



**NCSE** | National Center for School Engagement

**Addressing Truancy in Non-Subpoenaed Schools in  
Duval County Public Schools (Jacksonville, FL):  
Effectiveness of the Intervention Team Process**

**National Center for School Engagement**

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**An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children  
303 E. 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 400 Denver, CO 80203  
303/837-8466**

**[www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org)**

## **Addressing Truancy in Non-Subpoenaed Schools in Duval County Public Schools (Jacksonville, FL): Effectiveness of the Attendance Intervention Team Process**

Truancy is a nationwide concern, both in elementary and secondary schools. While many communities have adopted strategies for addressing this issue in schools with the highest levels of truancy, it is worthwhile to examine the practices of schools in which truancy rates are less pronounced. Studying the actions at these schools may provide direction for preventing and reducing truancy.

Duval County Public Schools (DCPS), headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida, is comprised of schools with a range of truancy levels and includes both subpoenaed and non-subpoenaed schools. In the state of Florida, students are considered truant if they have more than 5 unexcused absences in a calendar month, or more than 10 unexcused absences in any 90 day period. During the 2005-2006 academic year, subpoenaed schools consisted of institutions with high numbers of students exceeding these legal absence limits; these schools were placed on a subpoena list managed by the State Attorney's Office. Each month, the State Attorney's Office subpoenaed the attendance records of all students that exceeded the statutory threshold of absences, and incorporated the use of appropriate interventions to reduce truancy. Non-subpoenaed schools included all of the district schools that the State Attorney's Office did not choose to place on its subpoena list, primarily because these schools were not having excessive truancy issues.

Even though non-subpoenaed schools may have less severe truancy issues, they nonetheless are encouraged to conduct AITs. The purpose of this research is to describe and assess the effectiveness of the AIT process by these schools.

Twenty six out of thirty schools chosen at random from the non-subpoenaed institutions in DCPS participated in phone interviews to describe and assess the effectiveness of their Attendance Intervention Team (AIT) process, a strategy aimed at addressing truancy. AIT meetings typically bring together representatives from the school, the parent, and, in many cases, the student to discuss causes and solutions related to the occurrence of truancy. The respondents included staff members from 14 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 6 high schools, 1 alternative middle school, and 1 alternative middle/high school. The number of responses may total more than 26 for certain interview items, as several answers fell into more than one response category.

### **Interview Responses**

#### *Composition of Attendance Intervention Teams*

AITs generally consisted of two to six members from the school setting. The majority of AITs included at least one school administrator such as a principal, assistant or vice principal, dean, or house administrator (19), in addition to a guidance counselor (18). Over half of the schools in the survey reported a social worker on the AIT (14), while many included an attendance or data entry clerk (9). Some AITs included a teacher (6),

school resource officer (3), truancy officer (2), behavior specialist (1), security officer (1), secretary (1), or nurse (1).

#### *Attendance at AIT Meetings*

All AIT meetings consisted of the members of the AIT plus the parent or guardian of the student exhibiting attendance concerns. The majority of the AIT meetings also included the student (15). Additional attendees included the teacher (7) and/or a school based social worker (3).

#### *Coordination of AIT Meetings*

A variety of individuals coordinated the AIT meetings including an attendance or data entry clerk (10), guidance counselor (9), school administrator (6), or truancy officer (1). In one school, no particular person was designated as the coordinator of AIT meetings.

#### *Determination of Need for AIT Meeting*

Sites reported the position of the individual(s) responsible for monitoring attendance, the frequency of attendance checks, or a combination of both. In many schools, designated individuals such as attendance or data entry clerks (9), teachers (5), guidance counselors (1), secretaries (1), or school administrators (1) were primarily responsible for reporting high numbers of absences. Several schools did not name a specific individual with responsibility for monitoring attendance (11).

The majority of schools reported the frequency with which they checked for excessive absences. Habitual attendance checks occurred on a daily (5), weekly (3), monthly (5), quarterly (1), or “regular” (1) basis. Schools in which teachers monitored attendance tended to have fewer AIT meetings (0-15 meetings) during the school year, compared to schools in which data entry or attendance clerks checked attendance (0-59 meetings). Schools where attendance patterns were checked daily or weekly tended to hold fewer AIT meetings (1-10 meetings).

#### *Follow-Up on Improved Attendance*

Schools varied in terms of who was responsible for monitoring improved attendance. Attendance or data entry clerks (12), guidance counselors (7), social workers (5), school administrators (3), teachers (3), and truancy officers (2) followed up on student attendance. In some schools, the responsibility for monitoring attendance was shared or alternated between two individuals. For instance, in some cases both a guidance counselor and a teacher, or a social worker and data entry clerk would team to monitor attendance.

### *Subsequent Steps for Unimproved Attendance*

Three possible avenues were reported as consequences for unimproved attendance. Several schools referred truants to a student attendance officer (12); others referred students to a school based social worker (10); and one institution sent a school resource officer to check on the student. Three schools indicated that unimproved attendance was “not applicable” or had not occurred at their sites.

### *Frequency of AIT Meetings*

In the majority of schools, AIT meetings were held on an “as needed” basis (18). Some schools organized AIT meetings once per month (5), while a few schools coordinated meetings once per quarter (3).

### *Number of AIT Meetings Held During Previous Year*

The number of AIT meetings held during the previous school year ranged from 0 to over 50, with the majority indicating 10 or fewer AIT meetings in a one year period. Four schools reported that no AIT meetings were held during the previous year. The following chart displays the range of responses.

<b>Number of AIT Meetings</b>	<b>Responses</b>
0	4
1-2	2
3-9	6
10-20	7
21-30	1
31-49	0
50-100	3
Don't know	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>26</i>

### *Effectiveness of AIT Process for Improving Student Attendance*

School staff members provided insights on the effectiveness of the AIT process for improving student attendance. The majority assessed the AIT process favorably; one staff member had no opinion. Responses fell into the following categories.

“Very effective” (8): One guidance counselor indicated that all students involved in the AIT process had shown improvement in attendance. Another guidance counselor suggested that parental involvement with the school and the student led to the success of AIT meetings. An assistant principal appreciated parental accountability in the AIT process, including the possibility of legal action.

“Effective” (10): Some respondents considered the AIT process to be effective to a limited degree, whereas others indicated the usefulness of the AIT process but offered suggestions for improvement. Two data entry clerks believed that the AIT process was effective primarily because of the threat of legal action. One house administrator stated that increasing the use of police or a school attendance officer would improve the process, while a behavior specialist felt that utilizing a truancy officer to reinforce parental attendance at AIT meetings would be beneficial. Another data entry clerk indicated that the AIT process was effective for a limited amount of time, as students who had attended AIT meetings exhibited excessive numbers of tardies after a few weeks.

“Not effective” (7): One data entry clerk explained that the AIT process does not address excessive tardies, an area of greater concern than absences at many schools. The lack of incentive and reinforcement of parental attendance at AIT meetings was highlighted by a guidance counselor as a weakness in the AIT process; in addition, this staff member indicated that students over the age of 16 were withdrawn from school once they had exceeded a certain number of absences, thereby removing these students from the AIT process.

### **Additional Findings and Conclusion**

Non-subpoenaed schools with the lowest frequency of AIT meetings (0-5 meetings in a one year period;  $n = 10$ ) tended to be elementary schools and middle/high schools with a particular focus such as the visual and performing arts, gifted and academically talented programs, or a college preparatory curriculum. These schools also featured daily or weekly checks of attendance records, typically conducted by data entry clerks or teachers. AITs in these schools usually consisted of three or fewer school personnel. For these schools, school administrators, guidance counselors, and attendance or data entry clerks were the most common members of AITs.

Non-subpoenaed schools with the highest frequency of AIT meetings (25 or more meetings in a one year period;  $n = 4$ ) comprised middle and high schools; two of the schools had no identifiable magnet programs, and one was an alternative education center. Attendance was checked on a daily to monthly basis by secretaries or attendance clerks. AITs included three or more school staff members: school administrators and social workers were most commonly on AITs with a variety of other school personnel.

The AIT process was generally considered an effective strategy for addressing truancy in non-subpoenaed schools in DCPS. Interestingly, the interviewees who responded that AITs were very effective also conducted the fewest AITs; none conducted more than 15 per year. It is possible that programs with less effective AITs conduct more because truancy issues are not being resolved as well. School personnel also indicated that parental involvement seemed to be a key factor contributing to the success of the AIT process. Respondents also recommended improving the effectiveness of the AIT process by involving additional personnel, such as school attendance officers or truancy officers, as members of AITs.

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

Author:  
Hilary Burg

National Center for School Engagement  
c/o Colorado Foundation for Families and Children  
303 E. 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 400  
Denver, CO 80203  
(303) 837-8466  
[www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org)