

**MULTNOMAH COUNTY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE
EVALUATION PLAN--July 1998 to June 2000
3/3/99**

This memo outlines the evaluation for the Multnomah County School Attendance Initiative (SAI). We are conducting a comprehensive study, consisting of implementation and outcome evaluations. In these evaluations we will 1) contribute data to partners and stakeholders to use in developing and modifying the intervention, 2) depict the implementation of the intervention, including variations in implementation among teams, 3) portray characteristics of students receiving the intervention, 4) assess the project's effectiveness as measured by attendance improvement, 5) describe factors associated with successful outcomes, and 6) offer suggestions for future program development. The evaluation will be implemented for two years, beginning July 1998.

I. Background. The desirability of both implementation and outcome evaluations for the new project derives from our experience evaluating the Byrne and Department of Education funded Truancy Diversion Projects in the Portland Public Schools. First, regarding the need for an implementation evaluation, we found considerable variation in how well project staff and schools implemented the truancy prevention procedures. In fact, project staff were rather idiosyncratic in their execution of the procedures, while in some schools there was no implementation of the project at all! These variations should not surprise anyone who knows about implementing new projects, especially in the schools where great independence is given to school administrators. This suggests, however, that it is essential that we measure and describe how each team implements the new project and what intervention each school usually conducts before referring a student to the SAI.

The process evaluation will show how the intervention is implemented across teams. This serves multiple purposes, including:

1. Involving key partners in the planning and ongoing implementation of the evaluation
2. Determining the data needs of key partners and stakeholders, and facilitating the use of data in decision making among project and non-project stakeholders
3. Cataloging the processes of implementation of the intervention, including problems encountered, solutions generated, and resulting changes in intervention implementation
4. Providing technical assistance to participating agencies' staffs.

The outcome study is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the School Attendance Initiative. Results of the Truancy Diversion Projects, although promising, were not strong enough to automatically conclude that the SAI will be effective. In addition, research in schools has shown that when demonstration projects are taken to scale, they are often not as successful as originally touted. The outcome evaluation may not only show the effectiveness of the SAI, but may also permit us to understand the relationship between the quality and degree of project implementation, and the effects on student attendance and classroom performance. This information could then be used to further develop project procedures, culminating in an understanding of the "Best Practices" to improve school attendance.

II. Specific Evaluation Questions. The comprehensive evaluation addresses the following implementation and outcome questions:

A. Implementation:

1. What are the roles of the various project partners and staff? What are the methods of communication among project and non-project stakeholders? How do parents and others in the community give input into and respond to the project? How does the Policy Group function, including how it works with community and agency stakeholders and project staff?
2. How clear are the project's lines of authority and responsibility? How is information about roles and responsibilities communicated within the project? How well do intervention and school staff work

together? What is being done and what new things can be done to facilitate staff/agency cooperation? What training does staff receive?

3. What are the project's specific intervention methods, and are they carried out in a similar way across districts, schools and teams? What are the differences in referral rates among schools, and what accounts for these differences?
4. Who makes decisions about service provision other than "knock and talk" (educational, social, health/team review) for project families and what are the criteria for team review? What additional services, as measured by the referral and disposition, are planned for families who received team review? To what extent does the provision of services vary across teams? To what extent do families receiving case management avail themselves of offered services?
5. Are there additional benefits gained by the partners in the project's collaborative efforts that facilitate working together on other problems? Have any project problems occurred which impedes cooperation in other areas?
6. How effective is MESD's ReEntry classroom in improving attendance, school transition and achievement?

B. Outcomes:

1. To what extent is the intervention associated with short and longer term changes in attendance among students referred for the intervention? This question will be addressed using a pre-post repeated measures design, with attendance data from archival records as the dependent variable. The short-term analyses will examine subjects' attendance during the year in which the intervention took place. The longer term assessment will examine attendance for a) students in the Byrne grant referred in '97-'98; and b) a stratified, randomized student sample for the school year subsequent to the year the intervention took place.
2. Is there an improvement in average daily attendance rate in the intervention schools? The purpose of this analysis is to assess the benefit of the intervention among students not receiving the intervention (prophylactic effects). Trends will be examined to assess change in this variable. See caveat 3.
3. We will determine the natural history of non-attendance by examining the attendance of those students who have a gap of at least 30 school days between referral and initial intervention dates. We will compare the intervention effects to the natural history results to better understand the impact of the intervention.
4. What variables are associated with relatively better project outcomes? We will collect data on students (attendance immediately prior to the intervention, age, grade level, gender, ethnicity, first language, IEP, academic achievement, school lunch program, criminal history), and project staff (age, gender, ethnicity, team, team function, attitudes toward the intervention, field experience). Multiple regressions will be used to determine characteristics associated with improved student attendance. Archival data (pending provision by PPS) will be supplemented with a survey of project staff. If teams have different success rates, the characteristics of successful teams will be examined.
5. To what extent are teachers assessing referred students' environmental and learning factors in the classroom that may contribute to non-attendance? To what extent are accommodations needed and made for assessed students?

III. Evaluation Methods. We will employ different evaluation methods to extract answers to the specific evaluation questions listed above:

1. Direct observation;
2. Formal and informal communications (phone, fax, email);
3. Formal and informal surveys of staff and partners;

4. Archival data; and
5. Data collection forms specifically designed for this project¹, in collaboration with project partners.

We will also develop a database to capture the data collected on the forms and to be able to provide routine management reports. Each team is responsible for entering its own collected data. We will work collaboratively with the partners to make the database as user friendly as possible. In the same collaborative way, we will design reports that the project and the team can generate on site.

We will train staff on the use of both the data collection forms and the data entry program. We will also provide the team leaders with guidelines for quality assurance methods.

IV. Caveats.

1. Currently, confidentiality issues with PPS limits the amount of data that are available for evaluation. Certain analyses may need to be adjusted, based on the outcome of the conversation with PPS.
2. A teacher assessment tool is being developed for use in the classroom, but may not be implemented until year 2.
3. We will examine whether the average daily attendance (ADA) rates are a sensitive enough measure to determine success of the project by analyzing these rates for the Roosevelt Cluster schools since the '94-'95 school year.

¹ Referral form, documenting the demographic and school information
Attendance form, documenting the absences, disciplinary and withdrawal information
Daily Activity Sheet, documenting outreach activities, family concerns, referrals, and dispositions
Case Management Daily Activity Sheet, documenting case management activities