial for long-term student success.

The Solution

An intervention program developed by the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy aims to prevent the onset of truancy among young students by improving teacher-parent communication and giving teachers the ability to intervene when absences start piling up.

Called the Early Truancy Prevention Program (ETPP), the program was designed in collaboration with teachers and administrators in the Durham Public Schools. With funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, ETPP was implemented in 20 first- and second-grade classrooms in five high-poverty Durham public elementary schools.

ETPP leverages the close connection students have with their teachers in elementary school and equips teachers with what they need to head off emerging attendance problems. Key components include:

- Teacher training for conducting a home visit at the beginning of the school year.
- A smartphone for teachers to better communicate with parents.
- An online attendance information system for easy record keeping.
- Alerts for teachers to know which students are accumulating unexcused absences.
- Targeted interventions to address individual student barriers.

The Results

ETPP reduced chronic truancy without imposing a burden on teachers. In classrooms where the intervention was used, the number of students with four or more absences decreased by 8.9 percent, while
the number of students with six or more absences dropped by 10.3 percent and those with 10 or more absences declined by 11.9 percent.

Teachers also reported better home-school communication due to home visits, and parent-initiated contact also increased substantially due to teachers’ use of a smartphone. In cases of excessive absences and tardiness, teachers also reported feeling they had more authority to intervene.

### The Cost

Teachers were paid for their extra duties and given a smartphone with a data plan to cover frequent communication with parents. The cost equated to about $1,750 per teacher, or $70 per student.

### The Next Step for Your School or District

Given its demonstrated effectiveness, schools and districts with high rates of absenteeism should consider implementing ETPP to improve attendance and school engagement at the start of students’ school careers.

The ETPP research team has made teacher training materials available online at: childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/project/truancy-prevention-project. For more information about implementing ETPP practices in your school or district, contact Amy Schulting at amy.schulting@duke.edu.