

**Governor's Truancy Prevention Initiative
End-of -Year Evaluation Report
June 2007**

**Submitted to
The New Mexico Department of Public Education**

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Executive Summary

In 2003, the Governor of New Mexico initiated a state Truancy Prevention Program to identify and implement successful programs for preventing truancy in schools. The goals of the state Governor's Truancy Prevention Program, as administered by the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED), are to:

- decrease truancy rates,
- decrease dropout rates, and
- increase attendance rates among students.

In academic year 2006-07, the PED funded seven school districts to implement this program. Major highlights of this year's evaluation are presented in the following box:

Highlights:

- 547 students completed a "New Mexico Youth: Views on Truancy" survey. Over half (56%) of these respondents said they had *never* cut class or skipped school. Over one-third (38%) said they had been truant.
- Most students agreed that truant students get worse grades, are more likely to have low-paying jobs as adults, and have parents who do *not* know when they are truant. Over half the students think teachers and parents *do* care when students are truant, and 46% feel their schools reward students who are not truant.
- Over half (52%) the students identify school-related factors, particularly "boring classes and/or uninterested teachers" as being the primary reasons for truancy.
- Over half (54%) felt the most effective way to prevent truancy was to reward students for improved attendance. Another 49% felt that if teachers provided more interesting and interactive classes this would improve attendance rates.
- Principals who responded to the survey said they took the following actions to decrease truancy: enhanced truancy policy enforcement, increased contact with parents, increased student and family accountability, and increased student motivation to attend classes. At post-intervention, 35% of the principals reported that their schools had lower truancy rates.
- Unlike students, principals do not tend to select school-related factors as the major reasons for truancy. Principals are more likely to select family-related factors, including: lack of parental guidance and supervision, non-supportive family attitudes toward education, single-parent homes, poverty, and a lack of understanding of attendance laws. Principals, at post-intervention, also felt that inconsistent procedures to deal with truancy were also at fault.
- Principals were also likely to prefer different methods for preventing truancy than students. Principals cited the following methods as more effective: having a school contact person to communicate with parents of truant students; stronger penalties for truant students; rewards for students with good attendance; making home visits to parents; and using truant officers.
- Principals provided brief significant change case studies that demonstrate how truancy prevention efforts can have an impact on individual students.

Background

In 2005 the New Mexico legislature passed and signed House Bill 955 into law. This bill supports education reform initiatives that are intended to prevent truancy and decrease dropout rates. In particular, HB 955 addressed the inconsistency that exists between the section of the Public School Finance Act that permits disenrollment of students after 10 consecutive absences and the section in the Compulsory School Attendance Law that prohibits the expulsion of truant students. The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) amended the rule to provide specific guidance for schools in how to implement the new requirements. House Bill 106, passed during the 2004 legislative session, adds language to the Compulsory School Attendance Law that defines truancy (i.e. how many unexcused absences create a truant or habitual truant), requires early identification of unexcused absences and truancy, explains enforcement of prevention of habitual truancy, and outlines penalties.

The Governor initiated a state Truancy Prevention Program in 2003 to determine and implement successful programs for preventing truancy. The PED's School and Family Support Bureau funds pilot programs in order to identify best practices and effective strategies for preventing truancy that are unique and relevant to New Mexico populations and cultures. The goals of the state Governor's Truancy Prevention Program are to:

- decrease truancy rates,
- decrease dropout rates, and
- increase attendance rates among students.

In academic year 2006-07, the PED funded seven school districts to implement:

- best practice programs and/or early intervention programs as required by the new Governor's Truancy Prevention Law (HB 106), some of which might build...
 - community collaborations among local partners to carry out effective truancy prevention programs and create systemic change at the local level.

Evaluation Design

The University of New Mexico Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (CHPDP) was contracted to evaluate the school districts receiving grant funding from PED in FY07. The UNM evaluation team met with the PED Truancy Prevention Program Coordinator, Ron Lucero, in early October 2006 to review the evaluation design from the previous year and to begin designing the evaluation plan. The evaluation design for 2006-07 included:

- finalizing outcome indicators for the program in conjunction with the PED. These indicators were identified as: Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) statistics; truancy rates; attendance rates; and possibly drop out rates (for high schools only) for the schools involved in the program. These data were to be collected from the PED's STARS

- database;
- measuring any changes in attitudes and/or behaviors regarding truancy issues among teachers, parents, students and administrators at the seven funded sites;
- providing evaluation-related training and technical assistance to the grant sites at a grantee conference in the Fall, 2006. Training was to address evaluation expectations and indicators, data sources, and demonstrate how to complete the various evaluation surveys during the school year;
- conducting an initial, or pre-test survey of grant school administrators and a one-time only student survey at the seven funded sites. Evaluators were to compile and analyze the data, and prepare a preliminary report of baseline findings;
- conducting a final, or posttest, survey of grant school administrators at the seven funded sites. At this time, data from the pre-test and the posttest were to be compared and presented in a final report of findings;
- collaborating with the PED to identify strategies gaining better data related to attendance issues in schools; and
- preparing an evaluation report of the Fall 2006 grantee conference to the PED.

To achieve these goals, the evaluation team prepared evaluation presentations and workshops for the PED's Funded Partners' Meeting in October 2006, also providing the grant site representatives with their individual sets of pre-test administrator evaluation surveys and the one-time student questionnaires to be administered within two months. The evaluation team collected those completed surveys from the sites, created Access and SPSS databases, entered the data, and analyzed them. A mid-year report presented preliminary evaluation data from those principal/administrator surveys. The evaluation team also worked with the PED STARS database personnel to gain the baseline outcome indicators—2005-06 school-level AYP, truancy and attendance rates—that are to be compared to the 2006-07 rates to determine if there has been any improvement in the grant school sites.

In March, 2007, the UNM evaluation team disseminated the posttest administrator evaluation survey, collected these from the grant sites, entered the data and analyzed them. Comparison statistics were run for certain questions standard to both the pre- and posttest. These data are presented in this final, end-of-the-year evaluation report. This report provides the results of these surveys and other learning gained during the 2006-07 school year.

Youth Truancy Prevention Survey Results

Youth Survey Results

The 2006-07 evaluation administered one survey, titled "New Mexico Youth: Views on Truancy" to students in the grant school districts. Completed, anonymous surveys were received from 547 students, elementary through high school. The purpose of this survey, which was administered by the grant sites, was to gain information on how New Mexico students view the issue of truancy, and what they actually know about it. The Governor's Truancy Prevention Program considered that having students' perceptions of truancy—why it's a problem, why it happens, and what possible

solutions they might recommend—would be useful in planning future interventions, as the data gathered provide insights into the target audience. The following is a summation of the key findings.

Truancy Incidence. Over half (56%) of the student respondents said they had never cut class or skipped school. On the other hand, over one-third (38%) said they had done this. Reasons given for cutting class or skipping school tended to fall into four main categories. These were:

▪ Little motivation to be in school/Lack of interest in academics/Not caring about attendance.

105 student responses fell into this category. Examples of statements:

“Because the class is boring and doesn’t interest me.”

“I don’t want to go to school because school is boring.”

“School isn’t always an environment I want to be around. Some teachers just make up assignments the same day they’re given.”

“There was nothing being done in the classroom and the teacher didn’t care nor pay attention.”

“I would go hunting with my dad.”

“Sometimes school is not fun, or nothing important is going on, so some days are better spent at home.”

“Having no ride to school or feeling no motivation to go.”

▪ Family-related issues and/or being ill, tired or bullied.

43 student responses fell into this category. Some sample statements are:

“Being sick and having no one to call in because I have no phone.”

“Because my grandmother died and I was really upset and went to the funeral.”

“Personal family problems which made me feel sick and not able to concentrate in school.”

“Bullying.”

“I’ve been skipping school because I need to go to the dentist in Albuquerque.”

“Tired; not an important day at school. Staying home to sleep late.”

▪ Being unprepared for classes.

There were 31 responses in this category. Examples of statements include:

“Didn’t complete class work that was due.”

“I was finishing projects that were due that day.”

“I wasn’t ready for the test, so I went to the park to study so I could take the test the next day.”

“Not having my homework.”

“Needed to finish a project due for another class.”

Perception of School’s Truancy Rate. Over one-third (37%) of the students responding felt the truancy rate in their school was at a medium level, or 50%. Over one quarter of them (29%) felt the rate would be lower than that, at about 25%. Twenty-one percent (21%) thought the rate was at a moderately high level, about 75%. Although the evaluation team was unable to compare these perceptions to a general New Mexico truancy rate, it appears that more than half the students, approximately 58%, feel that the rate of truancy in their school ranges from a medium to a moderately high level.

Truancy-related Attitudes. Students were asked to select their level of agreement with several common statements—some correct and some not—related to truancy. Table 1 provides a summary of their attitudes and knowledge.

Table 1: Students' Truancy-related Attitudes (N=547)

Statements	Agree to Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree to Strongly Disagree
a. Truant students get worse grades than other students.	61%	24%	14%
b. Truant students are NOT as smart as other students.	26%	25%	49%
c. Truancy has NOTHING to do with criminal activity—like alcohol/drug abuse or gangs.	35%	35%	30%
d. Parents can keep their children from being truant if they help with homework.	38%	28%	35%
e. Truant students are more likely to have low-paying jobs when they are adults.	51%	25%	25%
f. Truant students are more likely to go to jail as adults.	31%	32%	37%
g. Most parents do NOT know if their children are truant from school.	59%	23%	17%
h. My school rewards students who are NOT truant.	46%	22%	31%
i. Teachers in my school do NOT care if students skip classes or are truant.	13%	19%	68%
j. Parents of students in my school do NOT care if their children are truant.	11%	32%	56%
k. Most students who are truant have a good reason for being truant.	23%	35%	41%

In eight out of the 11 statements, student respondents showed clear majorities in their level of agreement. Most students agreed that truant students get worse grades, are more likely to get low-paying jobs when they grow up, and have parents who do *not* know when they are truant. On the other hand, though most felt truant students get poor grades, they did not equate this with low intelligence; almost half (49%) disagreed that truant students were not as intelligent as other students. Over half the students felt that both teachers and parents *do* care when students were truant, and 46% felt their school provided rewards to students who were not truant. (At the same time, almost one third (31%) do *not* feel their schools provide support to those who are not truant.) Students seemed more split in their opinions about whether truancy was related to criminal activity and/or substance use, whether parent involvement at home helped prevent truancy, and whether students who were truant while youths were more likely to go to jail as adults. It is interesting to note that while most students (41%) felt truant students generally do *not* have a good reason for their behavior, almost as many (35%) have neutral feelings about this.

Reasons for Truancy. Student respondents were asked to select what they felt to be the six main reasons students are truant, from four main categories of underlying factors—family factors, school

or environmental factors, economic factors, and student-related factors. The following lists what students feel are the main factors for truancy in New Mexico schools.

Table 2: Student-selected Reasons for Truancy (N= 547)

Factor Selected (in order of selection)	Percent of Students Selecting the Factor
Classes are boring/uninteresting; teachers do not listen to students	52%
Problems (abuse, violence, illness) at home	44%
Bored with classes/worry about schoolwork	44%
Lack of interest in education/poor grades	44%
Drug and/or alcohol abuse	39%
Strong peer pressure to cut class/skip school	38%
Parents give little guidance or supervision	28%
Student stays at home to help the family	28%

The top selection by students falls into the “school/environmental factors” category, while the number two selections fall into the “student factor” and “family factor” categories. One of the categories ranked as number 2, “bored with classes/worry about schoolwork” is very similar to the number one ranked reason, which tends to indicate that, from the student point of view, the quality of schooling tends to be a major reason that young people skip school. Some other statements made by students with regard to their choices include:

- *“Many students do not show up to school because they are trying to hide from bullies or other problems among their peers.”*
- *“Parents do drugs and don’t care about their kids’ education.”*
- *“School starts too early so they want to stay home and sleep.”*
- *“Some parents do not care, but the schools’ facilities are old and broken down. Truancy would be lower if students actually enjoyed being at school.”*
- *“Gangs, or groups of...bullies.”*

Methods for Preventing Truancy. Students were also asked to read a list of various potential methods for reducing truancy in schools, and select the top three that they felt would be most effective. Table 3 provides a summary of these findings. In support of their choices, students also made suggestions for improvement of their own. Some of these include:

- *“Make the school system more fun, active, and more extra-curricular activities after school or during school.”*
- *“Make school [start] a little later and I guarantee there will be a lot more people at school.”*
- *“Teachers need to actually teach, not just read out of the book, because I would do that myself at home.”*
- *“Have field days for students who improved attendance.”*
- *“If [a] student is bored with classes because of easy work, provide more of a challenge.”*
- *“[Have] teachers understand cultures.”*
- *“Hire teachers that want to teach, not just ones that need a job to retire on.”*
- *“You should reward students that are there every day of the week.”*

Table 3: Student-selected Methods for Preventing Truancy (N=547)

Methods for Preventing Truancy (in order of selection)	Percent of Students Selecting the Method
Reward students for improved attendance.	54%
Help/encourage teachers to provide more interesting classes where students participate more often.	49%
Call homes when the students are absent.	29%
Find better ways to improve school safety (make sure students are safe, not bullied.)	27%
Have stronger penalties for truant students.	24%
Find better ways to involve families, parents and guardians in school.	20%
Use truant officers to work with truant students and their families.	19%

Principal Truancy Survey Results

Principal Survey Results

The evaluation team administered two surveys, baseline and post-intervention, to the principals of the schools awarded the Truancy Prevention grant. Thirty-six principals completed the baseline survey, and 32 completed the post-test instrument; of these, 27 were matched pre- and posttest.

Grant Expectations and Reasons. At baseline (beginning of the school year), 82% of the principals expected that their schools' truancy rates would decrease during the year. At posttest (around April, 2007), only 74% of the principals expected the rate to drop, a difference of 8%. Interestingly, at posttest, approximately 26% of the principals said they expected the rate to increase.¹ Some of the reasons given by the principals for these expectations, at baseline and post-intervention, from most often cited to less cited, were:

- Consistent truancy policies, procedures and practice
- Enhanced enforcement of truancy policy
- Increased awareness (parents, students, community) of truancy policy and issue
- Student motivation factors.

Actions Taken to Prevent Truancy. All principals reported taking specific steps to decrease truancy. Among some of the major steps or actions taken, in order of those most often cited to less cited, are shown in Table 4.

1. There is no way, using the survey data, to determine if this drop in principal expectations was caused by a misunderstanding of the survey question itself, or whether principals, in fact, perceived that the methods they were using were not having as much impact on the truancy rate as they had originally expected.

Table 4: Actions Schools Take to Prevent Truancy (N=36 Pre/32 Post)

Baseline Actions Cited	Percent of Principals Selecting	Post-intervention Actions Cited	Percent of Principals Selecting
Enhancing policy enforcement	28%	Contact and follow-up action with parents	33%
Increasing student/family accountability	23%	Enforcement of truancy policies	14%
Increasing student motivation	12%	Student/family accountability	13%
Strengthening community partnerships	12%	Legal/court partnerships	12%
Enhancing partnerships with courts/legal system	10%	Policy clarification and follow-up actions	9%
		Increased student motivation	8%

It appears that, after having implemented different truancy prevention actions during the school year, principals felt that enforcing the truancy policy, particularly through contact and follow-up actions with parents of truant students, had the most impact on decreasing their schools' truancy rates. The only action, from baseline to post-intervention survey, that did *not* seem to contribute as much to truancy prevention, was strengthening community partnerships, other than with the legal system.

At baseline, the principals reported that they expected the following results to occur due to taking these actions:

- 35% expected they would have a lower truancy rate,
- 20% expected the community to have a greater awareness and understanding of the truancy issue,
- 18% expected no results in particular, and
- 15% felt that all involved players (students, families, teachers, administration, legal system) would be taking more responsibility.

At post-intervention, there were a few differences in the results that principals felt had occurred:

- 35% reported that their schools had lower truancy rates or that attendance had improved,
- 30% reported that involved players had taken on their responsibilities to reduce truancy,
- 17% reported that positive change, in general, had occurred,
- 16% felt there was an increase in awareness and understanding of the truancy issue, and
- 10% felt that little to no change had taken place.

Overall, over a third (35%) of the principals felt their expectations had been met in terms of the program's ability to reduce their schools' truancy rates. It appears that one key factor in making that happen was the willingness and ability of all involved (school personnel and families) to recognize and act on their responsibility for making this happen.

Reasons for Truancy. Principals were asked, in the same way that youth were, to select from four major categories—family factors, school or environmental factors, economic factors, and student-related factors—what they felt were the major reasons truancy occurs. Table 5 presents the principals’ selections, at baseline and at post-intervention.

Table 5: Principal-selected Reasons for Truancy (N= 36 Pre/32 Posttest)

Baseline Factor Selected	Percent of Principals Selecting Factor	Post-intervention Factor Selected	Percent of Principals Selecting Factor
Non-supportive family attitudes toward education	80%	Lack of parental guidance/supervision	83%
Lack of parental guidance/supervision	69%	Non-supportive family attitudes toward education	70%
Lack of awareness of attendance laws	51%	Poverty	50%
Single-parent homes	40%	Single-parent homes	43%
Poverty	40%	Inconsistent procedures to deal with truancy	27%
High mobility rates	40%	Student drug and/or alcohol abuse	27%
Students lack understanding of attendance laws	31%	Students lack understanding of attendance laws	27%

Although the proportions of selection may have varied a bit between baseline and the post-intervention measure, principals overwhelmingly chose family factors as the main reasons for truancy. The reasons most often selected were: a lack of parental guidance or supervision of their children, parents having poor, non-supportive attitudes toward the value of education, a lack of parental awareness of attendance laws, poverty, and single parenting. In addition, especially at post-intervention, principals also selected student-related factors as causes for truancy, including their own lack of understanding of the attendance laws, and drug/alcohol abuse. Only at post-intervention did principals indicate they felt that a school environment-related factor might be important, that of having inconsistent truancy policies and procedures.

Methods for Preventing Truancy. Like youth, the principals were asked to select the methods they felt would work best for keeping students from cutting class and being truant. This question was asked only in the post-intervention survey. Table 6 presents these data.

Table 6: Principal-selected Methods for Preventing Truancy (N=32)

Methods for Preventing Truancy (in order of selection)	Percent of Principals Selecting the Method
Have a contact person at school for parents of truant students to work with	53%
Have stronger penalties for truant students.	53%
Reward students for improved attendance	43%
Make home visits to families of students who are absent or truant a lot	37%
Use truant officers to work with truant students and their families.	37%
Find better ways to involve families, parents and guardians in school.	27%
Give workshops or trainings for families about attendance.	20%

These responses seem to correspond with the family- and student-related reasons principals selected as the major factors contributing to truancy (see Table 5). In addition, they reflect the post-intervention actions that principals listed as having most affect on truancy rates—contact and follow-up with parents, enforcement of truancy policies, and increasing student/family accountability (see Table 4). At post-intervention, principals had also indicated student motivation and truancy policy clarification to be important in reducing truancy; these may be reflected in principals’ selection of such methods as rewarding students for improved attendance (motivation), and having truancy-related contact people at the schools and giving workshops for families (clarifying truancy policy).

Significant Change Case Studies

Hammond (1998), in *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* notes that in evaluation, often the approach is to “...look for the problem, do a diagnosis, and find a solution. The primary focus is on what is wrong or broken...Appreciative inquiry suggests that we look for what works in an organization. The tangible result...is a series of statements that describe where the organization wants to be, based on the high moments of where they have been. Because the statements are grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat their success.” As part of this evaluation, each grant site principal was asked to identify and describe one significant change case study that came about because of the truancy prevention efforts in his/her school. As a demonstration of the appreciative inquiry method, the following truancy prevention significant change case studies are predominantly positive and indicate the potential of these efforts to reduce truancy rates (see Table 7).

Table 7: New Mexico Governor's Truancy Prevention Program (2006-07)
Significant Change Case Studies (N = 30 schools)

Governor's Truancy Prevention Program Significant Change Case Studies				
Grant Site	Issue/Problem	Method of Addressing Issue	Client Outcome	Significance of Outcome
Alamogordo-Chaparral Middle	Presented with a student whose mother had been in/out of jail, so student had been out of school from October to March.	Program brought mother to court; mother asked program for assistance. Program provided family counseling and JPPO officer.	Student now back in school. Although she will have to repeat 7 th grade, she is doing well.	Student doing better academically and socially.
Alamogordo-Alamogordo H.S.	Parent involved in a dysfunctional relationship with child requested assistance for student who had "shut down" in terms of academic work to the extent she was in danger of not graduating.	Program worked with parent to bring the issue to court. Program provided tutoring for student, and monitored her through the truancy court system.	Student attending class more regularly and is on better terms with her parent.	Student has been dismissed from the court system and is on track for graduation.
Alamogordo-Academy del Sol	Presented with a student with poor attendance, attending classes only 1-2 days every two weeks due to health and poor attitude.	Student was placed with the Truancy Court and required to sign in every morning.	Student's attendance has gone from poor to excellent; she has only missed one class in 4 weeks. Student's self-esteem and attitudes have improved.	Student continues to do well in class; she has attained credit in all classes, allowing her to graduate on time with her class.
Alamogordo-Mountain View Middle	Presented with student missing school due to poor attitude but also parent failing to send the student to school.	Program helped the parent understand attendance policy; parent sent student to school more regularly.	Student's attitude and confidence have increased due to consistent attendance.	Student's academic performance has improved, along with self-esteem.
Aztec-McCoy Elem.	Presented with student who had 20 unexcused absences, poor grades, ADHD and other medical issues.	Program sent 2 letters to family and arranged meetings with mother. After one meeting, mother assisted in getting Medicaid; had another meeting with truancy specialist.	After letters and meetings, student started on medications. Student's attitude toward school improved.	Student shows no further absences and grades have improved.
Bernalillo- Bernalillo Middle	A pueblo student missed 10 days in first 2 months of school. She had a hard time making the transition from one school to another, got behind in her work and asked the teacher for help.	Counselor, parent, attendance officer, truancy officer and student determined cause of the problem. Counselor met weekly with student to help and check grades; parents checked student's work. Student invited student to student group sessions, which also helped her make friends.	Student and family were better able to communicate with the school officials, which helped the student feel supported. She attended school regularly and improved her grades.	Student had considered dropping out of school and had failed 4 classes in the first 9 weeks of school She has passed all of these classes in the fourth 9 weeks. Student is much happier and confident.

Governor's Truancy Prevention Program Significant Change Case Studies

Grant Site	Issue/Problem	Method of Addressing Issue	Client Outcome	Significance of Outcome
Bernalillo -Placitas Elementary	A student was not getting to school on a constant basis due to the family's transportation problems. Absenteeism was beginning to seriously affect the student's academic success.	Truancy liaison assistant identified the problem, and the principal called a SAT (Student Assistance Team) meeting.	The SAT was able to arrange transportation with the school district to allow the student daily access to the school.	Student at school regularly and attending class consistently. His grades have improved, and the parent is better informed as to what the student is doing in class and school.
Bernalillo - Santo Domingo	A student was 10 days absent in the Fall semester.	Attendance monitor identified the issue; scheduled meeting of the principal, teacher, district truancy liaison, parent and tribal court representative. An incentive program for the student was put in place.	Student gained commitment to being at school every day at the proper time. As her attitude toward school improved, so did her motivation to learn.	Student's grades have improved significantly, was only absent one day in the Spring semester, and the parent is better informed about the student's work and progress.
Bernalillo - Roosevelt Elementary	A student was constantly absent. Mother informed school that student "didn't want to come to school" or "was too tired to come."	Program team, parents, teachers and principals met to discuss the truancy issue. Team monitored student's attendance and tardiness, using positive comments and incentives to encourage his attendance at school.	Student began to improve; he gained a sense of pride in his classwork and school.	Student is completing his homework, his parents are more involved, and he is making academic gains. Student only misses school now when he is sick.
Bernalillo - Cochiti	Student was failing, having missed over 40 days of school in 2005-06. Mental health issues presented as physical symptoms.	Truancy team identified positive interventions, including school-based counseling, and made accommodations (special education teacher) that fit the student's regular school day.	Student had a significant improvement in attendance, has begun participating in a leadership group, joined an athletic team, and improved academics.	Student has improved his academic performance and it is likely he will continue with school. In addition, his social and emotional status have improved greatly.
Bernalillo - Carroll Elementary	Presented with students who were not coming to school, and whose absences were affecting their academic performance.	Program staff made home visits and met with the parents, along with the counselor to discuss issues and potential solutions.	Most students returned to school on a regular basis. Family communication offered suggestions that helped the students.	Students' attendance improved, and the school has made strong efforts to address issues and find appropriate solutions.
Bernalillo -Bernalillo High	During 2005-06, a student was "reclassified;" due to this he felt it was a waste of time to come to school. He quit coming to school after the winter break, and did not receive any of his credits.	Program, student and parents agreed student would get missed work from his teachers and counselor. Program helped student do this work during lunch period to get "caught up," and receive his credits.	Student came back to school in 2006-07. He is positive and excited due to receiving all his credits for the first semester.	Student will receive 4 out of 6.25 credits for the school year (originally he would only have received 3 credits). He continues to attend school and is trying hard. He intends to return to school next year.

Governor's Truancy Prevention Program Significant Change Case Studies				
Grant Site	Issue/Problem	Method of Addressing Issue	Client Outcome	Significance of Outcome
Bernalillo- Algodones Elementary	Presented with a student who never came to school on Fridays, as she went with her mother to sell jewelry that day.	With other truant students, student was part of Truancy Mentor Program meeting to discuss importance of attendance. Program used positive reinforcements that students could earn if their attendance improved.	Student's attendance has improved, she has gained confidence in her class work, she has a positive attitude, is concerned about the quality of her class work, and enjoys wearing her perfect week's attendance medal.	Student has been praised by Truancy mentors, teachers and classmates. Her grades have improved and she enjoys the positive reinforcement.
Gadsden- Gadsden High	12 th grader had a truancy problem.	Program worked with social worker, administrators, and transitional facilitator to set a plan to keep student engaged in school. Home visits to Las Cruces helped keep student in school.	Student returned to school, made up her academic work and graduated. She has since joined the army.	Student could have become a dropout, but instead returned to school, graduated from high school, and has been able to follow-up with life plans.
Gadsden- Chaparral Middle/ High School	One 8 th grade student had been a habitual truant for at least 3 years. In 2005-06, second semester, he had at least 17 unexcused absences. Student was failing due to truancy.	The student became involved in the school's truancy prevention activities.	The student's attitude toward school changed "drastically," and from January-April, 2007, the student had no unexcused absences.	This student's case was one of those submitted to the District Attorney's office (although little action was taken by that office). Through the school's truancy prevention efforts, the student has been "turned around," he is happy in school and passing his classes.
Horizon Academy West	Program was faced with at least 15 students (and their families) who had patterns of up to 10 unexcused absences or 15 late arrivals, or both, since the 2005-06 school year. The pattern was continuing in 2006-07.	In collaboration with the Truancy Court, the school brought the 15 students and their family members to the conference table to address the range of issues hindering their ability to get the students to school everyday on time.	Out of the 15 families, one withdrew. Seven show marked improvement with no unexcused absences; 3 decreased their tardiness rates to no more than 3/month; and 4 students have shown sporadic improvement in at least having valid excuses for some absences and late arrivals.	By attaching a currency to non-academic privileges, firmly holding students accountable for arriving on-time, enforcing rules, rewarding desired behaviors, setting examples, cognitively restructuring problems/solutions, informing the community about how students "lose ground" with every day of absence, and keeping communication lines open, the program has brought about an improvement in student on-time arrivals, changed certain families' predispositions to oversee their children's attendance, and reduced absenteeism.

Governor's Truancy Prevention Program Significant Change Case Studies				
Grant Site	Issue/Problem	Method of Addressing Issue	Client Outcome	Significance of Outcome
Roswell-University High	Presented with a student with a history of non-attendance, compounded by a past pregnancy that kept her out of school for a year.	Assisted student with flexible scheduling, parenting classes, and child care. Allowed student to attend school while spending a significant amount of time with her child.	Student's attendance, grades and attitude about school improved.	Student is only one semester behind in achieving graduation. She attends 90% of the time, and feels better about herself. Child's health/developmental progress monitored, and he has no developmental deficits, although at risk for this at birth.
Roswell- Mesa	Presented with 8 th grader in a self-contained program with a truancy issue.	Program had student and father attend a meeting with the Truancy officer. Family signed a contract.	Student's attendance has greatly improved and the father is now more conscientious in terms of "calling in" for the student.	Parent participation showed that the student could become more successful in academics. Student has passed into 9 th grade.
Roswell-Mt. View Middle	Student was failing all but one class due to missing 25% of her classes. Student was dealing with depression.	Truancy officer and dean of students made home visits to get the student to school. Teamed student with a counselor who visited once per week, as well as a tutor.	After the third and fourth nine week sessions, student was passing all of her classes. She has had only two unverified absences since February, 2007.	Student will graduate this year and be promoted to the 8 th grade. She has raised her proficiency in reading and is now at grade level.
Roswell-Berrendo Elementary	Student was experiencing academic and social difficulty because she was absent on a weekly/bi-weekly basis.	Program determined that student perceived that parents took her out of town to go shopping on a regular basis. Talks with parents showed mother having tests for a debilitating illness. Parents had not bothered to respond to school request for notification/ documentation, and had not told student true reason for trips.	In meeting with parent to inform of the law, regulations, and potential penalties—as well as the possible impact the travel was having on their daughter's education/social development, parents provided documentation of past appointments. Parents made arrangements for the student to stay with others and attend school.	Student has had fewer absences, and has improved her academic and social progress.
Roswell-Del Norte Elementary	Two students in same family had frequent tardies and absences; one student was a "zone exemption." Parents were not assuring that the students got to school.	Truancy officer met with the family to inform them that both students needed to attend the same school.	The "zone exemption" was revoked, and students now attend the same school.	Students' attendance has improved, although tardiness levels have not.
Roswell-East Grand Plains	Presented with a family with a history of poor attendance.	Truancy officer wrote letters to and then met with the parents at school, and informed them that they could be taken to court.	Students have been in attendance on a regular basis.	Students are having more success in school.

Governor's Truancy Prevention Program Significant Change Case Studies				
Grant Site	Issue/Problem	Method of Addressing Issue	Client Outcome	Significance of Outcome
Roswell -El Capitan	Truancy officer prepared a file on a family whose children were truant.	Program took the parents to court.	Student came to school and attendance improved significantly.	Student demonstrates regular attendance when parents are held accountable.
Roswell -Military Heights	Presented with two students who continually missed the bus and, thus, school.	Truancy officer made numerous home visits, as well as program staff. Determined parents were not getting the children up in time.	Parent got the students up in time and to school.	(Unfortunately, the family moved after this.)
Roswell -Missouri Ave. Elementary	Presented with student in single-parent family who had several unexcused absences.	Truancy officer met with parents; parents did not understand attendance laws, nor the need to communicate with the school. Parents signed a contract.	Student coming to school more often.	Student has no unexcused absences this semester, and absences are down almost 50%.
Roswell - Nancy Lopez Elementary	Presented with a student who had had 5 absences first semester. Student was refusing to go to school due to family problems. Student was oppositional and defiant with mother.	Mother attended parent education training; learned the school would help parents. Though student took on "parenting" role at home, he learned he had to go to school. Truancy officer also brought student to school at least once.	Student learned that there was support for mother, and has not missed any more days from school.	Parents are learning to work with the school to address truancy, and recognize there is help for them. This parent is more willing to call the school and ask for help, rather than letting their child stay at home.
Roswell -Pecos Elementary	Kindergarten student was retained due to excessive absences.	Program met with mother to explain attendance and educational concerns. Mother had to go to court, as she did not grasp the importance of attendance.	Student is attending school and has only missed 5 days.	Student is happier, is reading at his grade level and has caught up on his academic work. He is meeting his educational benchmarks.
Roswell -Valley View	Presented with a student who was continually absent.	Sent letters, made phone calls, and had parents in for a conference. Parents said the student claimed to be sick. Student was to be brought to school for the nurse to ascertain whether she was ill.	Student realized that faking illness to miss school was not working anymore.	Student has been able to receive instruction, and has not fallen behind in her lessons. Student is showing academic improvement.
Roswell -Washington Ave.	Presented with student who missed the bus frequently and had missed 6 days in the first semester, and had 6 tardies.	Truancy officer met with the parents and the SAT Team. Helped parents realize the importance of the issue.	Student has had fewer absences than in the first semester. Parents now are accountable and communicate with the school.	Student has improved in self-esteem and is seeing the importance of academics.

Governor's Truancy Prevention Program Significant Change Case Studies				
Grant Site	Issue/Problem	Method of Addressing Issue	Client Outcome	Significance of Outcome
Taos-Ranchos Elementary	Overall truancy problems in the school.	School's truancy program has teachers contact parents after 3 unexcused absences, inform them that the school attendance law is being enforced, and work with them on strategies to keep the student in school. After 5 unexcused absences, parents receive a letter, and contact with JPPO is made. After 7 unexcused absences parents receive a letter, and a home visit by a social worker. They must develop an intervention plan and meet with JPPO. Any more absences result in contact with the District Attorney's office.	The truancy prevention program has kept more students in school. Fewer parents take their children out of school to go on vacation. Parents and students have learned of the consequences of not attending school. Student's report cards are good and they score well on the NMSBA.	Greater numbers of students attend school, and parents/caretakers are more fully aware of the school attendance law. Students are learning, which helps the school make AYP. The attendance rate is at 95%.
* <i>Taos Charter not received</i>				

Discussion of Findings

Truancy is considered a forewarning of other serious and negative behaviors among youth—and adults—including delinquency, substance abuse, social isolation, educational failure and/or dropout, gang activity, and participation in criminal activity, such as theft or burglary. At least one study of truancy in elementary schools found that three-quarters of the students who were truant at that grade level failed to graduate (Robins & Ratcliff, 1978). Although little research has been done to specifically evaluate the cost-effectiveness of truancy prevention programs, what research does exist indicates that truancy prevention programs are inexpensive compared to the costs of dropout, criminal activity, loss of future income from well-paid jobs, and the like.

Focus on Youth. In some U.S. cities, absentee rates can be as high as 30%. Although the evaluation team does not have an overall truancy rate for New Mexico schools, it is interesting to note that over half of the students participating in this study thought their schools had a truancy rate that ranged from a medium (about 50%) to a moderately high level (75%)—rates much higher than 30%—while only about 38% of them thought it fell below those ranges. These data may be a reflection of an inaccurate perception of social norms; students may believe that more students are truant than there are in reality. This perception could contribute to the belief that “everyone’s doing it,” so why shouldn’t I, and could be a factor in peer pressure to skip school. Once the evaluation team and the PED have the individual grantee schools’ 2006-07 truancy rates, these should be shared with those schools’ administration. If the schools’ truancy rates are indeed lower than most of their students believe, this information can be transmitted in messages to students to decrease the current social norms that may lead to increased truancy. Given that over one-third (38%) of the students taking this survey reported they had skipped school or cut class, this type of preventive communication effort should take place as soon as possible.

In a similar vein, most students surveyed agreed that truant students did worse academically, were more likely to have low-paying jobs when they became adults, that parents do not generally know if their children are truant, and that both parents and teachers do care if the students are cutting class. On the other hand, most appeared to be somewhat unsure about the accuracy of such statements as:

- Truancy has nothing to do with criminal activity, gangs and/or substance abuse,
- Parents can keep children from being truant by helping with homework, and
- Truant students are more likely to be incarcerated as adults.

Given that the above statements are mainly accurate, these might also serve as the basis for certain prevention messages to be conveyed to students. In addition, it is a quite positive sign that at least 41% of the students felt that those skipping school do not have good reasons for doing so, and 35% are unsure. These statistics, again, can serve as the basis for more positive social norm messages to be conveyed in the schools.

Focus on Principals. Although the principals participating in this study seem to have gained confidence in the truancy prevention efforts they were undertaking, only about one third (35%) felt these activities would have an impact on lowering their truancy rates. This seems to be an indicator of how difficult it is to address and overcome such a complex problem as truancy. When the 2006-07 truancy rates are available, and should they indicate that grantee schools’ rates have improved,

this information should be conveyed to the grantees as soon as possible. This type of information can go far in improving motivation and commitment to continue truancy prevention efforts. It would also help point to what particular types of efforts seem to work better than others.

Youth and Principal Comparisons. Other research has indicated that school personnel and students may not see eye to eye with regard to the underlying reasons for truancy. Students are more likely to say boredom with school and classes and poor relationships with teachers are major grounds for truancy. School staff tend to see the causes as primarily related to family, peers and characteristics of the students themselves (ERIC, Linn-Benton, 1992). The results of this evaluation follow similar patterns, as seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Two of the most often cited causes of truancy chosen by students were that classes were boring/uninteresting or teachers do not listen to students, and being bored with classes or worried about schoolwork. Students appear to select the reasons that are probably more personally and immediately relevant to them, including having problems at home, substance abuse, little guidance from parents, staying at home to help families out, and feeling strong peer pressure to cut class. In contrast, principals tended to select family factors as those most likely to cause truancy, including: parents who give little guidance/supervision to their children, non-supportive attitudes toward education. They were also more likely to attribute the causes to deeper underlying economic factors, such as poverty and single-parent homes. By the post-intervention stage, more principals were willing to acknowledge that inconsistent truancy prevention procedures might also be part of the truancy problem.

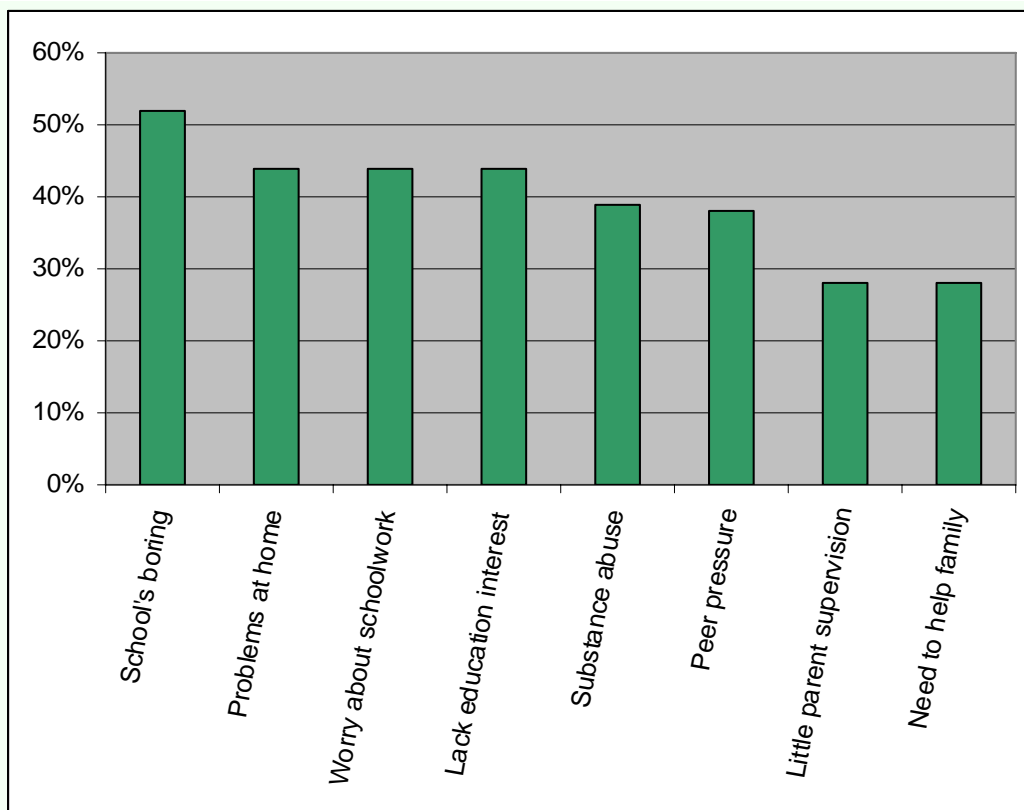


Figure 1: Student-selected Reasons for Truancy (N=547)

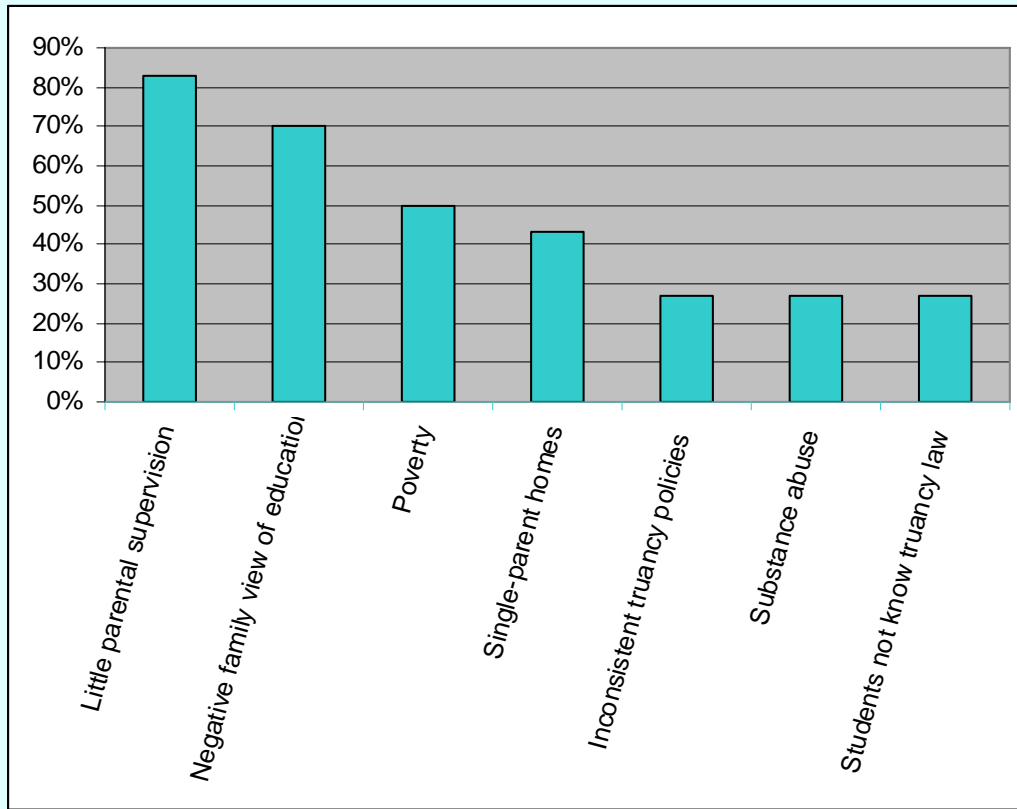


Figure 2: Principal-selected Reasons for Truancy (N=32)

While youth and principals selected what they felt to be major causes of truancy from a list of factors, research shows that all of the factors on that list—categorized as family-related, school-related, economic influences, and student variables—contribute to truancy problems. New Mexico school administrators may well want to consider all these factors and their relevance to truancy prevention as they move forward with their programs. In particular, given that well over half of the 547 students responding to this survey indicated that they felt the learning environment in school is not conducive to doing well, schools should consider including efforts to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning as a means of motivating students to remain in school.

Of interest, students and administrators tended to select some similar methods of preventing truancy, although each group placed different emphasis on preferred activities (see Figures 3 and 4). Students stress making the school environment more interesting and safe, and rewarding students who remain in school. Although principals did feel rewarding students was appropriate, a smaller percent of them chose this than did students, and more principals than students emphasized having stronger punishments for truants. Again, as noted in the literature, comprehensive and educational strategies best designed to prevent and reduce truancy include involving parents/guardians as well as community partners in the programs, committing to firm sanctions for truancy, motivating parental responsibility, addressing unique needs of truant children, and finding ways to better engage students in learning while addressing root causes for this problem.

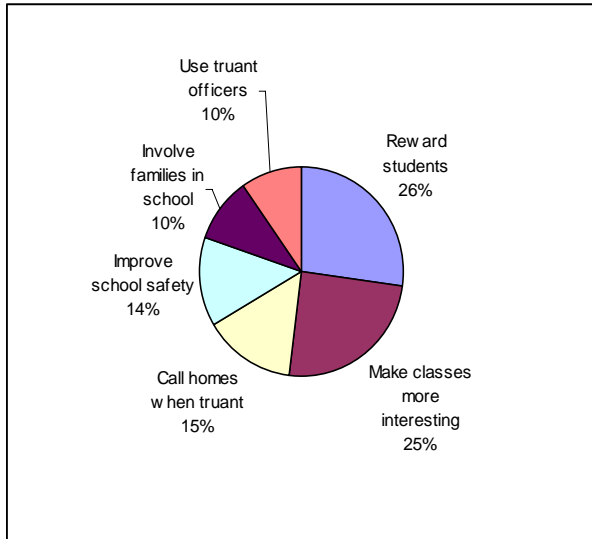


Figure 3: Student Preferred Methods to Reduce Truancy

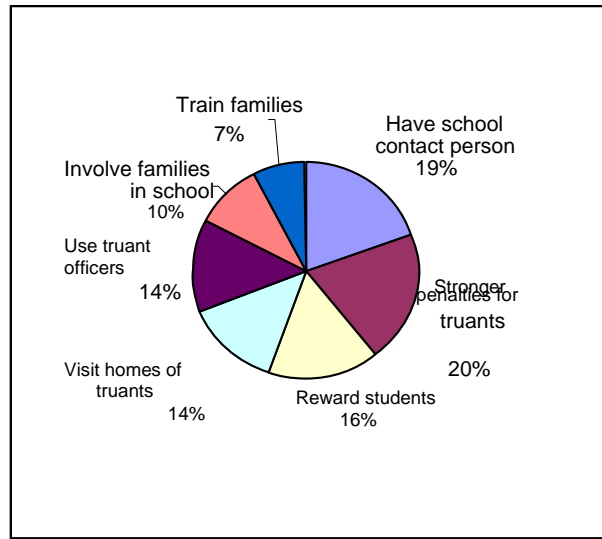


Figure 4: Principal Preferred Methods to Reduce Truancy

Conclusion

The discussion section put forth several potential suggestions for future truancy prevention efforts in the schools, based on the evaluation data collected. In addition, it is recommended that the PED, once it has approved this evaluation report, make the findings available to the grantee schools, as they would benefit from seeing the results of their participation in the surveys. In addition, the feedback may help them in framing future truancy prevention programs. It does appear, overall, that the truancy prevention programs in these funded sites are helping to improve attendance rates in schools.

The evaluation team will not have access to the New Mexico schools' 2006-07 truancy rates until late August 2007. As an addendum to this end of the year evaluation report, the team will assess those rates and compare them to the truancy rates of the 2005-06 school year, to determine if any overall improvement took place.