

Champaign Unit#4 School District TAOEP Program

TAOEP Purpose/History/Overview

Champaign Unit #4 Schools offers a comprehensive Truancy Intervention Initiative complemented with a targeted researched-based, three-tiered Truancy Intervention Program. With this in mind, a diverse planning work group was established to support an effective Truant's Alternative and Optional Education Program, TAOEP. Through their collaborative efforts, a unique, community-based truancy program was enhanced, encompassing prevention, intervention and dropout credit retrieval.

Proper organization and program planning is fundamental to the success of a comprehensive Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP). Members of the Champaign Community Unit School District Unit #4 planning group (Attendance Improvement Committee) believe that planning should occur as a dynamic process, with constant assessment and modification of truancy intervention strategies and supplemental services. This approach increases the likelihood that program goals are achieved. The following specific planning strategies were utilized in the implementation and continual evaluation of the Unit 4 TAOEP, which began with the Fiscal Year - 2008 cohort. With continued support of state, local, and district funds, the Unit #4 TAOEP will continue to support Unit #4 students in the future.

Strategic Plan

In conjunction with Unit 4 administrative staff, the AIC developed a strategic plan, *Operation STOP* (Stop Truancy Outreach Program), for the district's truancy reduction program during the 2007-2008 school years. It outlines prevention, intervention and credit retrieval strategies and services. Unit 4 attendance staff, principals, teachers, support staff, parents and elementary, middle and high school students are held accountable for identification, intervention and follow-through on identified attendance issues. The proven "Check and Connect" system for truancy intervention is outlined. Incentives and home visits are used to increase engagement and have proven effective in decreasing unexcused absences. Operation STOP increases the focus on identification of specific students and implementation of effective interventions to improve school attendance.

Establishing Program Objectives

Input is solicited from AIC and Campus Attendance Improvement Teams, AIT members in creating program objectives. High expectations are set for all students of all ethnicities. Objectives are carefully formulated to set achievable, yet challenging goals that can be evaluated in a quantitative fashion.

Organizing the Infrastructure to Execute the Plan

The Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention Coordinator (Coordinator), the TAOEP Contact person, along with the assistance of the AIC, establishes the organization and process for services to be offered. This includes the identification of Truancy Interventionists/Student Advocates (Truant Interventionist), and criteria for selecting these individuals. This also includes

scheduling of monthly work group meetings to strengthen the program. Unit 4 TAOEP developed School Attendance Procedures in 2008 that document the program infrastructure.

School Attendance Procedures

Unit 4's *School Attendance Procedures* outline specific pathways for truancy prevention, truancy intervention and dropout credit retrieval and is rigorously monitored. The current processes and procedures in place for increasing attendance have effectively demonstrated a positive impact on student attendance.

In summary, the *School Attendance Procedures* outline:

- Systemic monitoring of school level attendance strategies and interventions
 - A matrix details the tasks, responsible person and reporting progress/outcome analysis. Each school's AIT participates in a systematic review of their processes with the Coordinator on a monthly basis
- District-wide and school specific attendance incentives
 - Each campus has an attendance incentive plan in place
- Monthly AIT meetings at each Unit 4 school
 - Attention to absences prompts targeted interventions
- Truant Interventionist accountability
 - Truant Interventionists are responsible for fulfilling the duties and responsibilities outlined in their job descriptions to include:
 - Compilation of a monthly Truancy Intervention Report
 - Documentation of Individual Optional Education Plans (IEOP)
 - Truancy Intervention Reports are analyzed monthly to highlight strategies utilized and services that could be offered or developed to provide increase results with TAOEP students
- Community resource development, awareness and involvement are important.

Needs/Resource Assessment

Needs Analysis Data and Source(s):

A needs analysis of Unit 4 data demonstrates significant positive strides in addressing truancy and attendance issues over the life of the FY2008 TAOEP; however work needs to continue.

According to the 2009 Illinois District Report Card, of the 16 schools in the district, six fell below the state average for attendance rates (four of these schools were between .1 and .7% below the state average of 93.7%). These numbers represent a marked improvement over the statistics prior to the implementation of the FY08 TAOE. However, especially at the high school level (where the attendance rate was 88.9% in 2009, and 89.9% in 2008), attendance rates have significant opportunities to improve. The year prior to establishing a Unit 4 TAOEP, 12 out of 16 schools fell significantly below the state average for attendance rates; the Unit 4 TAOEP is positively correlated with improved attendance.

The problem does not end with attendance rates; high chronic truancy rates have persisted in the district. The 2009 Illinois District Report Card, lists a Unit 4 Chronic Truancy Rate of 3.8% (339 students/ 8824 total), slightly above the state average of 3.7%. The Unit 4 chronic truancy

rate dropped from 5.1% (458 students) in 2008 and 4.7% (418 students) in 2007. Despite progressively lower rates, it remains a problem. Chronic truancy is highly correlated with dropping out of school. Work to support students before they drop out is clearly indicated.

Significantly, the Unit 4 drop-out rate has declined over the last several years. The current rate is .9%, having dropped from 1.8% in 2008 and 2.9% in 2007. TAOEP services provide academic support/credit retrieval for students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out thereby building relationships and re-engaging students with the community, their education and future.

Two indicators that have been shown to correlate to attendance problems are low-income backgrounds and high mobility rates. A majority of the schools within the district exceed the state averages for low-income families. Seven of the district's schools have a low income population of over 50%, with three schools currently over 70%. TAOEP home visits and referrals to community agencies/resources provide supports for low income students.

With respect to mobility rates, the district has an 18.4% mobility rate compared to 13.5% for the state, with nine Unit 4 schools reporting rates over 20%; two elementary schools report rates of 30.8% and 30.9% respectively. Research indicates that every time a child changes schools they lose three months of education. Therefore, these statistics show a high number of students who are at-risk for low-achievement, reduced engagement and potential failure. Unit 4's large mobility population needs support to become and stay engaged in school. TAOEP programming provides such services.

District Interventions/Goals

Truancy Prevention:

Champaign Unit #4 offers Truancy Prevention district-wide to all students in grades K-12 that have missed two or more unexcused absences with no valid reason. Five (5) Truant Interventionist/Student Advocates cover all elementary, middle and high schools. The services provided includes monitoring of attendance, teaming with school staff attendance improvement teams to get to the root of attendance problems and providing both individual and group attendance incentives that are District funded.

Student Identification:

In keeping with the rigid participation criteria for TAOEP, established by Section 2-3.66 of the School Code, only students identified as truants, chronic or habitual truants, dropouts or potential dropouts will be served by the Unit 4 TAOEP. **Truants** are defined as students subject to compulsory school attendance that are absent for the school day or a portion of the school day without proper permission. Students are considered **chronically truant** if absent for 10% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days without permission. **Dropouts** consist of those students no longer attending school, while **potential dropouts** are those students with an attendance problem (chronic truancy, truancy, tardiness, selective absenteeism or excessive absenteeism) that interferes with academic learning.

Aside from these definitions, a number of indicators or behaviors exist for the identification of these students, as well as those classified as potential dropouts. These indicators include: poor academic performance, lack of motivation to achieve, tardiness, absenteeism, low-income

family, inability to hold a job or family's dependence on the student's employment, teen pregnancy, alcohol/drug abuse, high mobility rate, behavioral incidents, emotional liability and social problems. Unit 4 initially targets students with 2 unexcused absences; it truly an *early* intervention program.

Type of Services:

Supplemental services that provide TAOEP students enrolled in TAOEP with supports (e.g. tutoring, mentoring, health services, home visits, counseling) are offered, in conjunction with community partners, to prevent and intervene in truant behavior and provide drop out credit retrieval are adherent to the Unit 4 mission statement which reads:

"The mission of the Champaign Community Unit School District #4, in partnership with the community, is to guide all students in gaining knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to direct their lives, improve a diverse society, and excel in a changing the world by providing dynamic, resource-rich learning environments and experiences in which people and lifelong learning are valued."

Truancy Prevention Services:

Truancy prevention activities are offered to all Unit 4 students in grades K-12, who meet the truancy criteria. Activities include the following:

1. Home visits give parents the opportunity to find out what kind of help is available from Unit 4 and gives the Truant Interventionist assistance in determining the causes of student's truancy.
2. Letters sent home when student have missed 2, 10, 15 and more unexcused absences informing parents of the truancy laws and school requirements.
3. "Phone master" automatically calls home daily to notify parents if their child has missed school and instructs parents to notify the school.
4. Individual as well as group attendance incentives to help emphasize the importance of going to school.
5. When interventions have proved unsuccessful, Truant students are referred to the districts, Student Attendance review Board. If attendance continues to be a concern, students are referred to the Regional Office of Educations, Truancy Review Board and then to court.
6. Truant Interventionists and ultimately the Coordinator are responsible for Unit 4 Truancy Prevention Services.

Proactive Programs developed or promoted through community collaborations to promote improved attendance.

1. Project Access Pilot: Serving twenty students with attendance problems, academic shortcomings, discipline infractions and police or court involvement, have been referred by the attendance program for mental health wrap around assistance, through the Project Access initiative.
2. Operation Hope: Serving seventy students that reside in the Garden Hills, Douglas area to promote student achievement, good attendance and college or vocational planning. In 2008, several truants resided in the Garden Hills and Douglas area. The funding, collaboration between the City of Champaign, Champaign Park District and the United Way has proven to be highly successful with **a 100% graduation rate, 100% college acceptance rate, and an average attendance rate of 90%**.
3. Summer Youth Program: 31 students completed a summer program that provided stipends to completers that had good attendance and no police or court involvement during the summer of 2010. The students that were enrolled were students that had demonstrated poor attendance during the academic school year, had multiple discipline infractions and under achieved. The students attended anger management, decision making workshops and completed a job training program during their 6-weeks of summer vacation. The Truant Interventionist, mentored, and assisted.
4. Seniors at Risk Program: Twenty seniors, 10 from each High school, that are in need of credits to graduate have been referred to the Community Liaison for assistance in completing school. Seventeen parents have agreed to participate.
5. Community after-school tutorial program: serves 45 students at Pilgrim Church and New Hope Academy.

TISA Overview:

Truancy Interventionists/Student Advocates:

At the beginning of the school year, with the help of Truant Interventionists, the caseloads are formulated and the school staff, parents of truants, and truant students are in-serviced on the program. Attendance records are monitored by the attendance program through Unit 4 database, *Eschool*, and collected by the Truant Interventionist. Any student who has missed 2 unexcused absences, is evaluated for enrollment in Unit 4 TAOEP program. Home visits are made by the Truant Interventionist to determine the reasons for the two absences. If there is no valid reason for the absence, the student is enrolled in the TAOEP program. The student and parent with the assistance of the Truant Interventionist develop achievable goals for attendance improvement.

Attendance records are reviewed and incentives awarded on a monthly/weekly or daily basis to eligible students to allow frequent positive reinforcement. Quarterly rewards/incentives, provided by community agencies as well as the district, are distributed to students and groups with low absenteeism. Each school is awarded incentive money to complement their building budget, based upon the number of students that attend the school. The principals, with input from their school's AIT, determine what incentives are awarded to TAOEP students and track the impact the incentive has made on attendance improvement.

The Truant Interventionist have established a network of area business that have volunteered various age-appropriate incentives such as movie passes, reduced food prices at participating restaurants/fast-food stores, retail store discount coupons, and donated pizzas for group rewards. The district contributes a significant amount of financial resources to this endeavor. Additional encouragement in the form of perfect attendance certificates are distributed to eligible students. Most improved school attendance award trophies and certificates are distributed to qualifying students.

Truant Interventionist/Student Advocates:

Preferred qualifications include:

- Obtained minimum of 60 college hours
- Experienced and knowledgeable in working with local human service agencies, school settings, and court system
- Possess good human relation skills
- Willing to work with at-risk children and families in the community

Responsibilities include:

- Identify qualifying program participants
- Perform initial assessment of all referrals and identified students
- Develop IOEP in conjunction with student and guardians
- Monitor progress made toward achieving program goals
- Keep records on student attendance, academics and behavior
- Perform data analysis on attendance, academics and behavior
- Assist with the management of all attendance incentive programs

Roles and Assignments:

Tawanda Jones: Edison, Jefferson, Garden Hills

Cindy Barger: West view, Barkstall, Bottenfield, Kenwood, Robeson, South Side

Verdell Jones: Centennial, Dr. Howard.

Henry Ross: Central, Carrie Busey

Rickey Parks: Franklin, Stratton, Academic Academy

Attendance School Plans:

Each Campus is required to submit their plans for the school year. The planning is done by the Attendance Improvement Team in each building based upon the districts goals and campus needs.

Attendance Rates:

The following are the attendance rates by school from School Year (SY) 2009-2010 vs. SY 2010-2011:

<u>Campus</u>	<u>DecSY2010</u>	<u>Dec SY2011</u>
Barkstall	95%	96.06%
Bottenfield	95%	96.46%
Carrie Busey	92.70%	94.18%
Dr. Howard	92.50%	94.19%
Stratton	94.60%	94.44%
Garden Hills	93.90%	94.87%
Kenwood	94.10%	94.74%
Robeson	94.10%	95.72%
South Side	94.70%	95.52%
BTW	94%	94.99%
Westview	94.90%	96.14%
Edison	93%	94.74%
Franklin	93.30%	93.95%
Jefferson	93.50%	94.75%
AA	84.70%	83.56%
Centennial	90.10%	91.58%
Central	87.40%	90.41%

District Rates	ES	MS	HS	Total District
Dec SY 2010	94.1%	93.3%	88.7%	92.3%
Dec SY 2011	95.2%	94.48%	91%	93.8%