

# Attendance Improvement Literature Review and Implementation Framework

Prepared for Arlington Public Schools

July 2014



In the following report, Hanover Research reviews best practices in the development of district-wide attendance improvement initiatives and proposes a framework for the implementation of an attendance program at Arlington Public Schools (APS).

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary and Key Findings .....</b>	<b>4</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	4
KEY FINDINGS.....	4
<b>Section I: Causes and Effects of Absenteeism.....</b>	<b>6</b>
DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	6
CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM.....	6
Risk Factors for Chronic Absenteeism .....	8
EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM .....	8
Absenteeism as a Precursor to Dropout.....	10
<b>Section II: Attendance Improvement Strategies .....</b>	<b>11</b>
DEFINING PROBLEMATIC ABSENTEEISM.....	11
Addressing Tardiness and Early Dismissal .....	12
COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH STRATEGIES.....	13
ATTENDANCE MONITORING AND TRACKING.....	15
ATTENDANCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTIONS.....	16
Prevention .....	17
Interventions.....	18
Legal Interventions .....	19
ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES .....	20
Student Incentives .....	20
Teacher Incentives.....	21
TRUANCY DISINCENTIVE PROGRAMS .....	22
<b>Section III: Arlington Public School Attendance Improvement Framework.....</b>	<b>24</b>
SUMMARY .....	24
APS DISTRICT ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE FRAMEWORK .....	25
Defining Problematic Absenteeism .....	25
Enacting a Comprehensive Monitoring System.....	26
Establishing Attendance Policies .....	26
Communicating Attendance Policies.....	27
Enabling Preventative Measures .....	27
Enabling Effective Interventions.....	28

Monitoring Efficacy of Interventions.....28

**Appendix I: School Response to Attendance Issues ..... 29**

**Appendix II: Key Elements of the APS Dropout Prevention Plan ..... 36**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

## INTRODUCTION

In this report, Hanover Research reviews best practices in the development of district-wide attendance improvement initiatives and proposes a framework for the implementation of an attendance program at Arlington Public Schools (APS). This report draws upon the existing base of secondary literature as well as a 2013 Hanover Research report titled “The Impact and Effectiveness of School Attendance Policies” to identify research-based best practices and effective mechanisms for improving attendance in the K-12 context. The report comprises the following three sections:

- **Section I: Causes and Effects of Absenteeism** establishes consistent definitions for the terms “absenteeism” and “truancy” and investigates the likely causes and potential effects of chronic absence from school. This section also investigates common risk factors for absenteeism and explores the correlation between chronic absenteeism and dropout.
- **Section II: Attendance Improvement Strategies** explores the current base of research regarding the efficacy of common practices in the improvement of school attendance. This section includes evidence from scientific evaluations, as well as documentation of practices from schools and districts across the United States.
- **Section III: Arlington Public School Attendance Improvement Framework** proposes an implementation strategy for a district-wide attendance initiative at APS. This section draws upon research-based best practices in the area of attendance improvement, as well as the results of a survey of APS principals and the National Dropout Prevention Center and Networks recommendations for a comprehensive dropout prevention strategy at APS.

Below we present key findings from this research.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Prior to the implementation of attendance improvement initiatives, districts must first develop a clear and consistent definition of what constitutes problematic absenteeism.** This definition may include several categories of absenteeism – such as moderate, chronic, and excessive – that correspond to different levels and intensities of intervention to correct the behavior.
- **Districts should develop a comprehensive monitoring system to track student attendance and other key indicators.** Such systems can help identify students that are problematically absent and shed light on the root cause of the absenteeism. Key indicators may include: student demographics and family background; academic

performance; disciplinary records; and information related to student's extracurricular involvement.

- **Districts must also develop appropriate and equitable attendance policies to regulate guide schools' responses to problematic absenteeism.** These policies should be developed with the input of building-level teachers, administrators, and community members, and should include a range of interrelated topics including sanctions for truancy, appropriate types of interventions, and the threshold for the initiation of an attendance intervention.
- **Involving parents and guardians in attendance issues has been shown to be a critical factor in the success of district attendance initiatives.** As such, developing effective communication strategies to disseminate information related to district policies and the potential outcomes of absenteeism is a critical consideration for school districts. The district-wide attendance policy should also stipulate required actions for sustained communication with parents or guardians of absent students.
- **Student engagement is thought to be one of the most significant indicators of positive attendance.** As such, districts should make efforts to ensure that all students are behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively engaged in the school environment. Such engagement may be precipitated by creating high academic standards, encouraging teacher and administrators to develop deep relationships with students, and bolstering academic and social supports available to students.
- **Districts should develop multi-tiered intervention structures that effectively address various levels of absenteeism.** All interventions should be initiated with an investigation of the root cause of a student's absenteeism, and further activities should be tailored to the individual student. In general, home-based interventions are considered most appropriate for elementary students, while a combination of both home- and school-based interventions is thought to be effective for secondary students.
- **School districts must create data-driven systems of evaluation to assess the efficacy of attendance initiatives.** This process of monitoring and evaluation should create a flexible and iterative process for the continuous improvement of the district's attendance improvement program.

## SECTION I: CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM

In this section, Hanover Research draws upon secondary literature to define key terms and establish an understanding of absenteeism in the K-12 education context. The section begins by establishing definitions of two common and inter-related terms – absenteeism and truancy – before exploring the root causes and potential effects of chronic school absence. This section also emphasizes identifying students at greater risk of absenteeism and explores the correlation between absenteeism and school dropout.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

Little consensus exists regarding the proper method for classifying various student behaviors related to school attendance. Terms such as “truancy” and “chronic absenteeism,” for example, are defined differently by education researchers than they are by law enforcement agencies.<sup>1</sup> While some school districts define truancy as one or more unexcused absences,<sup>2</sup> law enforcement agencies describe it as any absence that is *illegal*.<sup>3</sup> These slight discrepancies in terminology across various studies and practice areas complicate the identification of best practices pertaining to student attendance.

The National Center for School Engagement claims that the outcomes of a student missing class remain constant regardless of how the activity is classified or whether it was known by a parent. Therefore, this report uses the terms *chronic absenteeism* and *truancy* interchangeably, yielding to a particular study’s preference when necessary.

### CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

A recently conducted meta-analysis of the existing research and literature on truancy reduction finds that approaches to the issue span numerous academic disciplines and yield largely disparate results.<sup>4</sup> As such, identifying a conclusive list of the causes of absenteeism

<sup>1</sup> Leff, L. “New Attendance Push Prized by Students, Educators.” USA Today. <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-09-03/education-attendance-incentive/57561242/1>

<sup>2</sup> Maynard, B., et al. “Indicated Truancy Interventions: Effects on School Attendance Among Chronic Truant Students.” The Campbell Collaboration, July 5, 2012. p. 9. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.campbellcollaboration.org%2Flib%2Fdownload%2F2136%2F&ei=LEdlUvfqLe2z4APuioDYDg&usg=AFQjCNHsrYNOG87JfKREmX\\_a5NzVwXycw&sig2=qjoTtQHW2UBH3GIPsEbY0w&bvm=bv.54934254,d.dmg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.campbellcollaboration.org%2Flib%2Fdownload%2F2136%2F&ei=LEdlUvfqLe2z4APuioDYDg&usg=AFQjCNHsrYNOG87JfKREmX_a5NzVwXycw&sig2=qjoTtQHW2UBH3GIPsEbY0w&bvm=bv.54934254,d.dmg)

<sup>3</sup> Maynard, B., et al. “Interventions Intended to Increase School Attendance in Elementary and Secondary School Students.” Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review Protocol. p. 2. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCwQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.campbellcollaboration.org%2Flib%2Fdownload%2F709%2F&ei=qjpoUs7QMrD54APRnoHQDA&usg=AFQjCN EK7qhXwveOuL7fGrNrlAs\\_4EbpXQ&sig2=Wnk8upD\\_4oYX2Xcl-FI-7w&bvm=bv.55123115,d.dmg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCwQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.campbellcollaboration.org%2Flib%2Fdownload%2F709%2F&ei=qjpoUs7QMrD54APRnoHQDA&usg=AFQjCN EK7qhXwveOuL7fGrNrlAs_4EbpXQ&sig2=Wnk8upD_4oYX2Xcl-FI-7w&bvm=bv.55123115,d.dmg)

<sup>4</sup> Maynard, B., et al. “Interventions Intended to Increase School Attendance in Elementary and Secondary School Students.” Op. cit. p. 48.

proves challenging. However, a general consensus has emerged that excessive or chronic absence is generally the result of a number of simultaneous factors.<sup>5</sup> These highly inter-related categories include:<sup>6</sup>

- **Students' perceptions of school:** Absent students are less likely to perceive school in a favorable light.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, building a sense of attachment and belonging to a school can mitigate chronic truancy. Research also shows that authoritative school climates that demand more from students and provide increased support yield better attendance records than more lenient schools.<sup>8</sup>
- **Family characteristics:** Not surprisingly, family environment greatly influences a student's attendance pattern. Ultimately, a stable home environment, as well as parental attention and involvement in a student's schoolwork, are critical for increasing attendance.<sup>9</sup> Students are more inclined to miss school if they perceive discipline at home to be lenient or inconsistent.<sup>10</sup> However, absenteeism is also more likely among students who believe their parents are exerting too much control over them.<sup>11</sup>
- **Economic influences:** Certain economic issues, such as the indirect costs associated with school attendance and the inability to earn wages during the school day, are considered a significant barrier to attendance for low-income students.<sup>12</sup>
- **Personal or psychological factors:** Feelings of academic inferiority in the classroom, as well as social incompetence, can spur a student's desire to miss school.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, fear of bullies and pressure from peers to miss school often contribute to a student's absenteeism.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Chang, H. and Romero, M. "Present, Engaged, and Accounted for: The critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades." National Center for Children in Poverty. 2008, p. 5.  
[http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text\\_837.pdf](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_837.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [1] School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies and Practices Going in the Right Direction?" Center for Mental Health in Schools, The University of California, Los Angeles. 2008, p. 6.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/school%20attendance%20problems.pdf>

[2] "Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students." The Gardner Center, Stanford University. 2012, p. 2.

[http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/resources/policy\\_fact\\_sheets/Absence\\_Interventions\\_PFS.pdf](http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/resources/policy_fact_sheets/Absence_Interventions_PFS.pdf)

[3] "Contributing Factors to Absenteeism." Indiana Department of Education. January 28, 2014.

<http://www.doe.in.gov/student-services/attendance/contributing-factors-absenteeism>

<sup>7</sup> Railsback, J. "Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies from Research and Practice." Northwest Regional Educational Practice. p. 6. [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/302](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/302)

<sup>8</sup> "Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools." Virginia Department of Education, August, 2005. p. 8. [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/dropout\\_truancy/improving\\_school\\_attendance.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/dropout_truancy/improving_school_attendance.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Railsback, J. Op. cit. p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "School Truancy and Dropout Prevention." National Association of Social Workers. 2005, p. 303.

<http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/school/documents/School%20Truancy%20and%20Dropout%20Prevention.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm, H. et al. "Absence from School: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs." Department for Education and Skills. p. 30. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8655/1/RR424.pdf>

Current research indicates that the extent to which these factors effect absenteeism vary by a student’s age. In general, **attendance patterns at the elementary school-level are largely driven by family factors**, while **chronic absenteeism at the middle- and high school-levels may be influenced by all the factors described above.**<sup>15</sup>

### *RISK FACTORS FOR CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM*

A number of studies have attempted to identify risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of chronic or excessive absence from school. In particular, several studies have noted that certain students from certain demographic backgrounds – namely male students, members of minority groups, economically disadvantaged students, students from single-parent households, and children of parents who do not have a high school diploma – are likely to have higher rates of truancy.<sup>16</sup> A review of 634 students conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention revealed the scope of barriers facing by chronically truant youth: 87 percent qualified for free or reduced lunch, 19 percent had individualized education plans, 15 percent had a history of school disciplinary problems, and 13 percent had juvenile criminal records.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, research indicates that **poor academic performance** and **association with delinquent peers** are strongly correlated to increased absenteeism and, in turn, higher rates of dropout.<sup>18</sup>

### **EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM**

Left unaddressed, attendance issues in a school can lead to a host of negative consequences for students’ academic achievement and health. As school districts continue to develop strategies and policies to shrink achievement gaps, attendance remains paramount for the success of such programs. Simply put, school districts cannot close achievement gaps if students do not attend class.<sup>19</sup> Students who frequently miss school face statistically significant odds that they will underperform when compared to their non-truant peers, and high absenteeism is the factor most associated with high dropout rates.<sup>20</sup>

This issue holds for younger students as well. Those who are chronically absent as early as kindergarten demonstrate lower achievement in later grades.<sup>21</sup> For example, a California

<sup>15</sup> “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit. p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> “Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools.” Op. cit. p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> “Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review.” National Center for School Engagement. 2007, p. 5. <http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/PiecesoftheTruancyJigsawALiteratureReview.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Yeide, M. and Korbin, M. “Truancy Literature Review.” Development Services Group and the U.S. Department of Justice. 2009, pp. 3-7. <http://www2.dsgonline.com/dso/truancy%20literature%20review.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. May 2011, p. 1.

[http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/CFE\\_Attendance\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/CFE_Attendance_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [1] Railsback, J. Op. cit. p. 6.

[2] “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Op cit. p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Op. cit. p. 2.



study found that only 17 percent of children who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and Grade 1 were proficient readers by the end of Grade 3. In contrast, 64 percent of their peers who attended school regularly were proficient readers at the end of Grade 3.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, a 2012 examination of absenteeism and academic performance in Utah found that **excessive absence was associated with a 0.85 point drop in cumulative grade point average** and that **chronically absent students were 1.7 times more likely to read below grade level.**<sup>23</sup>

Despite the benefits of being in class, students who do attend school regularly are negatively impacted by their truant peers. Research shows that students gain more when attending schools with higher attendance rates. Specifically, when comparing two students with similar attendance records and controlling for demographic variables, the student attending a school with higher attendance rates will perform better in Grade 4.<sup>24</sup> Attendance is also related to student health. A study of 10<sup>th</sup> graders in Michigan found poor attendance to be the only statistically significant predictor of behaviors such as cigarette use, binge drinking, and marijuana use. A larger-scale study of students in grades 7–12 found that truancy predicts a student’s cigarette, alcohol, and drug use as well as risk for weapon-related violence, suicide, and high-risk sexual behaviors.<sup>25</sup>

A number of authors have also pointed to the financial costs of chronic absence from school. Notably, truancy can have **direct financial costs to schools and districts, as federal and state monies are generally allocated based upon Average Daily Attendance figures.**<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the indirect societal costs of chronic truancy are well documented. A 2005 study found that adolescent students who skip classes occasionally were four times more likely to have committed a serious assault than their peers, while chronically truant students were 12 times as likely to have committed serious assault, 21 times as likely committed a serious property crime, and seven times as likely to have been arrested.<sup>27</sup> The Virginia Department of Education reports that truancy has been associated with a large number of indirect societal costs, including:

- Less educated workforce;
- Higher daytime crime rates; and
- Cost of social services for families of children who are habitually truant.

---

<sup>22</sup> “Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism in Indiana: The Impact on Student Achievement.” Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Summer, 2012. p. 2. [http://www.ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB\\_V10N3\\_2012\\_EPB.pdf](http://www.ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB_V10N3_2012_EPB.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> “Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism.” The University of Utah Education Policy Center. July 2012, p. 3. <http://www.utahdataalliance.org/downloads/ChronicAbsenteeismResearchBrief.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> “Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools.” Virginia Department of Education. Op. cit. p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Yeide, M. and Korbin, M. Op cit. p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> “Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review.” National Center for School Engagement. Op cit. p. 11.

*ABSENTEEISM AS A PRECURSOR TO DROPOUT*

The correlation between chronic absenteeism and school dropout is well documented.<sup>28</sup> Several studies have shown that a poor attendance record as early as Grade 6 represents a significantly increased risk of dropping out prior to graduation.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics notes that “high school dropouts have been found to exhibit a history of negative behaviors, including high levels of absenteeism throughout their childhood.”<sup>30</sup> Though no conclusive national studies appear to exist regarding the numeric correlation between chronic school absence and dropout rates, a 2012 study conducted by researchers at the University of Utah found that **chronically absent students in Grades 7 through 12 were nearly 7.5 times more likely to drop out of school than their peers.**<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> [1] “Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review.” National Center for School Engagement. Op cit. p. 6.

[2] Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 3.

[3] “School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies and Practices Going in the Right Direction?” Center for Mental Health in Schools, The University of California, Los Angeles. Op cit., p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Op cit. p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> “Every School Day Counts – The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data.” National Forum on Education Statistics. February, 2009. p. 1. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009804.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> “Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism.” The University of Utah Education Policy Center. Op cit. pp. 5-6.

## SECTION II: ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

In this section, Hanover Research explores common strategies and methods employed by schools and districts to improve student attendance. This section examines those practices that are most frequently discussed in the extant literature base, and, when available, presents the findings of scientific studies investigating their efficacy. In general, educational experts and researchers agree that **an effective attendance improvement initiative should comprise a number of related strategies, rather than a single isolated practice.**

### DEFINING PROBLEMATIC ABSENTEEISM

The first step to developing a comprehensive attendance improvement initiative is to define the rate at which absenteeism is to be targeted with an intervention.<sup>32</sup> While the research literature generally defines “chronic absenteeism” as missing at least 10 percent of school days of the course of a year, states, districts, and schools tend to employ different benchmarks to define problematic absences.<sup>33</sup> In most instances, however, **schools and districts use both excused and unexcused absences in the calculation of problematic absenteeism.**<sup>34</sup>

Several models exist for defining various levels of absenteeism. In a comprehensive study of the causes and effects of absenteeism among primary-grade students, Chang and Romero propose that districts and schools use three general measures to assess the severity of absenteeism: **moderate** (missing between five and ten percent of school days); **chronic** (missing ten percent of school days); and **excessive** (missing twenty or more percent of school days).<sup>35</sup> Conversely, New York State’s Greensburgh Central School District has determined a month-to-month cumulative schedule as the criterion for defining problematic absences (Figure 2.1). Such a schedule allows schools to identify emerging attendance trends early in the school year and stage effective interventions before the student begins to fall behind academically.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> [1] “Strengthening School Attendance Policies and Practices to Address Educational Neglect and Truancy.” Student Advocacy. 2008, p. 4. <http://studentadvocacy.net/AttendanceMemoFinal4-6-09.pdf>

[2] “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit. p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit. p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Op. cit. p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> “Strengthening School Attendance Policies and Practices to Address Educational Neglect and Truancy.” Student Advocacy. Op cit. pp. 4-5.

**Figure 2.1: Elementary Cumulative Days Absent Guide  
(Greenburgh Central School District)**

MONTH	CUMULATIVE DAYS ABSENT
September	4
October	9
November	13
December	18
January	22
February	27
March	31
April	36
May	40
June	45

Source: Student Advocacy<sup>37</sup>

### *ADDRESSING TARDINESS AND EARLY DISMISSAL*

A review of the existing base of literature did not identify a clear consensus regarding the treatment of tardiness and early dismissal within general attendance policy frameworks. Instead, it appears that schools and districts take a wide range of approaches to defining and sanctioning tardiness. Some schools prescribe punishments such as detention or suspension to encourage students to arrive in class on time.<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, Virginia's Hampton City Schools has developed a progressive system to track and sanction tardiness, implementing a process similar to that for absenteeism after the fifth recorded instance of tardiness or early dismissal (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2: Hampton City Schools Truancy Policies**

NUMBER OF TARDIES / EARLY DISMISSALS	ACTION TAKEN
5	Parent or guardian notified
10	Corrective action plan developed and signed by student and parent(s)/guardian(s)
15	Corrective action plan reviewed and amended; case worker may become involved
20	Truancy referral process is initiated

Source: Virginia Department of Education<sup>39</sup>

California's Valley High School (Santa Ana Unified School District) has developed a comprehensive tardiness policy as part of the district's more general attendance

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Moore, J. "Best Practices Employed by Georgia High School Administrators to Reduce Student Tardiness." Georgia Southern University. 2012, pp. 61-63.

<http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1319&context=etd>

<sup>39</sup> Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools." Virginia Department of Education. Op. cit., p. 103.

framework.<sup>40</sup> The policy stipulates that teachers will stand near their doors and greet students at the beginning of class, and administrators and dedicated monitors will “sweep” students toward classrooms. At the beginning of the class period, teachers are instructed to lock classroom doors, and tardy students are directed to “lockout rooms.” The school has developed a range of possible sanctions for habitual tardiness, including: administrative detention after three tardies; Saturday school; athletic ineligibility; drafting of an “Attendance Contract;” and marking the student as “truant” after 30 minutes.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of the selected tardiness policy, **school and district administrators should take steps to solicit feedback from key stakeholders and take steps to ensure the policy is appropriately and equitably enforced.**

### COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH STRATEGIES

The current body of literature generally recommends two primary strategies for communicating school attendance policies and initiatives throughout the school community: i) a large-scale outreach program to **educate students and families of attendance policies** and the consequences of absenteeism; and ii) sustained communication to alert parents and guardians of truancy and problematic absenteeism.<sup>42</sup> To date, no studies have conclusively determined the most effective means of conducting these outreach initiatives. However, an examination of practices employed districts and school across the country suggests common themes in the development of effective communication strategies.

Recent evidence suggests that **the most effective programs in reducing chronic absenteeism typically involve significant parental involvement.**<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, most district attendance initiatives appear to begin with communicating attendance requirements and protocols to students and parents. Parental outreach is generally initiated with a clear and concise letter detailing attendance requirements, which the school or district may ask parents to sign and return to their student’s school.<sup>44</sup> These outreach materials should be provided to families in languages other than English, when necessary, and in a low-literacy

<sup>40</sup> “Student Conduct and Attendance Policy.” Valley High School, Santa Ana Unified School District. 2012-2013. <http://www.sausd.us/cms/lib5/CA01000471/Centricity/Domain/5181/Student%20Conduct%20Attendance%20and%20Tardy%20Policy%202012-2013.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> [1] “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Op cit. pp. 5-6.

[2] Gandy, C. and Shultz, J.L. “Increasing School Attendance for K-8 Students.” Wilder Research. 2007, p. 3. <http://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Publications/Studies/Increasing%20School%20Attendance%20for%20K-8%20Students/Increasing%20School%20Attendance%20for%20K-8%20Students%20-%20A%20Review%20of%20Research%20Examining%20the%20Effectiveness%20of%20Truancy%20Programs.pdf>

[3] “Best Practices in Developing Truancy Reduction Programs.” National Center for School Engagement.

<http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/BestPracticesInDevelopingTruancyReductionPrograms.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Yeide, M. and Korbin, M. Op cit. p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> [1] “Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools.” Virginia Department of Education. Op cit. p. 26.

[2] Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 23.

format to ensure that the message reaches the most critical demographic groups.<sup>45</sup> Alternatively, the educational non-profit organization Student Advocacy recommends a number of more intensive parental outreach strategies, including:<sup>46</sup>

- Encouraging parents and guardians to seek clarification regarding any aspect of the attendance policy that is unclear;
- Posting attendance policies in high-visibility areas around schools that are likely to be visited by parents and guardians;
- Holding small meetings at the beginning of the school year for families new to the district or those whose children have an established history of attendance problems; and
- Highlighting that it is the family’s responsibility to ensure attendance each day.

Schools typically employ a range of strategies to communicate absences during the school year. Virginia statute currently requires that schools notify a parent or guardian of any and all unexcused absences from school, a practice which is typically conducted through automated telephone calls.<sup>47</sup> When a student’s absences – both excused and unexcused – begin to appear problematic, educational experts generally recommend that schools increase the intensity of communication efforts by making personalized telephone calls, sending personalized letters from high-level administrators, or making home visits to document the student’s absences and highlight the importance of regular attendance.<sup>48</sup>

Though lacking scientific rigor, the practical experiences of school districts may illuminate the efficacy of various communication and outreach efforts. Notably, administrators at Oregon’s Warm Springs Elementary School **found that the periodic distribution of letters documenting school attendance policies and the consequences of chronic absenteeism was not a sufficient measure to reduce instances of problematic truancy.** Instead, the school took a more proactive measure – sending weekly syllabi home with students to keep parents abreast of the school work – in order to alert parents of how quickly students may fall behind with sustained absences.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the New York City Department of Education’s *Interagency Task Force on Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism* made communication a focal point with the district’s 2010 attendance improvement initiative. The district developed a multimedia advertising and outreach campaign including a comprehensive parental education program, and ultimately witnessed a 24 percent decline in the number of chronically absent elementary students.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> “Strengthening School Attendance Policies and Practices to Address Educational Neglect and Truancy.” Student Advocacy. Op cit. p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. pp. 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> “Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools.” Virginia Department of Education. Op. cit., pp. 59-60.

<sup>48</sup> [1] “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit.

[2] Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Railsback, J. Op cit. pp. 45-46.

<sup>50</sup> “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Op cit. p. 57.

## ATTENDANCE MONITORING AND TRACKING

There is a general consensus within the literature that effective attendance improvement initiatives require a system for tracking and monitoring student attendance.<sup>51</sup> However, while most district and school systems generally track only the cursory attendance data required by state statute, such as Average Daily Attendance, education experts generally advocate for **more sophisticated and comprehensive systems to monitor both excused and unexcused absences.**<sup>52</sup> The most effective systems provide a holistic picture of a student, including discipline records, demographic background, and academic achievement data to help administrators identify chronic absenteeism and help discern the underlying causes of attendance problems.<sup>53</sup>

At a minimum, the US Department of Education recommends that schools attempt to collect data regarding the reasons for students' absences.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlights the importance of **creating a “mutually exclusive yet exhaustive taxonomy” that allows teachers and administrators to record virtually any attendance issue without overlapping or confounding results.**<sup>55</sup> Such a system allows schools and districts to assess the root causes of problematic absences, and target intervention strategies to each student. The NCES recommends the following categories as a basis for a taxonomic structure:

- Recognized non-instructional activity
- Religious observation
- Illness, injury, or health treatment
- Family emergency
- Disciplinary action
- Legal or judicial requirement
- Family activity
- Student employment
- Transportation barrier
- Skipping school
- Situation unknown

**Ultimately, the success of attendance data collection efforts rests with teachers themselves who are often tasked with attendance record-keeping.** Because data quality

<sup>51</sup> [1] Bruner, C., Discher, A., and Chang, H. “Chronic Elementary Absenteeism: A Problem Hidden in Plain Sight.” Attendance Works and The Child and Family Policy Center. November 2011, p. 2. <http://www.edweek.org/media/chronicabsence-15chang.pdf>

[2] “School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies and Practices Going in the Right Direction?” Center for Mental Health in Schools, The University of California, Los Angeles. Op cit., p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> [1] Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 4.

[2] “Best Practices in Developing Truancy Reduction Programs.” National Center for School Engagement. Op cit.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, T. and Lovrich, N. “Updated Literature Review on Truancy.” Center for Children and Youth Justice. 2011, p. 35. <http://www.ccyj.org/uploads/PPO/WSU%20Literature%20Review.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> “Dropout Prevention.” United States Department of Education. 2008, p. 13. [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice\\_guides/dp\\_pg\\_090308.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/dp_pg_090308.pdf)

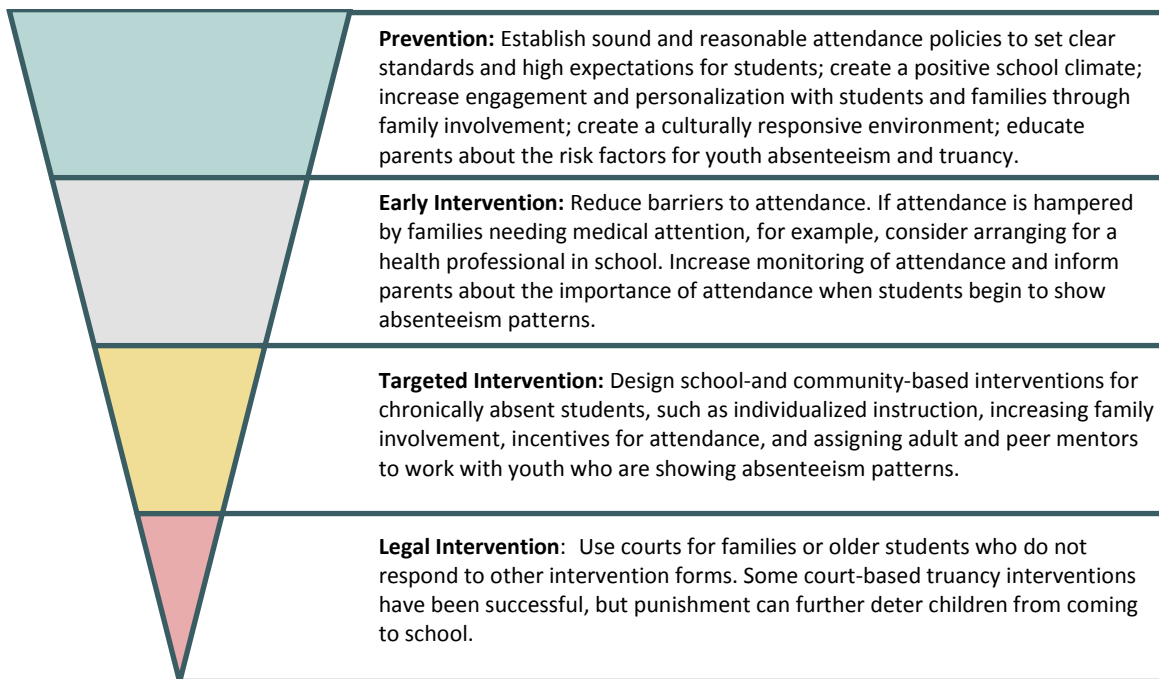
<sup>55</sup> “Every School Day Counts: The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data.” National Center for Education Statistics. 2009, pp. 11-12. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009804.pdf>

suffers without clear collection policies, staff members should repeatedly be made aware of district procedures, either through professional development or a comprehensive handbook. Additionally, to prevent data procedures from over-burdening teachers, districts should upgrade information systems to make the process as automated as possible.<sup>56</sup>

## ATTENDANCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTIONS

The majority of sources consulted in the preparation of this report recommend the development of a tiered structure for the prevention and correction of chronic absenteeism.<sup>57</sup> In general, these begin with “universal” interventions –preventative measures applied across the entire school – and escalate to legal interventions for the most chronically absent students (Figure 2.3).<sup>58</sup> This subsection describes possible measures associated with each of the stages of intervention, highlighting the importance of tailoring the intervention to the underlying causes of a student’s absenteeism.

**Figure 2.3: Continuum of Attendance Interventions**



Source: Adapted from The Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities (2012)<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> [1] “Strengthening School Attendance Policies and Practices to Address Educational Neglect and Truancy.” Student Advocacy. Op cit. pp. 5-8.

[2] Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 21.

[3] “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit.

<sup>58</sup> [1] “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit.

[2] Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Text taken verbatim from: “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit.



## PREVENTION

Truancy prevention measures are typically seen as a comprehensive and universal set of practices designed to deter problematic absenteeism before it occurs. In most instances, educational experts note that such strategies are closely tied to school culture, generally crossing over into the realms of academic standards school engagement, and should not be limited to pro-attendance practices.<sup>60</sup> A 2000 study cited by the Virginia Department of Education found that, overall, **“authoritative” schools and districts with high academic standards and high levels of academic and social support tend to have better attendance records than more lenient schools and districts.**<sup>61</sup>

Overall, best practices in truancy prevention are generally aligned with strategies employed in dropout prevention initiatives.<sup>62</sup> Key among these considerations is making efforts to ensure that students are engaged both academically and in the greater school community.<sup>63</sup> The Center for Mental Health in Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles recognizes three types of engagement that may contribute to attendance and absenteeism: **behavioral engagement** (academic, social, and extracurricular participation); **emotional engagement** (reactions to teachers, classmates, and administrators); and **cognitive engagement** (investment in academics and learning).<sup>64</sup> Common strategies to increase student engagement in these realms include: increasing familial involvement in students’ education, tailoring curriculum and learning opportunities to student interests, forming deep and caring relationships with students, and creating an environment in which students feel that they can succeed and are recognized for their achievements.<sup>65</sup> While the key outcomes of school engagement have been noted to improved academic achievement, students who are not effectively engaged in school have been noted to be at higher risk for chronic absenteeism and, ultimately, dropout.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> [1] “Truancy Prevention Efforts in School-Community Partnerships.” National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. 2012, pp. 6-7.

[http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/Truancy%20Prevention%20Efforts%20in%20School\\_0.pdf](http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/Truancy%20Prevention%20Efforts%20in%20School_0.pdf)

[2] “School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies and Practices Going in the Right Direction?” Center for Mental Health in Schools, The University of California, Los Angeles. Op cit., p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> “Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools.” Virginia Department of Education. Op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Smink, J. and Reimer, M. “Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention.” 2005, p. 1. <https://www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/progress/present/15ways.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> [1] “Taking Attendance Seriously.” Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Op cit. p. 5

[2] Jones, T. et al. Op cit. p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> “School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies and Practices Going in the Right Direction?” Center for Mental Health in Schools, The University of California, Los Angeles. Op cit. p. 29.

<sup>65</sup> [1] Railsback, J. Op cit. p. 23-37.

[2] “Ten Things A School Can Do to Improve Attendance.” National Center for School Engagement.

<http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/10ThingsASchoolCanDoToImproveAttendance.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> “School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies and Practices Going in the Right Direction?” Center for Mental Health in Schools, The University of California, Los Angeles. Op cit. p. 29.

Additionally, schools should ensure that students are presented with a range of social and academic support structures to help ensure student success, and to contribute to decreased likelihood of absenteeism.<sup>67</sup>

### *INTERVENTIONS*

As opposed to universal prevention, attendance interventions are usually reserved for those students who are approaching or who have exceeded a predetermined threshold that signals chronic or problematic absenteeism. In most instances, **researchers advocate for a multi-tiered intervention structure, with more gentle and generalized strategies giving way to targeted and intensive practices if chronic absenteeism persists.**<sup>68</sup>

**First-tier interventions** – often referred to as “Early Interventions” – are generally deployed when a pattern of poor attendance has been identified but the student has not yet reached the chronic absenteeism threshold.<sup>69</sup> Considered especially important in the primary grades, these interventions are usually initiated by investigating the **root cause of a student’s absenteeism** and working with the student, family members, and other key stakeholders to address the issue.<sup>70</sup> Often, first-tier interventions take the form of a **school-based intervention**, using support and other services to address the student’s disengagement from the school environment or to address certain areas of noted academic need.<sup>71</sup>

If the likely cause of absenteeism is determined to be outside of the school environment, administrators may choose to develop a **home-based intervention**. These interventions are generally enacted when a student has limited or inconsistent parental involvement, lacks a structured home environment, or has inconsistent transportation options to and from school.<sup>72</sup> Appropriate interventions can include phone calls and home visitation, and in many instances may require a dedicated case manager or social worker to ensure that best practices and legal considerations are adhered to.<sup>73</sup> Districts must also be prepared for the range of factors that may require a more comprehensive response, such as a severe illness within the family or economic hardship.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Smink, J. and Reimer, M. “Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention.” Op cit. p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> [1] “Strengthening School Attendance Policies and Practices to Address Educational Neglect and Truancy.” Student Advocacy. Op cit. p. 4.

[2] “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit.

[3] Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Railsbeck, J. Op cit. pp. 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> “Strengthening School Attendance Policies and Practices to Address Educational Neglect and Truancy.” Student Advocacy. Op cit. p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Railsbeck, J. Op cit. p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Chang, H. and Romero, M. Op cit. p. 21 and . 23.

<sup>74</sup> “Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students.” The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit.

When students or families are unresponsive to first-tier attendance strategies and a student reaches the point of chronic absenteeism, schools and districts should then escalate to more **targeted interventions**.<sup>75</sup> Most frequently employed at the secondary level, targeted interventions typically involve intensive use of school support services and community partnerships to help engage students and families in education.<sup>76</sup> In some instances, targeted interventions may necessitate the implementation of individualized instruction, the establishment of peer or adult mentoring networks, or careful coordination with public agencies, such as the juvenile justice system and child protective services.<sup>77</sup> Effective targeted interventions should be considered an iterative process, maintaining the flexibility to adapt practices that have either shown positive results or been ineffective at the first and second tiers.

### *LEGAL INTERVENTIONS*

In general, the **involvement of the juvenile justice system should be considered a last resort reserved for the most problematic instances of chronic absenteeism**.<sup>78</sup> Removing parents or children from their home is generally thought to have a negative impact on school attendance, and evidence indicates that the threat of such punitive actions is not a significant deterrent to truancy or absenteeism.<sup>79</sup>

However, the Virginia Department of Education notes several benefits of involving the juvenile justice system in truancy reduction initiatives.<sup>80</sup> The Department notes that youth courts can be a powerful means of creating external accountability for chronically absent students and may lead to positive behavioral changes. Additionally, the legal system has been shown to be effective at addressing problems associated with chronic absenteeism such as delinquency and violent behavior in middle and high school students. Moreover, the involvement of youth courts **removes the decision-making responsibility from school administrators, creating a set of responses and sanctions that may be perceived as more severe than those imposed by a school**.<sup>81</sup>

The National Center for School Engagement notes that the involvement of the juvenile justice system may be an effective means of recovering state or federal monies lost due to chronically absent students.<sup>82</sup> A program launched in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for example, placed substantial legal onus on parents to prevent truancy, while offering increased parenting support where needed. Ultimately, the district credited the program with increasing school

<sup>75</sup> "Strengthening School Attendance Policies and Practices to Address Educational Neglect and Truancy." Student Advocacy. Op cit. p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Railsbeck, J. Op cit. pp. 18-19.

<sup>77</sup> "Collaborative Approaches to Reducing Absenteeism Among K-12 Students." The Gardner Center, Stanford University. Op cit.

<sup>78</sup> Jones, T. et al. Op cit. p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> "Truancy Prevention Efforts in School-Community Partnerships." National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. Op cit. p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> "Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools." Virginia Department of Education. Op. cit. pp. 52-53.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> "Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review." National Center for School Engagement. Op cit. p. 15.

enrollment by nearly 800 students per year, and regaining some \$300,000 in per capita funding.<sup>83</sup>

## ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES

Despite being somewhat controversial and lacking support from rigorous scientific studies, many schools and districts have developed incentive programs to encourage positive behavior and school attendance. This subsection describes several incentive programs – designed to incentivize both teachers and students – and describes best practices culled from the existing research base in the development of attendance incentive programs.

### *STUDENT INCENTIVES*

A recent study conducted by the Brookings Institution examined student incentive programs in five major U.S. cities. Students participating in these programs were monetarily compensated for educational inputs (e.g., reading books, completing math homework, or attending school) or for student achievement outputs (e.g., standardized test scores, class grades). A Washington, D.C., program profiled in this report specifically incentivized five student behaviors: attendance, behavior, wearing a school uniform, completion of homework, and completion of class work.<sup>84</sup> Students were eligible to receive as much as \$10 per day for meeting these expectations. While no program rewarding outputs showed significant results, programs rewarding inputs such as the Washington, D.C., incentive structure yielded positive results in terms of increased student achievement. However, these positive results were not statistically significant.<sup>85</sup> Thus, this study adds credibility to programs incentivizing educational inputs such as attendance; however, a lack of statistically significant growth in student achievement suggests that other interventions may be more appropriate.

One example of a successful low-cost attendance incentive program can be seen at California's Corona-Norco Unified School District (CNUSD). CNUSD analyzed student data to identify attendance patterns, including particular days on which students were more inclined to miss school. With this information, teachers created incentives for students to attend class on these targeted days. For example, CNUSD teachers began testing students on Fridays, creating more impetus to attend class on this commonly skipped day.<sup>86</sup> While no conclusive data exist to prove this program's ability to increase attendance, it nonetheless represents a low-cost, low-risk, and easily-to-implement solution for districts.

Despite minimal evidence of their value, student incentives for attending school have cropped up in districts nationwide. As such, a general consensus on best practices for incentive programs has emerged:

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Allan, B. and Fryer, R. "The Power and Pitfalls of Education Incentives," The Hamilton Projects, Brookings Institute. pp. 8-11. [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/092011\\_incentives\\_fryer\\_allen\\_paper2.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/092011_incentives_fryer_allen_paper2.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "Corona-Norco Unified School District – District Profile," The Broad Prize. p. 3. <http://www.broadprize.org/asset/coronafacts.pdf>

- **Attendance incentives are most effective when part of a more comprehensive approach**, including outreach to families, development of a school-wide culture, and increased student engagement.<sup>87</sup> Isolated effect sizes from incentive programs are modest at best, and students rarely internalize these incentive structures.<sup>88</sup>
- **Simple, low-cost incentives work as well as high-cost, monetary incentives.** Examples include certificates, extra recess time, homework passes, and pizza parties.<sup>89</sup> These strategies are primarily useful for targeting attendance among primary school students.<sup>90</sup>
- **Schools should avoid only recognizing perfect attendance and take care to reward punctuality as well.** Because any missed class time can impact achievement, attendance should be recognized in a variety of ways.<sup>91</sup>
- **Programs that align the incentives of teachers, students, and parents have the greatest impact on direct outcomes.** Because all three of these stakeholders affect student attendance, they should all be pushed in a similar direction.<sup>92</sup>

### *TEACHER INCENTIVES*

Though considerably less common than student incentives, some districts have developed systems that reward teachers for supporting school attendance goals. A study by the Brookings Institution evaluated the impact of teacher incentive programs on specific variables, including student attendance. The programs studied include:<sup>93</sup>

- **New York City:** Schools meeting achievement targets were awarded \$3,000 per teacher, and schools meeting 75 percent of the target received \$1,500 per teacher. The progress report card score used to determine awards comprised three categories: progress, performance, and environment. Attendance represented 5 percent of the total score. Disbursement of awards to teachers was decided upon by individual schools, with most using an incentive scheme that granted teachers the same amount regardless of seniority. However, the study concludes that no evidence exists to suggest that teacher incentives augment student performance, attendance, or graduation rates.
- **Nashville:** Middle school math teachers were awarded \$5,000, \$10,000, and \$15,000 bonuses, depending on student performance. This program demonstrated no impact on student achievement, nor did it affect the way that teachers instruct students in the classroom.

<sup>87</sup> "Establishing School-wide Attendance Incentives." Attendance Works.

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/AW-Incentives-two-pager-1-4-11.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> Allan, B. and Fryer, R., Op. cit., p. 21<sup>88</sup> "Establishing School-wide Attendance Incentives," Attendance Works.

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/AW-Incentives-two-pager-1-4-11.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> Railsback, J. Op. cit. p. 14

<sup>90</sup> "Establishing School-wide Attendance Incentives." Attendance Works. Op cit.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Allan, B. and Fryer, R., Op. cit. p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. pp. 12-14.

The authors of this study conclude that **incentivizing teachers has only modest impacts on their their instructional technique and, in turn, is unlikely to change student behaviors**, such as school attendance. More thoughtful approaches to shaping teachers' behaviors, such as extensive professional development, may be required to create substantive changes in student attendance patterns.<sup>94</sup>

## TRUANCY DISINCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Though district attendance initiatives have typically focused on truancy disincentives – namely punitive actions or restrictions of non-academic privileges – evidence suggests that such actions tend to be only marginally effective. In fact, research suggests that harsh pro-attendance discipline programs, such as “zero-tolerance policies,” may negatively affect student attendance. Zero-tolerance policies in which students receive suspensions and detentions for unexcused absences or tardiness further remove them from critical instruction time. These practices spur a disconnect between students and their schools, creating a negative and combative school environment, especially for low-income and minority students.<sup>95</sup> Researchers from the University of California, Los Angeles note that the impacts of zero-tolerance policies seem to be “lower achievement, high dropout rates, an increase in the achievement gap, and racial profiling of students.”<sup>96</sup> In most instances, educational experts advocate keeping students engaged in some form of instruction, regardless of a student's wrong-doing. Because research shows that missing class increases the likelihood of future absences, more and more schools now use in-school suspension programs rather than sending students home.<sup>97</sup>

Some disciplinary systems used to discourage absenteeism also involve academic repercussions, another largely ineffective technique. For example, course instructors at Creekview High School in Cherokee County, Georgia, must fail a student upon his or her accumulation of seven unexcused absences.<sup>98</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics warns that such a punitive method further excludes students from critical learning opportunities.<sup>99</sup>

Regardless, disciplinary action for truancy may be an effective deterrent when employed as part of a more comprehensive attendance strategy, especially at the secondary level. A large number of educational researchers and experts, including the National Center for School Engagement and the National Association of Social Workers, advocate for the

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Railsback, J., Op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> “School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies and Practices Going in the Right Direction?” Center for Mental Health in Schools, The University of California, Los Angeles. Op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Sundius, J., and Farneth, M. “On The Path To Success: Policies and Practices for Getting Every Child To School Every Day.” Open Society Institute – Baltimore. p. 9.

[http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/whitepaper3\\_20080919.pdf](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/whitepaper3_20080919.pdf)

<sup>98</sup> “Establishing School-wide Attendance Incentives,” Op. cit.

<sup>99</sup> “Every School Day Counts – The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data,” Op. cit., p. 1.

development and equitable administration of sanctions.<sup>100</sup> However, **schools and districts must ensure that these sanctions are appropriate, effective, and do not further remove students from the instructional environment.**<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> [1] "Best Practices in Developing Truancy Reduction Programs." National Center for School Engagement. Op cit.

[2] "School Truancy and Dropout Prevention." National Association of Social Workers. p. 304.

<http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/school/documents/School%20Truancy%20and%20Dropout%20Prevention.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> [1] "School Truancy and Dropout Prevention." National Association of Social Workers. p. 304.

[2] Railsback, J., Op. cit. p. 13.

## SECTION III: ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

In this section, Hanover Research proposes a framework for the development of an attendance improvement initiative at Arlington Public Schools. The framework described in this section is grounded in a review of the research-based best practices in attendance improvement outlined in Section II of this report, as well as a review of the “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” and the National Dropout Prevention Center and Networks (NDPC/N) 2012 “Arlington Public Schools Dropout Prevention Intervention Plan Review,” documents that were provided to Hanover Research by APS personnel. The key elements from both of these reports are included as Appendix I and Appendix II of this report, respectively.

In general, **evidence suggests that the best practices for improving school attendance are markedly similar to those for dropout prevention.**<sup>102</sup> As such, Hanover Research highlights elements of the attendance improvement framework that coincide with elements of APS current dropout prevention strategy. Additionally, this section notes instances where the proposed framework directly addressed attendance-related issues mentioned “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” report.

### SUMMARY

A tabular summary of the proposed APS attendance improvement framework is presented as Figure 3.1 below. This table is presented in the approximate chronological order of implementation, and includes a description of the key actions associated with each of the seven components of the framework. Additional information related to the development of the framework and its alignment to other APS goals and initiatives are provided in the subsequent subsection.

**Figure 3.1: Summary of APS Attendance Improvement Framework**

COMPONENT	KEY ACTIONS
Define Problematic Absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create clear and consistent definition of absenteeism</li> <li>• Identify thresholds requiring different levels of intervention</li> <li>• Establish how tardiness/early dismissal will be addressed in concert with absenteeism</li> </ul>
Enact Comprehensive Monitoring System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop system for tracking excused and unexcused absences</li> <li>• Create taxonomy to track the reasons and causes of absences</li> <li>• Educate teachers regarding the importance of maintaining detailed and accurate attendance records</li> <li>• Incorporate additional data related to academic performance, school engagement, and disciplinary actions</li> </ul>

<sup>102</sup> Smink, J. and Reimer, M. “Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention.” 2005, p. 1. <https://www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/progress/present/15ways.pdf>



COMPONENT	KEY ACTIONS
Establish Attendance Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulate appropriate and equitable sanctions for unexcused absences</li> <li>• Develop clear protocols for informing parents or guardians of absences</li> <li>• Develop follow-up schedules for continued absenteeism</li> </ul>
Communicate Attendance Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate parents and students regarding attendance policies and procedures</li> <li>• Disseminate information regarding the potential outcomes of chronic absenteeism</li> <li>• Continue communication strategies with absent students and families for the duration of the school year</li> <li>• Communicate attendance policies to local businesses and community partners</li> </ul>
Enable Preventative Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop robust and comprehensive support services to help students become engaged in the school environment</li> <li>• Create high academic and attendance standards to create student accountability</li> <li>• Develop deep and understanding relationships with students</li> <li>• Apply all sanctions firmly and equitably</li> </ul>
Enable Effective Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create progressive, multi-tiered interventions to address various levels of absenteeism</li> <li>• Investigate the root cause of absenteeism and tailor interventions to each student and situation</li> <li>• Engage partners within the community, including social workers, case managers, health care providers, and civil service organizations</li> <li>• Develop protocols for involving the juvenile justice system in the management of chronic absenteeism</li> </ul>
Monitor Efficacy of Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor the efficacy of attendance improvement initiatives</li> <li>• Create a flexible and iterative system working toward the goal of continuous improvement</li> </ul>

## APS DISTRICT ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE FRAMEWORK

This subsection contains detailed information related to the proposed APS attendance improvement framework. The sections contained herein generally correspond to the components outlined in Figure 3.1 above, and incorporate elements from the “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” and Arlington Public Schools Dropout Prevention Intervention Plan Review” included as Appendix I and Appendix II of this report, respectively.

### *DEFINING PROBLEMATIC ABSENTEEISM*

As a first step in developing an attendance improvement framework, APS should create a clear and consistent definition as to what constitutes problematic absenteeism (Appendix I.B). This definition may include several levels of absenteeism (for example, moderate, chronic, and excessive) that correspond to different tiers of intervention. If APS decides to create a rigid threshold for the initiation of an attendance intervention – such as the 10 percent absence rate used by many schools and districts – administrators should ensure that the system allows for the identification of students with emerging attendance problems (Appendix I.A).

Additionally, results of the “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” survey suggest that APS should create a clear definition and policy regarding student tardiness (Appendix I.B and Appendix I.C). The definitions established for absenteeism should address what constitutes tardiness and/or early dismissal, and how these infractions are accounted for in the general attendance policy.

### *ENACTING A COMPREHENSIVE MONITORING SYSTEM*

Arlington Public Schools should develop a comprehensive system to monitor student attendance and a variety of other indicators that may place students at greater risk for absenteeism, such as academic performance, discipline records, demographic information, and family history. This system should track both excused and unexcused absences, and allow for the implementation of a “mutually exclusive and exhaustive taxonomy” to allow teachers and administrators to track and identify the root cause of absences.

This component of the proposed attendance improvement framework is well aligned with current APS initiatives and several of the goals established in the NDPC/N’s “Arlington Public Schools Dropout Prevention Intervention Plan Review” report (Appendix II.A). In particular, as part of Goal 1 (Ensure that every student is challenged and engaged), the NDPC/N recommends that APS develop a data collection system that “enables identification of students who are at-risk and the evaluation of prevention and intervention strategies.” According to the NDPC/N, this will necessitate the combination of a number of disparate student information databases and the development of consistent reporting protocols across the district (see Appendix II.A, Goal 1).

Additionally, the “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” survey contains a number of references to more efficient and effective attendance data management protocols. In particular, secondary school teachers reported interest in a more accessible and user-friendly data format for tracking student absences (Appendix I.D) and more integrated method for sharing this data with representatives of the child welfare system (Appendix I.H).

### *ESTABLISHING ATTENDANCE POLICIES*

Arlington Public Schools must also solicit input from key stakeholders – including teachers, administrators, and community members – in the development of appropriate and equitable attendance policies. These policies should include sanctions for unexcused absences at the primary and secondary school levels, as well as the general mechanisms for addressing chronic absenteeism across the district. While the policies described herein must be carefully adhered to and universally applied, APS should also take steps to ensure that they are flexible enough to allow for the individualization of interventions and adjustments to improve the systems efficacy.

The results of the APS “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” highlight the need for the development of a clear and comprehensive attendance policy. Both elementary and secondary principals noted the need for a formal and standardized

district-wide attendance policy (Appendix I.B, Appendix I.C, and Appendix I.D) to establish attendance-related protocols to be enacted at the building level (Appendix I.E). Additionally, enacting a consistent, district-wide attendance policy may contribute to the NDPC/N-established “Goal 2: Eliminate the Achievement Gap” by increasing the performance of the district’s lowest achieving students (Appendix II.A).

### *COMMUNICATING ATTENDANCE POLICIES*

An effective attendance improvement initiative requires the engagement of both students and parents. As such, APS should launch a well-planned communication strategy to disseminate information regarding the district’s attendance requirements and policies and inform families of the potential risks of chronic absenteeism. Information regarding policies should be displayed in heavily-trafficked areas around the school and distributed to households through mail. APS may also consider requiring parents and students to sign a copy of the district’s attendance policies and return them to school administrators prior to the beginning of the school year.

APS must also consider the development of a sustained communication strategy to reach problematically absent students and their families over the course of the school year. Results of the “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” survey indicate that both elementary and secondary teachers feel it would be helpful to continue automated calls when students have reached a specified number of absences; however, there is a general consensus that sustained communication with parents is lacking (Appendix I.H). Specific strategies suggested by APS principals include: sending monthly attendance letters; holding meetings with families to discuss attendance plans; offering technology training to parents to allow them to access student information and data; and making sure that attendance information is delivered in a timely and effective manner.

Protocols for the communication of attendance-related issues to parents and guardians should be clearly addressed in the district’s attendance policy.

### *ENABLING PREVENTATIVE MEASURES*

Preventative measures are a type of universal intervention that can significantly impact the rates of both chronic absenteeism and dropout. Perhaps the most critical consideration in enabling preventive measures is to ensure that all students are engaged – behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively – in the school environment. APS may consider supplementing academic and social support services, encouraging teachers and administrators to form deep relationships with students, and recognizing students’ successes to further student engagement.

The issue of preventative truancy measures is directly and indirectly referenced repeatedly in the NDPC/N’s “Arlington Public Schools Dropout Prevention Intervention Plan Review” (Appendix II.A). The practices associated with Goal 1 (Ensure that every student is challenged and engaged) directly address one of the most salient concerns surrounding student attendance. Additionally, Goal 3 (Recruit, retain, and develop high quality staff),

Goal 4 (Provide optimal learning environments), and Goal 5 (Meet the needs of the whole child) can all significantly contribute to student engagement and reducing chronic absenteeism.

#### *ENABLING EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS*

Arlington Public Schools should develop a multi-tiered system of interventions to address various levels of student absenteeism. This system should outline practices appropriate for students at both the elementary and secondary levels, and include more intensive practices for students with more severe attendance problems. In general, elementary attendance issues should be addressed with primarily home-based interventions, while secondary attendance problems should be addressed with both home-based and school-based interventions. To the extent possible, all corrective action should be initiated with an investigation of the root cause of absences, and interventions should be tailored to the needs of individual students and families.

The effective administration of attendance interventions may necessitate the formation of partnerships with actors and organizations throughout the community. Results of the “School Responses to Attendance Issue Questions, 2013-2014” survey indicate secondary school principals, in particular, feel that community partnerships may be an effective means of combatting chronic absenteeism (Appendix I.B). Elementary and secondary principals also agreed the developing relationships and a clear delegation of responsibility with critical partners – including the Department of Human Services, the Juvenile Courts, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and Northern Virginia Community College – may ultimately assist in the development of effective attendance interventions.

The development of a comprehensive student data system – addressed in several of the NDPC/N’s goals for APS’s dropout prevention initiative – may also prove useful in the administration of attendance interventions (Appendix II.A). Data from this system can be used to investigate the cause of absenteeism and help administrators develop appropriate and effective interventions.

#### *MONITORING EFFICACY OF INTERVENTIONS*

Arlington Public Schools must also develop a data-driven system to monitor the efficacy of attendance interventions and, more generally, attendance policies. This system should, to the extent possible, incorporate data from a range of sources and create a flexible and iterative process for the continuous improvement of the district’s attendance initiative.

# APPENDIX I: SCHOOL RESPONSE TO ATTENDANCE ISSUES

This appendix contains the results of a survey conducted by Arlington Public Schools to assess the perceived efficacy of various district attendance protocols and the areas where these protocols may be improved. School principals were asked to respond to the following questions relative to attendance:

- What successful policies/practices need to be retained?
- What policies/practices present challenges, need to be considered, and/or possibly changed?
- What support does your school need to order to best handle student attendance?
- What are the school system's responsibilities relative to attendance?
- What are the school's responsibilities relative to attendance?
- What are the parents' responsibilities relative to attendance?
- What are the community's responsibilities relative to attendance?
- How can attendance issues best be communicated between interested and responsible parties (school system, schools, parents, and community)?

### Appendix I.A

What successful policies/practices need to be retained?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily tracking of student attendance</li> <li>• Involvement of social workers in the attendance process</li> <li>• Allotment of time for the social workers to handle attendance issues</li> <li>• Automatic robo-calls from synergy and designated office staff to assist with follow-up calls to parents</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Elementary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and direct contact with students exhibiting emerging attendance problems</li> <li>• Group and individual counseling around attendance issues</li> <li>• Attendance specialists working with students and parents</li> <li>• Teachers being approachable about attendance and showing sensitivity and encouragement about students attending school</li> <li>• A supportive and collaborative team approach working with school social workers, psychologists, substance abuse counselors and outside agencies                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collaborative efforts with DHS, the Juvenile Court, Parks and Recreation, and Northern Virginia Community College</li> <li>○ Working with the court system –CHINS</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Intervention meetings with parents, counselor and administration+                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individual meetings with students and parents to establish rapport</li> <li>○ School conferences+</li> <li>○ Phone calls+</li> <li>○ Home visits+</li> <li>○ Parent conferences</li> <li>○ Emails</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Three- and five-day letters</li> <li>• Attendance contracts/plans and student-signed improvement plans +++</li> <li>• The interagency committee at the court house dealing with truancy and unexcused absences +</li> <li>• Support from probation officers</li> <li>• Addressing tardies with seriousness                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Implementing a demerit system for unexcused absences and tardies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and direct contact with students exhibiting emerging attendance problems</li> <li>• Group and individual counseling around attendance issues</li> <li>• Attendance specialists working with students and parents</li> <li>• Teachers being approachable about attendance and showing sensitivity and encouragement about students attending school</li> <li>• A supportive and collaborative team approach working with school social workers, psychologists, substance abuse counselors and outside agencies                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collaborative efforts with DHS, the Juvenile Court, Parks and Recreation, and Northern Virginia Community College</li> <li>○ Working with the court system –CHINS</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Intervention meetings with parents, counselor and administration+                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individual meetings with students and parents to establish rapport</li> <li>○ School conferences+</li> <li>○ Parent conferences</li> <li>○ Emails</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Three- and five-day letters</li> <li>• Attendance contracts/plans and student-signed improvement plans +++</li> <li>• The interagency committee at the court house dealing with truancy and unexcused absences +</li> <li>• Support from probation officers</li> <li>• Addressing tardies with seriousness</li> <li>• Implementing a demerit system for unexcused absences and tardies</li> </ul>

**Appendix I.B**

What policies/practices present challenges, need to be considered and/or possibly changed?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to standardize and formalize the policy and practice regarding attendance – one APS policy that all follow</li> <li>• The definition of and policies regarding excessive absences need to be addressed               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The definition needs to be the same for elementary and secondary</li> <li>○ There is a need for the reduction of the parent excused absences before action can be taken</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There is a need for a standardized policy regarding tardies               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The interagency stopping the practice of dealing with tardies has had a negative effect – the practice should be resumed (secondary)</li> <li>○ Consider counting tardies as absences (secondary)</li> <li>○ Add an unexcused tardy letter (elementary)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• More staffing is needed to support attendance tracking and monitoring               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ More clerical staff is needed to keep accurate records (elementary)</li> <li>○ More assistance is needed from the social worker in checking residences, making home visits, and calling parents with chronic absences/tardies – perhaps increased staffing (elementary)</li> <li>○ More attendance specialists are needed (secondary)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Discontinue the synergy-generated letters after one unverified absence</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Elementary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discontinue the unnecessary auto call for absences – Tori already calls before 11 a.m., and it often causes confusion</li> <li>• Provide an email option for parents to use to report absences in addition to the parent call-ins – more parents may respond if given that option</li> <li>• After a certain (to be determined) amount of tardies and/or absences, a home visit is needed to check residency</li> <li>• Drop the “other special cases” approved by the school principal – remove the term “principal discretion”</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we best work with students with specific issues/needs?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Latino students who, as a group, have more attendance issues than other groups</li> <li>○ Students from single-parent households</li> <li>○ Students with chronic attendance problems, not necessarily 15 days in a row</li> <li>○ Students with physical issues</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The biggest challenge is getting teachers to take attendance</li> <li>• Attendance secretaries should be able to excuse the Career Center, as was possible in the past</li> <li>• Robo calls should identify the student, especially when parents have more than one child in the same school</li> <li>• Schools should ask parents and students to sign that they have seen and understand the APS attendance policy</li> <li>• Schools should engage community partnerships to deal with chronic absenteeism</li> </ul>

**Appendix I.C**

What support does your school need in order to best handle student attendance?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A standardization of policy and practice across the system</li> <li>• A standardized policy regarding tardies</li> <li>• Identification of and support and interventions for students with attendance concerns                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ County guidelines for attendance panels at the various schools – a systemic way to conduct attendance meetings and set expectations (elementary)</li> <li>○ Suggestions on interventions/consequences – a better understanding of expected interventions that the attendance specialist should be providing to students+ (secondary)</li> <li>○ A well-trained staff to deal with attendance issues (attendance specialists, social workers, school counselors and administrators) (secondary)</li> <li>○ A better way to flag students who are starting to miss multiple days (secondary)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Assistance with chronic tardies – a way to count “leaving early” and “coming late” as absences</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Elementary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A follow-up on students with excessive absences</li> <li>• A dedicated office staff to assist with follow-up calls to parents</li> <li>• More assistance from the social worker, making home visits, checking residences and calling parents whose children have chronic absences/tardies</li> <li>• The Ed Center to come out strong discouraging family trips during school days</li> <li>• The Ed Center to clarify what is meant by “at principal’s discretion” (What a principal excuses at one school may differ from what a principal at another school may excuse)</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives to improve attendance</li> <li>• Consequences that are enforced more strongly and more evenly</li> <li>• Teachers letting counselors or APs know if a student is absent 2 or 3 times rather than waiting until excessive absences occur</li> <li>• Teachers receiving attendance-taking training and support</li> <li>• Parents communicating with the school early on</li> <li>• A suitable work space for attendance specialists to perform their duties</li> <li>• The ability to move to standards or competence mastery in course work to allow students to be able to balance the critical needs in their lives with school and to move at the pace that their life allows</li> </ul>



**Appendix I.D**

What are the school system's responsibilities relative to attendance?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision and maintenance of a clear and strong attendance policy (with teeth) that each school is responsible to follow</li> <li>• Provision of a flow chart of action to be taken with regard to absenteeism, to include who does what when and to specify points at which:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Letters area sent to parents</li> <li>○ Phone calls are made to parents</li> <li>○ Meetings take place</li> <li>○ Attendance plans are made</li> <li>○ Documents go to court</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Elementary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping letters/policies uniform from school to school alleviating parent confusion as they move from school to school</li> <li>• Making sure that attendance information is in the handbook so that every member of the community receives the same message</li> <li>• Informing the public via press release of the attendance policy prior to the beginning of the school year, as stated in the policy</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracking of absences and provision of information in an easily usable data format</li> <li>• Calculation and reporting on chronic absences by districts, schools, and subgroups</li> <li>• Pursuing students who are absent and attempting to find ways to help them get back in school</li> <li>• Provision of high levels of intervention to students with chronic absences at the pre-K level</li> <li>• Provision of support to staff when working with challenging students and parents, especially when court may be warranted</li> <li>• Provision of a tardy policy</li> </ul>

### Appendix I.E

What are the school's responsibilities relative to attendance?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following APS policy/procedure in the taking and tracking of attendance – understanding and implementing the policy</li> <li>• Keeping accurate and updated attendance records+</li> <li>• Providing parents with attendance information</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Elementary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mailing letters</li> <li>• Calling parents after the first hour of the day to determine reason for absence</li> <li>• Informing social workers about chronic attendance issues</li> <li>• Teachers keeping accurate attendance records</li> <li>• Teachers assisting students with make-up work for excused absences</li> <li>• School counselors needing to be actively involved in assisting students and families with any established absenteeism patterns</li> <li>• School administrators needing to be familiar with the state's attendance policy, developing an implementation plan, and communicating the plan to all staff members and parents/ guardians</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing strategies and consequences in an even and non-discriminatory way</li> <li>• Ensuring that all students' school attendance relates to the success of their academic work, benefits the students socially, and provides opportunities for communication between teachers and students - in order to establish regular habits of dependability important to the future of the student</li> <li>• Working closely with students and their families to prevent students from becoming truant</li> <li>• Holding attendance plan meetings with students and parents, meetings that can also include a counselor, social worker, case carrier and/or administrator</li> <li>• Referring students to Juvenile Court when appropriate</li> <li>• Working with court officials to provide services to students and their families</li> </ul>

### Appendix I.F

What are the parents' responsibilities relative to attendance?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepting responsibility for their children's attendance                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensuring that their children attend school each day on time</li> <li>○ Remaining engaged in the process of encouraging and enforcing school attendance – highlighting the importance of attendance as it relates to their children's education (secondary)</li> <li>○ Working with the school in giving consequences for poor attendance/truancy (secondary)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Notifying the school of student absences in a timely manner – reporting absences++</li> <li>• Trying to scheduling appointments and vacations outside of school time and during school breaks</li> <li>• Following up on schools' recommendations</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Elementary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following the attendance policy</li> <li>• Sending a written explanation of absences upon the child's return to school</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working collaboratively with the attendance specialist to resolve attendance issues – having open communication with school officials</li> <li>• Attending school meetings</li> <li>• Notifying the school of any changes in contact information</li> </ul>

### Appendix I.G

What are the community's responsibilities relative to attendance?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting good attendance through the court system</li> <li>• Reporting students who are not in school – alerting police and/or school if they see children who are not in school</li> <li>• Supporting APS attendance policies – acting as a stakeholder in support of good attendance</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not catering to students who are skipping school, e.g. the Ballston Mall</li> <li>• Providing local businesses with school phone numbers where they can make direct reports when they see students out of school and possibly skipping</li> <li>• Gathering support from probation officers in support of good attendance</li> </ul>

### Appendix I.H

How can attendance issues best be communicated between interested and responsible parties (school system, schools, parents, and community)?
<b>Responses from both Elementary and Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate a strong communication between schools and parents                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Make policies and expectations clear to parents through the handbook, website, phone calls, and letters - via printed, electronic and verbal communication</li> <li>○ Continue robo calls, emails and/or letters when students have reached a specified number of absences (5 classes) instead of waiting until the student has developed a bad pattern of missing school (secondary)</li> <li>○ Continue communication between social workers/counselors and parents (secondary)</li> <li>○ Make certain that the technology is sufficient to notify parents in a timely manner (secondary)</li> <li>○ Update contact information with regularity (secondary)</li> <li>○ Offer a technology training session for parents who have difficulty with technology – making certain that they are able to access grades, deadlines for assignments, and attendance information on line (secondary)</li> <li>○ Hold meetings with families to develop attendance plans (elementary)</li> <li>○ Hold kindergarten information night (elementary)</li> <li>○ Send monthly attendance letters that are not generated by Synergy (elementary)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Share policies with stakeholders at the beginning of the school year</li> </ul>
<b>Responses from Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make certain that the attendance specialist forges and maintains strong communication with the school registrar to prevent students from dropping out</li> <li>• When a student has a situation that appears to be problematic, address parents and students in a collaborative manner – strictly punitive or shame-based approaches are not helpful</li> <li>• Make certain that there is a strong framework of understanding between APS and court officials to facilitate and expedite court intervention, e.g. an outline of expectations</li> <li>• Share data with the child welfare system</li> <li>• Have community members become involved with students to provide prevention services to families when indicated</li> <li>• Reward and highlight students who have not missed a day of school</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX II: KEY ELEMENTS OF THE APS DROPOUT PREVENTION PLAN

The National Dropout Prevention Center and Network identified the following “essentials to an effective dropout prevention initiative” for APS:

- A comprehensive and user-friendly student data collection system;
- Early identification of and intervention for students at risk for dropping out;
- Attention to students transitioning from one school/one level to another;
- Students having positive relationships at and feelings of connectedness to their schools;
- Students’ ability to make connections between their schooling and the real world, both present and in the future;
- Student knowledge of their opportunities for completion/graduation;
- Responsive teaching and teacher accountability;
- Timely access to counseling services;
- A working relationship between the community and the school system;
- A working relationship between parents/guardians and the school system; and
- Ongoing assessment of dropout prevention and intervention strategies, including interim measures.

**Appendix II.A: NDPC/N Dropout Prevention Implementation Framework**

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
<p>1. Ensure that every student is challenged and engaged.</p>	<p>Data collection system – <i>Creating and implementing a user-friendly data system that allows stakeholders to access reliable information for a variety of purposes, specifically for the generation of reports that enables the identification of students who are at-risk and the evaluation of prevention and intervention strategies</i></p>	<p>Systemic renewal – <i>Research indicates that change can occur through on-going and critical inquiry into current practices and efforts at removing organizational barriers to improvement. Building a system structure that supports change leads to progress in maintaining natural evolution within school systems.</i></p>	<p>Data is spread out across different databases and is difficult to correlate. This makes identification of at-risk students, monitoring, assessment, and longitudinal study difficult. APS uses eSchoolPlus for its student information system.</p> <p>There appears to be limited capacity for a dropout early warning system due to inconsistencies in data reporting, communication across schools, and multiple databases.</p> <p>Notes indicate that APS has worked with the Mid-Atlantic Equity Center at George Washington University and adopted a system of student identification based on attendance, behavior and course completion. The impact of this is unclear, as is its research basis. Perhaps this is the first attempt at developing a dropout early warning system.</p> <p>Notes indicate that school personnel report difficulty knowing whether or not interventions are working.</p>	<p>School policies and practices need to adjust so there is consistency across APS when it comes to data monitoring, collection and reporting.</p> <p>All schools need to use one common form to collect student data upon school registration. If APS is going to create a dropout prevention initiative, one database with consistent data is imperative.</p> <p>In order to create a high functioning, effective student information system, it will be necessary to address APS’ view of communications and relationships with multi-cultural students and their families. Personnel with the cultural sensitivity skills needed to collect essential student information are necessary.</p> <p>It would be helpful to have a dropout early warning system. Such a system is feasible with some major adjustments to current data management practices.</p>

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
	<p>Early identification of at-risk students – <i>Creating a system to identify at-risk students who exhibit indicators associated with dropping out of high school early in their school careers in order to monitor these students as soon as the indicators become apparent</i></p>	<p>Early interventions: Family engagement, Early childhood education, Early literacy development - <i>Research has shown that student success relies heavily on engagement by the family, enrichment interventions between the ages of birth to five, and literacy interventions with young children who possess risk factors.</i></p>	<p>Identification of at-risk students by APS appears to be taking place too late. By the time they are identified as at-risk, students have already accumulated risk factors that are challenging to overcome.</p> <p>APS reports cultural barriers in dealing with parents.</p> <p>Communication and lack of home access to technology are also reported issues.</p>	<p>Assessment of risk factors should be done as soon as a student enters APS. Determine literacy levels, experience in early childhood education. Additionally, since family engagement is one of the greatest predictors of student success, assess the propensity for family support and engagement.</p> <p>Following students longitudinally would be ideal.</p>
	<p>Parental engagement – <i>Ensuring parental engagement through home-school partnerships with parents / guardians</i></p>			
	<p>Opportunities for completion – <i>Assisting students to feel success and recognize their various opportunities for high school completion</i></p>	<p>Mentoring/tutoring, Service Learning, Alternative schooling, After-school opportunities: <i>These basic core strategies identified by the NDPC/N provide multiple pathways to graduation.</i></p> <p>Active learning, Individual instruction, Educational technology – <i>Research has shown students can have academic success by being exposed to different ways of learning, and teachers can instruct in non-traditional ways that address multiple intelligences and varying student experiences.</i></p>	<p>Actions by APS indicate efforts to monitor curriculum and instructional practices and communicate pathways to graduation.</p> <p>A Tiered Prevention/Intervention system is reportedly well-received at the middle school level. Its research basis and effect in schools is not clear.</p>	<p>NDPC/N best practices offer basic core strategies and proven instructional methods that offer students multiple pathways to graduation. APS may want to explore these avenues further.</p> <p>Students need help making connections between their lives and their school experiences. Different instructional methods and targeted support by adults can assist with this.</p>
	<p>Real world connections – <i>Providing students with “real world connections” so that students are able to connect their school experiences with their life experiences, past, present, and in the future</i></p>		<p>Making the most of instruction enables effective learning among students who are not thriving by use of traditional methods and settings.</p>	<p>Continue with efforts to link curriculum with students’ real life. Systemic use of service-learning is one method of doing this.</p>

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
2. Eliminate achievement gaps.	Leadership, responsive teaching and accountability – <i>Creating an environment with strong leadership, responsive teaching, and accountability that supports high quality curriculum and instruction</i>	Professional development – <i>Teachers who work with youth at high risk of academic failure need to feel supported and have an avenue by which they can continue to develop skills, techniques, and learn about innovative strategies.</i>	Teachers play an essential role in meeting the needs of students regardless of their cultures and/or abilities. Data indicate some APS personnel do not demonstrate capabilities to build necessary positive relationships that lead to school connectedness among students.	Intensive teacher training is needed with attention to cultural sensitivity and consistency of expectations for all students. Teachers also need access to resources or personnel with expertise in dealing with issues that arise so troubled students are not denied attention they need for success.
	Transitions – <i>Recognizing the inherent risk associated with transitions during youth and adolescence and addressing such transitions as moving from one grade level to another, from one school to another, from one school division to another, and/or from one country to another</i>	Systemic renewal - <i>Research indicates that change can occur through on-going and critical inquiry into current practices and efforts at removing organizational barriers to improvement. Building a system structure that supports change leads to progress in maintaining natural evolution within school systems.</i>	APS recognizes inherent risks with grade changes, school changes, and changes of state and/or country. Though APS has programs in place, there is no system-wide procedure for communication regarding at-risk students making transitions.	School policies and procedures need to accommodate students for whom transition offers potential for dropping out. This might be addressed via a coordinated APS staff effort or creation of an improved data collection system.
	Positive relationships and connectedness to the school – <i>Ensuring a feeling of connectedness among students to their school, their teachers, and classmates</i>	Family engagement – <i>Research shows that family engagement has a direct, positive effect on children’s achievement and is the most accurate predictor student’s success in school.</i>	APS data indicate the highest percent of dropouts are LEP and economically disadvantaged, with the largest portion being Hispanic.	Reaching out to families of low-achieving students is imperative. Efforts at family engagement are needed, taking into consideration family literacy level, home language, and culture.
	Parental engagement – <i>Ensuring parental engagement through home-school partnerships with parents/guardians</i>	Safe learning environment – <i>A safe learning environment is focused on academic achievement, maintaining high standards, fostering positive relationships between students and staff, and encouraging parental and community involvement.</i>	A language and communication barrier is apparent between teachers and students, as well as APS and students’ families.  APS data also indicate a lack of effort by some teachers and staff to nurture positive relationships and connectedness among students.	Students and their families also need to feel safe and accepted with the place and the people involved in student progression through school.  Professional development may assist teachers and staff in understanding their role in building positive relationships, school connectedness, and a safe and nurturing environment.

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
	<p>Real world connections – <i>Providing students with “real world connections” so that students are able to connect their school experiences with their life experiences, past, present, and in the future</i></p>	<p>Active learning, Individual instruction, Educational technology - <i>Research has shown students can have academic success by being exposed to different ways of learning, and teachers can instruct in non-traditional ways that address multiple intelligences and varying student experiences.</i></p>		<p>Address bullying at all levels. The Olweus Program is an anti-bullying program; it is a comprehensive, school-wide program designed and evaluated for use in elementary, middle, or junior high schools. The program’s goals are to reduce and prevent bullying problems among school children and to improve peer relations at school. The program has been found to reduce bullying among children, improve the social climate of classrooms, and reduce related antisocial behaviors, such as vandalism and truancy. The Olweus Program has been implemented in more than a dozen countries around the world and in thousands of schools in the United States.</p> <p>Develop a comprehensive approach to address school connectedness. New Hampshire’s Multi-Tiered Approach to</p> <p>Dropout Prevention (APEX II) is designed to achieve five outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly reduce the dropout rate in high schools;</li> <li>• Reduce suspension and expulsion rates through the implementation of a school-wide positive behavioral system, which incorporates students and parents in decision-making;</li> <li>• Develop successful transition programs for at-risk 8th graders to ensure a successful shift to 9th grade and the high school climate;</li> <li>• Provide successful and intensive school-to-career services for current dropouts so they may have a chance to complete high school; and</li> <li>• Expand the state’s capacity to implement proven dropout prevention strategies by creating multiple</li> </ul>



APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
				avenues for comprehensive technical assistance and professional development opportunities.
	<p>Access to counseling services – <i>Providing access to counseling, where the counselor is able to monitor student success and progress toward high school completion, in addition to maintaining close contact with the student</i></p>	<p>School-community collaboration – <i>This occurs when groups or agencies come together to establish a community in which everyone is accountable for the quality of education. Schools cannot exist in isolation. At-risk students need support from resources found in the community as well as in the school.</i></p>	<p>APS has programs and services in place that offer mentoring, student monitoring, and attention to mental health. However, APS acknowledges limitations and inconsistencies within these programs and services.</p>	<p>A view that everyone in the community can take responsibility for student learning and well-being is necessary. Partnerships are needed that can offer initiatives such as school-to-work programs, drug abuse prevention programs, after-school centers, and parental involvement programs.</p>
	<p>Community engagement – <i>Supporting community engagement by establishing connections and relationships within and across the community</i></p>			<p>It is important to coordinate community collaborations to avoid duplication and maintain focus.</p> <p>Implement the <i>Planning Effectively for Resource Collaboration</i> (PERC) model. The PERC process and model is a structured three-phase planning process and framework that can be modified to adjust to the needs of different types of communities, agencies, and school districts. The intent is to engage people in planning for alliances that stimulate them to look for ways their programs can connect with other programs to strengthen service delivery which, in this case, will be dropout prevention for at-risk youth. PERC is a mapping process that endeavors to link, across programs and across agency lines, services which are similar or which closely complement each other. The process is based on the development and analysis of a “target population – agency matrix” and a series of mapping exercises to explore the nature of the interagency relationships. PERC ends in</p> <p>an interagency planning session. The PERC process is</p>

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
				based on several assumptions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Each agency or organization is unique and effective in carrying out its own specific mission;</li> <li>2. Many of these missions connect directly with the missions and activities of other agencies; and</li> <li>3. By working together, agencies and organizations can maintain their own autonomy, individuality, and focus; they can accomplish more than would be possible if each agency continues to work alone.</li> </ol>
3. Recruit, retain, and develop high quality staff.	Leadership, responsive teaching, and accountability - <i>Creating an environment with strong leadership, responsive teaching, and accountability that supports high quality curriculum and instruction</i>	Professional development - <i>Teachers who work with youth at high risk of academic failure need to feel supported and have an avenue by which they can continue to develop skills, techniques, and learn about innovative strategies</i>	APS recognizes the need to support and educate its teachers and staff. APS advocates for the creation of teacher teams for mutual support, and use of data to emphasize the reality of the risk factors that exist within the student population. A gap remains with getting all teachers “on board” to consistently support at-risk students, specifically LEP.	APS should put in place a protocol for hiring new teachers. There needs to be a specialized professional development effort for new and challenged teachers as well, and mentors should be available for teachers who need the additional support.

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
<p>4. Provide optimal learning environments.</p>	<p>Assessment of prevention and intervention strategies – <i>Conducting ongoing assessment of effective prevention and intervention strategies to increase high school completion</i></p>	<p>Systemic renewal - <i>Research indicates that change can occur through on-going and critical inquiry into current practices and efforts at removing organizational barriers to improvement. Building a system structure that supports change leads to progress in maintaining natural evolution within school systems.</i></p>	<p>APS has developed a tiered prevention/intervention system that seems as if it would be effective in improving the likelihood of graduation among at-risk students. Its research basis is unclear however, as are its impacts thus far.</p>	<p>Efforts at preventing dropout are not consistent across schools in APS. A change needs to occur in the way interventions are implemented, managed, and monitored.</p>
	<p>Transitions – <i>Recognizing the inherent risk associated with transitions during youth and adolescence and addressing such transitions as moving from one grade level to another, from one school to another, from one school division to another, and/or from one country to another</i></p>	<p>School-community collaboration - <i>This occurs when groups or agencies come together to establish a community in which everyone is accountable for the quality of education. Schools cannot exist in isolation. At-risk students need support from resources found in the community as well as in the school.</i></p>	<p>Attention is being given to the transition process for students at risk. Efforts are being made to provide additional career classes and opportunities for students who need to work. APS is exploring ways it can partner with community groups and agencies to prevent drop out.</p>	<p>Students need to be taught that there are multiple pathways to graduation.</p> <p>Some students need to earn money while still in school, and these students should be accommodated through school-community collaboration that can provide career-based learning and opportunities.</p>
		<p>Mentoring/Tutoring, Service-learning, Alternative schooling, After-school opportunities : <i>These basic core strategies identified by the NDPC/N provide multiple pathways to graduation.</i></p>	<p>A number of NDPC/N Best Practices can be utilized to enhance efforts by APS to provide optimal learning environments.</p>	<p>Likewise, CTE offers school-to-work programs that teach career-specific skills. Certain programs allow students to earn a living and attend school on a different schedule.</p>
		<p>Active Learning; Educational Technology; Individualized Instruction; Career and Technology Education (CTE) - <i>Research has shown students can have academic success by being exposed to different ways of learning, and teachers can instruct in non-traditional ways that address multiple intelligences and varying student experiences. NDPC/N identifies these methods as making the most of instruction.</i></p>		<p>APs should continue to explore alternative ways of instruction, school scheduling and partnering outside of school in order to provide feasible opportunities to at-risk students.</p> <p>Enhance school-community collaboration through the PERC model.</p>

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
<p>5. Meet the needs of the whole child.</p>	<p>Assessment of prevention and intervention strategies – <i>Conducting ongoing assessment of effective prevention and intervention strategies to increase high school completion</i></p> <p>Access to counseling services – <i>Providing access to counseling, where the counselor is able to monitor student success and progress toward high school completion, in addition to maintaining close contact with the student</i></p>	<p>Systemic renewal - <i>Research indicates that change can occur through on-going and critical inquiry into current practices and efforts at removing organizational barriers to improvement. Building a system structure that supports change leads to progress in maintaining natural evolution within school systems.</i></p> <p>School-community collaboration - <i>This occurs when groups or agencies come together to establish a community in which everyone is accountable for the quality of education. Schools cannot exist in isolation. At-risk students need support from resources found in the community as well as in the school.</i></p>	<p>APS is putting great emphasis on assessing students’ opportunities to meet their unique needs, such as being overage or under-credited.</p> <p>APS is also interested in providing career assessments and communicating these with parents.</p> <p>Counseling services are in place for advice about access to the Career Center as well as career exploration.</p>	<p>APS students are being encouraged academically, and interest is being expressed in the career paths of the at-risk students. This systemic effort at demonstrating interest in the future of these at-risk students is positive and must remain constant and consistent across all schools.</p> <p>Indications are that communication with parents and families of at-risk students remains a constant obstacle.</p> <p>Additional efforts at school-community collaboration with specific agencies catering to non-English speakers could assist in reaching families who find communicating with the school difficult.</p> <p>Additionally, school-community collaboration can assist with providing career-based learning opportunities.</p>

APS Strategic Plan Goal	Related APS Best Practice(s)	Related NDPC/N Best Practice(s)	Summary Analyses	Recommendations
		<p>Active Learning; Educational Technology; Individualized Instruction; Career and Technology Education (CTE) - <i>Research has shown students can have academic success by being exposed to different ways of learning, and teachers can instruct in non-traditional ways that address multiple intelligences and varying student experiences. NDPC/N identifies these methods as making the most of instruction.</i></p>		<p>Likewise, various methods of instruction allow for alternate teaching methods and motivational strategies to be used. Core NDPC/N strategies can allow for additional opportunities for “catching up” or fitting in with students like themselves.</p> <p>Consider implementing an <i>Accelerated Learning Academy</i> that is based on the philosophy that schools are designed to accelerate student learning through high expectations, research-based instructional strategies, and community collaboration. Accelerated Learning Academies take what is usually reserved for gifted and talented children and share it with all students.</p> <p><a href="http://www.acceleratedschools.net/">http://www.acceleratedschools.net/</a></p>

## PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds partner expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.

<http://www.hanoverresearch.com/evaluation/index.php>

## CAVEAT

The publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this brief. The publisher and authors make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this brief and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties which extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. No warranty may be created or extended by representatives of Hanover Research or its marketing materials. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided herein and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results, and the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every partner. Neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Moreover, Hanover Research is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. Partners requiring such services are advised to consult an appropriate professional.



1700 K Street, NW, 8th Floor  
Washington, DC 20006

P 202.559.0500 F 866.808.6585  
[www.hanoverresearch.com](http://www.hanoverresearch.com)