School-County Collaboration

Truancy Prevention Learning Communities | Spring 2024

Policies to address chronic absence have an impact that stretch beyond the classroom into the wider community. Two groups with responsibility for responding to truancy— schools and county human service agencies—operate in fast-paced, high-demand, and resource-constrained contexts, which can contribute to feelings of disconnection and frustration without planful and purposeful collaboration.

Laying a Foundation for Meaningful Collaboration

Strong, lasting, cross-agency collaborations are built on the following elements:

Trust	Shared Interest & Relevance	Leadership	Collaborative Infrastructure	Time & Patience	Buy-In At All Levels

(Capacity Building Center for States, 2017)

To foster purposeful collaboration with clearly defined objectives, ground attendance intervention efforts in the principles below:

- **Build and maintain trust so all partners are able to share information, perceptions, and feedback and work as a cohesive team.**

- **Agree on core values that each partner can honor in spirit and practice.**

- **Focus on common goals that all partners will strive to achieve.**

- **Develop a common language so all partners have a shared understanding of terms.**

- **Respect the knowledge and experience each person brings.**

- **Assume best intentions of all partners.**

- **Recognize strengths, limitations, and needs; and identify ways to maximize participation of each partner**

- **Honor all voices by respectfully listening to each partner and attending to the issues they raise.**

- **Share decision-making, risk taking, and accountability so that risks are taken as a team and the entire teach is accountable for achieving goals.**

(DeCarolis, Southern, & Blake, 2007)

This resource was developed with information provided during the Spring 2024 Truancy Prevention Learning Communities. A recording of the full webinar is available on YouTube.

For more information or to share a strategy your community is using to address chronic absence, contact Julie.Incitti@dpi.wi.gov or DCFYJ@wisconsin.gov.

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF Public Instruction

Forming & Maintaining Connection

Develop shared vision and goals
- ☐ What population are we serving together?
- ☐ What issue/problem will we address together? Do all collaborators interpret this issue/problem in the same way?
- ☐ What is the desired outcome of our collaborative efforts? Are these outcomes SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound)?

Include multiple perspectives and voices
- ☐ Have we consulted with individuals directly impacted by our collaborative work?
- ☐ Are a variety of experiences involved in our work?
- ☐ Are members of the truancy committee required by statute looped in to our efforts?

Wisconsin education statutes to guide collaborative truancy efforts

Truancy committee
Wis. Stat. s. 118.162

Truancy plan
Wis. Stat. s. 118.162(4)

Evidence from school
Wis. Stat. s. 118.16(5)

School attendance enforcement
Wis. Stat. s. 118.16

Communicate clearly, regularly, and inclusively
- ☐ Do we have clearly defined roles and responsibilities? Do we all agree to these roles/responsibilities?
- ☐ What information are we required to share with each other by statute? What strategies do we have to communicate with each other (shared notes, project management tools, etc.)?
- ☐ Do we share an understanding of the needs and limitations of all collaborators?
- ☐ Are we all familiar with frequently used acronyms or key system processes?

Generate buy-in at all levels
- ☐ How can we solicit feedback from and share the work/progress of the collaborative group with our colleagues and our community?
- ☐ Based on feedback received, do we need to revise our collaborative approach or goals?

Measure Impact
- ☐ What ability does each agency have to collect and share data?
- ☐ How can we regularly collect information related to key activities?
- ☐ When and how should we periodically assess and analyze both ongoing and completed efforts?
- ☐ Reflecting on our data, is course correction necessary?

(Adapted from Forum for Youth Investment, 2023)

Getting Unstuck

Despite best efforts, sometimes connection fizzles out. If you are feeling like your community is stuck, the resources below may help to brainstorm a path forward.

- "Barrier Busters" (p.149)
- Building and Sustaining Child Welfare Partnerships
- Take Action: School District Administrators
- Readiness Assessment Tool

Strategies from Wisconsin Counties and Schools

Appleton Area School District (AASD)

Partnership with Outagamie County Human Services | [Stephanie Marta](#) and [Scott Kornish](#)

AASD and Outagamie County Youth and Family Services (YFS) have been rebuilding and enhancing a previous collaborative attendance intervention effort. This work is supported by the school district's attendance coordinator and has paved the way for YFS to expand programming to other districts across Outagamie county.

- A feeling of disconnection between AASD and YFS intensified following the closure of truancy court in 2018. Synchronized start dates for the district attendance coordinator and a YJ Innovation Grant presented an opportunity to address the lack of communication and partnership between agencies.
- YFS hosted a Truancy Summit in February 2024 for all districts in the county to learn about school avoidance, exchange strategies that work, and strengthen interagency connection.
- A key objective of the attendance coordinator has been improving the relationship between AASD and Outagamie County. Strategies used include:
  - Monthly status check meetings with school district and YFS staff
  - Monthly office hours at YFS for intake and ongoing staff to discuss open cases
    - A release of information is obtained for youth referred for truancy to facilitate information sharing between AASD and YFS. Schools can also contact YFS to discuss potential referrals without student/family names.
  - Regular attendance at truancy intake meetings
- Two important practice changes YFS has made to facilitate collaboration include:
  - Ensuring school administrators are aware of connections that have been made between human services and other school staff members.
  - Working with districts to streamline their truancy referral form and then routing completed forms from schools through the Attendance Coordinator to ensure consistency.

Walworth County

Partnership with Elkhorn Area School District (EASD) | [Kendra Kennedy](#)

In Walworth county, key stakeholders including county staff, school staff, school resource officers, and the local municipal court coordinate to reduce truancy and related youth justice referrals. Key outcomes of this working partnership include adopting a restorative practices approach in schools to foster a sense of belonging and reduce exclusionary discipline; connecting students with resources to address root causes of truancy; and partnering with municipal courts to support families with follow-through on these services.

- The school district and county co-wrote an application for a YJ Innovation Grant. Grant funding was used to hire a Mental Health Navigator—a county employee who spends 90% of her time in EASD schools.
- The EASD and HHS partnership center their work around three project goals:
  - *Improve community partnerships:* 2 Mental Health Navigators serve as a bridge between schools and HHS—connecting students to services faster and building trust with families. County staff also attend municipal court hearings to provide assessments and referrals to services.
  - *Reduce formal truancy referrals:* Mental Health Navigators share [YJ system information and best practice](#) strategies with schools so it is clear how and when to best utilize county resources. District staff has also been trained in restorative practices.
  - *Improve family and student engagement and skills:* Improved communication around root cause has increased referrals for services like [CCS](#) and therapy. Using ticketing more mindfully and strategically has increased needs-matching for municipal court dispositions and helps to connect families with supports like county-run [Active Parenting](#) classes. EASD has also changed the tone of [attendance letters](#) to make them more easily understood and engaging for families.

Green County

Partnership with Green County School Districts | Cassandra Rugg

The goal of the Green County Truancy Diversion Program is to encourage daily attendance and reduce referrals for habitual truancy. Their work is focused on building relationships between schools, parents, and students. County truancy coordinators facilitate cross-agency collaboration and also serve as a direct connection to students and their families.

- Participation in the diversion program is voluntary. Services offered to referred students include transportation, incentives (like gift or food cards or donations from the Packers and Bears), and educational time and support in the office.
- The truancy coordinators use several strategies to foster collaboration:
  - *August Check-in Meetings:* Used as a "level set" with each school before the school year starts. A time/date/location for monthly meetings is selected. District attendance letters are reviewed and appropriate timing for diversion intervention is agreed upon. Truancy coordinators remind schools of available services and "red flag" families are discussed.
  - *Monthly Check-in Meetings:* Used to check-in on "red flag" students/families and determine if next steps (like monitoring, letters, calls, or a parent meeting) are necessary.
  - *Monthly Court Visits:* Eligible students are invited to participate in Dollars for Days.
  - *Parent/School Meetings (as needed):* Used to discuss the factors contributing to non-attendance, identify potential solutions, and determine if services like transportation, mental health or AODA would be beneficial. These meetings can serve as an entry to the diversion program.
  - *Open, Ongoing Communication:* Connection maintained between schools and human services between meetings. Truancy coordinators keep schools in the loop and schools share copies of attendance spreadsheets with truancy coordinators.

Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)

Partnership with Dane County Human Services (DCDHS) | Laura Glaub, Sue De Buhr, and Alex Maves

In October 2022, Dane County's juvenile judge asked MMSD and county human services to review their working partnership to determine how they could better serve youth and families. The workgroup focused their efforts on moving from mandated reporting (which contributed to over-reporting of Black and Brown families) to mandated supporting. This mindset shift included implementation of professional development across school districts, teaming, and tiers of support for students and families. The work of this group has evolved over time and human services hopes to use this approach to other districts in the county.

- Workgroup identified a need for common language and shared understanding of concepts within schools and across the city and the county. They determined the best way to address this was through professional learning and adoption of universal practices.
  - *Shifts within schools:* All schools have an attendance team comprised of members with a variety of roles. Teams receive training on how to pull and look for chronic absence trends in daily, weekly, and monthly attendance data.
  - *Shifts across the city:* MMSD Lead Social Workers and the DCDHS Access Supervisor meet monthly to discuss potential truancy referrals and consult with each other. These meetings are also used to proactively identify professional learning opportunities to broaden awareness of services available beyond CPS and YJ intervention.
  - *Shifts across the county:* Human services has been piloting a group for high school girls to build out additional supports offered by the county. Some topics discussed in group are known contributors to non-attendance (healthy relationships, conflict navigation, healthy habits, etc.). This group has also served as a form of wraparound support with mutually beneficial outcomes for all participants—Girls are now connected to more diverse programming, opportunities, and adult supports; while the connection between MMSD and DCDHS continues to grow and strengthen.

Additional Tools & Resources

- [Youth justice issue brief #3: Truancy](#), Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
- [Best practice approaches to truancy reduction: Information for school attendance officers](#), Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- [Creating and sustaining cross-system collaboration to support families with co-occurring issues: An administrator's handbook](#), Capacity Building Center for States
- [Building and Sustaining Child Welfare Partnerships](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families
- [Improving child welfare outcomes through systems of care: Building the infrastructure: A guide for communities](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families
- [Building systems of care: A primer](#), Sheila A. Pires
- [Creating and sustaining cross-system collaboration to support families in child welfare with co-occurring issues: An administrator's handbook](#), Capacity Building Center for States
- [The five tenets of successful cross-system collaboration](#), The Forum for Youth Investment
- [District and school teams to improve attendance](#), Attendance Works
- [Early matters toolkit—Community-wide supports: Engage community stakeholders](#), Attendance Works
- [Reframing family, school, and community engagement: A communications toolkit](#), Frameworks Institute
- [10 steps communities can take to reduce chronic absence](#), Attendance Works
- [Data-sharing toolkit for communities: How to leverage community relationships while protecting student privacy](#), Attendance Works
- [Collecting data and sharing information to improve school-justice partnerships](#), National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- [For school board members: Frequently asked questions about chronic absence](#), Attendance Works