EVIDENCE-BASED NEBRASKA

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM GUIDEBOOK

for Program Development and Cultural Components

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Programs across Nebraska have been working to reduce chronic absences and excessive absenteeism through targeted intervention and prevention strategies. This Guidebook is intended to assist communities in developing prevention and intervention strategies that fully address school absenteeism. In addition to outlining evidence-based responses to school absence, we looked specifically for programs that include a cultural competence component, or that have shown prior success in working with specific populations most at risk for excessive absenteeism.

First, we present an overview of the risk factors for excessive absenteeism and potential negative outcomes associated with increased absences from school. In the second part of this report, we present information on current assessment strategies used in Nebraska and on the importance of matching services with level of need. Next, using data from the Nebraska Department of Education, we assess differences in attendance statewide to examine racial disparities in school attendance. The fourth part of this report measures the effectiveness of excessive absenteeism programs in Nebraska using data on school attendance prior to programming and while enrolled. The Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) then calculated the percent change in attendance for these two time periods.

For FY 2018-2019, there were a total of 21 funded programs addressing absenteeism through Community-based Aid, the number of funded programs from 2019-2021 grew to 25. An additional five programs served youth through the diversion program. Approximately 3,120 youth participated in these programs and remained out of the juvenile justice system, for at least a short period of time. Program staff input the data needed to assess program effectiveness and should be commended for their efforts. Overall, 30 programs were able to input data sufficient for analyses (n=1,524 or 48.8%). Of those, 50% of programs (15 of the 30 programs) showed a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) improvement in attendance from pre-enrollment to enrollment for those who successfully completed programming.

As statewide data from the Department of Education suggest some racial/ethnic groups were more likely to be absent compared to White students, we examined if there were significantly different outcomes for successful cases by race or ethnicity. While our findings do not suggest that one racial or ethnic group improved significant more than another, without accounting for any other factors, all racial or ethnic groups reported reductions in overall absences for those who successfully completed programming. Finally, we offer recommendations for programs moving forward to help them meet the challenges they face as they work to improve school attendance.

Challenges related to data collection and reporting continue to present problems for programs and analyses. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic presented additional difficulties as programs remained committed to monitoring attendance and offering intervention strategies to target excessive absenteeism during virtual schooling. Although this guidebook utilized data from pre-enrollment to enrollment, we hope to add post-enrollment data in the future once more data are available. JJI remains committed to improving data collection through improvements to the JCMS and continued training for program staff.

Introduction

Prior research has repeatedly documented that poor school attendance has long term impacts on youth, schools, and society. Interventions have traditionally been geared towards measuring unexcused absences, and often neglected to include excused absences (Hobbs et al., 2018, Gottfried, 2009; Sutpen et al., 2010). This is understandable, as truancy has been linked to long-lasting associations with negative life outcomes, especially for non-violent crime and problem drinking (Rocque, et. al 2016). In the most general sense, truancy refers to a legal term that defines a set number of unexcused absences over a designated period of time (Supten et al., 2010). Specifically, in Nebraska schools "may report to the county attorney" when the school's efforts have not been successful in discouraging excessive absenteeism resulting in 20 or more absences (Neb. Rev Stat. SS 79-209). During the 2018-2019 school year in Nebraska, 67,804 (22%) of students were reported as absent for 10-19 days, 16,252 (5.3%) of students were absent for 20-29 days, and 12,854 (4.2%) of youth were absent for 30 or more days (Voices for Children, 2020). Research that supports the inclusion of both excused and unexcused absences and for the purposes of this guidebook, we use the terms chronic absence and/or excessive absenteeism to capture poor school attendance owing to the myriad of reasons why a youth may be absent from school.

Dropping out of school is not the result of a single event, but rather the culmination of a lengthy process of school disengagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Reshcly & Christenson, 2013). This process involves patterns established during the early school years, such as being held behind a year or chronic absences, which place students at risk for dropping out prior to graduation (Im et al., 2013). Aucejo and Romano (2016) found that students who were absent a mere ten days had reduced scores in math and language arts. Falling behind academically then places students at higher risk of dropping out of school, employment issues, and financial consequences (Robert Woods Foundation, Attendance Works, n.d.).

To make recommendations for best practices for interventions that target reducing chronic absences and excessive absenteeism, it is important to understand risk factors for school absence. Research suggests that youth of color, those living in poverty, and/or those with a disability, experience more barriers to school attendance which may lead to greater school absences compared to non-minority, more economically privileged homes, and non-disabled peers (Gee, 2018; Gottfried et al., 2017; Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Romero & Lee, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Across public schools in the U.S., youth who identify as African American, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Multiracial are more likely to be chronically absent (defined as missing at least 15 days of school per year) than White youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Further, youth from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes have a greater likelihood of school absence compared to peers not living in poverty (Child Trends Data Bank, 2015). Across the U.S., 4th and 8th graders from schools with greater proportions of students receiving free and reduced priced lunch (FRPL) were more likely to miss three or more school days, this gap widens as the percentage of students qualifying for FRPL increases. Moreover, a quarter of high school youth with disabilities miss more than 15 days of classes, 6% higher than youth who do not report disabilities (Gottfried et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Figure 1 below demonstrates the relationship between poverty and school attendance issues for youth in Douglas and Sarpy counties in Nebraska (GOALS Annual Report).

Figure 1: Impact of Race and Poverty in Douglas and Sarpy Counties 2020-21*

DOUGLAS COUNTY

94% of Black students who missed more than 15 days, were experiencing poverty

90% of Hispanic/Latino students who missed more than 15 days, were experiencing poverty

60% of White students who missed more than 15 days, were experiencing poverty

SARPY COUNTY

71% of Black students who missed more than 15 days, were experiencing poverty

64% of Hispanic/Latino students who missed more than 15 days, were experiencing poverty

36% of White students who missed more than 15 days, were experiencing poverty

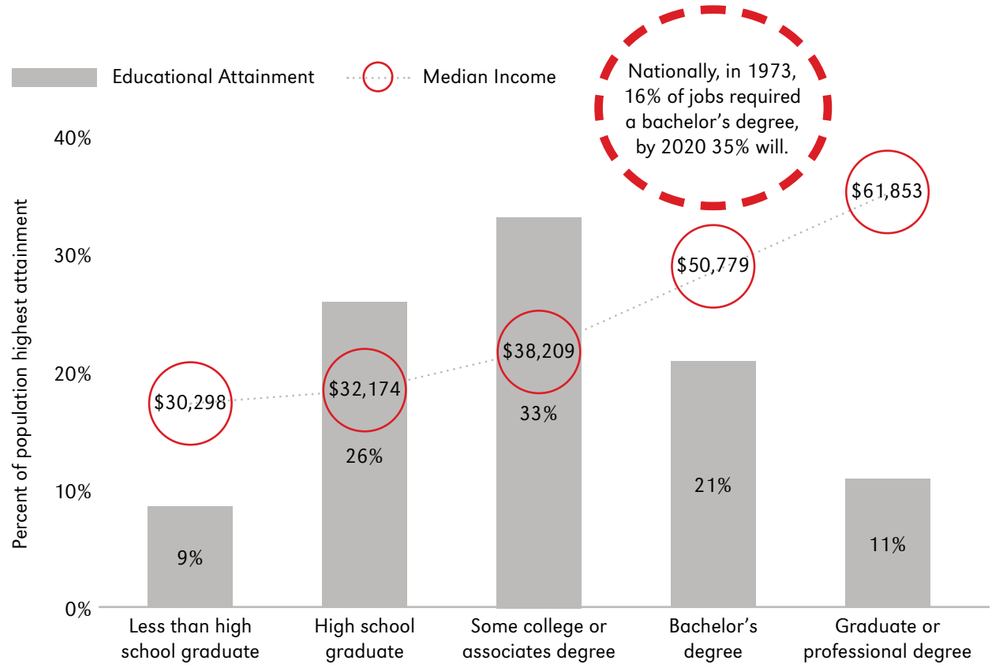
GOALS | ANNUAL REPORT | 2020-21

*Only highest represented racial groups referenced

Beginning in spring 2020, school buildings across the state of Nebraska were forced to close and had to quickly transition to online/virtual learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While we cannot know what long-term effects school closures during this time will have on attendance and graduation rates for school-aged youth in the U.S., research has documented some short-term effects. Studies suggest that students in the U.S. from low income families and those from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds were more likely to have high rates of absenteeism or truancy during COVID-19 closures, and more likely to have a family member become infected with or die from COVID-19 compared to children from less socio-disadvantaged households or to White, non-Hispanic children (Dai et al., 2021; Herold, 2020; Oster et al., 2021; Verdery et al., 2020). As the COVID-19 Pandemic has shown, school absence, even for the best possible reasons, has a negative impact on academics as well as social emotional learning.

Chronic absence is linked to poor outcomes, regardless of whether it is related to illness, vacation, stress, family need, work, or socioeconomics. Data from the 2019 American Community Survey from the United States Census Bureau show that individuals aged 25-64 with less than a high school degree ("dropouts") have a labor force participation rate of 69.8% compared to 78.9% for high school graduates and 90% for those with a bachelor's degree or more. Moreover, high school dropouts earn about $10,000 less than median income in the state of Nebraska and over $20,000 less than someone with a bachelor's degree (2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. U.S. Census Bureau. Analysis by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research.) Figure 2 below illustrates the median income for Nebraskans at each level of educational attainment. The median income of Nebraska youth who drop out of school is $30,298, compared to $38,209 for youth who have at least some college or an associates degree.

Figure 2: 65% of Nebraskans have some higher education and higher education leads to higher income



Sources: 2019, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau "Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020." *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce* (2013)

In addition to the economic consequences resulting from excessive absenteeism, poor school attendance has also been linked to negative outcomes for individuals, communities, and society. Truancy is associated with greater likelihood for substance abuse (Best et al., 2006; Henry, 2010; Vaughn et al., 2013) and delinquent behavior by individuals (Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011; Lochner & Morietti, 2004; Vaughn et al., 2013). It also has consequences for communities, in that it results in higher rates of criminal activity and more government spending for social services (Baker, Simon, & Nugent, 2001).

Given what is known about youth who are more at risk for excessive absenteeism, interventions aimed to reduce this behavior should focus on addressing the root causes of truancy to improve school attendance behavior. This Guidebook discusses alternatives to court, best practices for reducing poor school attendance, a discussion of the necessity of providing culturally responsive interventions, and a look at data from excessive absenteeism intervention and prevention programs in Nebraska. The purpose of this Guidebook is to offer best practice recommendations to address excessive school absenteeism through program development and cultural competency.

Across the country there is "growing recognition that juvenile court is not the appropriate venue" for managing behavioral issues such as excessive or chronic absenteeism (Connecticut State Dept. of Education, 2018, p. 2). Most state education departments and juvenile justice systems now support the notion that involvement in the juvenile justice system will not yield the outcomes we hope for our young people. In fact, researchers have determined that that "the most effective model for truancy intervention is prevention" (CSDE, 2018, p. 2).

This Guidebook is intended to assist communities in developing powerful interventions that fully address school absenteeism. In addition to outlining evidence-based responses to school absence, we looked specifically for programs that include a cultural competence component, or that have shown prior success in working with specific populations most at risk for excessive absenteeism.

Best Practices

Rather than relying on punitive "get tough" approaches that do little to reduce court involvement, the Risk-Need-Responsivity model (RNR) is a rehabilitative framework that centers on three principles: the risk principle—the intensity and duration of services should increase as risk level increases; the need principle—criminogenic needs should be the target of programming; and the responsivity principle—services are delivered in a way that accounts for the individual's characteristics or circumstances (Andrews & Bonta, 2006, Andrews et al., 1990). General responsivity addresses the influence of specific services and whether interventions focus on behavioral and social learning practices, skill enhancement, and cognitive change (Andrews et al., 1990; Dowden & Andrews, 1999). Specific responsivity involves individualizing treatment according to characteristics of the individual, including strengths, ability, motivation, personality, and demographic characteristics (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Best practices requires that programs serving chronically absent youth provide services that: 1) match the level of risk; 2) address the youth and family's needs; and 3) individualize treatment to the youth, including culturally appropriate approaches.

Assessment

Programs must first understand why youth miss school before they are able to implement appropriate, effective, and culturally relevant programs. Dube and Orpinas (2009) found that appropriate assessments and specifically school refusal instruments, allow programs to address the underlying reasons students are absent. Prior research has found that youth miss school for a variety of reasons: some miss school to avoid fear- or anxiety-producing situations, others to escape from adverse social or evaluative situations. Excessive absenteeism programs should use assessment tools to identify youth needs and barriers to school attendance to best match these needs with targeted interventions.

Attendance Programs should first determine whether the attendance issue is a family issue or a youth issue. The program should then employ the tool that gets at the root problem.

At this time, the Juvenile Justice Institute does not have a formal recommendation for one specific absenteeism assessment tool. Absenteeism can be a multifaceted issue so one tool may not capture all pertinent information. The School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS) has been the most recommended assessment tool as it was designed to assess risk for excessive absenteeism, has been validated, and is cost effective for programs. However, this tool will not provide information about the family or home circumstances that can be contributing to absenteeism such as transportation or employment schedules. If programs are utilizing the SRAS, it is recommended that staff also try to determine if these issues exist with the youth and family during intakes or follow-up meetings. Assessment tools that are focused on family functioning and circumstances such as the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale (NCFAS) can help determine family-related absenteeism issues but may not provide information about absenteeism specific to school situations like bullying. Again, this can be ascertained through further conversations and building trust with the youth. The NCFAS tool may also not be cost effective for all programs. There are dozens of family functioning tools that absenteeism programs may be utilizing that we are not aware of at this time. More information about these tools can be found in Appendix 1.

Several other assessments are currently being utilized by Community-based Aid funded programs in Nebraska. A summary of these assessments and their application are below. Other non-funded programs may be using additional tools not included here. Further, the Nebraska Screening and Assessment Tool (NSAT), a risk to reoffend tool, is currently being developed specifically for Nebraska's diversion youth and is expected to be available next fiscal year.

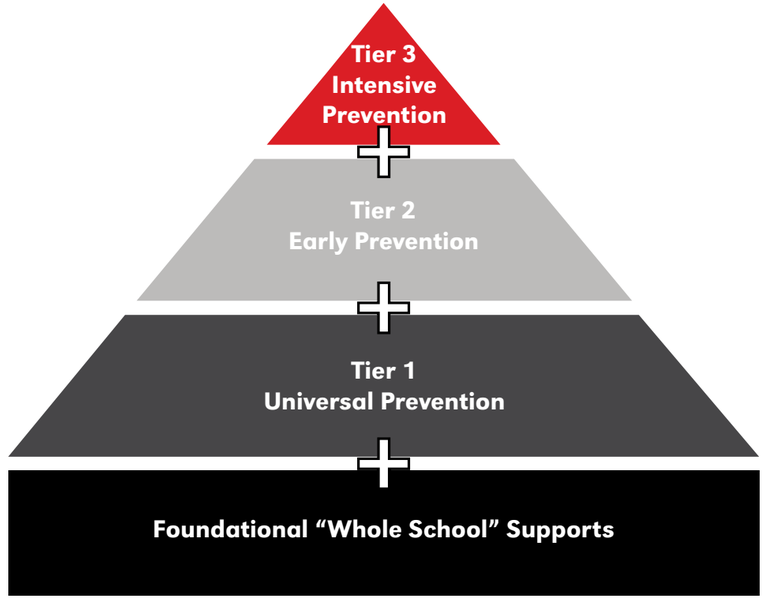
It should be noted that until July 17, 2020, the only test option available in the JCMS for data entry by CBA funded programs was the SRAS; the MAYSI-2, NYS, and SSI- were added after programs indicated these were the assessment tools they were using and needed to be able to track these in the database. Also, as programs provide services to youth outside of just those targeting excessive absenteeism and may use these additional tools to assess a myriad of needs, not necessarily because they have found them useful for determining absenteeism related issues. There may be other tools being used that are not included in the JCMS that we are not aware of and have not added, therefore programs would be unable to enter this information. Programs may also be assessing youth they are serving and not entering this data into the JCMS.

Matching Level of Need

Without assessment, programs may inadvertently miss the youth's needs. For example, Dube and Orpinas (2009) found that 60.6% of the elementary youth reported they "missed school to gain parental attention or receive tangible rewards" (pg. 88).

Interventions must match the level of need. Attendance Works recommends using a tiered approach (Figure 3 below) that categorizes youth based on their degree of absenteeism and matches the youth's level of need to services. This three-tiered approach begins with foundational supports for the school, followed by prevention support (Tier 1), individualized support (Tier 2), and intensive intervention (Tier 3).

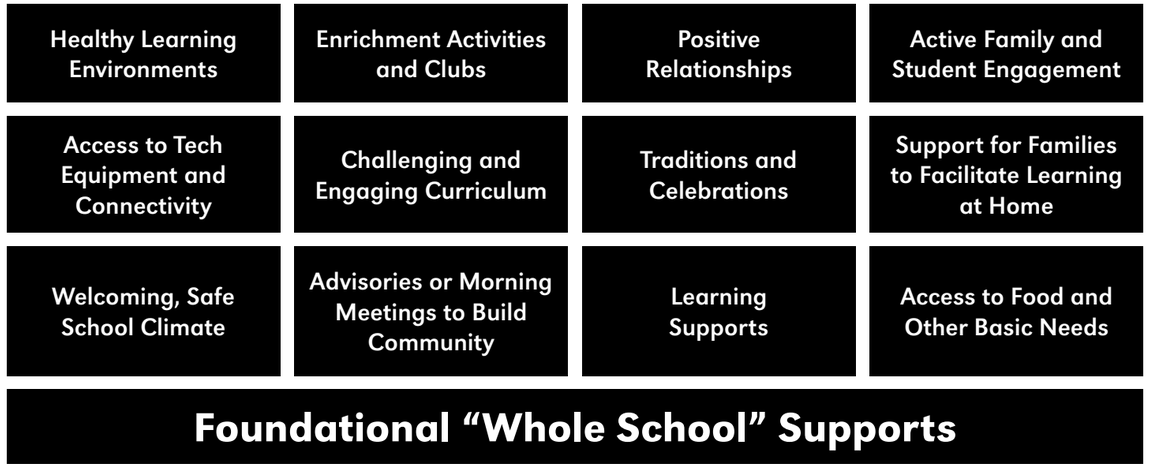
Figure 3: Tiered Approach



Source: www.attendanceworks.org

Support strategies at the foundational level targeted at promoting attendance through practices for the entire school and involve building and improving relationships and communication for the school community. These support strategies include such things as access to computers and Internet access. Additional foundational supports are included in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Foundational Supports



Source: www.attendanceworks.org

For youth at Tier 1 (youth with minimal absences), experts recommend minimal intervention. For example, a notification advising the parent or guardian of how the absences impact their child's development and academic progress is a common recommendation.

Youth who miss 10% or more school during the previous school year are more at risk for attendance issues and should be provided with Tier 2 services including more individualized support. Attendance Works recommends beginning Tier 2 support strategies when a student misses two days in a month for the current year. For example, when a student accumulates two days of absences in a month, a meeting or home visit with the youth and family would be recommended. Further, Tier 2 support strategies may include mentoring, the creation of an individualized attendance plan with family and youth input, physical and mental health support, and necessary technical support and training.

Youth who continue to demonstrate difficulties with attendance may be moved into Tier 3, requiring more intensive intervention from program and school administrators. Tier 3 intervention strategies should be provided to students who missed 20% or more of the past school year or 20% or more of days enrolled in the current year. Additionally, Tier 3 support strategies should be used when attendance has not improved with Tier 2 interventions. Tier 3 interventions should strive to assess the youth's current situation and coordinate case management decisions.

Excessive Absenteeism Models in Nebraska

Counties across Nebraska have worked with local non-profit agencies to develop alternatives to court involvement. Some of the prevention efforts currently in place in our state reflect best practices. These efforts include attendance monitoring, increasing school engagement, focusing on family engagement, family support services, truancy trackers, and mentoring students for academic success. Programs often employ incentives, team meetings, and tutoring.

Many communities are in the midst of developing innovative and effective programs. Some of these are highlighted later in this report.

In addition to formal excessive absenteeism programs, Nebraska also utilizes school-based interventionists who may take referrals for behaviors as well as attendance issues. These program staff work on school engagement, being a supportive adult, homework assistance, future planning, problem solving, and attendance. Interventionists are funded in Dawes, Hall, Howard, and York Counties.

Individualize Treatment

The responsivity principle for effective treatment involves individualizing treatment for each youth. This accounts for characteristics like ability, motivation, personality, talents, and demographic characteristics. To be most effective, programs targeting chronic or excessive absenteeism must account for these characteristics and address risk factors that may contribute to excessive absences from school.

Youth of Color

As noted above, prior research demonstrates that youth of color are often at the highest risk of attendance issues. Morris (2016) describes how Black girls are pushed out of educational systems. More than two decades ago, Fergusen (2000) documented how Black boys are disproportionately "in trouble" and suspended from U.S. school systems. Despite this, in initial searches it has been difficult to find evidence of attendance programs geared toward specific populations and youth of color.

Data

To help pinpoint areas of the state where youth are most in need of attendance programming, we requested data from the Nebraska Department of Education for 2019-2020.

Methodology

JJI used a relative rate index (RRI) to determine whether the proportion of school children who are chronically absent and identify with a minority racial/ethnic group are proportionate to school children who are chronically absent and identify as white. Three steps were used to determine the RRI of school children who are chronically absent. First, we calculated the rate of school children who are chronically absent and white for each jurisdiction in the state by taking the total number of white school children enrolled in each jurisdiction and dividing it by the total number of white school children who were chronically absent in that jurisdiction, Next, we calculated the rate of school children who were chronically absent and identify with a minority racial/ethnic group for each jurisdiction in the state. For each racial/ethnic group, we used the total number of school children in each group and divided this number by the total number of school children who were chronically absent in that jurisdiction in each subsequent minority racial/ethnic group. Finally, the calculated rate of white youth was divided by the calculated rate for each minority group. The number that is calculated in the final step is the RRI of chronically absent youth.

Results

Table 1 illustrates that racial/ethnic minority youth were statistically overrepresented among youth who are chronically absent in 41 of 93 of Nebraska's counties for 2019-2020. The red arrows indicate where youth of color are chronically absent significantly more than White youth. The green arrows indicate that youth of color are significantly less chronically absent than White youth. The bolded number describes the extent to which the population is overrepresented. For example, in Adams County, Hispanic youth are almost twice as likely (1.89) to be chronically absent as compared to White youth. County names in bold indicate that the county had a CBA funded excessive absenteeism program in 2019-2020. The numbers in bold next to the county name indicate the number of programs in the program if there is more than one. Counties with an asterisk have a truancy program funded through diversion. Counties with empty cells indicate either no significant findings related to racial/ethnic differences in rates of chronic absences or that the numbers in this county were too small to calculate the RRI.

Legend

Empty cells indicate no significant findings.

↑ and ↓ Indicate over and under representation, accordingly.

County — County names in red indicate that there is currently a CBA or JS grant funded program focused on attendance issues operating in the county.

County — Bold county names indicate a CBA or JS grant funded diversion program serving truancy diversion youth.

Numbers in a cell describe the extent to which the population is overrepresented using White as a reference category. For example, in Adams County, Hispanic youth are almost twice as likely (1.89) to be chronically absent as compared to White youth. In Antelope County, Hispanic youth are more than twice as likely to be chronically absent (2.15).

Table 1: 2019-2020 School Attendance Data

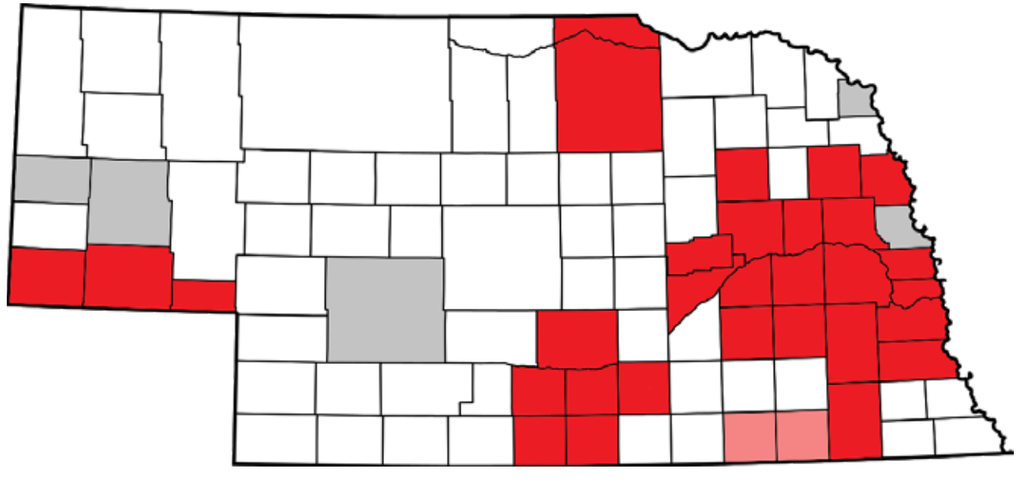
	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White
Adams				↑ 1.89			↓
Antelope				↑ 2.15			↓
Arthur							
Banner							
Blaine							
Boone							
Box Butte	↑ 2.02					↑ 1.72	↓
Boyd							
Brown							
Buffalo			↑ 1.69	↑ 1.58			↓
Burt			↑ 2.12				↓
Butler							
Cass				↑ 2.04			↓
Cedar							↓
Chase				↑ 1.56			↓
Cherry	↑ 2.75						↓
Cheyenne				↑ 1.51			↓
Clay				↑ 1.74			↓
Colfax			↑ 1.98	↑ 1.88			↓
Cuming	↑ 3.47			↑ 1.42			↓
Custer				↑ 1.95			
Dakota	↑ 2.40				↑ 2.14	↑ 1.57	
Dawes	↑ 2.91						↓
Dawson							
Deuel							
Dixon							
Dodge			↑ 2.17	↑ 1.46			↓
Douglas (3)		↓ .85	↑ 2.71	↑ 1.98		↑ 1.83	↓
Dundy				↑ 1.92			↓
Fillmore				↑ 1.89			↓
Franklin							
Frontier							
Furnas							
Gage			↑ 3.03	↑ 1.56			↓
Garden							
Garfield							
Gosper							
Grant							
Greeley							
Hall				↑ 1.65			↓
Hamilton				↑ 1.86			
Harlan							
Hayes							
Hitchcock							
Holt							

	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White
Hooker							
Howard							
Jefferson							
Johnson							
Kearney							
Keith				⬆ 1.61			⬇
Keya Paha							
Kimball							
Knox	⬆ 3.48			⬆ 2.43			⬇
Lancaster		⬇ .62	⬆ 1.74	⬆ 2.02		⬆ 1.92	⬇
Lincoln				⬆ 1.95			⬇
Logan							
Loup							
Madison	⬆ 2.36		⬆ 2.84	⬆ 1.62		⬆ 1.68	⬇
McPherson							
Merrick							
Morrill							
Nance							⬇
Nemaha							
Nuckolls				⬆ 2.21			
Otoe (2)				⬆ 1.78		⬆ 2.10	⬇
Pawnee							⬇
Perkins							
Phelps				⬆ 1.77			⬇
Pierce							⬇
Platte				⬆ 1.51			⬇
Polk							
Red Willow				⬆ 2.14			⬇
Richardson							
Rock							⬇
Saline				⬆ 1.53			⬇
Sarpy		⬇ .74		⬆ 1.52		⬆ 1.47	⬇
Saunders						⬆ 1.84	
Scotts Bluff	⬆ 2.17			⬆ 1.47			⬇
Seward						⬆ 2.14	⬇
Sheridan	⬆ 2.00			⬆ 1.92			⬇
Sherman							⬇
Sioux							
Stanton							
Thayer							
Thomas							
Thurston	⬆ 7.61			⬆ 3.99			⬇
Valley							
Washington				⬆ 1.92			⬇
Wayne							
Webster							
Wheeler							
York				⬆ 1.66			⬇
STATEWIDE	⬆ 3.18	⬇ .80	⬆ 2.53	⬆ 1.79		⬆ 1.67	⬇

In Table 1 above up and down arrows indicate over and under representation, accordingly. The findings suggest that statewide, students of color (i.e., Black or African American, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, Two or More Races) were more likely to be chronically absent compared to White students. Specially, American Indian, or Alaska Native students were more than three times (3.18) chronically absent compared to White youth, with rates for Black or African American students at 2.53, Hispanic students at 1.79, and those identifying as two or more races at 1.67 times more likely to be absent compared to White youth. Asian students were chronically absent at 4/5ths the rate of White students; all other students of color were chronically absent more often than White students. Prior research and data from the Nebraska Department of Education support the notion that students of color are more likely to be chronically absent from school compared to White students, making these students more at risk for future system involvement and negative social and economic consequences.

Nebraska Existing Programs

Figure 5: Nebraska counties with funded programs



For FY 2018-2019, Nebraska had 21 funded programs, the number of funded programs grew to 25 for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, covering 44 counties. Five programs are operated as part of the juvenile diversion program, while the remaining programs operated separate from diversion.

Methodology

The Juvenile Justice Institute calculated attendance patterns for two time periods[1]:

- Pre-enrollment: This period included any time prior to the youth enrolling or being referred to the program (in cases of monitor only cases). Programs were asked to include at least one semester prior to enrollment date. In some circumstances, programs entered more than one semester. In other circumstances, programs entered pre-enrollment data from the same semester the youth enrolled if the enrollment date was later in the semester. All pre-enrollment data were combined across semesters or data blocks.
- Enrollment: This period included any time after the youth enrolled in the program. Programs were asked to enter attendance until the student was discharged from the program. All enrollment data were combined across semesters or data blocks.

The purpose of these analyses was to assess the impact programs were having on absenteeism. We compared pre-enrollment attendance data and enrollment attendance data for youth being served in all truancy/diversion programs reporting data across Nebraska. The analyses for this Guidebook use cases from July 1, 2018, through May 31, 2021. Given this time frame, it should be noted that this includes data from 2020 when COVID-19 closures likely impacted program attendance and may have altered reporting. There was a total of 3,120 youth served in excessive absenteeism programs from July 1, 2018, through May 31, 2021. Table 2 below includes a breakdown of all cases from the dataset from July 1, 2018, through May 31, 2021, the number of usable cases in the dataset, and the loss of percent of sample for each program/county. Cases missing complete data for either pre-enrollment or enrollment were excluded from the analyses.

Table 2: Assessing Final Analysis Sample vs. Original Sample 7/1/18 – 5/31/21—Calculating Loss in Percentage

County/Tribe Program	Usable Cases 7/1/18 – 5/31/21	Total Cases 7/1/18 – 5/31/21	Loss in Percent of Sample
Adams County STARS	174	186	6.45%
Boyd County	7	8	12.50%
Buffalo County	170	210	19.00%
Burt County	1	8	87.50%
Butler County	87	88	1.13%
Cass County	1	60	98.33%
Cheyenne County	9	12	25.00%
Colfax County	68	134	66.00%
Cuming County	45	67	22.00%
Dakota County	8	11	27.27%
Dodge County	25	74	66.22%
Douglas County			
GOALS	35	68	48.52%
Latino Center of the Midlands	2	99	97.98%
Urban League	2	86	97.67%
Gage County	40	54	25.93%
Holt County	66	85	22.35%
Jefferson County	91	449	79.73%
Kimball County	7	8	12.50%
Lancaster County			
Lancaster County High Schools	151	189	20.11%
Lancaster County Attorney's Office	15	42	64.29%
Lincoln County	12	21	42.86%
Madison County	40	75	46.67%
Merrick County	15	49	69.39%
Otoe County	16	40	60.00%
Platte County	11	45	75.56%
Sarpy County – Juvenile Justice Center	124	147	15.65%
Saunders County	112	126	11.11%
Seward County	89	94	5.32%
Thayer County	93	182	48.90%
Washington County	8	35	77.14%
Total	**1,524**	**3120**	**51.15%**

[1] Post-Enrollment data was not included in this report as there were not enough cases for statistical analyses (n=179 in the long version for all dates).

After excluding cases with missing data, the total number of youth served in excessive absenteeism programs from July 1, 2018, to May 31, 2021, was 1,524 cases across 30 programs (Table 3). A description of the percent of cases by program is included below. These analyses include 48.4% of the total cases for the designated observation dates. JJI continues to train programs in order to have an accurate account of the youth served and the programs they attended across Nebraska.

Table 3: Number and Percent of Excessive Absenteeism Juvenile Cases by Program

County/Tribe Program	Number of Cases	Percent of Sample
Adams County STARS	174	11.4%
Boyd County	7	0.5%
Buffalo County	170	11.2%
Burt County	1	0.1%
Butler County	87	5.7%
Cass County	1	0.1%
Cheyenne County	9	0.6%
Colfax County	68	4.5%
Cuming County	45	3.0%
Dakota County	8	0.5%
Dodge County	25	1.6%

County/Tribe Program	Number of Cases	Percent of Sample
Douglas County		
GOALS	35	2.3%
Latino Center of the Midlands	2	0.1%
Urban League	2	0.1%
Gage County	40	2.6%
Holt County	66	4.3%
Jefferson County	91	6.0%
Kimball County	7	0.5%
Lancaster County		
Lancaster County High Schools	151	9.9%
Lancaster County Attorney's Office	15	1.0%
Lincoln County	12	0.8%
Madison County	40	2.6%
Merrick County	15	1.0%
Otoe County	16	1.0%
Platte County	11	0.7%
Sarpy County – Juvenile Justice Center	124	8.1%
Saunders County	112	7.3%
Seward County	89	5.8%
Thayer County	93	6.1%
Washington County	8	0.5%
Total	**1,524**	**100%**

Excessive Absenteeism Status Case Type

Table 3 displays the excessive absenteeism status case type. The majority of cases (44.29%) referred to programs during FY 2018-2021 involved monitor only (n=675); 21.6 % for truancy intervention (n=329; 33% for truancy diversion (n=507; and 0.9% were missing a truancy status type (n=13). Monitor only cases are those cases in which the program is monitoring attendance (but is not intervening) and the case is under review by the County Attorney for filing. Truancy intervention cases are those cases in which the program has begun to take steps to intervene with the juvenile or family at the request of the school or parent. Truancy diversion cases are those cases in which the County Attorney has filed a truancy petition (or will file one if the youth does not complete the truancy diversion.

Table 4: Excessive Absenteeism Status Case Type

Case Source	Frequency	Percent
Monitor Only	675	44.3%
Truancy Intervention	329	21.6%
Truancy Diversion	507	33.3%
Missing	13	0.9%
Total	**1,524**	**100%**

Case Type by Referral Source

Table 5 displays the excessive absenteeism case type by referral source. Regarding monitor only and truancy intervention cases, the majority (97.3% and 85.4%, respectively) were referred by the school. For truancy diversion programs, the majority (59.6%) were referred by the county attorney. Overall, schools (n=1,146 or 75.2%) and county attorneys (n=362 or 23.8%) were the most likely sources for excessive absenteeism case referrals.

Table 5: Excessive Absenteeism Case Type by Referral Source

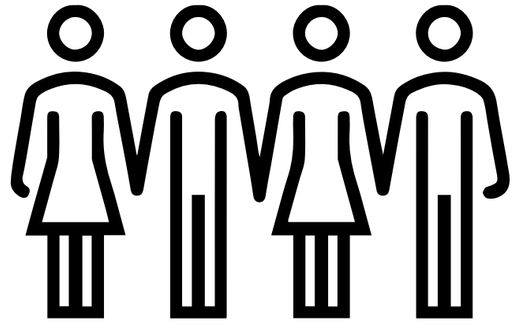
	Monitor Only	Truancy Diversion	Truancy Intervention	Missing
County Attorney	14 (2.1%)	302 (59.6%)	43 (13.1%)	3 (23.1%)
Other	3 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Parent/Guardian	1 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)
School	657 (97.3%)	203 (40.0%)	281 (85.4%)	5 (38.5%)
Missing	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)	1 (0.3%)	5 (38.5%)
Total	**675 (100%)**	**507 (100%)**	**329 (100%)**	**13 (100%)**

Cases by Gender

Programs served a similar number of females and males. 48.2% (n=735) of the cases during this time frame involved female youth and 51.5% (n=785) of the cases involved male youth.

Table 6: Cases by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	735	48.2%
Male	785	51.5%
Missing	4	0.3%
Total	**1524**	**100%**

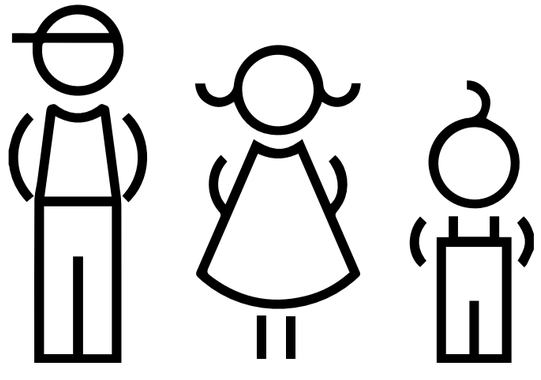


Cases by Age

Table 7 presents the frequency of cases by age. Age at the time of referral ranged from 5 to 20 years, with a mean age of 13.90 years. The most frequent age at the time of case was 16 years. There were seven cases with missing information (either missing a date of birth or a referral date); thus, age could not be calculated for those seven youth.

Table 7: Frequency for Age by Case

Age	Frequency	Percent
5	21	1.4%
6	37	2.4%
7	34	2.2%
8	29	1.9%
9	38	2.5%
10	40	2.6%
11	68	4.5%
12	100	6.6%
13	158	10.4%
14	199	13.1%
15	233	15.3%
16	306	20.1%
17	209	13.7%
18	38	2.5%
19	5	0.3%
20	2	0.1%
Missing	7	0.5%
Total	**1524**	**100%**



Cases by Race and/or Ethnicity

Most youth referred to excessive absenteeism programs were White (n=1050; 68.9%), followed by Hispanic (n=272; 17.8%) and Black/African American (n=91; 6.0%). For one case, race and/or ethnicity was not specified (n=1; 0.1%). Fewer youth were American Indian (n=36; 2.4%), Asian (n=8; 0.5%), Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander (n=2; 0.1%), Other Race (n = 34; 2.2%) and Multiple Races (n=30; 2.0%).

Table 8: Nebraska Population Ages 5-20 Referred to Excessive Absenteeism Program

	EA Programs	
Race/Ethnicity	**Frequency**	**Percent**
White	1050	68.9%
Hispanic	272	17.8%
Black/African American	91	6.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	36	2.4%
Asian, Pacific Islander	10	0.6%
Other or Multiple Races	64	4.4%
Unspecified	31	2.0%
Missing	1	0.1%
Total	**1524**	**100%**

Note. Due to small sample sizes, individuals identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander were combined into one category as were those classified as Other or Multiple.

Excessive Absenteeism Program Outcome Measures

Methodology

To measure change in school attendance patterns, programs entered attendance data for every youth who participated in their program. This was a complex process and programs should be commended for their dedication to entering attendance data.

Programs entered data in JCMS for eight absence types, categorized under both excused and unexcused absences (Figure 6). It should be noted that for the purposes of analyses we did not include administrative and school activity absences because youth are in school those days, even if away. We also did not include excused or unexcused tardies because practices across the state vary widely on whether these are considered absences and the number of total tardies that becomes a single time absent.

Figure 6:

Discharge Reason for Youth in Excessive Absenteeism Programs

First, we examined reasons youth were discharged from excessive absenteeism programs. Of the 1,524 cases referred to excessive absenteeism programs, discharge reason was included in 1,518 cases. Youth discharged from an excessive absenteeism program because they completed the program requirements comprise the largest group, 38.1% (n=580). In six of the cases (0.4%), a discharge reason was missing, which may have been due to failure to close cases or cases that were still active. Table 9 displays the discharge reasons for all youth.

Table 9: Discharge Reason

Discharge Reason	Frequency	Percent
Completed Program Requirements	580	38.1%
Did Not Complete Program Requirements	136	8.9%
Open Cases	238	15.6%
Transferred Schools	106	7.0%
Transferred to GED Program	1	0.1%
Other (Moved Away/Death, etc.)	76	5.0%
Transferred to Homeschool	45	3.0%
Dropped Out	23	1.5%
Graduated	89	5.8%
Referred to Higher Services	119	7.8%
Case Type Changed	93	6.1%
City/County Attorney Withdrawal	12	0.8%
Discharge Date but No Reason Indicated	6	0.4%
Total	**1524**	**100%**

Discharge by Program

For ease of presentation and analysis, we grouped the various discharge reasons into four categories: 1) Successful completion (completed program requirements and graduated), 2) Unsuccessful completion (did not complete program requirements and dropped out), 3) Other (cases with a discharge date but no reason indicated, transferred schools, transferred to GED program, transferred to homeschool, referred to a higher level of service, and case type changed), 4) Open cases (cases with no discharge date or reason indicated).

Overall, programs had varying rates of successful and unsuccessful program completion (Table 10). One caveat that should be noted, however, is that programs may vary by how they define successful completion of the program. JJI will continue to train programs on uniform definitions and approaches, but regardless of how cases close – programs that are trying to improve school attendance should be able to demonstrate that they in fact improve school attendance – at a minimum while the youth is involved in the program.

Table 10. Successful, Unsuccessful, and Other Discharge Reasons by County

County/Tribe Program	Successful	Unsuccessful	Other	Open	Number of Cases
Adams County STARS	20.7% (*n* = 36)	9.8% (*n* = 17)	36.2% (*n* = 63)	33.3% (*n* = 58)	174
Boyd County	100.0% (*n* = 7)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	7
Buffalo County	52.9% (*n* = 90)	5.3% (*n* = 9)	26.5% (*n* = 45)	15.3% (*n* = 26)	170
Burt County	100.0% (*n* = 1)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	1
Butler County	40.2% (*n* = 35)	11.5% (*n* = 10)	46.0% (*n* = 40)	2.3% (*n* = 2)	87
Cass County	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	100.0% (*n* = 1)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	1
Cheyenne County	33.3% (*n* = =3)	44.4% (*n* = 4)	22.2% (*n* = 2)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	9
Colfax County	39.7% (*n* = 27)	16.2% (*n* = 11)	7.4% (*n* = 5)	37.3% (*n* = 25)	68
Cuming County	55.6% (*n* = 25)	13.3% (*n* = 6)	17.8% (*n* = 8)	13.3% (*n* = 6)	45
Dakota County	50.0% (*n* = 4)	37.5% (*n* = 3)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	12.5% (*n* = 1)	8
Dodge County	52.0% (*n* = =13)	4.0% (*n* = 1)	44.0% (*n* = 11)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	25
Douglas County					
GOALS	45.7% (*n* = 16)	31.4% (*n* = 11)	14.3% (*n* = 5)	8.6% (*n* = 3)	35
Latino Center of the Midlands	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	100.0% (*n* = 2)	2
Urban League	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	100.0% (*n* = 2)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	2
Gage County	92.5% (*n* = 37)	2.5% (*n* = 1)	5.0% (*n* = 2)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	40
Holt County	87.9% (*n* = 58)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	10.6% (*n* = 7)	1.5% (*n* = 1)	66
Jefferson County	48.4% (*n* = 44)	9.9% (*n* = 9)	41.8% (*n* = 38)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	91

County/Tribe Program	Successful	Unsuccessful	Other	Open	Number of Cases
Kimball County	85.7% (*n* = 6)	14.3% (*n* = 1)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	7
Lancaster County - Combined					
Lancaster County High Schools	21.2% (*n* = 32)	15.9% (*n* = 24)	45.7% (*n* = 69)	17.2% (*n* = 26)	151
Lancaster County Attorney's Office	20.0% (*n* = 3)	13.3% (*n* = 2)	26.7% (*n* = 4)	40.0% (*n* = 6)	15
Lincoln County	41.7% (*n* = 5)	33.4% (*n* = 4)	16.7% (*n* = 2)	8.3% (*n* = 1)	12
Madison County	20.0% (*n* = 8)	2.5% (*n* = 1)	31.6% (*n* = 14)	35.0% (*n* = 17)	40
Merrick County	6.7% (*n* = 1)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	40.0% (*n* = 6)	53.3% (*n* = 8)	15
Otoe County	62.5% (*n* = 10)	25.0% (*n* = 4)	6.3% (*n* = 1)	6.3% (*n* = 1)	16
Platte County	9.1% (*n* = 1)	27.3% (*n* = 3)	9.1% (*n* = 1)	54.5% (*n* = 6)	11
Sarpy County – Juvenile Justice Center	45.2% (*n* = 56)	21.0% (*n* = 26)	15.3% (*n* = 19)	18.5% (*n* = 23)	124
Saunders County	50.0% (*n* = 56)	2.7% (*n* = 3)	32.1% (*n* = 36)	15.2% (*n* = 17)	112
Seward County	38.2% (*n* = 34)	5.6% (*n* = 5)	46.1% (*n* = 41)	10.1% (*n* = 9)	89
Thayer County	62.4% (*n* = 58)	1.1% (*n* = 1)	37.6% (*n* = 35)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	93
Washington County	37.5% (*n* = 3)	37.5% (*n* = 3)	25.0% (*n* = 2)	0.0% (*n* = 0)	8
Total					**1524**

Because data was extracted in the middle of a school year, we anticipated that many programs would have open cases. However, programs that discharged a large percentage of their cases unsuccessfully must examine why this is occurring. Perhaps the school is referring youth and expecting a different outcome. Perhaps the underlying reasons for absenteeism are not getting identified and addressed. As Table 10 above demonstrates, many cases remain open, which impacts the overall success rate, but programs with higher than 25% of their cases closing unsuccessfully should examine the model they are using and determine whether their intervention matches the population they are serving. However, it is imperative to note that these data are prone to several methodological problems, such as the use of a non-validated assessment instrument, small sample size and sample characteristics, which make generalization of the results unreliable.

Impact on Attendance

Cases Included in the Attendance analysis

To assess whether programs are having an impact on absenteeism, we compared pre-enrollment attendance patterns to enrollment attendance patterns. Cases that did not have complete data for either pre-enrollment or enrollment could not be included in the analysis. As such, program impact on attendance for successful cases (i.e., completed program requirements and graduated) could only be calculated for (n=669 out of 1524) 44% of the total sample. This means that for some programs, we could not examine outcomes on attendance because they did not have any cases with sufficient data. The reasons a case may not have been included are listed in Table 11 below:

- Youth transferred in and out of school districts and attendance information was not available.
- Youth were new to a program and only enrollment data was available.
- Programs were not able to accurately enter data during the training/data quality assurance period, so the absence data was not split by enrollment date or absences were missing.
- Cases had obvious data entry error that could not be reconciled for analysis.
- Cases did not have the data required to calculate required attendance.
- Cases with no enrollment period identified.

Table 11: Reasons for Not Including Cases

Reason not Included	Frequency	Percent
Only enrollment data	45	4.7%
Only pre-enrollment data	292	30.9%
No required attendance	41	4.3%
No enrollment period identified	320	33.8%
Did no split by enrollment date	119	12.6%
Multiple reasons	127	13.4%
Total	**944**	**100%**

Successfully Closed Cases (Completed Requirements and Graduated)

We employed a Repeated Measures ANOVA to determine if there were significant mean differences between absences from pre-enrollment and absences from enrollment. A Repeated Measures ANOVA compares mean values at time 1 (pre-enrollment) to mean values at time 2 (enrollment) to estimate significant change between those two time periods. Table 12 displays the number of cases included in analysis, percent absent pre-enrollment, percent absent enrollment, percent change, and the effect size of this change. Effect sizes measure the magnitude of effects, so even if a percentage change is not significant, effect sizes greater than 0.10 indicate there are likely effects that are not apparent because of small sample sizes.

Table 12: Change in Overall Absences from Pre-enrollment & Enrollment for Successful Case Closures

County/Tribe Program	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	N	M (SE)	M (SE)	%	N^2
Adams County STARS	36	23.49% (2.55)	15.78% (1.97)	-7.71%***	0.21
Boyd County	7	11.76% (1.84)	17.63% (4.46)	5.87%	0.37
Buffalo County	90	30.00% (1.83)	22.30% (2.00)	-7.72***	0.13
Burt County	1	–	–	–	–
Butler County	35	21.05% (1.97)	11.51% (1.74)	-9.53%***	0.29
Cheyenne County	3	22.01% (3.04)	1.50% (1.50)	-20.51%***	0.99
Colfax County	27	12.95% (1.46)	17.96% (2.40)	4.74%	0.12
Cuming County	25	14.35% (1.14)	8.33% (1.21)	-6.03%***	0.40
Dakota County	4	26.07% (5.04)	14.92% (2.90)	-11.15%*	0.78
Dodge County	13	29.46% (3.95)	15.59% (4.68)	-13.87%*	0.33
Douglas County GOALS Center	16	29.00% (5.63)	16.44% (3.22)	-12.56%*	0.28
Gage County	37	14.97% (1.05)	13.45% (1.16)	-1.52%	0.05
Holt County	58	13.34% (0.99)	12.59% (1.12)	-0.75%	0.00
Jefferson County	44	14.31% (1.22)	11.90% (1.74)	-2.41%	0.05
Kimball County	6	14.34% (2.01)	12.71% (1.68)	-1.63%	0.04
Lancaster County High Schools	32	34.47% (2.38)	14.02% (1.47)	-20.45%***	0.67
Lancaster County Attorney's Office	3	43.5% (6.60)	18.44% (9.74)	-25.06%*	0.96
Lincoln County	5	28.28% (5.66)	16.64% (9.73)	-11.64%	0.20
Madison County	8	20.22% (2.64)	12.55% (3.55)	-7.67%	0.44
Merrick County	1	–	–	–	–
Otoe County	10	39.00% (4.71)	21.82% (3.40)	-17.18%**	0.62
Platte County	1	–	–	–	–
Sarpy County Juvenile Justice Center	56	41.35% (2.62)	21.45% (1.88)	-19.91%***	0.47
Saunders County	56	12.54% (1.01)	9.71% (1.16)	-2.83%*	0.10
Seward County	34	24.49% (2.35)	9.29% (1.70)	-15.20%***	0.43
Thayer County	58	10.89% (1.01)	6.02% (0.77)	-4.88%***	0.23
Washington County	3	8.56% (3.89)	4.43% (1.76)	-4.13%	0.41

Note. *=p<0.05 **=p<0.01; ***=p<0.001. Significance tests or means for programs with only 1 case could not be calculated.

Youth Characteristics on Attendance within Successful Program Cases

Next, we examined whether changes from pre-enrollment to enrollment for successful program cases (completed program requirements and graduated) significantly differed by age, gender, and race/ethnicity. In other words, whether demographic information (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity) could explain students' improved attendance during their involvement in the program.

Attendance Change and Age

Overall, there were not any significant differences in total attendance by age $F(1,646) = 0.381$, $p=38$, $n^2=0.01$. This means that across all ages, youth were absent roughly the same amount, regardless of age. However, there was a significant effect between age and pre/post enrollment $F(1,646) = 4.77$, $p<0.00$, $n^2=0.01$. This means that age is a significant predictor for the percent change from pre-enrollment to enrollment.

Attendance Change and Gender

Overall, there were not any significant differences in total attendance by gender $F(1,662) = 2.10$, $p<0.14$, $n^2 = 0.01$. This means that for both males and females, youth were absent roughly the same amount. However, the descriptive statistics show males (-8.58 reduction) demonstrated a greater reduction in absences compared to females (-6.76 in reduction), but this was not statistically significant in the repeated measures ANOVA $(1,662) =0.024$, $p<0.87$, $n^2 = 0.01$. Table 13 displays the values for male and female youth.

Table 13. Significant Interaction Effects of Gender & Pre/Enrollment

Gender	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change
	N	M (SE)	M (SE)	
Female	325	21.48% (0.88)	14.72% (0.71)	-6.76%
Male	339	22.25% (0.86)	13.67% (0.70)	-8.58%

Attendance Change and Race/Ethnicity

Overall, there were significant differences in total attendance by race/ethnicity $F(1,657) = 2.48$, $p<0.05$, $n^2 = 0.01$. This means that the total amount of absences across both time periods was statistically different based on race/ethnicity. These differences, however, did not affect the percent change from pre-enrollment to enrollment absences $F(1,657) = 1.137$, $p< 0.34$, $n^2 = 0.01$. This means that there was not a racial or ethnic group that improved more than another, but that some groups did have more absences overall. Table 14 displays the values for all youth.

Table 14. Significant Interaction Effects of Race and Pre/Enrollment

Race	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change
	N	M (SE)	M (SE)	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	16	23.68% (3.92)	13.22% (3.21)	-10.46%
Asian	4	26.83% (7.85)	12.66% (6.43)	-14.17%
Black, African American	26	27.62% (3.02)	12.50% (2.52)	-15.12%
White	507	21.75 (0.70)	14.36 (0.57)	-7.39%
Hispanic	97	20.69% (1.62)	15.12% (1.33)	-5.57%
Other Race	14	14.70 (4.20)	7.49 (3.44)	-7.21%
Multiple Races	5	36.74 (7.02)	10.83 (5.75)	-25.91%

Change in Specific Attendance Types within Successful Program Cases

For successful cases, the change in absences was compared by absence type from pre-enrollment to post-enrollment. Table 15 shows that nearly all types of absences depicted a significant effect, excluding suspension and religious excused absences. This stands to reason because religious absences and suspensions would not necessarily be the types of absences that could be affected by a program.

Table 15: Change in Absences by Absence Type from Pre-enrollment to Enrollment for Successful Case Closures

Absence Type	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	M (SE)	M (SE)	%	N^2
All Excused Absences	6.02 (0.35)	4.00(0.25)	-2.02%***	0.05
Suspension	0.53% (0.12)	0.55% (0.11)	0.17%	0.00
Religious	0.57% (0.13)	0.53% (0.10)	0.04%	0.00
Medical	4.92% (0.32)	2.92% (0.21)	-2.00%***	0.06
All Unexcused Absences	15.85% (0.62)	10.19% (0.47)	-5.66%***	0.13
Truant	5.15% (0.44)	2.92% (0.34)	-2.23%***	0.05
Parent Acknowledged	2.34% (0.21)	1.64% (0.15)	-0.70%***	0.02
Illness	4.09% (0.24)	2.80% (0.19)	-1.29%***	0.05
Unverified	4.27% (0.44)	2.83% (0.28)	-1.44%***	0.02

Unsuccessfully Closed Cases

We also compared whether there was any change from pre-enrollment to enrollment for unsuccessful cases (n=159, did not complete program requirements and dropped out). Any effects for programs with fewer than 10 cases are not considered significant owing to a lack of statistical power with small sample sizes. Therefore, there were no significant differences from pre-enrollment to enrollment. In this report, absences neither significantly improved, nor got significantly worse while enrolled in the programs.

Table 16. Change in Overall Absences from Pre-enrollment and Enrollment for Unsuccessful Case Closures

County/Tribe Program	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	N	M (SE)	M (SE)	%	N^2
Adams County STARS	17	24.26% (2.92)	26.04% (3.46)	1.77%	0.03
Boyd County	0	–	–	–	–
Buffalo County	9	37.14% (8.65)	69.77% (6.58)	32.62%***	0.76
Burt County	0	–	–	–	–
Butler County	10	38.28% (4.02)	48.54% (8.71)	10.27%	0.21
Cheyenne County	4	29.99% (2.91)	18.93% (4.96)	-11.07%	0.52
Colfax County	11	77.80% (46.99)	20.60% (3.35)	-57.20%	0.12
Cuming County	6	25.14% (3.37)	62.03% (15.23)	36.89%*	0.57
Dakota County	3	28.49% (10.06)	27.82% (1.83)	-0.67%	0.00
Dodge County	1	–	–	–	–
Douglas County GOALS Center	11	35.99% (3.58)	38.12% (5.85)	2.13%	0.01
Gage County	–	–	–	–	–
Holt County	0	–	–	–	–
Jefferson County	9	36.26% (11.04)	58.81% (12.66)	22.55%	0.31
Kimball County	1	–	–	–	–
Lancaster County	2	16.84% (1.80)	41.29% (2.52)	24.45%*	1.00
Lincoln County	4	21.38% (2.29)	4.31% (2.35)	-17.07%*	0.89
Madison County	1	–	–	–	–
Merrick County	0	–	–	–	–
Otoe County	4	35.80% (7.03)	45.52% (7.10)	9.72%	0.39
Platte County	3	31.34% (8.19)	26.88% (13.23)	-4.46%	0.13
Saunders County	3	29.89% (5.17)	58.39% (21.24)	28.51%	0.38
Seward County	5	24.47% (6.25)	52.10% (17.48)	27.63%	0.58
Thayer County	1	–	–	–	–
Washington County	3	38.76% (15.58)	49.77% (16.81)	11.01%	0.09
Total	**159**				

Note. *=p<0.05 **=p<0.01; ***=p<0.001. Significance tests or means for programs with only 1 case could not be calculated.

Limitations

Data collection was the most serious obstacle to the evaluation of excessive absenteeism programs. All programs indicated that data collection was an issue. Many had multiple data entry personnel, which set forth some obstacles (i.e., standardization, definitional inconsistencies, etc .). Given that our data entry database is relatively newer, these challenges were expected. The Juvenile Justice Institute provided interns in 2015-2016 to enter data, and extensive individualized training, to fix inconsistencies in reporting for a majority of the programs, however, this does not appear to be a sustainable solution to accurate data entry.

In addition to limitations from users, there are also systematic limitations that should be noted. Programs rely exclusively on schools to report their data. Programs that were not embedded in the schools may have had more difficulty in obtaining data. In some instances, program staff were granted access to the school's online attendance reporting software. Programs have expressed that this has greatly improved their ability to gather data. Furthermore, some school superintendents felt that reporting data might be a violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy ACT (FERPA). JJI produced a memo and trained programs on why this data collection effort is exempt from FERPA. Further, a portion of the data for this guidebook was gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns of schools across Nebraska. In addition to other data collection issues, school shutdowns likely had an effect on further complicating the ability of programs to gather and input data on attendance.

Potentially Effective Models

Recommendations from experts attest to the need to be strategic in decisions to address absenteeism interventions. Using a tiered-strategy approach, strategies should focus on applying only the minimum amount of intervention necessary to address attendance issues. Building on this approach and to address issues related to the overrepresentation of youth of color in rates of school absence in Nebraska, potentially effective models also highlight the need for prevention and intervention strategies to be individualized and consider youth and family situations holistically as they relate to school attendance issues. JJI reached out to nine excessive absenteeism programs in Nebraska that target racial/ethnic minority groups to interview for this report, but only received responses from three programs in time to include in this guidebook.

Owing to research on the ways youth of color are disproportionately represented in data on excessive school absences, effective models to combat this issue must be individualized and culturally responsive.

Kearney has studied attendance models and reasons for youth absenteeism for decades. Kearney (2008) proposed an interdisciplinary model for addressing chronic absenteeism, with an emphasis on using common terminology and definitions. He further recommends a holistic and comprehensive approach that allows for the plan to adapt as factors change for the youth and family.

One model that contains many of the best practice elements identified above is operated by the Greater Omaha Attendance and Learning Services Center (GOALS). This agency recently introduced a multi-agency, inter-disciplinary model, ELEVATE, which combines the strengths of four different agencies. The intervention starts with an NCFAS assessment, which considers ten life domains of the family. The model utilizes restorative practices, by involving Concord Mediation Center in the development of service plan and involving the youth and support systems in the development of an attendance plan. The University of Nebraska Medical Center's Charles Drew is available to serve any mental or physical health needs of the youth. While GOALS continue to work with the family or guardian, the Urban League meets with the youth as attendance navigators within the youth's school. Despite having many of the effective elements, this new multi-disciplinary model has not yet been evaluated.

Colfax County's Buy Back Program

Colfax County, Nebraska has utilized a variety of truancy models over the past few years. In 2018, their unique model of meeting student's personal needs was highlighted in the Connecticut State Department of Education's Catalog of Truancy Intervention Models (CSDE, 2018).

Colfax County continues to be innovative in meeting the unique and individualized needs of their county's diverse population. In November 2021, JJI interviewed the Colfax County Attorney and the Schuyler Central High School Director of Student Services; Dr. Joey Lefdal, about a new data driven model called the "Buy Back Program."

Many disciplines have utilized a buy back model (the military, employers), but this appears to be the first school system in Nebraska utilizing an asset recovery or buy back model. The concept is straightforward: for every minute lost or not attended, student must return to the school to make up that time. School administrators have focused especially on students who are only a few credits away from graduation, but the flexible buy back system is designed to meet the individual needs of every youth and family on their educational journey. For some youth, they have been out of the country for a month of more, and they have substantial time to return to the school. For other youth, it was just a small hurdle they had to overcome to get back on track.

Colfax County has also been highlighted for its work in identifying youth who need mental health services. Once identified, they work with families and therapists to provide free counseling at their schools.

These combined efforts are meeting the needs of youth and their families, and accommodate any individual cultural, personal, or medical need. Both the school administrator and the County of Attorney have collaborated to set up culturally specific and family need specific services. Educators are compensated for the extra time that they spend at the school on weekends.

Central High School started this program in 2019, so this model has not yet undergone independent evaluation.

Refugee Youth - CUES Omaha Navigators

The CUES School System encompasses three schools in the eastern part of Omaha. Their goal is to provide quality education for elementary and middle schoolers by focusing on "individualized student and family support services that connect families to community resources" (CUES School System) CUES three schools boast a total population of 573 students, of which 92% identify as students of color (CUES School System Website).

CUES is in the process of building a Family and Student Support program as a resource for the youth they serve. The school retains Navigators acting as credible messengers whose goal is to provide academic and emotional support for middle school students, specifically refugee/migrant populations (e.g., Sudanese African, Latino). Credible messengers are individuals who have relevant life experiences (Sanchez & King, 2018), in this case, they may have been a refugee youth themselves. Given their previous life experiences, credible messengers have lived experience that help them connect to others that are going through similar experiences. As part of this role, Navigators also connect middle schoolers with a variety of programs outside of school such as, Upward Bound, Step-Up Omaha, and more.

In January 2022, JJI staff interviewed Jacques Musavyimana, a Navigator with CUES Schools, about the Family and Student Support program. To address improvements to school attendance for this population, Mr. Musavyimana brings his personal experiences as a refugee to working with youth from refugee/migrant populations. He believes that both parents and school administrators must work together and recognizes that parents of refugee/migrant youth face barriers to school involvement. Navigators are responsible for helping the school administrators and teachers work with parents as they navigate language barriers, miscommunication, and a work/home balance. In this role, Mr. Musavyimana acts as a bridge between the parents and students. For example, if a child is absent from school, the Navigator will reach out to the parent or older sibling to assess the situation and see where help is needed.

CUES Schools hopes that the Family and Student Support program and Navigators will boost efforts to encourage school attendance beginning with building relationships and trust with the families.

Elements of effective programs include applying a multidisciplinary approach, using individualized treatment plans, and when feasible, using guides or navigators that are from the youth and family's communities.

Conclusion

To provide context for understanding the challenges Nebraska excessive absenteeism programs are experiencing when working with youth, this guidebook has examined reasons for disparities in chronic absenteeism among youth. We utilized data from the JCMS to put these challenges into perspective and to assess the impact of these interventions on attendance behavior among youth receiving programming. For FY 2018-2021, 3,120 youth were served in excessive absenteeism programs from July 1, 2018, through May 31, 2021. After excluding cases missing complete data for either pre-enrollment or enrollment, 1,524 cases across 30 programs remained for analyses. Of these cases, most were monitor only (44.3%), followed by truancy diversion (21.6%), and truancy intervention (33.3%). Cases were most commonly referred to a program either by the school (75.2%) or county attorneys (23.8%).

CBA funded excessive absenteeism programs served a similar number of males (48.2%) and females (51.5%), with an average age of 13.9 years. Most youth referred to programs were White (68.9%), followed by Hispanic (17.8%), and Black/African American (6.0%).

JJI measured change in attendance patterns for youth who attended programming. The most common reason for discharge from a program was because the youth had completed program requirements (38.1%). We assess program impact on absenteeism using pre-enrollment and enrollment attendance patterns. Thirty programs reported sufficient data to examine successful case closures based upon attendance patterns. Of these 30 programs, 15 were found to have a statistically significant change on attendance patterns from pre-enrollment to enrollment, meaning attendance improved between the pre-enrollment and enrollment period. Several reasons may account for programs not showing a statistically significant difference in absences between these periods including data entry errors and small sample sizes, for example.

Of the successful program cases, we examined if there were significant differences by age, gender, and race ethnicity. The analyses showed no significant differences in total attendance by age or gender. We also did not observe any statistical differences in attendance by race/ethnicity. While the total amount of absences across both time periods was statistically different based on race/ethnicity, these differences did not affect the percent change from pre-enrollment to enrollment. There were also no changes in attendance when we controlled for program type. Findings also did not suggest significant differences for unsuccessful case closures for any program. In other words, for the cases that we were able to include in these analyses, absences neither significantly improved nor got significantly worse while youth were enrolled in the programs.

It is important to note that these analyses were not intended to be a full evaluation of every funded excessive absenteeism program in Nebraska, but rather to help provide context on issues related to over-representation of youth of color in rates of excessive absenteeism. Limitations in usable data may have contributed to the lack of significant findings, especially as it relates to outcomes for youth of color. We recommend having a core team of data specialists responsible for collecting and entering all attendance data into the JCMS as this will improve data collection efforts across the state and increase the ability for evaluators to assess whether programs are effective. Over half of all cases were dropped from these analyses due to inaccuracies in data reporting. This resulted in some programs having too few cases for statistical analyses. Having a dedicated individual or team would improve the accuracy and usability of these data.

As there is no one right way to address absenteeism, excessive absenteeism programs should work to minimize barriers to school attendance by individualizing the services they provide. Findings from our interviews with programs in Nebraska suggest that excessive absenteeism programs are developing innovative strategies to improve school attendance, through buy back models and the use of Navigators. These strategies allow programs to be responsive to addressing barriers to attendance at an individual level. While these programs have yet to undergo extensive evaluations, they do offer hope for reducing racial disparities in attendance.

Recommendations

While there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to absenteeism programs, here are some best practices programs focusing on improving school attendance should follow:

1. Assess

- Programs should assess the situation of each youth and/or family individually, ideally with a validated tool that determines the barriers that are directly impacting attendance.
- If possible, the assessment process should include the perspective of the youth, the parent or guardian as well as school professionals.
- Please see the assessment section of this report for more information about currently available tools.

2. Respond - Case Planning

- The intervention, or plan, utilized should flow from the assessment. The plan should be tailored specifically to the needs of the youth and/or family. For example, if transportation is the main issue preventing attendance, intervention efforts should focus on transportation needs.
- The intervention must be employed closely in time to the absenteeism event. If a youth is referred to the county attorney six months post being absent, the problem has generally either become much worse or resolved itself.
- Programs should be mindful of dosage. A youth with minimal absences does not need an intensive case plan.
- Use a tiered strategies approach. An example of a tiered approach is provided in Figure 3 in this report. A tiered approach can be utilized with youth initially being served as well as to step-down the intensity of the interventions.
- If possible, use a multi-disciplinary approach or team. This allows for resources to be available as they are identified, rather than requiring for the service to be set up. A multi-disciplinary team encourages a variety of interventions and reduces the amount of time required to set up and begin needed services.
- Meet the youth and/or family where they are. Credible messengers and system navigators are often more effective if they come from the same or similar cultural background, neighborhood, or background of the youth being served.
- Whenever possible, programs should provide hope and a pathway out of the problem, as opposed to a punitive approach. A Buy Back Program, or incentivized attendance program may offer a variable pathway out of excessive absenteeism.
- If using incentives within the program note that they are more effective if they are timely (awarded right after the goal is met) and if the incentive is one that is relevant to the youth. For example, a youth who enjoys art may be more motivated if the reward is a new sketch book compared to a McDonald’s gift card. However, incentives do not need to be large or pricey. Expensive rewards are usually not sustainable and can make smaller incentives less effective.
- Be clear about the goals and expectations. This includes what type of behavior will result in an incentive or sanction. Establish what the program expects from the youth and/or family and be responsive to feedback they share about the plan.
- Be flexible with the plan. There will be circumstances that neither the program, school, youth, or family can foresee. In other words, do not drop a youth from a program for one small infraction or setback. Address the issue, then monitor to see if it continues to be something that impacts attendance.

- Modify the plan if needed. If the youth and/or family's circumstances change, allow for the intervention to change as well.
- Check implicit bias. When programs receive initial information about a youth and/or family, it can be easy to form opinions and judgements before even meeting the youth and/or family. This can be based on the circumstances of the referral or, especially in small communities, the family name or part of town they live in.

3. Outside the Program

- If possible, schools should coordinate with agencies and county attorneys to ensure strategies are in place in every community to prevent student attendance issues before they become problematic. These strategies may include identifying barriers to school attendance in the community and connecting parents and caregivers to necessary resources in the community to address these barriers.
- Becoming a familiar face/agency within the community can help build trust with youth and families.
- Get to know the school administrators and other school staff who deal with attendance. Developing a positive relationship with these individuals can help with gathering information and data about the youth and their attendance needs.
- If possible, having direct or "real-time" attendance data can help monitor and intervene with attendance concerns in a timely manner. For example, program staff being able to see multiple truancies to one specific class as it is occurring versus a weekly or monthly report or aggregated truancy information lets program staff know they need to address this with the youth as it is happening.
- Learn how the school classifies absences. There is not one common definition for types of absences, and it can change from school to school even within the same region. Knowing what the school is considering unexcused or excused can help tailor case plans but can also help with the unexpected absences during the intervention.
- If programs are entering attendance data into an external database such as the JCMS, the attendance classifications should be consistent with the school's definitions. It may help to be upfront with the school what programs are tracking to clear up confusion on attendance categories. This is where a good relationship with the school can be beneficial.
- Programs should stay informed on changes to legislative guidance in Nebraska.
- The Catalog of Truancy Intervention Models (ct.gov) is a great resource for programs. It contains promising intervention models, a description of the model, and information about delivery and model modalities, in addition to links for additional information.
- The Ohio Supports Attendance: A Community Collaboration of the Supreme Court of Ohio & the Ohio Department of Education is another excellent resource for programs to improve school attendance and keep youth out of the juvenile justice system.

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Appendix 1

Additional Assessment Tools

- **The School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS)** was developed to target four common problem areas among frequently absent youth: avoidance of negative stimuli, escape from aversive social or evaluative situations, attention-getting behavior, and positive tangible reinforcement. Both parent and youth complete the tool, allowing for comparison across reasons.
- **The Nebraska Youth Screen (NYS)** is a tool which assesses risk of future offending by collecting the following information: youth demographics, age at first arrest, criminal history, family circumstances/ parenting, education/employment, peer relationships, substance use, leisure/recreational time, personality/behavior, and attitudes/orientation. This assessment is completed by the diversion or truancy officer.
- **The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument-2 (MAYSI-2)** is a behavioral health assessment tool designed for youth aged 12-17. It provides scores on alcohol/drug use, anger-irritability, depressed-anxious, somatic complaints, suicide ideation, thought disturbance, and traumatic experiences. This assessment is completed by self-report and takes about 5-10 minutes to administer. Evaluations suggest the MAYSI-2 shows promise as a reliable and valid screening tool assessing risk related to mental or emotional problems.
- **The Simple Screening Instrument for Substance Abuse (SSI-SA)** is an alcohol and drug use screening tool for adolescents and adults aged 13 and older. This 16-item scale encompasses a broad spectrum of signs and symptoms for substance use disorder such as, drug use, preoccupation and loss of control, adverse consequences, problem recognition, and tolerance and withdrawal. It was designed for use in a clinical setting and the score indicates the severity of alcohol and other drug problems. This instrument can be administered by a trained interviewer or self-administered. Evaluations of the validity and reliability of the SSI-SA have found it to be among the most common screening instruments used. It has been shown to demonstrate sensitivity for predicting an alcohol or drug dependence disorder and test-retest reliability among adolescents.
- **The North Carolina Family Assessment Scale (NCFAS)** examines family function across eight domains: environment, parental capability, family interactions, family safety, child well-being, social/community life, self-sufficiency, and family health. The primary worker for the family completes the assessment after obtaining information about the family primarily through home visits.

Appendix 2

Example of filled in Tiered Approach Worksheet

Family and Student Engagement	Social and Emotional Learning Relationships	Behavioral and Mental health	Data Monitoring	Physical Health	Academic Support	Basic Needs
Connect family with community supports	Conduct empathy interview	Individual Plan based on Identified Needs	Intensive outreach to locate student and family and assess situation	Individual Plan based on Identified Needs	Connect with a tutor or other individualized academic support	Provision of targeted resources
Virtual/physically distanced family meeting or home visit when absences add-up	Institute Success Mentor or Family Ambassador Program	Small group counseling to provide support for students dealing with anxiety	Using absenteeism data to activate targeted supports	Assist a family with identifying a medical home / family health practitioner	Additional tech support and training for families and students	Assisting a family with signing up for public programs e.g. Medicaid, SNAP etc.
Community building to create belonging and connection	Invite families to design the school's drop-off and pick-up protocols	Individual wellness check and connectivity assessments	Personalized outreach and communication to families when students are absent	Immunization Clinic	Clear, concise and consistent communication about schedules and expectations	School Community Food and Household Goods Pantry

Healthy learning environments	Welcoming, safe school climate	Positive relationships	Learning Supports	Active family and student engagement	Access to Food and Other Basic Needs
Access to tech equipment and connectivity	Advisories or Morning Meetings to Build Community	Enrichment activities and clubs	Traditions and celebrations	Challenging and Engaging Curriculum	Support for all families to facilitate learning at home

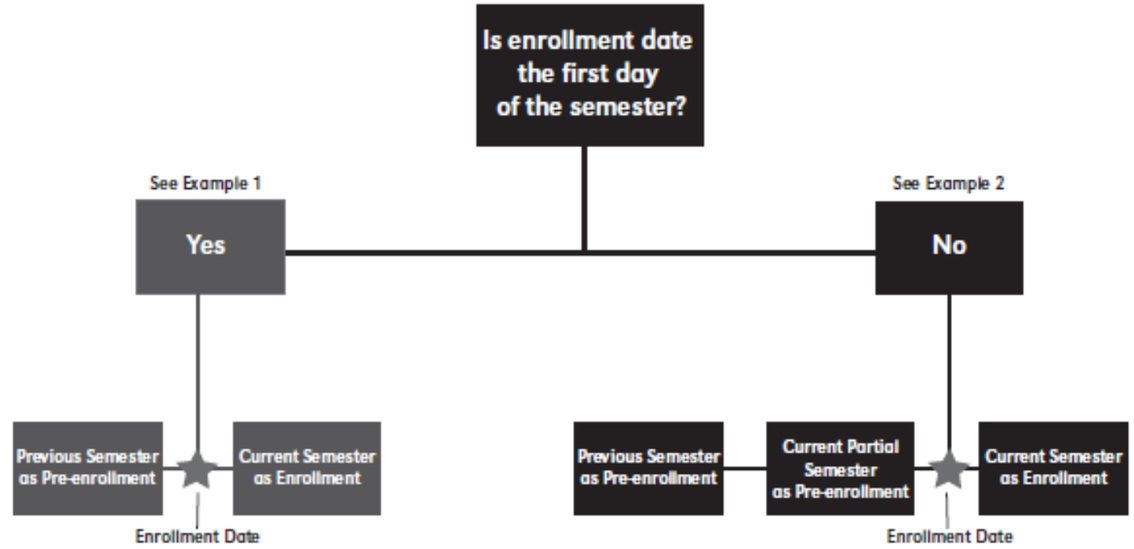
Appendix 3

Example of a blank Tiered Approach Worksheet

Family and Student Engagement	Social and Emotional Learning Relationships	Behavioral and Mental Health	Data Monitoring	Physical Health	Academic Support	Basic Needs
			Tier 3 Intensive Intervention			
			Tier 2 Early Intervention			
			Tier 1 Universal Prevention			
			Foundational Supports			

Adapted from format created by Nancy Erbstein, Associate Professor of Education in Residence, with the UCDavis Center for Regional Change and Sacramento City USD.

Appendix 4



Example 1 Scenario: In the following hypothetical situation, a student who has poor attendance throughout fall of 2022 would be referred to an absenteeism program for the first day of the spring semester. Let's say the first day of the spring semester that the youth is enrolled in the absenteeism program is January 8th, 2023. In example 1, you would enter pre-enrollment data for the entire fall of 2022 semester, and then then you would enter enrollment data for the entire spring of 2023 semester (January 8th, 2023) till the last day of the semester (hypothetically being) May 14, 2023.

Example 2 Scenario: In the following hypothetical situation, a student becomes referred into an absenteeism program and enrolls in January 31, 2022. For data collection purposes, pre-enrollment data would be entered twice. First, you would enter pre-enrollment data from January 7 (hypothetical first day of the spring 2022 semester) to January 31, 2022. Then, you would also need to enter pre-enrollment data for the entire fall 2022 semester as well. Finally, you would enter enrollment data for the remainder of January 31, 2022 to the end of the spring 2022 semester (hypothetical end of the semester date of May 14, 2022.

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