School Attendance and Data to Engage Interventions with Teachers

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Background

What is truancy?

Truancy occurs when a student of compulsory school age accrues a certain number of absences, regardless of whether they occur separately or happen all at one time. The law defines a child who is "truant" as having three or more school days of unexcused absence during the current school year. A student becomes "habitually truant" when she has had six or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year (Educational Law Center, 2019, p. 1).

In Pennsylvania compulsory attendance is ages 6 thru 17, ending on the 18th birthday (PDE, 2021).

Pennsylvania Truancy Expectations

- The Commonwealth of PA's law for truancy changed in 2021, and it is now necessary to look at each student and family in a Student Attendance Plan Model (PDE, 2020).
- Schools are to work to find solutions in both the school and community to lead the student to improve his or her attendance. This is a very time intensive process but can lead to success with all parties including the school, parents, and student (PDE, 2020).

Causes of Truancy with Secondary Students

Categorical causes for truancy can be positioned within four major topic areas.

These categories include:

- family factors,
- school factors,
- community influences, and
- student variables (Zhang, et al, 2007).

Student Causes of Truancy

- Student factors low academic performance and repeating grades, lack of caring relationships with adults, negative peer influence, and bullying.
- CDC researchers used the 2013 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to examine associations between bullying victimization and missing school because of safety concerns (Steiner & Rasberry, 2015).
- Jacob and Lovett (2017) researched different populations and their attendance rates. They saw a pattern that English Language learners are 1.2 times less likely to be chronically absent than peers, while students with special education needs are nearly 1.5 times more likely to be chronically absent than peers.

How to Help Teachers?

Professional Development and Adult Learners

- Professional development time is precious and needs to be used so that the adult learner is able to value it as well.
- Schachter, Gerde, & Hatton-Bowers (2019) focused on four different learning styles for professional development:
  - one-time workshop/training,
  - coursework/course credit,
  - coaching, and
  - technology-mediated.

Professional Development Data-Sample

Pre-Test

- Highest Concern- 3.95/5
  - Students are not motivated
- Lowest Concern- 2.5/5
  - Students do not feel safe and secure at school

Post-Test

- Highest Concern- 4.24/5
  - Negative events in the child's home life interfering with learning
- Lowest Concern- 2.7/5
  - There isn't a good method of communicating between home and school.

Classroom Change

Teacher Questions

Causes of Truancy
1. Do you believe school is a cause of truancy for your students?　　　　Yes or　　　No
2. Do you believe family is a cause of truancy for your students?　　　　Yes or　　　No
3. Do you believe mental health is a cause of truancy for your students? Yes or No
4. Do you believe connection is a cause of truancy for your students? Yes　　or No
5. What other causes do you see or feel affect your students?_____

Intervention
1. Do you have an intervention you want to try in your classroom?_____
2. Does this intervention match what you believe is the cause of truancy?_____
3. Do you need help putting your intervention in place?_____
4. How do you plan to monitor putting your intervention in place?_____

Classroom Based Interventions

- Teachers were interviewed to see what the students in their classes need
  - HS ES Classroom-
    - Lessons related to time management, employment expectations, and self-advocacy (4 lessons run)
    - Asked for lessons to be repeated in non-studied classes
  - MS Learning Support-
    - Team building activities and self-esteem building
  - MS ES Classroom-
    - Extra incentives into classroom rewards

Student Information

- High school students were able to process the importance of attendance by income lose activity
- Middle school students were enthusiastic about the group activities, but struggled to verbalize what they learned

- Middle school students asked about team building activities and came to school to participate

Teacher Feedback

"The students were discussing the methods and strategies they learned after the lessons."

"The intervention targeted mental health, connection, and incentive-based behavior systems. I think it helped me focus on connecting with students more consistently, though the intervention did not necessarily target family as a means of support student attendance."

"This intervention was easy to implement and did not take up much time. It was easy to track student data through PowerSchool and simple to check in with students on how they felt things were going."

Key Points

- Interventions need to be based on the the reasons a student in a class is truant.
- Teachers have to buy into the intervention for it to be successful.
- Students responded very well to the classroom based interventions, and have asked for them to continue.

Data Driven Intervention Ideas

- Mentoring Programs (internal or external)
- "Boys Club" or "Girls Club"-Team building, physical activity, and a question of the day
- Peer Mentoring- Building positive peer relationships
- Reward/Incentive Based Programs (Classroom/PBIS)
- Academic Supports
- High School Students working with younger at risk students (MS/ Elem)
- Internship Program
- Sign Outs
- PrimeTime

Plans

- Continue to share attendance resources and interventions with all teachers
- Model interventions for teachers
- Work to assess the reasons for absences to pair interventions with the reasons
- Continue to support teachers in carrying out the interventions
  - Running classroom lessons, meeting with students, ect

The End