Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance

Summary Report: Fall 2001 – 2003

Prepared by Kelly A. Ouellette

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Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance

Executive Summary

The Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance (the Consortium) is a project of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC). The JJAC is a Governor-appointed committee of volunteers charged with preventing delinquency and improving Connecticut's juvenile justice system. It oversees the distribution and use of federal juvenile justice funding to Connecticut and is staffed by the State Office of Policy and Management (OPM).

The JJAC's focus on school attendance is based on the belief that school gives young people positive experiences and provides an environment where they can develop the skills and attitudes they need to become productive, law-abiding citizens. Regular school attendance promotes academic and social learning; provides young people with connections to adults, peers and the community; builds habits of attendance necessary for successful employment; and provides supervision and structure to the day, limiting free time and keeping students out of trouble. Research has linked truancy to a multitude of problem behaviors in young people and shown that school-related factors – such as commitment to school, good school performance, involvement in school activities, and high levels of anticipated educational achievement – can reduce the likelihood of youth becoming involved in delinquency and violent offending.

Under Connecticut State Law, truancy is a complex issue involving parents, schools, courts, and communities. The JJAC has funded truancy prevention programs in each of these areas and knows that it is both costly and ineffective to use juvenile justice interventions – such as placement in residential facilities – to address truancy in all but the most severe cases. School districts are often better equipped than the courts to deal with truancy issues.

Experts agree that the most effective truancy and delinquency prevention programs promote **positive youth development** rather than focus solely on the prevention and reduction of problem behaviors. Programs can address school attendance before it becomes truancy. A youth development approach views young people in terms of their talents and assets and considers them to be valuable community resources. In applying a youth development approach to its work, the JJAC has shifted its focus away from "truancy" and toward a more positive goal of improving school attendance. In 2001, the JJAC formed the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance with this purpose in mind.

The Consortium Model

The Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance is a multi-year, collaborative effort of local school districts and statewide agencies focused on improving school attendance in Connecticut through better use of data. Its goals are to implement attendance data collection strategies and data-driven planning; identify and meet member technology, program and training needs; and disseminate Consortium findings and program information statewide. The JJAC has funded

many school attendance improvement initiatives, and while programs may achieve their goals, attendance problems often resurface once funding ends. By focusing on data collection and data-driven planning, the JJAC hopes to help school districts establish procedures to address attendance problems in more effective and systematic ways.

Consortium members are program and technology representatives of local school districts and representatives from statewide agencies concerned with juvenile justice, education, and child welfare. The JJAC provides modest grants to member school districts in support of data collection, analysis and planning efforts; school building-level attendance task forces; and related training for school staff including teachers. Grants are supplemented by collaborative projects and capacity-building activities that help districts learn from each other and develop data analysis and planning skills. Through regular Consortium meetings and training events, members discuss strategies for improving attendance and receive expert training and technical assistance on how to use attendance data.

Participating Local School Districts		
Ansonia	Danbury	Hartford
Killingly	New Britain	Norwich
Stonington	Winchester	Windham

Participating Statewide Agencies

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

Connecticut Association of Schools

Connecticut Consortium for Law & Citizenship Education

Connecticut State Department of Education

Department of Children and Families

Judicial Branch

Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee

Office of Policy and Management

Consortium Results

School districts involved in the Consortium are required to contribute local data to a Consortium-wide attendance database. Districts submit computer files containing student-level demographic and attendance data to the Consortium data consultant annually. The Consortium-wide database provides a pool of attendance data from the nine member school districts that is used for data analysis and training purposes. The database contains two years of attendance data, and analysis of this data reveals some concerning trends. Consortium attendance data show that students miss about 13 days of school each year on average – more than two and a half weeks. The data also show that **45% of ninth graders missed nearly a month of school last year**. In addition to analyzing attendance data at the Consortium level, member school districts receive district-level attendance reports to facilitate comparison of results among member districts and analysis of local data.

While the focus of the Consortium grant program has been on using data and technology to improve attendance, participating school districts know that the most effective way to make a difference in attendance is to take a comprehensive approach. Administrative leaders must create a culture within each school building that values regular school attendance, and schools must implement multiple strategies to address the multiple problems that lead to absenteeism. Procedures must be put in place to open the lines of communication among school staff, students, and their families to talk about attendance before it becomes a problem. Consortium

school districts have implemented an array of strategies to help improve attendance. These strategies have been organized into four broad categories:

> **Make Attendance a Priority** – build awareness and commitment to regular school attendance in school buildings, in homes, and in the broader community.

> **Establish Effective Attendance Policies** – ensure that effective attendance policies are in place and enforced consistently across the district and within school buildings.

> **Collect Data and Monitor Attendance** – collect and monitor attendance data to ensure effective interventions occur when students begin to exhibit patterns of poor attendance.

> **Use Data for Program Planning** – select attendance improvement strategies based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of local attendance data.

Promising practices and lessons learned for each category can be found on the JJAC web site at http://www.opm.state.ct.us/pdpd1/grants/JJAC/JJACPublications.htm.

Next Steps

The Consortium is about halfway into a four-year collaborative process. By the end of the 2003/2004 school year, the Consortium-wide attendance database will include three years of attendance data, and school districts will be in a position to demonstrate progress in their ability to analyze attendance data and use it for program planning. Member districts will receive a third year of funding and receive additional training and technical assistance on attendance data analysis and data-driven planning. Consortium products will be published on the JJAC web site at http://www.opm.state.ct.us/pdpd1/grants/JJAC/JJACHome.htm.

Plans for the future include development of a toolkit on using attendance data for school improvement and submission of one or more articles for publication in professional journals. The Consortium will explore opportunities to expand its reach by involving other school districts interested in attendance issues in Consortium activities. Finally, the Consortium will begin to share its experiences broadly and move forward on a system change agenda to make school attendance an explicit priority in Connecticut at both the state and local levels.

Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance

Summary Report: Fall 2001 – 2003

I)   Introduction

The Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance (the Consortium) is a collaborative effort of local school districts and statewide agencies concerned with improving school attendance in Connecticut through better use of data. The Consortium is a project of Connecticut's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) which provides direct grants to member school districts and funds Consortium activities.

This summary report describes the Consortium and its activities during its first two years. It documents the context in which the Consortium was formed, describes the Consortium model, shares promising practices for improving school attendance, and assesses the Consortium's effectiveness as a model grant program. It also summarizes the activities of each member school district and includes an appendix of sample documents and supporting materials.

II)   Background

A) State Legislation and Policy

Connecticut state law concerning *school attendance* is defined in Section 10-184 to 186 of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.). Parents or guardians who have the care of children between five and 18 years of age are required to send them to public school unless they are receiving equivalent instruction elsewhere. Parents have the option of not sending children to school until the age of seven, and students who are 16 or 17 years of age may withdraw from school with parental consent. Parents must personally appear at the school district office and sign an option or consent form to keep their children out of school. The law states that parents or guardians may be fined twenty-five dollars for each day that a child in their control fails to attend school, although this penalty is rarely enforced.

C.G.S. Section 10-186 defines the duties of local and regional boards of education regarding school attendance and procedures for determining residency status for purposes of school enrollment. Boards of education are required to provide public school accommodations for children five years of age through 21 years of age who reside in the local jurisdiction and who are not graduates of high school or vocational school. Section 10-199 authorizes local or regional boards of education to appoint *attendance officers* to investigate students who are absent or attend school irregularly, cause such students to attend school regularly, and present cases requiring prosecution for violation of school laws to prosecuting officers.

Under Connecticut law, truancy and habitual truancy are defined as follows:

> A *truant* is a child age five to eighteen, inclusive, who is enrolled in a public or private school and has four unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten unexcused absences from school in any school year.
>
> A *habitual truant* is a child age five to eighteen, inclusive, who is enrolled in a public or private school and has twenty unexcused absences within a school year.
>
> *C.G.S. Sections 10-198a and 10-200*

C.G.S. Section 10-198a defines specific policies and procedures concerning truants that local school districts must adopt and implement, including requirements to:

1. Hold a meeting between the parent (or other person having control of the child) of a truant child and appropriate school personnel to review and evaluate the reasons for the child being truant;

2. Coordinate services with, and referrals of children to, community agencies providing child and family services;

3. Notify the parent in writing of the obligation of the parent to ensure that children attend public school or receive equivalent instruction;

4. Obtain a telephone number or other means of contacting the parent during the school day; and

5. Monitor individual unexcused absences of children and contact the parent whenever a child fails to report to school.

Items three through five above apply to students in grades kindergarten through eight. Local school districts are free to adopt and implement policies and procedures that exceed these minimum requirements under state law. C.G.S. Sections 10-200 to 202 provide guidance to cities, towns, and police departments regarding appropriate local ordinances and handling procedures for truant and habitually truant students. Under these statutes, local authorities may stop children under 18 during school hours to determine whether they are truant from school and, if so, send them to school. Truant students may also be arrested for truancy and financial penalties may be imposed.

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) Policy Manual defines *educational neglect* and states that DCF shall accept reports of the educational neglect of children (policy 33-7-7). Educational neglect occurs when a parent interferes with the ability of a child to receive proper care and attention educationally. A presumption exists that parents or guardians are fully responsible for ensuring school attendance for children up to eleven years of age or about sixth grade. Beyond age eleven, school districts typically refer truancy cases to Superior Court for action against the student rather than making reports of educational neglect to DCF.

> State policy considers parents or guardians fully responsible for ensuring school attendance for students younger than 12 years old.

C.G.S. Sections 46b-120 through 149d define the duties of the Judicial Branch with respect to truancy and provide definitions and handling procedures for "families with service needs" and "youth in crisis." One of the reasons a family may be considered a *family with service needs* (**FWSN**) is that it includes a child who is a truant or habitual truant.[1] FWSN complaints may be filed with the Superior Court by a wide range of people including, but not limited to, superintendents, police officers, probation officers, DCF staff and licensed agencies, youth service bureaus, or a parent or foster parent of a child. Local education agencies (LEA's) are statutorily mandated to file a FWSN petition regarding all children who are defined as habitually truant. Such action is discretionary on the part of the LEA for children defined as truant. The Superior Court refers FWSN complaints to a probation officer who investigates the validity of the claim. If the court finds a child to be habitually truant, it may order that the child remain in his own home or in the custody of a relative or any other suitable person and be subject to the supervision of a probation officer or be placed in a non-secure residential facility under DCF supervision. A child who has been adjudicated by the court as a FWSN child and who violates a court order can be found to be delinquent and may be placed in a secure facility.

Section 46b-120 defines a *youth in crisis* as a person 16 or 17 years of age who, within the last two years, has four unexcused absences from school in any one month or 10 unexcused absences in any school year.[2] Upon verification of a youth in crisis claim, the Superior Court may make and enforce orders including, but not limited to, requiring work or specified community service; mandating that the youth in crisis attend an educational program approved by the court; or requiring mental health services. In contrast to FWSN cases, a youth in crisis found to be in violation of such orders is not considered to be delinquent.

There is no state definition of excused or unexcused absences, and local and regional boards of education develop and adopt their own attendance policies and procedures. The **Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE)** collects demographic data on district enrollment each year as of October 1st but does not collect student attendance data. The vast majority of federal flow-through and state education funding to local school districts is calculated based on student enrollment and/or student residency data.[3] Only small competitive grant programs use school attendance data and truancy rates as factors in calculating funding to local districts.

In summary, a review of Connecticut state legislation and policy reveals an emphasis on parental responsibility for ensuring students' attendance at school, definitions of truancy and habitual truancy, and procedures for referring truancy cases to DCF and juvenile court. The SDE does not provide districts with incentives to improve school attendance, and prior efforts to pass state legislation on state-mandated definitions of excused and unexcused absence have been unsuccessful.

B) Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee

The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) is a Governor-appointed committee of volunteers charged with preventing delinquency and improving Connecticut's juvenile justice system. The JJAC was established in accordance with the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended, and is responsible for overseeing the

distribution and use of federal juvenile justice funding to Connecticut. The JJAC is staffed by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM).

Experts agree that the most effective anti-crime and anti-delinquency programs promote **positive youth development** rather than focus solely on the prevention and reduction of problem behaviors. Positive youth development is an ongoing process by which all young people seek to meet their basic physical and social needs and develop the competencies necessary to succeed in adolescence and adulthood. The JJAC incorporates a youth development approach into its funding priorities through programming that provides Connecticut's young people with positive role models and opportunities to participate in recreational, cultural, and skill-development activities.

Examples of JJAC Programs
• Before and after school programs
• Improving school attendance
• Truancy prevention
• Alternatives to suspension and expulsion from school
• Parent training
• Law-related education programs
• School resource officers
• Nontraditional policing
• Youth service bureaus
• Combating underage drinking

C) Why School Attendance?

It seems intuitively obvious that school attendance is important. If schools are doing a good job of fostering academic achievement in students, then attending school is a necessary prerequisite to society's goal of preparing its youngsters for future success. Just showing up at school will not necessarily result in academic excellence for all students, but education research shows that "time on task" matters.[4] Research from the Public Policy Institute of California provides convincing evidence that the time students spend at school is directly linked with gains in academic achievement:

> A unique study in collaboration with the San Diego Unified School District… compiled and analyzed a highly detailed, student-level database that enabled them to link factors influencing student achievement in ways that have not been possible with the state-level data generally used in such studies.... The percentage of days a student was absent was a strong negative predictor of each student's gain in achievement in math and reading. [5]

While the research linking school attendance and test scores is compelling, academic achievement is only one reason to care about whether students are in school. The JJAC's focus on school attendance is based on the belief that school gives young people **positive experiences** and provides an **environment** where they can develop the skills and attitudes they need to become productive, law-abiding citizens. For 20 years, the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee has funded programs to prevent truancy and improve school attendance because regular attendance at school:

- Promotes academic and social learning;
- Provides young people with connections to adults, peers and the community;
- Builds habits of attendance necessary for successful employment; and
- Provides supervision and structure to the day, limiting free time and keeping students out of trouble.

Under Connecticut State Law, truancy is a complex issue involving parents, schools, courts, and communities. The JJAC has funded truancy prevention programs in each of these areas and knows that it is both costly and ineffective to use juvenile justice interventions – such as placement in residential facilities – to address truancy in all but the most severe cases. School districts are often better equipped than the courts to deal with truancy issues.

Research has linked truancy, low commitment to school, and academic failure to a multitude of problem behaviors in young people such as school dropout, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency and violence.[6] Conversely, research has identified school-related protective factors[7] – such as commitment to school, good school performance, involvement in school activities, and high levels of anticipated educational attainment – that reduce the likelihood of youth becoming involved in delinquency and violent offending.[8] Poor school attendance is often an indicator of other issues, such as health problems, learning disabilities, bullying, or troubles at home. Monitoring attendance on a regular basis – and intervening proactively when students miss school – prevents students from falling behind and provides opportunities to identify and address underlying student and family issues.

Experts agree that the most effective truancy and delinquency prevention programs promote **positive youth development** rather than focus solely on the prevention and reduction of problem behaviors. A youth development approach views young people in terms of their talents and assets and considers them to be valuable community resources. In applying a youth development approach to its work, the JJAC has shifted its focus away from "truancy" and toward "attendance" with a goal of addressing school absenteeism before it becomes truancy.

> "We want to help ensure that Connecticut's young people are not only educated, but are also safe, healthy, and prepared to lead productive lives as law-abiding citizens."
>
> *Valerie LaMotte, Office of Policy and Management, JJAC Staff*

D) School Attendance Funding in Connecticut

Connecticut's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee was formed in 1975 and began exploring the subject of truancy in the early 1980s. In 1983, the JJAC Subcommittee on Families With Service Needs hired independent consultant Deborah Stewart to conduct a Truancy Study Project to analyze the problem of school truancy, develop a program category for JJAC funding, and summarize promising program models for truancy intervention. The resulting report described over 60 effective programs for increasing school attendance and concluded that truancy must be viewed in a systems context. "To assure meaningful and long-term improvements, it appears necessary to utilize a range of system-wide and targeted early intervention strategies to change the personal, familial and educational factors causing school truancy."[9] These findings helped the JJAC formulate a funding category to support comprehensive approaches to truancy prevention through the collaborative efforts of schools, parents, students, and the broader community.

From 1985 through the mid-1990s, the JJAC used federal juvenile justice funding to initiate several truancy prevention initiatives:

- **Project NET – Network to End Truancy (1985-1987):** Provided small grants to eleven local school districts for phone lines and equipment to notify parents when

students failed to come to school. Also supported publication of a newsletter on truancy prevention.

- **Project Attendance (1987-1988):** Provided grants of $45,000 to the cities of Bridgeport, Milford, and Windham to support school attendance programs.

- **FWSN/Runaway Project (1991-1992):** Funded local programs for families with service needs and runaways that included truancy prevention strategies in Hamden, New Haven, and West Haven.

- **Local Activity to Reduce School Truancy (1992-1994):** Provided grants of $5,000 per year to the cities of Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury, and Windham to fund local truancy intervention programs.

- **Police Youth Programs (1999-2001):** Provided grants of up to $10,000 for police youth programs in the area of truancy prevention/intervention for local agencies in Norwich, Southbury/Middlebury, Stonington, and Winchester.

In 1998, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 98-183: An Act Concerning Truancy And Other Family With Service Needs Cases. Section 1 defined new judicial branch responsibilities with respect to truancy and FWSN cases, including a requirement to establish protocols for referral of truants to community-based intervention programs prior to court referral. Section 2 authorized a demonstration project to establish a school and community-based truancy prevention initiative to address the needs of public school children who exhibit patterns of unexcused absences from school.

The Office of Policy and Management (OPM) managed the **Truancy Prevention Demonstration Program** in consultation with the State Department of Education and the Judicial Branch, and the JJAC provided some initial funding for the program. OPM issued a competitive request for proposals to local boards of education for comprehensive local truancy prevention programs developed in collaboration with youth service bureaus, juvenile review boards, and other community-based networks. Applicants were required to describe policies adopted by the local board of education pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-198a Policies and Procedures Concerning Truants and plans for a truancy prevention initiative to:

- Monitor school attendance;

- Enhance any existing in-school truancy prevention programs;

- Establish after-school and summer school programs for truants;

- Provide mentoring programs for children at risk of being truant;

- Implement school and community-based intervention programs targeting families with elementary school children who exhibit persistent patterns of absenteeism or truancy;

- Provide in-school alternative education initiatives for chronic truants; and

- Provide monthly truancy reports to the Office of Policy and Management.

OPM awarded grants to school districts in the cities of Danbury, Hartford, and Windham. Projects were funded from 1998 to 2001 through a combination of state and federal funds. Grantees focused on improving school attendance through policy revision, direct services to

students, education of parents and the public, and collaboration with law enforcement and other community agencies. The three pilot projects are summarized below:

Truancy Prevention Demonstration Program 1998 to 2001	
Danbury Public Schools Project STRIVE	Expanded truancy prevention and intervention services by: 1) improving adherence to state policy and strengthening regulations, 2) identifying at-risk students early, 3) making available creative and culturally sensitive services, and 4) taking a leadership role on the issue of truancy.
Hartford Public Schools RAP-T Attendance Project	Provided services through a collaborative approach to families of chronic truants in elementary grades.
Windham Public Schools Windham Truancy Prevention	Supported home and school visits by Truancy Resource Officers to follow up on referrals for students who are truant from school; funded a Truancy Prevention Specialist; established an Attendance Advisory Committee with community involvement.

In 2000, the JJAC developed a new competitive grant program to expand school attendance improvement efforts to more of the state's cities and towns. The Improving School Attendance program supported initiatives to increase school attendance, particularly in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade. Nine school districts won competitive grants of $18,000 to $25,000 for the 2000/2001 fiscal year (Ansonia, East Hartford, Norwich, Stonington, Vernon, Waterbury, and Winchester). Continuation grants of $28,000 to $37,500 were awarded to the same nine school districts in 2001/2002. Grants supported strategies such as consistent enforcement of policies, communication from schools to families, enhancement of existing attendance programs, increased funding for after school and summer programming, and alternatives to suspension.

E) Lessons Learned: 1983 – 2001

Between 1983 and 2001, the JJAC spent significant time and money seeking ways to increase attendance in Connecticut's schools. School- and community-based programs tested a variety of attendance improvement strategies, such as implementing computer and phone systems to facilitate attendance monitoring; revising attendance policies and procedures; hiring attendance officers, social workers, linguists, and home-school liaisons; supporting police sweeps and shuttle services; and developing an array of interventions targeting students who were truant or identified as being at risk of truancy. The JJAC worked with several school districts through multi-year grant programs to assess the effectiveness of these strategies, and the results have been mixed. There are many examples of initiatives that were successful initially but were later de-funded due to competing priorities and/or budget constraints. As a result, truancy rates often increased again once JJAC funding ended.

Similarly, results are mixed on how truancy rates are affected by programs that target particular groups of students, such as students deemed to be "at risk" of truancy based on demographic characteristics (e.g., Hispanic boys entering the 7th grade). While programs such as mentoring initiatives or after-school activities are surely beneficial, it remains unclear to what extent such programming prevents or reduces absenteeism.

The most successful JJAC-supported school attendance initiatives focused on making attendance *matter* – at the district level, in school buildings, and in the classroom. Successful districts put in place good policies and regulations and then enforced them immediately on a consistent basis. This seemingly simple approach can be difficult to accomplish. It requires that administrative leaders accept

> "We learned that we can't blindly place kids in programs based on their demographics or 'at risk' status. Just because a kid is in a cohort doesn't make him a truancy risk."
>
> *Mike McKee, Superintendent of Schools,*
> *Stonington Public Schools*

responsibility for attendance results, tighten attendance procedures, develop technical and reporting capabilities, and ensure that student services are available to help students and their families. Staff must have access to the necessary resources and information to monitor attendance and intervene effectively when students show patterns of absenteeism.

In the fall of 2001, the JJAC decided to focus on a new strategy for improving attendance and designed a grant program to involve school district and state agency personnel in a collaborative process to learn **how to use data to improve school attendance**. Through the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance, the JJAC hoped to help school districts make systemic changes in how they address attendance issues – changes that would result in sustainable improvements.

III) The Consortium Model

The Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance is an association of local school and statewide agency representatives focused on improving school attendance through data. The JJAC has engaged a limited number of school districts in a multi-year collaborative process to learn about data-driven planning; explore attendance data collection strategies and best practices; and identify and meet member training needs with respect to data. By exploring attendance improvement strategies and disseminating Consortium findings throughout the state, the Consortium hopes to influence key leaders and build support for attendance improvement efforts at both state and local levels.

The Consortium's focus on data stems from the belief that collecting good data – and analyzing it effectively – should be the basis for all program planning efforts. "Many times, we administrators design programs based on 'gut instinct.' Unfortunately, that doesn't always work. We need to look at the data – to really analyze it – before we're even sure about what issues we have," says Pat Doyle of Danbury Public Schools. Without good data analysis, even well-designed programs may fail to achieve the desired result.

To effectively use data for decision-making purposes, school districts must first ensure that their data is accurate and readily available to those who need to use it. Because Connecticut schools are not required to report average daily attendance to the State Department of Education, few districts have in place rigorous processes for collecting and monitoring attendance data.

Consortium school districts receive modest grants in support of school attendance data collection, analysis and planning efforts; school building-level attendance task forces; and related training for school staff including teachers. Member districts have used these funds to improve the quality of their student data, refine data collection and coding rules, train staff on data entry procedures, implement new data analysis tools, and establish school-based or district-wide teams to monitor and analyze attendance data.

Consortium Activities

Grants to local school districts

Meetings and training

Shared attendance database

Consortium grants are supplemented by collaborative projects and capacity-building activities that help districts learn from each other and build data analysis and planning skills. Through regular Consortium meetings and training events, members exchange ideas about attendance improvement activities and receive expert training and technical assistance on how to analyze and use attendance data. Consortium school districts also contribute local data to a Consortium-wide attendance database that is used for training purposes and to compare data across the districts. Through these efforts, school districts receive funding, learning opportunities, and technical assistance to help them address their attendance issues more effectively.
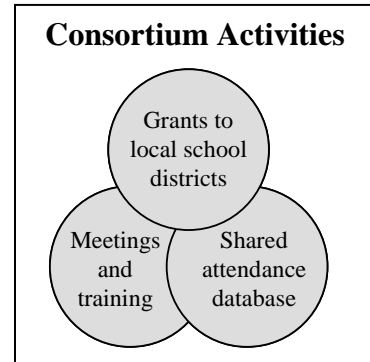
A) Consortium Participation

In October 2001, the JJAC issued a competitive request for proposal (RFP) to local and regional boards of education to apply for membership in the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance. School districts were required to demonstrate their readiness for, and value to, the Consortium by describing steps already taken toward planning and implementing a comprehensive approach to improving school attendance. Nine school districts were selected for participation in the Consortium (see Appendix A for a map of district locations and Appendix B for an overview of the nine districts) with nine statewide agencies concerned with education, child welfare, and juvenile justice participated.

School Districts	Statewide Agencies
Ansonia	Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
Danbury	Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
Hartford	Connecticut Association of Schools
Killingly	Connecticut Consortium for Law & Citizenship Education
New Britain	Connecticut State Department of Education
Norwich	Department of Children and Families
Stonington	Judicial Branch
Winchester	Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee
Windham	Office of Policy and Management

The RFP required that Consortium representatives be: 1) knowledgeable about attendance efforts in their districts; 2) at a high enough level to allow them to distribute Consortium information district-wide; and, 3) available and willing to attend all Consortium meetings. Districts identified at least two Consortium representatives – one with a programming focus and one who would be part of a Technology Group. Job titles of program representatives include: Superintendent of Schools, Curriculum Director, Pupil Services Director, Attendance Officer/Coordinator, Administrative Assistant for Communications and Development, Supervisor of Attendance and Elementary Prevention, Special Projects Director, and School Social Worker. Technology Group representatives have job titles such as Director of Management Information Systems, Director of Technology, Technology Coordinator, and Systems Manager/Coordinator.

Valerie LaMotte, Office of Policy and Management, staffs the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee and oversees all aspects of the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance program. The Consortium contracts with Gary Hoachlander, President of MPR Associates, Inc., to provide expert consulting services, training, and technical assistance on using data to improve attendance. [10] The Consortium hires additional consultants to assist with data analysis, grant monitoring, and program documentation. See Appendix C for a complete list of Consortium representatives and staff from 2001 – 2003.

B) Grants to School Districts

The competitive RFP issued by the JJAC in the fall of 2001 provided for an initial grant of $5,000 to each school district that joined the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance. Districts used these funds to support district participation in Consortium activities and/or for existing school attendance initiatives. The member districts also became eligible to apply for two to four additional years of JJAC funding. The Consortium members jointly planned all Consortium activities and had significant input into funding decisions. In 2002, the JJAC asked the Consortium to recommend how to divide $240,000 in Consortium funds among the member school districts and how districts should be directed to spend those funds. After much deliberation,

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Consortium Grants

Membership Application Grants
- ❑ January 2002 – September 2002
- ❑ $5,000 initial grants to support Consortium participation

Data-Driven Planning Grants – Year I
- ❑ July 2002 – June 2003
- ❑ $27,000 grants to support data collection, analysis, and planning; school building task forces; training

Data-Driven Planning Grants – Year II
- ❑ July 2003 – June 2004
- ❑ $30,000 grants to support data-driven planning initiatives
- ❑ Danbury Public Schools approved for a $30,000 grant to support direct services for 9th graders

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Consortium members agreed to divide grant funding evenly among member districts and require that districts use funds for data-driven planning activities (rather than provision of direct services to students).

The JJAC issued a second RFP in 2002, and the nine eligible school districts applied for $27,000 data-driven planning grants that would run from July 2002 through June 2003. The Consortium met to review the grant applications, and each district received feedback on its

plans from other Consortium members. Districts engaged in the following types of activities under the 2002/2003 Consortium grants:

- Development of attendance policies and procedures;

- Purchase of equipment, hardware, computer tools, and software for attendance data collection and analysis;

- Data clean-up efforts and development of procedures for entering data in an accurate and timely manner;

- Training on how to collect attendance data and generate attendance reports;

- Support of building- or district-level attendance teams responsible for analyzing data, researching attendance issues, and recommending improvement strategies;

- Provision of training for Child Study Teams, Student Assistance Teams, Prevention Teams, and other school personnel on how to address absenteeism;

- Efforts to communicate more effectively with parents and families regarding attendance expectations, policies, and procedures.

Periodic Consortium meetings gave members opportunities to share their progress and discuss the challenges they faced in working toward their planned goals and objectives. Some districts made significant progress during the first year, while others encountered unforeseen obstacles that slowed them down and/or required them to adjust their plans.

As the 2002/2003 grant cycle drew to a close, the Consortium met to determine how to use the $270,000 in JJAC funds available for the 2003/2004 grant cycle. Several districts wanted to shift from data-driven planning to a programming focus, which would allow districts to use funds in support of direct services to students. However, the Consortium ultimately decided that most districts needed another planning year before they would have solid data on which to base programming decisions. The exception was Danbury Public Schools, a district with demonstrated success using data to reduce student absenteeism. Danbury was permitted to apply for program funding by submitting a more detailed proposal that showed how program plans were based on a compelling analysis of attendance data.

In the spring of 2003, the JJAC issued an RFP for a second year of data-driven planning grants. The nine eligible Consortium districts applied for $30,000 in grant funding for the period of July 2003 through June 2004. Proposals from eight of the districts included plans to continue and enhance the data-driven planning work begun in the 2002/2003 grant cycle. Danbury Public Schools submitted a proposal that identified 9th grade absenteeism as a critical issue in the district and proposed to hire an experienced intervention staff member to focus on 9th grade absentees with a goal of reducing 9th grade absenteeism by 30%. As in the prior year, Consortium members provided feedback to each district on their proposed projects.

C) Meetings and Training

Through the Consortium grant program, the JJAC intentionally created a network of local school district and state agency personnel interested in improving school attendance through data. Consortium meetings and training sessions provide Consortium members with regular

opportunities to share information and learn from each other. (Refer to Appendix D for a complete list of Consortium meetings and training events.)

Consortium meetings are held every two to three months and are attended by program and technology representatives of the member school districts, representatives of the member state agencies, and Consortium staff. In the first several meetings, members focused on getting to know one another, learning about data, technology, and school attendance issues from each other and from outside experts, and establishing goals and objectives for the Consortium. Agenda items for more recent meetings have included:

- Discussion of attendance policy and data collection issues;
- District progress reporting on grant activities;
- Data submission guidelines for the Consortium data repository;
- Discussion of Consortium results, including promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned;
- Joint review of member grant applications; and,
- Plans for Consortium meetings, trainings, and other activities.

Consortium training events are facilitated by Gary Hoachlander of MPR Associates, Inc. While Consortium meetings typically are attended only by the Consortium representatives of particular districts or agencies, training events are open to a broader group of personnel within the member organizations. In fact, Consortium school districts are strongly encouraged to send teams of staff and administrators from their local districts to training events. By fall 2003, the Consortium had held five one-day workshops on how to analyze attendance data and use it to drive programming decisions and school improvement efforts.

D) Shared Attendance Database

School districts involved in the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance are required to contribute local data to a Consortium-wide database. Districts submit computer files containing student-level demographic and attendance data to the Consortium's data consultant on an annual or bi-annual basis. When possible, the Consortium uses the same data files and definitions as the State Department of Education to make data submission easier for the districts. Data requirements for the Consortium data repository were initially defined during early Consortium meetings in 2002 and have been refined twice: once by a subcommittee of program and technology representatives in May 2003 and again at Consortium meetings held in October 2003.

The Consortium-wide database provides a pool of attendance data from the nine school districts that is used for data analysis and training purposes. Districts have provided data for the 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 school years, and data collection will continue for at least two more years. As the districts implement policy and programming changes going forward, the Consortium database will provide baseline data that will be useful in assessing the impact of such efforts.

IV) What We're Learning: 2001 - 2003

The Consortium is about half-way through a four-year collaborative process. The focus has shifted as the school districts move from laying the groundwork for data-driven planning to using data to analyze attendance issues and make decisions:

Year 1 2001/2002	• Nine school districts receive $5,000 grants for Consortium participation • Members define Consortium goals and activities • Members learn about school attendance, data, and technology
Year 2 2002/2003	• Districts receive first-year planning grants of $27,000 • Districts focus on awareness-building, data clean-up, policy definition, and procedural changes at the school-building level • Members receive training and contribute to the shared database
Year 3 2003/2004	• Districts receive second-year planning grants of $30,000 • Districts focus on improving collection and use of data • Danbury receives program funding to target 9th grade attendance • Members receive training and contribute to the shared database

This section provides a summary of Consortium results including Consortium-wide attendance data and promising practices for improving school attendance. It also includes an assessment of the Consortium model and plans for future Consortium activities. A description of the activities of the nine Consortium school districts is provided later in this document.

A) Consortium Attendance Data

The purpose of creating a shared data repository is to 1) provide Consortium school districts with the ability to review summary and disaggregated attendance data for their own districts, and 2) provide the Consortium as a whole with a pool of attendance data from the member school districts that can be used for data analysis and training purposes. For some school districts, Consortium-developed attendance reports provided their first opportunity to look at local attendance data in a comprehensive way. Other districts were more sophisticated in terms of the data collection and reporting processes already in place in their districts.

The Consortium includes only nine of Connecticut's 166 local school districts and is not a statistically accurate representation of the state as a whole. However, the student population in the nine member districts represents nearly 12% of Connecticut's public school students. In the absence of statewide data, the Consortium database provides some clues as to what statewide attendance data might reveal.

The Consortium collected attendance data for the 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 school years and generated a series of attendance reports for each school district and for the nine districts combined. Each report presents attendance data using two basic formulas:

- **Average Daily Attendance (ADA)**, which is the number of days in attendance for each student divided by the number of possible days in attendance based on each student's enrollment.

- **Percentage of students attending less than 90% of possible enrolled days.** For students enrolled all year, this figure is the percentage of students missing 18 or more days of school in a year (nearly a month of school).

When calculating ADA, the Consortium did not differentiate between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. Doing so would have been prohibitively complex due to differences in how local districts define excused absence. More importantly, the Consortium's premise is that students must attend school to learn and succeed, so the key question is whether or not the student is in an instructional environment on a given day. For example, students assigned to in-school suspension are counted as being present while out-of-school suspension days are absences. The percentage of students attending less than 90% of possible school days shows the extent to which students are exhibiting extreme levels of absenteeism. In some cases, a relatively small number of students can have a significant impact on ADA.

Consortium reports present attendance data for the student population as a whole, as well as disaggregating the student population by:

- Level of schooling (elementary, middle, and high school);
- Student characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, special education, bilingual/ESL, and low income); and,
- Grade level (kindergarten through grade 12).

The reports further disaggregate the data by student characteristics within each level of schooling. An analysis of Consortium-wide attendance data reveals some disconcerting statistics and trends. Data show that ADA for students in the nine Consortium school districts was 92.7% during the 2001/2002 school year and 92.5% in the 2002/2003 school year. While an ADA of over 92% may seem acceptable, this means that, on average, students missed about 13 days – or two and a half weeks – of school each year.

By disaggregating attendance data, it quickly becomes evident that there are large groups of students missing considerably more than 13 days of school. For example, attendance rates differ by *level of schooling*. Consortium-wide attendance is 94.1% for elementary students, 92.8% for middle school students, and only 88.4% for high school students. In other words, high school students miss about four weeks of school. Disaggregating data by *student characteristics* shows that certain student populations – such as minority, special education, bilingual/ESL, and low income students – often exhibit high rates of absenteeism. Again, these effects tend to be magnified in the upper grades.

> Consortium-wide attendance data shows that 45% of ninth graders missed **nearly a month** of school last year.

Even a cursory review of attendance data by *grade level* reveals consistent patterns of attendance. Attendance rates are somewhat lower for kindergarten students and are at their highest levels during grades 1-6. Absenteeism increases in the seventh and eighth grades and then spikes up dramatically in the ninth grade. Absenteeism settles in at just over 30% for grades 10-12. Interestingly, the total number of students decreases by nearly 30% between grades 9 and 10, which begs the question of whether ninth graders with habits of poor attendance simply drop out of school.

Several Consortium school districts have conducted additional analysis to disaggregate their student attendance data further and begin to identify root causes of absenteeism. Nearly all

districts run reports that identify students with *excessive absences*, and some look for similarities among those students to identify systemic problems. Some districts track *attendance by month* to determine the extent of absenteeism at the start of the school year, during the holiday season, and in the last month of school. Killingly Public Schools analyzed *attendance by day of the week* and found that absenteeism was highest on Fridays. Based on this data, the Board of Education decided to schedule staff professional days on Fridays rather than on Wednesdays when attendance was highest.

These examples show that analysis of attendance data may reveal problems that are not evident simply by tracking district ADA or focusing on individual students with high absenteeism. By disaggregating attendance data and conducting qualitative analyses, Consortium districts are making progress in identify underlying causes of student absenteeism. However, much work remains before the Consortium will have hard evidence linking specific interventions with rates of attendance.

B) Promising Practices for Improving Attendance

Each of the Consortium school districts has taken a unique approach to improving attendance through data, yet a comparison of these approaches reveals common themes and challenges.
An overarching theme is that this type of effort cannot be done in a vacuum; it is not enough simply to implement new technologies or reporting tools. Rather, data-driven planning requires that people *learn how* to use data and be *motivated* to do so. Districts should ensure that the right people have access to good data, and that they have the time – and the skills – needed to monitor, analyze and interpret attendance data on a regular basis.

By documenting the efforts of member school districts, the Consortium identified four components of an effective attendance improvement effort: make attendance a priority; establish effective attendance policy; collect data and monitor attendance; and use data for program planning. This section of the report provides a brief overview of each component. A more detailed list of the Consortium's promising practices and lessons learned is included in Section VII of this document.

Improving School Attendance

1) Make Attendance a Priority
2) Establish Effective Attendance Policy
3) Collect Data and Monitor Attendance
4) Use Data for Program Planning
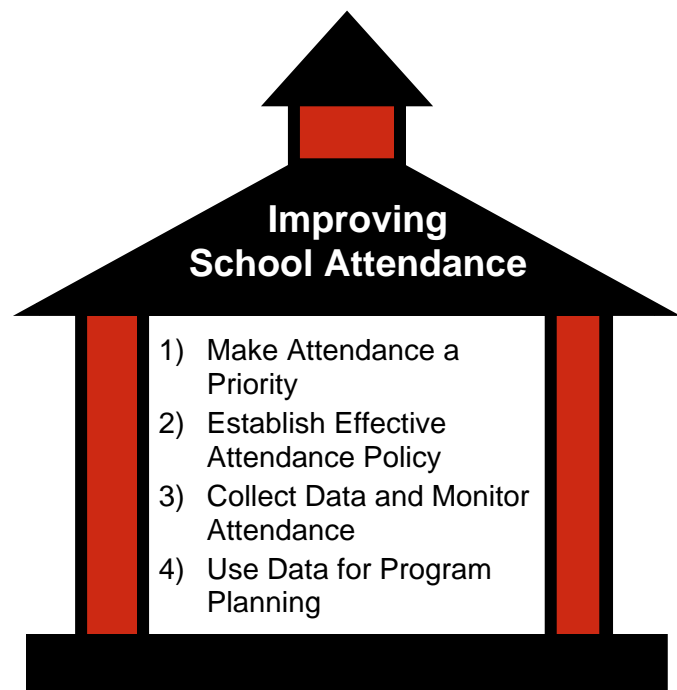
1) Make Attendance a Priority

Consortium school districts have learned that paying attention to attendance works. Student attendance tends to improve when teachers, administrators, and other staff members monitor attendance regularly and respond immediately and consistently when students are absent. However, tight resources and competing priorities often make it difficult for administrators and staff to focus on attendance and to maintain that focus over time. Keeping attendance "on the front burner" requires leadership commitment, systems of accountability at all levels, and ongoing efforts to emphasize the importance of regular school attendance in school buildings, in the home, and in the community:

Administrative Leadership – The most effective attendance improvement efforts identify attendance as a district priority and are supported by the superintendent. Building administrators and staff monitor attendance and view absenteeism as a "red flag" issue. Attendance goals and policies are evident in key documents, and attendance issues are on the agenda at administrative meetings.

Students and Faculty – A system of rewards and consequences encourages regular school attendance for both students and teachers. Attendance results are publicized to increase awareness and provide positive feedback. Faculty members understand the attendance policy and are involved in implementing attendance procedures. Faculty members act as role models for good attendance and recognize that their own attendance has an impact on student attendance.[11]

Family Involvement – Schools communicate regularly with families regarding attendance policy and expectations for student attendance. Families are contacted immediately and consistently when students are absent. School staff views absenteeism as an opportunity to identify and address underlying issues. Schools are sensitive to cultural and language differences when communicating with families.

Community Awareness – Schools collaborate with healthcare providers, police, community organizations and social service agencies to identify and address the causes of absenteeism. Community awareness initiatives involve local businesses, civic organizations, and community agencies in attendance improvement initiatives, as well as local media to educate and influence the community on attendance issues.

2) Establish Effective Attendance Policies

School districts that have successfully improved student attendance have learned that it is critical to put in place a sound attendance policy and enforce it consistently throughout the district. While this may sound straightforward, it can be surprisingly difficult to do. For example, some Consortium districts discovered that their attendance policies were inconsistent from one level of schooling to another, such as when students progress from a middle school with a lenient attendance policy to a high school with a very strict policy. Other districts discovered that attendance policies were being interpreted differently and/or enforced inconsistently among – and even within – school buildings.

> "At our school, you get suspended if you are absent too many times. That makes no sense to me."
>
> *– Connecticut High School Student*

Consortium districts have emphasized that attendance policies should provide help and support to students and their families rather than being punitive in nature. At the elementary level, attendance policy and intervention tends to target the family, while this emphasis shifts to working directly with students at the middle and high school levels. Many high schools tie attendance to course credit and/or graduation requirements; however, it is important to provide students with opportunities to "buy back" absences under such policies. Districts should also ensure that disciplinary policies do not inadvertently contribute to absenteeism (e.g., a student who is running late may skip school entirely to avoid getting a detention for being tardy).

When implementing new attendance policies and procedures, it is important to plan for and manage the change process. Districts must commit the necessary resources to communicate changes and provide staff training and support, as well as to handle potential increases in workload for data entry staff, administrators, social workers, etc. Consortium districts found it extremely helpful to involve the people who will implement the new policy – teachers, front office staff, nurses, etc. – in policy design and implementation planning. Plans should take into account the time and effort that is needed to educate students and their families on new policies and levels of enforcement.

3) Collect Data and Monitor Attendance

Attendance policy cannot be enforced effectively without accurate, timely attendance data. Data must be available to the people who need it and can act on it, and it must be reliable so they can make appropriate decisions regarding intervention. Attendance monitoring and intervention is most effective when there are mechanisms in place for the appropriate administrators and staff to review, discuss, and act on attendance data on a regular basis.

Data collection can be a particular challenge for school districts. Many Consortium districts spent considerable time reviewing and cleaning up student data, as well as documenting data collection procedures and coding standards. Staff must be trained to properly collect and enter attendance data in accordance with district policy, and the data entry process must be monitored for quality and consistency.

Effective attendance monitoring and intervention involves many people – teachers, nurses, administrators, social workers, guidance counselors, attendance officers, front office staff – and results in a better understanding of attendance issues and lots of contact with families. Schools should track *why* students are absent, develop

> "Our district attendance team identified siblings with similar patterns of absenteeism so we could coordinate efforts to help these families get their kids to school."
> – *Eileen Ehman, Ansonia Public Schools*

procedures to ensure early intervention when a student's attendance declines, be persistent in removing barriers to attendance, and provide positive feedback to students and families when attendance improves. In addition to tracking numbers of absences, staff members need to talk to students to learn the real reasons why they miss school.

Attendance teams provide a venue for school administrators and staff to meet regularly to discuss attendance issues. In addition to planning interventions for frequently absent

students, team meetings provide opportunities to discuss attendance issues more broadly and identify patterns or trends in attendance data. District-wide attendance teams are useful in identifying family patterns and community-based challenges. Some Consortium districts operate community-wide attendance review committees to encourage collaboration among community agencies – schools, police, state agencies, and community organizations – to improve student attendance.

4) Use Data for Program Planning

With increasing emphasis on measurement and accountability at both the federal, state and local levels, many school districts are investing in data repositories and analytical tools designed to help them understand how programming and practices impact an array of student outcomes. This requires that administrators and staff learn how to use these new technology tools and how to analyze and interpret data. Data can be misleading if used incorrectly, and it is important for administrators and staff to receive effective training and support as they begin to build their technical and analytical skills.

> "Although district attendance figures may seem acceptable, disaggregation of the data often reveals large numbers of students who miss literally weeks of school time each year."
>
> – *Gary Hoachlander, MPR Associates*

Consortium districts have spent significant time and effort designing useful attendance reports and disaggregating attendance data (e.g., by level of schooling, by school building, by student characteristic, by time period). Some district teams are exploring methods for using more advanced analytical techniques such as hypothesis testing and data mining. While quantitative data analysis helps identify interesting patterns and relationships, it is important to view such results as points-of-entry for further analysis. Districts must supplement quantitative analysis with *qualitative* analysis – by talking to students, faculty, parents, and staff – to understand what the data means. Once root causes of absenteeism are identified, districts can design effective programs that target particular grades or transition points; provide new services (e.g., on-site child care for teen parents); enable students to make up assignments; and improve school climate and school connectedness.

In summary, the JJAC looks to the Consortium to provide insight into how schools can contribute to the healthy development of young people and help prevent problem behaviors by ensuring that students are in school. Poor attendance is often a symptom of underlying problems, and

> "Students will come to school when they want to be there."
>
> – *Mike McKee, Stonington*

for some students the school environment itself prevents them from attending school. Truant students may be victims of bullying, frustrated by academic difficulties, afraid of particular teachers, or unable to form friendships and get involved in activities that make school an appealing place to be. Through attendance monitoring and early intervention, school personnel can identify and reach out to these students. The end goal is "to convince students that school is where they should be, all day every day, and that it is a place where they can succeed." [12]

C) Assessing the Consortium Model

The JJAC designed the Consortium as a new model for helping school districts make sustainable, systemic changes in how they address attendance issues. By creating a network of local district and state representatives to collaborate in this effort, the JJAC hopes to increase the impact of the grant program beyond what could be achieved simply by making attendance improvement grants to individual school districts.

An informal assessment of the Consortium model was conducted in 2003 to determine how members may have benefited from their participation in the Consortium and to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement. Consortium staff collected information about the Consortium by interviewing Consortium members; reviewing grant proposals, progress reports, and other documentation; and participating in Consortium meetings and training sessions. In general, most school districts have found their participation in the Consortium to be beneficial in some way, although some districts clearly benefited more than others.

1) Consortium Benefits

Consortium benefits fall into two broad categories: a) benefits to individual Consortium members, and b) benefits to the school districts they represent. Individuals benefit primarily from networking and professional development opportunities offered by the Consortium. A major benefit to school districts is that their involvement in the grant program often results in greater awareness of the importance of attendance and technology issues district-wide.

Networking and professional development: Most school district personnel said that they benefited from the informal networking opportunities and formal training events available to them as Consortium members. Consortium members believed the training programs were useful to them as individuals and their school-district attendance teams. People liked hearing from recognized experts and receiving feedback on their plans and challenges. Training workshops gave school personnel opportunities to share ideas with colleagues from other districts, as well as time to work with their local teams on local attendance issues.

Some Consortium members said their involvement motivated them to stay focused on local attendance efforts and to try new approaches. Representatives of smaller and/or less sophisticated districts – whether from an

> "After attending Consortium training, our team returned to the district invigorated and ready for action."
> – *Jan Huber, Killingly Public Schools*

attendance or a technology perspective – learned from others' experiences and were able to avoid repeating some of their mistakes. By being involved in programming discussions, technology representatives increased their understanding of school attendance issues and felt better prepared to translate attendance policy into coding rules.

There are several examples of Consortium members contacting their counterparts in other districts to discuss issues and ideas outside of Consortium meetings. Interactions with people from districts of different types and sizes exposed members to new perspectives and challenged some of their assumptions about how to improve attendance. His experience with the Consortium motivated one member to visit other districts when

planning a new initiative. "Without the Consortium, I never would have thought about asking other districts what they do," he said.

Awareness of attendance issues: School district involvement in the Consortium increased the visibility of school attendance as an important district issue. The involvement of state-level representatives sent a message to administrative leaders that the state has a vested interested in improving school attendance. This visibility lent credibility to local attendance improvement efforts.

The Consortium grant forced schools to really look at their attendance data – some for the first time. In some cases people were surprised at the magnitude of the problem. In many districts, attendance is seen as a priority and has become part of the ongoing dialogue among staff and administrators. Staff members are more proactive about assessing the validity of excuses, and administrators are beginning to understand what it takes to make a difference in improving attendance: good policy, accurate data, and consistent follow-through.

Value of data and technology: The Consortium grant program has helped raise awareness in school districts of the importance of data and technology. Consortium participation has motivated some districts to clean up their data, as well as to move forward more quickly on technology initiatives and broaden the scope of what they were already doing. As a result, Consortium districts feel better prepared to handle increasingly stringent state and federal reporting requirements.

This visibility with respect to technology has helped administrative leaders recognize the importance of data accuracy and the need to correct procedural inconsistencies and data integrity issues. In general, Consortium participation has increased districts' appreciation for the value of data: how to collect it, what to collect, what analyses are needed, other data elements that might be helpful, and ideas for looking at data in different ways.

2) Consortium Challenges

A number of challenges and opportunities for improvement have emerged and are described below. Some issues were raised by only one school district, while others were shared by many. Consortium members and staff made mid-course adjustments to address some issues. Others cannot be addressed in the current grant program (e.g., those that affect selection of Consortium districts/members) but will inform future initiatives.

Getting the right people involved: An important lesson is that it is imperative for Consortium representatives to be at a high enough level in their own organizations so they can distribute Consortium information broadly and influence leaders on attendance-related matters. It is also helpful if districts can involve two program representatives – one from the central office and one school-based administrator.

Several Consortium training workshops targeted school-building level attendance teams, yet it has been difficult for some districts to get people to attend. In some instances, school building personnel planned to participate but could not due to scheduling or communication problems. In a few cases, Consortium members questioned the value of the training and were hesitant to recommend it to their colleagues. Some Consortium representatives mentioned that travel to statewide training was problematic.

Finally, the Consortium has experienced turnover among its membership, which is disruptive but not surprising. A significant number of technology representatives changed during the project, which resulted in delayed data submissions and an ongoing need to get new representatives "up to speed" on the Consortium and its activities.

Usefulness of meetings: Feedback from Consortium members indicates that some people were frustrated by the lack of structure associated with early Consortium meetings. They wanted more direction on what the Consortium was trying to accomplish and a better process for determining what data was required for the Consortium database. Some people would have preferred that initial meetings be facilitated more actively with the Consortium moving into more a collaborative approach over time.

A few people recommended that Consortium meetings be less formal and give members more opportunities to interact, e.g., having similar districts form small groups and talk about a particular subject. Opinions differed on whether the Consortium was meeting too often or not often enough and depended, of course, on how valuable people found the meetings. Ideas for addressing this issue included clarifying the purpose of each meeting, making all meetings more focused, and establishing subcommittees so smaller groups of people could focus on specific subjects.

Difficulties with data collection: Several members were frustrated with difficulties in the process for submitting local data to the Consortium-wide database. People felt that requirements were not defined in enough detail up front, and that data inconsistency and errors in Consortium-wide reports reduced the effectiveness of training workshops. While some district representatives thought the Consortium data was useful when done correctly, others questioned the value of comparing attendance data across districts and preferred to focus their energies on analyzing and interpreting their own data.

Value of participation: While most Consortium members believe their participation has been a valuable experience, not everyone agrees. Some technology representatives found it difficult for data people to help each other because districts run different systems. Furthermore, districts with real-time databases do not find it useful to contribute data to the Consortium-wide database and receive reports back weeks or months later.

Some districts believe they are beyond the level of discussion occurring in the Consortium and are not learning anything new about how to handle attendance problems. Districts that have solid information systems in place were frustrated by the requirement that grant funding be used for data-driven planning activities instead of attendance programming. They recommend that the Consortium find ways to leverage the expertise of more advanced districts to help the other districts or structure the Consortium such that all districts are similar in terms of their capabilities and sophistication.

D) Conclusion

The Consortium is about halfway into a four-year collaborative process. Consortium school districts have received $30,000 grants for the 2003/2004 school year and are implementing plans to modify attendance policies, build technical capabilities, establish data-focused attendance teams, and train school staff on data collection procedures and data analysis. By

the end of 2003/2004, school districts should be able to demonstrate progress in their ability to use attendance data for program planning.

It is expected that several Consortium districts will apply for program funding for the 2004/2005 school year. The Consortium-wide database will provide baseline data that can be used to compare district data from year to year as policy and program changes are introduced. Members hope to gather evidence on how to improve attendance and use this evidence to inform policy and planning efforts in other Connecticut school districts and at the State Department of Education.

The Consortium will continue to provide members with training and technical assistance on attendance data analysis and data-driven planning. Consortium results and information will be disseminated through a statewide school attendance conference; articles will be submitted for publication to education journals; and a toolkit on using attendance data for school improvement will be developed. Consortium products and information will be published on the JJAC web site at http://www.opm.state.ct.us/pdpd1/grants/JJAC/JJACHome.htm.

> ## Year 4: 2004-2005
> ❑ More districts will apply for program funding in the 2004/2005 grant cycle.
> ❑ Districts will use data to plan and assess programming.
> ❑ The Consortium will collect and analyze attendance data for 2003/2004.
> ❑ The Consortium will continue statewide dissemination of results and products.
> ❑ The JJAC will continue to assess the Consortium's effectiveness.

Finally, the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee and the Office of Policy and Management will continue support of this project and assess the Consortium's effectiveness in helping school districts implement data-driven planning and improve student attendance. Based on this assessment, the JJAC and OPM may explore opportunities to expand Consortium membership to other Connecticut school districts and/or apply a similar model to other JJAC grant programs.

V)   School District Activities

This section of the report summarizes the work of the nine member school districts during the first two years of the Consortium. Each district summary provides:

- A brief description of the town/city and school district;

- Background information on the district's school attendance and technology activities prior to joining the Consortium;

- A description of district-level activities funded through the Consortium through the 2002/2003 school year;

- Summary attendance data for the district, and;

- Plans for the district's attendance initiative in the 2003/2004 school year.

Notes on community and school district data:

Demographic data contained in the following school district summaries is based on U.S. Census data for 2000; Strategic School Profiles for 2002/2003 as published by the Connecticut State Department of Education; and data provided to the Consortium by the nine member school districts.

The State Department of Education assigns each Connecticut school district to an *Educational Reference Group (ERG)*, which is a classification of districts whose students' families are similar in education, income, occupation, and need, and that have roughly similar enrollment. Districts are classified in ERGs A through I, with ERG I being the most needy. The lowest designation for non-urban towns is ERG H. Seven of the nine Consortium districts are assigned to the two lowest ERGs (H and I).

The State Department of Education designates some Connecticut school districts as *Priority School Districts (PSDs)* or *Transitional School Districts (TSDs).* Priority School Districts are those identified as having the greatest need to improve the quality of education available to their students. Transitional School Districts are those that are not Priority School Districts, but that exhibit some of the same educational and economic needs as PSDs. A majority of the Consortium districts are designated as PSDs or TSDs.

A) Ansonia Public Schools

Ansonia is a small industrial city in southwestern Connecticut with a population of 18,554. The city's per capita income of $20,504 is significantly below the statewide per capita income of $28,766, and 6.2% of residents live below the poverty line. Of those residents living in poverty, 12.3% are under age 18.

Ansonia Public Schools serves 2,585 students in four school buildings:

- Prendergast School – pre-k – 2nd grade
- Mead School – grades 3-5
- Ansonia Middle School – grades 6-8
- Ansonia High School – grades 9-12

Although the school district has recently enjoyed a higher level of budgetary support from the local community, Ansonia's per pupil expenditure of $7,913 remains one of the lowest in the state (163rd out of 166 districts). Ansonia is in ERG H and was identified as a Transitional School District in 2004. Approximately 36% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals and 33.5% are minorities. The cumulative four-year dropout rate is 16.7% compared to a statewide rate of 10.8%. Of those who graduate from high school, about 79% pursue higher education and 20% are employed or join the military.

In 1996, the City of Ansonia approved an ambitious school building/re-building plan. Over the next five years, a new high school was built and three school buildings were renovated and/or expanded to provide state-of-the-art computer labs, media centers, gymnasiums, and cafeterias, as well as more classrooms to reduce class size. The district's technical infrastructure was upgraded to provide computers in all classrooms, T-1 lines in the middle and high schools, a wide area network linking the four school buildings and the central office, and a new student database system. The Board of Education approved a new, full-time position of Information Systems Project Manager to implement and support new technologies.

School Attendance Activities

Prior to joining the Consortium, Ansonia's school attendance activities focused primarily on truancy tracking, which was the responsibility of school principals and a part-time Attendance Officer. The Attendance Officer also served as the security officer at the high school and was available five hours per week to verify residency and visit homes of students with unexcused absences. School staff made phone calls and sent letters to the homes of truant students to notify families of district policy and potential consequences for continued truant behavior.

Ansonia has two separate policies that address student attendance – one for students in grades K-8 and another for the high school (grades 9-12). The high school policy is very strict, and students who miss too many classes receive failing grades. Despite strict attendance policies and efforts to improve attendance, data show that absenteeism is a problem in the district. During the 1999/2000 school year, at least 35% of Ansonia's students – and 48% of middle school students – were absent 10 or more days.

In 2000, Ansonia recognized the need to take a more comprehensive approach to improving student attendance. The district applied for and received a $25,000 grant from the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee to increase school attendance with a focus on the early grades. Ansonia used this grant to hire an Attendance Social Worker for grades K-5 to work closely with students who had missed more than 20 days of school in the prior year. Through direct counseling of students, parent conferences, letters, home visits, and reward programs, the social worker helped many students improve their attendance significantly. Grant funds also supported police truancy sweeps and efforts to educate parents on the importance of regular school attendance. Ansonia received a continuation grant of $37,500 from the JJAC in 2001/2002, and as of the 2002/2003 school year, the Attendance Social Worker position at Prendergast Elementary School became a budgeted position.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

Ansonia's goal in joining the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance was to learn how to analyze data and use data-driven decision-making to develop recommendations for improving attendance. Specific activities to date have focused on improving the data collection process, tightening attendance policies at the elementary and middle school levels, and establishing a district-wide attendance team. Ansonia participated fully in Consortium activities by attending meetings, sending district teams to training sessions, and submitting required data.

To improve data collection, Ansonia purchased computer workstations for the intermediate and elementary schools to provide teachers with the technology they needed to record daily attendance. All teachers were trained to take daily attendance using the new student database system, with high school teachers learning how to take period attendance also. The grant paid for a portion of an attendance clerk who collected, recorded, and reported on attendance data at the elementary schools.

The Ansonia Board of Education tightened attendance policy, particularly for grades K-8. Because attendance policy was very strict at the high school level relative to the lower grades, many 9th graders had difficulty adjusting to the high school and understanding the consequences of truant behavior. Ansonia's efforts to implement a more uniform policy highlighted existing attendance problems, particularly at the middle school. For example, under the new guidelines a principal had to schedule 60 parent meetings in a single month to discuss attendance issues. While this made the new attendance policy difficult to implement, it is expected that the added workload will ease over time as students and their families grow more aware of the new policies.

The district established an attendance team comprised of representatives of Ansonia's newly formed Building Leadership Teams. The attendance team includes the following individuals:

- High school – assistant principal and guidance counselor;
- Middle school – guidance counselor and social worker;
- Elementary schools – assisting principal and social workers;
- Central office – assistant superintendent and administrative assistant (who is also Ansonia's program representative to the Consortium).

The attendance team met several times during the 2002/2003 school year and attended two Consortium training sessions. The team began to analyze Ansonia's attendance data by reviewing lists of students with high absenteeism, looking for family patterns, and discussing potential interventions. They also discussed issues regarding attendance policy and procedures, including difficulties in implementing the policy consistently across schools. The district began to train school secretaries to run monthly attendance reports to support the team's efforts, and more training is planned for next year.

Next Steps

Ansonia's plans going forward are to continue and expand the efforts of the district-wide attendance team and the Building Leadership Teams in analyzing and acting on attendance data; work with administrators, parents and the community to promote the importance of attendance; and develop programmatic recommendations for improving attendance based on data.

Although committed to improving attendance, Ansonia has had difficulty maintaining momentum without designated staff to support the initiative. In 2003/2004, the district hired a database professional who will submit data to the Consortium, run attendance reports for the attendance and building leadership teams, and provide assistance to those teams in analyzing the data. Ansonia's decision to join the state-wide Tetradata Consortium should provide additional data analysis and reporting capabilities for the teams to explore. The attendance team will meet monthly and is expected to provide programmatic recommendations for improving attendance by the end of 2003/2004. It will also address attendance policy and procedural issues that arise. Finally, attendance team members will step up efforts to promote attendance widely by sharing information at "Back to School" nights and teacher workshops, and by increasing efforts to partner effectively with local community centers.

B) Danbury Public Schools

The City of Danbury is located in western Connecticut and has a population 74,848. It is Connecticut's seventh largest city and is one of the fastest-growing in the state due to its lower relative real estate prices. Danbury has a railroad station that provides commuter access to New York City. Its per capita income of $24,500 is below the state average of $28,766, and about 8% of the population lives below the poverty line. Of those living in poverty, 8.7% are under age 18.

The Danbury Public School District serves 10,763 students in 17 school buildings:
- Thirteen elementary schools serving 5,252 students
- Three middle schools serving 2,410 students
- One high school – the largest in Connecticut – serving 3,100 students

Danbury Public Schools is assigned to ERG H and is considered a Priority School District. Per pupil spending in the district is $9,007, which is slightly below the statewide average of $9,663. Over 45% of students are minorities – with large numbers of African American, Asian, Latino, and Portuguese students – and over 38% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The cumulative four-year drop-out rate is 14.5% compared to the statewide average of 10.8%. Of those who graduate from high school, 85.8% pursue higher education and 13.6% are employed or join the military.

School Attendance Activities

In 1999, Danbury Public Schools was one of three school districts in the state to receive a large, three-year grant from the Office of Policy and Management through the legislated Truancy Prevention Demonstration program. Danbury's STRIVE (Stop Truancy Risk, Increase Valuable Education) program under this grant program addressed school attendance issues in a comprehensive fashion through activities such as policy revision and enforcement, early identification of students with poor attendance patterns, and provision of creative, culturally sensitive services designed to prevent truancy in at-risk students. Danbury also took a leadership role on the issue of truancy at the state level through its participation in the Governor's Truancy Task Force.

Danbury Public School District has in place clearly-defined policies and procedures on school attendance and truancy which are implemented and enforced in every school building. Teachers take attendance each morning and secretaries enter the data into the Star Base student information system, updating it as necessary throughout the school day. Letters are sent home each time a student has an unexcused absence, and teachers contact parents by phone to follow up on questionable absences. An escalating series of interventions occurs as students accumulate unexcused absences, which include involvement by pupil services staff, additional letters and phone calls home, parental meetings and home visits, internal referrals to child study teams or student assistance teams, and, ultimately, referral to court or the Department of Children and Families.

Danbury has implemented a variety of truancy prevention initiatives to foster home/school communications and community-wide involvement with a goal of identifying and addressing unmet student needs. Such efforts include media campaigns to promote regular school attendance; translation of attendance letters into Spanish and Portuguese; truancy sweeps and

mentoring programs by local police officers; collaboration with local physicians to advise school nurses and parents on handling conditions that commonly result in absences (e.g., asthma, lice); in-school suspension for truant students at the middle and high schools; and a variety of programs targeting "at risk" student populations such as rewards for improved attendance, mentoring programs, parent education programs in multiple languages, after school activities, and summer programs for students transitioning between schools. Community collaboration is central to Danbury's approach, and the district facilitates a local Truancy Task Force of community agencies that meets twice yearly to identify and act on issues that contribute to high absenteeism.

By rigorously implementing a host of attendance-related activities, Danbury has seen a significant reduction in absenteeism (2.6%) in its middle and high schools in recent years. The district has learned that the most effective way to improve student attendance is to enforce school attendance policy and procedures in a timely and consistent manner. Such enforcement enables schools to quickly identify students who are developing poor attendance habits and to uncover and address underlying student or family problems. The district's use of data and technology, as well as the efforts of a technology support staff member, enables school administrators and staff to be proactive in addressing attendance by providing them with timely and accurate attendance data on a regular basis. A technology staff member ensures that attendance data is collected accurately, runs monthly reports listing students with high absenteeism, and disaggregates district-wide attendance data to identify patterns of attendance for specific groups of students. Such efforts have promoted new conversations and helped to facilitate communications among school personnel concerned with student attendance.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

Due to its close collaboration with OPM on prior truancy prevention and school attendance initiatives, Danbury Public Schools was involved in designing the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance grant program, including the collaborative nature of the program and its emphasis on data-driven program planning. In terms of its own involvement in the Consortium, Danbury's focus was on promoting regular school attendance through the use of technology and data collection, so grant funding was used to enhance the district's attendance technology initiative already underway. The goal was to provide additional training to building-level personnel to decrease reliance on the central office for attendance reporting and data analysis. The district also wanted to expand its ability to analyze district-wide data and identify links between attendance and achievement.

The technology staff member funded by the grant provided an important link between pupil services and the information technology department. Her role was to ensure that school staff members were trained on how to collect and enter attendance data properly and understood the importance of doing so in a timely manner. She provided attendance reports to schools on a monthly basis to support the efforts of school-based attendance teams, child study teams, and student assistance teams. She trained school staff on how to run and analyze their own reports. A portion of grant funding was also spent to translate attendance letters into three languages and to purchase needed computer hardware to support attendance data collection and analysis.

By the end of the 2002/2003 school year, school building administrators and attendance teams were monitoring attendance regularly and school staff had been trained on relevant data collection and attendance intervention procedures. With data and technology systems in place and attendance procedures operational, Danbury's Consortium representatives felt ready to take the next step and develop a specific, targeted intervention program based on analysis of attendance data. The Consortium members agreed that Danbury was ready to move out of the infrastructure-building phase and apply for program funds for the 2003/2004 Consortium grant cycle. Danbury's approach would become a model program for other districts and would be "tested" during the 2003/2004 school year to determine its effectiveness. To apply for program funding, Danbury was required to submit a grant application that clearly demonstrated how the proposed program would meet specific student needs based on analysis of attendance data.

Danbury's proposed project for 2003/2004 was focused on improving attendance for a targeted pool of new 9th graders who had poor attendance during the 8th grade. An analysis of Danbury's 2002/2003 data showed that 9th grade absenteeism was the highest district-wide, and was more than twice the rate of 8th grade absenteeism. Specifically, Danbury's goal was to reduce 9th grade absenteeism from 9.75% to 7% in the 2003/2004 school year. The district's approach to addressing 9th grade absenteeism was to hire a two-day per week attendance intervention staff member to focus on two groups of students: 1) students identified as having high absenteeism in the 8th grade, and 2) 9th grade students with newly developed patterns of high absenteeism upon entering high school. Specific responsibilities of this staff person were to:

- Collect data on 8th grade students with high absenteeism;
- Send letters to parents of those 8th graders during the summer and make pre-high school home visits to discuss attendance;
- Monitor and meet with the targeted students – including newly identified absentees – during the school year; and
- Work with families, community agencies, and school staff to help the targeted students develop motivation to attend school regularly and receive needed services and support.

Next Steps

Moving forward, Danbury will continue to test its approach to addressing 9th grade absenteeism and assess its potential as a replicable model for other school districts. The attendance intervention staff member will share with the Consortium the tools and strategies used to target students and provide needed interventions. Danbury will continue to participate fully in Consortium activities by submitting required data, attending Consortium meetings and training sessions, and lending its leadership and support as the Consortium develops state policy recommendations with respect to school attendance.

C) Hartford Public Schools

Hartford is the capital of the State of Connecticut and is its third largest city. Hartford is located on the Connecticut River near the center of the state and has a population of 121,578. It is home to several large corporations and insurance companies, as well as numerous museums, historical attractions, and performing arts organizations. Hartford is one of the poorest and most troubled medium-sized cities in the nation. Its per capita income of $13,428 is far below the state average of $28,766, and over 30% of the population lives in poverty. Of those living in poverty, 41% are under age 18, giving Hartford the second highest urban child poverty rate in the nation for cities with over 100,000 residents. [13]

The Hartford Public School District serves 28,137 students in 35 school buildings:
- Twenty-six elementary schools serving 18,117 students
- Four middle schools serving 4,076 students
- Three high schools serving 5,944 students

There are also a number of magnet, alternative, and technical schools and programs available to Hartford students. Hartford Public Schools is assigned to ERG I and is considered a Priority School District. Per pupil spending in the district is $12,608, which substantially exceeds the statewide average of $9,663, yet its students historically score poorly on state mastery exams. Over 95% of students are minorities – with large numbers of African American and Latino students – and over 95% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The cumulative four-year drop-out rate is 29.7%. Of those who graduate from high school, 80% pursue higher education and 12% are employed or join the military.

Because of the challenges facing its students, Hartford Public Schools has in place an array of strategies and programs to assist students with their social, emotional and physical needs. Family Resource Aides in each school provide outreach to families, and several schools have Family Resource Centers or Student Assistance Centers that provide students with on-site services or referrals to community-based agencies. School-based clinics provide health care, mental health, and dental services with a focus on problem prevention. The district also collaborates with numerous local agencies – such as the police department, state agencies, and community-based organizations – to provide prevention and intervention services.

School Attendance Activities

Hartford Public Schools had a central truancy office in place prior to shifting its focus to improving school attendance. In 1998, Hartford was selected as one of three districts to participate in a Truancy Prevention Demonstration project funded through state and federal monies and managed by the Office of Policy and Management. This demonstration project provided significant funding over three years to pilot test comprehensive truancy prevention programs. Hartford's demonstration project focused on improving attendance of chronic truants at the elementary level through efforts including policy revision, direct services to students, education of parents and the public, and collaboration with law enforcement and other community agencies.

Using Truancy Prevention Demonstration grant funds, Hartford established a central attendance office, developed detailed attendance policies and procedures, and put in place the

staff needed to implement and enforce those policies in a large district. Hartford's comprehensive approach to school attendance includes:

- A uniform, consistent Attendance Plan and Procedures to address student attendance and truancy in grades K-12;

- A central attendance office responsible for policy development and implementation of the attendance plan and procedures;

- In-school prevention and intervention strategies; and,

- Collaboration with the police, state agencies, and community-based organizations.

The district's Attendance Plan and Procedures document clearly outlines the roles of school building and central office personnel in monitoring student attendance and implementing a sequence of interventions for students with unexplained absences. Initial interventions are handled by classroom teachers, school secretaries, Family Resource Aides and other student support personnel. Unresolved attendance issues are escalated to the central attendance office and assigned to an attendance worker. Eleven full-time and three part-time attendance outreach workers contact students and families and work with them to address attendance issues. Attendance office staff members meet with prevention teams, student assistance teams, and school-based attendance committees to review lists of habitual truants and explore strategies for addressing absenteeism. The central attendance office is also responsible for residency verification and for handling all Family With Service Needs, Youth In Crisis, and Juvenile Court referrals.

In addition to formal attendance policy and interventions, Hartford has in place a number of programs that encourage attendance either directly or indirectly. For example, families of students with perfect attendance have a chance to win a free car donated by a local business. Other examples include On Time Clubs that encourage 9th graders to attend school and arrive on time; 21st Century Learning Center programs that provide students with after school activities and homework help; Save Our Seniors (SOS) and Save Our Ninth Graders (SONG) programs that allow students to buy back time missed from school; district-wide mentoring initiatives facilitated by the guidance department; and the Friends Club, a program for students in grades K-3 who show early signs of school adjustment problems.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

In joining the Consortium, Hartford sought the opportunity to support the work of the central attendance office by improving the accuracy and timeliness of attendance data across the district. A district-wide student information system (SASI) was implemented in 1999, yet there was no consistency across (or in some cases, within) school buildings in how or when attendance data was collected and entered into the SASI system.

Hartford's initial approach to addressing the problem of inaccurate attendance data was to put computers in each classroom so teachers could enter attendance data directly into the SASI system. The district's approach changed in 2002 when the Hartford Public School District's information technology department took over the IT operations of the City of Hartford. The resulting reorganization led to significant changes in the district's IT strategy, and the planned approach was no longer considered to be feasible.

Using an alternative approach, Hartford has begun to equip all classrooms with IP Telephony to solve the attendance data collection problem. Teachers will enter attendance data directly into the SASI system using special telephones in their classrooms. Small computer screens on these phones bring up lists of students so that teachers can mark students absent quickly and easily at the beginning of the school day. Changes to attendance data during the course of the day are collected and entered into the SASI system by front office staff. Hartford is using a portion of its Consortium grant money to pay for computer software that connects the IP Telephony technology to the SASI student information system. The remainder of the grant money is being used to develop computer software to connect Hartford's PhoneMaster automated calling system with the SASI system. Once complete, the PhoneMaster system will use attendance data entered by classroom teachers to automatically call home if students fail to appear at school.

The new telephones and software were pilot-tested in one elementary school in early 2003 with a small group of classroom teachers. The teachers found the system very easy to use and could do so with a minimal amount of training and support. The district is continuing to roll out the new system across all school buildings on an aggressive time schedule. In the high schools, teachers will initially use the system for homeroom attendance only. The longer-term plan is for high school teachers to use the system for period attendance.

Next Steps

Going forward, Hartford's grant funding will continue to support testing and implementation of the IP Telephony system for attendance data collection and for development of computer software to fully implement the PhoneMaster automated calling system. As data accuracy improves, efforts will shift to the analysis and use of attendance data. Hartford plans to implement a data analysis and reporting tool such as Crystal Reports or SPSS in the coming year and to train administrative staff in its use. Over time, this will enable Hartford to improve its ability to generate useful attendance reports and begin looking at the relationships between absenteeism and other types of student outcomes.

D) Killingly Public Schools

The Town of Killingly is located in northeastern Connecticut and has a population of 16,472 residents. Although local efforts have brought small businesses and new job opportunities to the area in recent years, many of Killingly's students are growing up in an environment of rural poverty and isolation. The town's per capita income of $19,779 is significantly below the statewide per capita income of $28,766, and 8.7% of residents live below the poverty line. Of those residents living in poverty, 7.9% are under age 18.

Killingly Public Schools serve about 3,000 students in four school buildings, plus another 20-25 students in its alternative high school:
- Central School and Memorial School – grades K-4
- Killingly Intermediate School – grades 5-8
- Killingly High School – grades 9-12
- Alternative Learning Program (ALPS) – grades 10-12

Killingly's per pupil expenditure of $8,700 falls short of the state average of $9,663. The district is assigned to ERG H, the lowest ERG for non-urban districts. Although Killingly is no longer considered a Transitional School District as of the 2003/2004 school year, the district scores below Priority School Districts on many measures. Approximately 30.6% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals and 10.9% are minorities. English language learners in the district come from 20 language groups, with the largest being speakers of Spanish and Lao. The cumulative four-year dropout rate is 20.1%, nearly twice the statewide rate of 10.8%. Of those who graduate from high school, about 63% pursue higher education and 35% are employed or join the military.

School Attendance Activities

Killingly School District has in place a number of policies and programs for addressing student attendance issues. The district focuses on improving attendance by increasing home-school communications and partnering with families to solve problems that result in absenteeism. To encourage good attendance habits from the beginning, families receive communications on the importance of regular school attendance even before a child starts kindergarten.

Teachers enter attendance data directly into the district's student information system from their classroom computers. District-wide attendance monitoring procedures define interventions for addressing attendance problems, e.g., initial phone calls to parents, parent meetings, home visits, and letters from school administrators. The district's Truancy Intervention Program (TIP) is a building-level effort to identify students who are developing poor attendance habits. TIP teams meet regularly during the school year to recommend and implement interventions for students exceeding four unexcused absences in a month or 10 in a year. A district Attendance Officer is responsible for monitoring attendance in the intermediate and high schools, working directly with students to address attendance issues, making home visits, and handling referrals to the Department of Children and Families and juvenile court when necessary.

In addition to policies and procedures specifically targeting attendance, Killingly has a number of programs in place that affect attendance in a more indirect way by improving

school climate and providing direct assistance to specific students and families. Such programs include early childhood interventions to address school readiness; alternative programs for middle and high school students to address differences in learning style and behavioral issues; extended time programs to provide before/after school care, enrichment opportunities, homework help, and summer programming; school/business/community partnerships to provide opportunities for mentoring, internships, and volunteerism; character education/violence prevention and conflict resolution curricula; and alternatives to school suspension including in-school suspension, home tutoring, off-site instruction, and alternate time instruction.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

One of the largest challenges facing Killingly Public Schools is the need to reduce its high school drop-out rate, which increased to 29% in 2001. Because high absenteeism often precedes dropping out, Killingly's goal in joining the Consortium was to analyze attendance data and target the most effective strategies for reducing the number of students with high absenteeism. The district's approach was to develop an attendance database and establish a school advisory committee in each building to identify attendance issues, analyze attendance data, and develop strategies for improving attendance.

With the support of Consortium funding, Killingly developed an attendance database containing data from 1998-9 through 2002-3. The district has found it difficult to ensure the accuracy and consistency of attendance data across the district, and significant time has been spent to clean up data, establish and refine data collection procedures and coding standards, and train staff to collect and enter attendance data properly. The central office continues to work with building-level staff to improve the consistency with which attendance policy and data collection procedures are implemented.

With the database up and running, Killingly has begun to analyze and use its attendance data. Attendance is monitored weekly rather than monthly now, and this enables schools to be more proactive in identifying students with growing numbers of absences, as well as to provide positive feedback to students and families when attendance improves. The central office has unprecedented visibility into district-wide data and publishes average daily attendance (ADA) by school on a weekly basis to increase awareness of attendance trends in students, faculty, and administrators. In addition to running reports for school advisory committees (see next paragraph), central office personnel have used attendance data to make recommendations on policy issues. For example, because data indicated that both student and teacher attendance was lowest on Fridays, the district decided to schedule staff development days on Fridays rather than on Wednesdays when attendance is highest. The data also illustrated a dramatic decrease in absenteeism in the middle school (from 26.3% to 8.6%) in a year when equally dramatic changes were made in the school – new administrative leadership, new disciplinary practices, and a new anti-bullying curriculum. This ability to link data with policy changes helps with decision-making and facilitates the testing of new approaches.

Killingly also established school advisory committees in the four school buildings. The committees are charged with identifying attendance issues in their buildings, reviewing attendance patterns for both students and faculty, and recommending strategies to address

problem areas. Central office staff members run attendance reports for the committees to use in their discussions. While additional work needs to be done, the committees have made a start in looking at attendance patterns and trends within their buildings.

Next Steps

Moving forward, Killingly intends to shift its focus to analysis of disaggregated attendance data. This will likely be facilitated by an impending decision to acquire data warehousing technology that will support more sophisticated data analysis and reporting. Killingly will continue to build and support the school advisory committees and will heighten its focus at the middle and high school levels (grades 5-12). Central office staff will continue to run attendance reports for the school advisory committees and will test hypotheses formulated by the committees or administrative leaders. Possible areas of analysis include:

- Linkages between attendance and achievement data,
- Differences among student groups (low socioeconomic status, minority, English language learners, etc.),
- Relationships between teacher and student attendance, and
- Early correlates of high absenteeism in the upper grades.

Through such analyses, attendance data will help define changes in curriculum, instruction, and policy. The district will continue its efforts to implement consistent district-wide coding standards and data collection procedures to improve the accuracy of the underlying data. Finally, Killingly intends to review and revise district disciplinary policies that adversely impact student attendance.

E) Consolidated School District of New Britain

New Britain is a mid-sized city in central Connecticut with a population of 71,538 residents. Although its industrial base has eroded in recent years, it is home to several manufacturing companies and a growing number of technology firms. Per capita income is $18,404, compared to a statewide per capita income of $28,766, and about 16.4% of the population lives below the poverty line. Of those living in poverty, approximately 25% are under the age of 18.

The Consolidated School District of New Britain serves 11,382 students in 14 school buildings:

- Ten elementary schools serving 5,594 students in grades pre-K to 5
- Three middle schools serving 2,787 students in grades 6 – 8
- One high school serving over 3,000 students in grades 9 – 12

New Britain is assigned to ERG I and is a Priority School District. Per pupil spending in the district is $9,982, which is slightly higher than the statewide average of $9,663. Over 70% of students are minorities – about 50% are Hispanic and 17% are Black – and over 63% are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The cumulative four-year drop-out rate is 28.6%. Of those who graduate from high school, nearly 80% pursue higher education, 12% are employed or join the military, and 8% are unemployed.

The district has a strong MIS department and recently won an award by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education for its data information resource system. The district has a state-of-the-art Wide Area Network (WAN) connecting all schools across the district and giving them access to the Internet and to district-wide technology applications. A series of custom databases, including an attendance database, have been developed to support analysis of student data and produce monthly management reports that track an array of trends and performance measures. A centralized Help Desk supports administrators and staff with all hardware and software issues and fields 50 to 75 queries daily.

School Attendance Activities

New Britain has taken a proactive approach to student attendance since 1996. The district has a clearly defined attendance policy in place and employs an Attendance Officer to coordinate attendance efforts district-wide and an Assistant Attendance Officer to work primarily with 9th graders. The district's focus is on early identification of students who are developing patterns of poor attendance, particularly elementary and middle school students and those who are transitioning between levels of schooling (i.e., students entering grades 6 and 9). In addition to making home visits and working directly with students, the Attendance Officer facilitates collaboration among school personnel, students, families, and community agencies to identify strategies for improving attendance.

School Based Attendance Committees (SBACs) meet regularly in each elementary school to monitor attendance for regular education students and implement interventions according to district policy. The committee is made up of teachers, counselors, social workers, administrators, and nurses. The district Attendance Officer attends all committee meetings

and provides lists of students with high numbers of unexcused absences. Classroom teachers, who are responsible for tracking student attendance daily, may also refer students to their SBAC. A similar process is in place in the three middle schools, where the district Attendance Officer meets weekly with each school's Social Services Team (school psychologist, social workers, guidance counselors) to plan interventions for students with high absenteeism.

When student absenteeism persists despite interventions at the school building level, students are referred to a district-wide Attendance Review Committee, a collaborative effort involving representatives of the New Britain Police Department, Superior Court, New Britain Youth Services, Department of Children and Families, Visiting Nurses Association, Police Athletic League, Boys' and Girls' Club, Department of Social Services, YWCA, Wheeler Clinic, Klingberg Family Center, Catholic Family Services, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Mayor's Office, and Community Mental Health Affiliates. The Attendance Review Committee meets twice per month and reviews one or two cases each meeting to identify problems and offer needed services. Truant students and their families are required to attend, and failure to participate results in immediate referral of the case to the Department of Children and Families or juvenile court. Ninety-five percent of students reviewed by the committee show marked improvement in attendance. Sixteen and seventeen year old students who are habitually truant may be referred to New Britain's Juvenile Review Board under the state's Youth In Crisis legislation.

Finally, New Britain schools offer targeted programming to a limited number of students who have poor attendance habits and/or are deemed "at risk" of dropping out of school. Lack of funding prevents these programs from being widely available in the district. Such programs include:

- Summer Mentoring Program – students lacking consistent, positive role models receive one-on-one mentoring during the summer by going on outings that provide interest-based learning and new experiences. Mentors continue to monitor and support the students during the school year.

- Technology Attendance Program – students and their parents work with technology staff to learn how to assemble, operate, and repair a personal computer. Students with perfect school attendance during the year are allowed to keep the computer.

- Technology Play Room – students with perfect weekly attendance earn "coupons" that allow them to go to the technology center and play on computers loaded with fun games and educational software. Attendance is tracked on a weekly basis so students who miss a day of school are motivated to try again the following week.

- Young Parents Program – provides young parents with training in computer programming. Those who complete the program and pass certification testing are guaranteed employment upon graduation.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

New Britain's participation in the Consortium supports ongoing efforts to increase attendance and decrease the dropout rate. New Britain's MIS department has developed an

attendance database system that provides detailed reporting on attendance patterns, including disaggregation of attendance data by school, gender, ethnicity, free/reduced meals, special education, etc. The system is easy to use and is resident on the desktops of all administrators and staff in the district.

An Attendance Data Programmer was hired in January 2003 to support the implementation of the attendance database system. This new position is partially funded by the Consortium grant with the district providing additional funding and fringe benefits. The Attendance Data Programmer is responsible for maintaining daily attendance data across the district and producing statistical analyses and data reports for administrators, teachers, and attendance officers. The Attendance Data Programmer also provides help desk support and trains administrators, teachers, and staff on how to use the attendance database, incorporate attendance data in their decision-making, and create customized reports.

Next Steps

Going forward, New Britain's grant funding will continue to support a portion of the Attendance Data Programmer's salary. He will continue to provide help desk support and training to school staff and administrators and encourage their use of the attendance database. More advanced training will teach people how to create customized reports by importing data from the attendance database into Microsoft Excel and Access. Finally, attendance data will be incorporated into new MIS applications in an ongoing effort to provide administration, teachers, staff and families with better access to student information and trends.

F) Norwich Public Schools

Norwich is a small city located in southeastern Connecticut with a population of 36,117. The city's per capita income of $20,742 is well below the statewide per capita income of $28,766, and 11.5% of residents live below the poverty line. Of those residents living in poverty, 14.3% are under age 18 and a significant number of children are homeless. The Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun Casinos employ a large number of Norwich residents and are open 24 hours per day. Nearly a quarter of Norwich students have at least one parent working at a casino, and parent work schedules can interfere with students' regular school attendance and timely arrival.

Norwich Public Schools serve 4,195 students in 12 school buildings:
- Nine elementary schools serving 2,840 students
- Two middle schools serving 1,355 students
- One alternative high school serving 84 students

Norwich is one of two Connecticut communities with a private high school – the Norwich Free Academy – that serves local high school students but is not within the jurisdiction of the local public school district. A small number of high school students attend Norwich High School, an alternative high school operated by Norwich Public Schools. The school attendance improvement efforts described in this report apply only to those schools that are part of the Norwich Public School District.

The district's per pupil expenditure of $9,711 is on par with the statewide average of $9,663. Norwich is in ERG H and is a Transitional School District, however Norwich students historically perform well above ERG H averages on the Connecticut Mastery Test. The community has a growing minority population and 39% of students are minorities. Nearly half of all students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The cumulative dropout rate is 64.1%, however this number is misleading when compared with other districts or statewide averages because it is based only on Norwich's small alternative high school with fewer than 100 students. Of those students graduating from the alternative high school, 9% pursue higher education, 45.5% are employed or join the military, and 9% are unemployed.

School Attendance Activities

Norwich Public Schools uses the Star Base student information system to collect attendance data across the district. The system provides centralized access to a host of student information including attendance, tardiness, health information, enrollment details, parent/family information, and emergency data. Teachers use desktop computers in their classrooms to enter attendance data directly into the system during the homeroom period each day. School secretaries update attendance data during the school day as necessary. Monitoring of attendance data by school staff is uneven at best, and in some cases students accumulate a large number of absences before their attendance problems are noticed and addressed by school staff or administrators.

For many years, Norwich Public Schools has had a district attendance policy in place that defines truancy and unexcused vs. excused absences. The policy did not define specific roles and procedures for monitoring attendance or intervening with students showing patterns of

high absenteeism. A Truancy Review Board with representatives from the school system, youth services, juvenile court, DCF, and the police department operated for a number of years but was disbanded due to its inability to improve attendance patterns of habitual truants. Recent attendance improvement efforts have occurred primarily through individual counselors or small school-based programs such as "breakfast buddy" groups.

In 2000, Norwich received a $25,000 Improving School Attendance grant from the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee in support of a home-school liaison, a linguist, and case management through the Youth Services Bureau for one elementary school. The home-school liaison worked directly with families and students to address barriers to attendance and conducted family and community outreach efforts to build awareness of the importance of regular attendance. She worked closely with community agencies to provide students and families with needed services and support. Norwich received a continuation grant of $37,500 in 2001.

While these efforts seemed to have a positive impact, they were limited to one elementary school and could not be sustained through a permanent, budgeted position. The district recognized the need to address the attendance issue on a district-wide basis and decided that an important first step was to provide school staff with clear procedures for monitoring and addressing excessive absenteeism. A needs assessment survey was done to determine what staff members knew about the existing policy and how attendance issues were being addressed. The results of this survey provided a basis for updating attendance procedures.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

In joining the Consortium, Norwich's goal was to learn how to analyze attendance data at the building-level and identify strategies to increase attendance by improving school climate and developing school connectedness. The district's approach was to develop a comprehensive attendance procedure and increase the ability of Building Instructional Teams (BIT teams) to examine attendance data and incorporate this information into school improvement plans.

Social workers and guidance personnel used the results of the attendance procedure needs assessment survey to develop a uniform attendance monitoring and intervention procedure in collaboration with school nurses, administrators, and other staff. The new procedure defines the roles and responsibilities of teachers and staff in monitoring attendance and intervening when excessive absences occur. The procedure documents triggers for specific interventions (e.g., a certain number of unexcused or excused absences) and details how interventions should be documented.

Processes were put in place to support the new attendance procedure. Data clean-up and training was particularly important as the district converted to a web-based version of the Star Base system in the same time period. The Star Base Administrator defined coding rules based on the new attendance procedure and trained school staff on proper collection and entry of data. Attendance letters were drafted and loaded into the Star Base system so they could be generated automatically to notify parents of excessive student absenteeism. The use of these letters was pilot tested in two buildings. Student services personnel prepared materials to train BIT teams and school staff on the new attendance procedure and documentation process.

Norwich established a district-wide attendance team to participate in Consortium activities and develop strategies for improving attendance in the district. Team members attend Consortium training sessions and share what they have learned at BIT team meetings in the district's nine elementary and two middle schools. In addition to presenting the draft attendance procedure to BIT teams and building support for its implementation, the attendance team has focused on increasing the visibility of the attendance issue district-wide and emphasizing the importance of school building-level responsibility for attendance monitoring and intervention. Little time has been spent thus far on analysis of attendance data, although school attendance is being incorporated into the district's annual goal-setting process for school administrators.

Next Steps

Norwich's original plan was to submit the new attendance procedure to the district's Policy Committee at the end of the 2002/3 school year. Instead, the team will pilot test the new attendance procedure during the 2003/4 school year and then submit a fully-tested version to the Policy Committee for approval. The focus going forward is on building support for the new procedure within the school buildings, working out the "glitches" in implementing the procedure, and educating school staff, students and parents on the new rules. Attendance team members will continue to attend BIT team meetings and collaborate with them to examine attendance records and formulate attendance improvement strategies as part of each school's improvement plan.

The Star Base Administrator will continue to provide training and technical assistance on attendance data collection and analysis. She will support the implementation of the new attendance procedure from a technical perspective (e.g., documentation of interventions and parent notification via letters) and continue to submit Norwich data to the Consortium-wide database as required by the grant.

G) Stonington Public Schools

The Town of Stonington is located in southeastern Connecticut and borders the Long Island Sound and the State of Rhode Island. It has a population of 17,906 and includes the Borough of Stonington, Mystic, Old Mystic, Pawcatuck, and Wequetequock. The town's per capita income of $29,653 exceeds the statewide average of $28,766. Five percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Of those living in poverty, 5.4% are under age 18.

Stonington Public Schools serves 2,137 students in six school buildings:
- Three elementary schools serving 679 students
- Two middle schools serving 769 students
- One high school serving 689 students

Per pupil expenditure of $9,580 is on par with the statewide average of $9,663, and the district is assigned to ERG F. Nearly 11% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The student population is 3.2% minority which consists primarily of African American and Latino students. The cumulative dropout rate is 10.1% as compared with a statewide rate of 10.8%. Of students who graduate high school, 75.2% go on to pursue higher education and 24.8% are employed or join the military.

School Attendance Activities

The Stonington Public School District has been working on school attendance improvement for over three years. In 2000, Stonington received a two-year Improving School Attendance grant from the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee in support of a comprehensive approach to improving attendance in Stonington's elementary and middle schools. The approach was to increase efforts to: 1) improve communications with parents regarding attendance policy and expectations at the start of each school year; 2) contact families by letter or phone when students exhibited patterns of absenteeism; and 3) identify students with attendance problems and target them for interventions such as support groups, family meetings, referrals to counseling, and one-on-one discussions.

The project was successful in reducing absenteeism for a number of students and resulted in a list of recommendations aimed at addressing attendance issues in a consistent and proactive manner. The district implemented a community-based approach to improving attendance that emphasizes communicating with families, developing connections between students and schools, helping students be successful academically, and facilitating attendance monitoring through better data collection and reporting.

From a policy standpoint, interventions for excessive absenteeism in Stonington begin with letters and phone calls to parents and progress to social worker or police follow-up as necessary. The Achievement Board is a task force charged with finding creative ways to improve attendance, and its membership includes a probation officer, a DCF case worker, school social workers, a school administrator, and education lawyer, a town youth officer, a parent, and representatives from a local mental health agency, the community center, and the youth services bureau. Students who continue to exhibit excessive absenteeism despite school-based interventions may be referred to the community's juvenile diversion board and, ultimately to the Department of Children and Families or juvenile court. The district also

offers a variety of programs targeting students who are struggling academically or are poorly connected to school such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, ROPES training, after-school activities, reading clinics, and summer school, all of which may have a positive effect on attendance.

Through these and other efforts, Stonington has had some success in reducing both student absenteeism and the high school dropout rate in recent years. Data compiled during these school attendance improvement efforts show that monitoring attendance regularly and increasing communication with parents reduces "casual" absenteeism. On the other hand, students with a history of high absenteeism continue to miss school, and programs targeted for this cohort of students have not been proven to make a significant difference.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

Based on its experience with attendance improvement efforts, Stonington's goal in joining the Consortium was to explore ways of improving attendance on a more systemic basis. The district's approach was to implement new technologies that facilitate the analysis of student data – including attendance data – for the purpose of identifying barriers to attendance and changing curriculum and instruction so that students want to be in school rather than somewhere else.

Stonington recently implemented a new student information system and spent significant effort during the grant period to convert old student data, including some paper-based files, and clean up the data to improve its integrity. The technology director developed a data guide establishing consistent coding standards, worked with school secretaries and clerks to verify data accuracy, and trained personnel on data entry procedures to ensure new data was entered correctly into the system.

Stonington also contracted with EdSmart to develop a student data repository and reporting tool that integrates all student and district data in a web-based tool available to district personnel via the Internet. The data repository enables district personnel to create and test hypotheses, such as relationships between student absenteeism and grades or performance on standardized tests. The system can also be used for data mining, a process by which the system itself creates hypotheses by finding trends within the data.

In addition to implementing the data repository, Stonington began training school staff and administrators – principals, guidance counselors, social workers, and central office personnel – on how to use the repository to test hypotheses on their own or in collaboration with a task force or leadership team. The training plan takes into account the fact that it is not simply enough to teach people how to use the tool itself (i.e., which buttons to press). Rather, school staff and administrators must also receive training in how to create hypotheses and test new approaches, as well as how to make decisions about program changes based on their analysis of the data. School-level and district-level task forces have started to use the new tool in support of their planning efforts with respect to attendance and school improvement.

Next Steps

Going forward, Stonington will continue its efforts to fully populate and clean-up data in its student information system and provide data updates to the outsourced data repository. While Stonington has successfully implemented the data repository software developed under this grant, the district has faced challenges in getting building-level staff to use it. The data analysis tool is very powerful and, as a result, can be cumbersome to use. Therefore, the district plans to purchase a newly developed "add-on" to the EdSmart data repository – the EdDiscover application – which is a less powerful analysis tool but provides a graphic interface and is easier to learn and use. The district plans to train building-level staff on EdDiscover while continuing to use the more powerful analysis tool for leadership-level projects and planning sessions.

Stonington will continue to provide district data to the Consortium-wide database, as well as attend Consortium meetings and send building personnel to training events. Stonington's program representative to the Consortium, who is also the district superintendent and represents the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, will continue to play a leadership role in the Consortium's efforts to make state policy recommendations with respect to school attendance and build legislative support for change within statewide agencies and associations.

H) Winchester Public Schools

The Town of Winchester is located in northwestern Connecticut and has a population of 10,664. The per capita income of $22,857 falls short of the statewide average of $28,766. About 6.7% of the population lives below the poverty line. Of those living in poverty, 9.9% are under age 18.

Winchester Public Schools serves both the Town of Winchester and the City of Winsted and serves 1,115 students in four school buildings:

- Two elementary schools serving 734 students in grades K-5
- One middle school serving 369 students in grades 6-8
- One alternative high school serving about 25 students in grades 8-12

Winchester is one of two Connecticut communities with a private high school – The Gilbert School – that serves local high school students but is not within the jurisdiction of the local public school district. A small number of high school students attend the Winchester Alternate High School, which is operated by Winchester Public Schools and serves students who have difficulty in a traditional school setting. The school attendance improvement efforts described in this report apply only to those schools that are part of the Winchester Public School District.

Per pupil expenditure of $10,945 exceeds the statewide average of $9,663, and the school district is assigned to ERG G. Over 33% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The student population is 12.3% minority and includes primarily Asian, Black, and Hispanic students.

A significant challenge for Winchester Public Schools is that the district, due to its small size, lacks a full-time technology manager. Rather, several people take care of the district's data and information systems as part of their jobs. The district ran the Blackbaud student information system until recently when it moved to a new Phoenix system due to the need to improve the district's general accounting information. The conversion of student data to the new system has been a learning experience for those involved in the process.

School Attendance Activities

The Winchester Public School District has been working on school attendance improvement for over three years. The district's comprehensive approach includes regular school/home communications regarding attendance through back-to-school letters, open houses, daily calls home when students are absent, and monthly newsletters. School policy requires teachers to contact all parents on a monthly basis to discuss educational matters including attendance. A state-funded Family Resource Center provides a number of supports for parents and strives to open the lines of communication between homes and schools. Special awards, such as movie passes or breakfast with the principal, are offered to students with perfect or improved attendance. Another successful approach is for a family/school liaison to track specific families on a daily basis, which results in dramatic improvements in children's attendance. Finally, alternatives to suspension are in place at the alternative high school to keep students with behavioral problems on-site and in an academic environment whenever possible.

In 2000, Winchester received a two-year Improving School Attendance grant from the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee in support of a comprehensive approach to improving attendance which included: truancy sweeps and home visits by school staff in collaboration with local law enforcement officers; one-hour sessions after school in which truant students could make up school time and homework assignments; and Saturday make-up sessions for excessively truant students that included academic assistance and activities with local law enforcement officers. The district or police provided transportation to get students to and from school or make-up sessions. Truancy sweeps and police involvement were very effective in improving attendance, particularly when police officers chose to participate in such efforts rather than being assigned by the department. Although funding has ended, truancy sweeps continue without funding and school personnel are able to call on police for assistance in following up with specific students.

In addition to working closely with local police, the district collaborates with other community agencies to address student issues and encourage regular school attendance. School nurses maintain contact with local physicians to help families with medical issues and ensure the validity of medical excuses for absenteeism. District personnel are in regular contact with the juvenile probation department and other judicial authorities, and referrals to court and the Department of Children and Families are made when necessary.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

Winchester's primary goal in joining the Consortium was to further develop their data collection system to provide accurate, reliable and useful information. Grant funds were used to purchase and configure computer equipment and software to support collection and analysis of district data; provide staff development in support of data collection and dissemination; and begin learning to use data to improve attendance.

The district recognized that it was necessary to designate specific computers for data collection purposes, both for attendance data and other types of student data. The district also replaced or updated computer equipment and software as necessary based on the requirements of the new student information system.

Winchester spent significant time and effort to convert, test, and clean up student and district data to ensure that the new system contained accurate and reliable data. Data inconsistency and inaccuracy was a big problem, so the team developed code books and procedures to support implementation of a unified process of data collection that would improve the quality of the data going into the system. A special effort was made to include those affected by these changes in the design of the new procedures and in the implementation process. Staff members were trained in the use of data collection software and received ongoing support as required. Training continues for new or reassigned staff and as software updates or process changes occur.

During the initial phase of the grant, district team representatives met to discuss attendance issues and the data collection process. They worked closely to define data requirements, including those for attendance data collection and reporting. The district decided to contract with EdSmart for data warehousing services that will enable them to use data to inform program development, facilitate student tracking, and identify effective teaching techniques.

Next Steps

With the purchase of the EdSmart data repository, Winchester is positioned to take attendance tracking to the next level by reporting attendance results monthly and beginning to analyze their data in more depth. The district will continue efforts to disseminate useful information regarding attendance and student performance and ensure that the appropriate staff members use the information. Meetings of administrators and staff will be convened for the purpose of analyzing attendance data and identifying strategies to improve attendance, as well as to use attendance data to help target gaps in learning. Finally, Winchester will continue to provide district data to the Consortium-wide database and attend Consortium meetings and training events.

I) Windham Public Schools

The Town of Windham is located in eastern Connecticut and has a population 22,857. Its per capita income of $16,978 is significantly below the state average of $28,766, and about 17.5% of the population lives below the poverty line. Of those living in poverty, 23.9% are under age 18.

The Windham Public School District serves 2,959 students in six school buildings:
- Four elementary schools serving 1,156 students in grades K-4
- Windham Middle School serving 904 students in grades 5-8
- Windham High School serving 899 students in grades 9-12
- Windham Academy, an alternative high school serving a small number of students in grades 9-12

Windham Public Schools is assigned to ERG I and is considered a Priority School District. Per pupil spending in the district is $11,114, which exceeds the statewide average of $9,663. Nearly 60% of students are minorities – the student population is 52.2% Hispanic – and 61.6% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The cumulative four-year drop-out rate is 22.3% compared with a statewide average of 10.8%. Of those who graduate from high school, 70.9% pursue higher education, 26.5% are employed or join the military and 1% are unemployed.

School Attendance Activities

Windham Public Schools has in place attendance policies and procedures defining excused and unexcused absences and processes for addressing chronic truancy. The district begins each school year by sending information to parents that explains state law and district policy with respect to attendance. The schools collect attendance data from teachers and secretaries or attendance clerks enter it into the district's student information system. School staff, administrators, and parents refer students with attendance problems to the district Attendance Office for follow-up. Referrals to Windham's Juvenile Review Board, to juvenile court, and to the Department of Children and Families are made when necessary.

In 1999, Windham Public Schools was one of three school districts in the state to receive a large, three-year grant from the Office of Policy and Management through the legislated Truancy Prevention Demonstration program. Windham's truancy prevention initiative supported home and school visits by attendance officers, development of a district-wide Attendance Office, and an Attendance Advisory Committee to foster community involvement in truancy prevention. Other aspects of the truancy prevention initiative included town truancy sweeps by local police officers, bilingual community workers to work with students in grades k-4, and attendance officers to meet with students in school and conduct home visits as necessary.

Community communication has been an important part of Windham's school attendance improvement efforts. The Attendance Office has worked with local media to educate the community on the importance of attendance and the cost of truancy. The office publishes a newsletter, runs contests, and uses marketing materials to keep the attendance issue visible in

the community. Windham has also implemented programming – such as after school tutoring, recreation programs, and an off-site suspension program – to target specific students or groups of students believed to be at risk of truancy.

While Windham has been working on attendance data and technology initiatives for some time, the district has had ongoing difficulty with getting its data systems running smoothly and ensuring the integrity of attendance and other student data. Attendance monitoring and reporting continues to be a labor-intensive process, particularly at the high school level. Despite these challenges, the Attendance Office remains committed to tracking and reporting on attendance data as a means for improving the district's ability to effectively address student absenteeism.

Consortium Grant Activities: 2001 – 2003

Windham's purpose in joining the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance was to continue its technology improvement efforts and support the efforts of the Attendance Office. The district's project had three goals: 1) to provide accurate, reliable, useful, and readily available attendance data to all administrators; 2) to increase understanding of the importance of attendance among the districts administrators and teachers; and 3) to increase students' average daily attendance.

To achieve these goals, Windham began by upgrading computer hardware to meet the requirements of the new version of its student information system. Attendance clerks and secretaries were trained in the collection of attendance data to ensure that it was entered accurately into the system, and efforts ensued to inspect and clean up student data as needed. Information technology and attendance office staff developed procedures and a Data Manual to support the ability of data entry staff to enter attendance and other student data correctly.

Windham also contracted with EdSmart to provide the district with data warehousing services. The district received training and support from EdSmart, yet information technology personnel encountered a number of barriers in getting a clean "data dump" to EdSmart. It is anticipated that the EdSmart system will prove to be highly useful to district administrators in analyzing student data once the repository is populated and functional. The district will train the data manager and at least two secretaries in the use of Crystal Reports to facilitate data analysis using the EdSmart.

The Attendance Office provided monthly attendance reports to administrators in each school building during the year. These reports identified students with excessive absences and were used by administrators and staff to plan interventions and make referrals to the Attendance Office. Use of these reports, as well as a report to the Administrative Council, has increased communication across the district in addressing the attendance issue.

Windham implemented several policy changes that affect attendance data and/or intervention procedures. A new process was developed to address student transfers and withdrawals, which will improve the quality of attendance data by eliminating such students rather than counting them as absent. The district also started making juvenile court referrals for truancy earlier in the process to give the court additional time to collect documentation and build a case. Finally, the district implemented a new attendance policy for staff which resulted in

part from increased visibility of staff attendance data as a result of Consortium reporting activities.

Next Steps

Going forward, Windham will continue to focus on its goals of improving data accuracy, encouraging teachers and administrators to pay attention to attendance, and increase average daily attendance in all schools. The district will continue to focus on training of staff to ensure correct collection and entry of attendance and other student data. Efforts will continue to get the EdSmart data warehouse operational, and staff will be trained in Crystal Reports to facilitate the analysis of multiple variables using the tool. The Attendance Office will continue facilitation of school-based attendance committees by providing them with attendance reports on a regular basis. Finally, the Attendance Office will focus on improving the collection, reporting, and analysis of high school attendance data which has not been a focus to date.

VI)   Promising Practices and Lessons Learned

While the focus of the Consortium grant program has been on using data and technology to improve attendance, participating school districts know that the most effective way to make a difference in attendance is to take a comprehensive approach. In addition to implementing new data collection and analysis tools, people must be taught how to use the new tools and district leaders must give them the resources and support they need to do so on a regular basis. Once school districts have a handle on collection and analysis of attendance data, they need to apply specific practices in response to the data. An assessment of the Consortium school districts' experiences in the past two years reveals an array of strategies for improving attendance that may be of interest to others. These strategies have been organized into four broad categories:

❑ Make Attendance a Priority
   –   Administrative Leadership
   –   Students and Faculty
   –   Family Involvement
   –   Community Awareness

❑ Establish Effective Attendance Policies
   –   Policy Considerations
   –   Implementation Planning and Support

❑ Collect Data and Monitor Attendance
   –   Data Collection
   –   Monitoring and Intervention
   –   Attendance Teams
   –   Community Collaboration

❑ Use Data for Program Planning
   –   Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis
   –   Attendance Improvement Strategies

The tables on the following pages document "promising practices" and "lessons learned" that have been identified by Consortium districts through their attendance improvement efforts.

Make Attendance a Priority
Build awareness and commitment to attendance in school buildings, in homes, and in the broader community.

Administrative Leadership

Superintendents need to recognize the importance of attendance and make it a district priority.

Administrative leaders need to look for ways to keep school attendance "on the front burner" at both the district and school building levels.

Ensure attendance is on the administrative agenda on an ongoing basis:
- Attendance goals and policies are evident in key presentations, planning documents, training materials, newsletters, staff memos, and other documents.
- Attendance issues are discussed routinely at administrative and staff meetings.

District leaders must think systemically about attendance to uncover the real reasons students miss school.

Administrators and staff should view absenteeism as a "red flag" issue and recognize that poor attendance often contributes to academic failure and behavioral problems. Absenteeism may be a symptom of other problems and attendance can be one way to uncover them.

Create accountability for improving attendance at the school building level. Superintendents need to hold principals accountable for policy enforcement and results. Principals, in turn, need to hold staff accountable.
- Publicize attendance results to encourage friendly competition among school buildings.
- Use attendance results to reward administrators' efforts (if results are excellent) or motivate them to act (if results are poor or declining).

Paying attention to attendance makes a difference, and simply raising awareness of the importance of school attendance may decrease absenteeism initially. The challenge is to keep the focus.

District leadership needs to create incentives and motivation for improving school attendance because:
- Legal consequences through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the court system often have limited effectiveness.
- Federal No Child Left Behind legislation focuses on truancy rather than attendance.

A role of the central office can be to monitor attendance across the district and conduct periodic checks with building administrators to discuss attendance results, policy issues, procedural challenges, and the effectiveness of interventions in improving attendance.

It is difficult to get administrators on board – even to attend meetings. Lack of commitment at the leadership level makes it difficult for staff to make a difference in improving attendance.

It is difficult to sustain commitment to attendance improvement efforts long-term due to competing priorities and budget constraints. Funding can be a major challenge.
- Some attendance programs/staff positions are funded only to be cut later when budgets are tight.
- Attendance data can help administrators build a case for continued funding of programs and/or staff positions (e.g., social workers; music and sports programs; after school activities).

Students and Faculty

Use reward systems to draw attention to the importance of attendance and provide positive feedback to students with patterns of good attendance.
- Provide rewards for good attendance rather than for perfect attendance only.
- Provide rewards on a weekly or monthly basis – rather than by semester or year – to motivate students with poor attendance to improve going forward.
- Track and reward groups of students rather than individuals.
- Provide rewards for attendance rates on testing days.

Post attendance results prominently on a weekly basis (e.g., a large poster in the main entrance hall). Create friendly competitions among groups of students, classrooms, grade levels, schools and between students and faculty.

Involve students in the design of reward systems. Ask them what rewards would motivate them, and involve them in tracking and publicizing attendance data (e.g., as a classroom project).

Ideas for specific incentives include: gift certificates, ice cream/pizza parties, names on large posters, field trips, letters home, extra recess, special snacks, announcements over the loud speaker, car raffles for students' families, restaurant dinners, and access to special activities (e.g., playing computer games).

Link attendance to student privileges and interesting programs that they value, such as:
- Parking privileges and driver's licenses;
- A special program where students disassemble and then assemble a computer during the school year and get to keep the computer at the end of the year.
- Vocational training programs that result in certification and/or job placement (e.g., computer programming certification).

Implement reward systems with a focus on encouraging mature behavior and responsibility. Be careful about creating dependence on certain rewards and positive reinforcements.

Create rewards and incentives for faculty to improve attendance – their students and their own.
- Ask faculty what would motivate them, e.g., getting assistance from an intern if the teacher's own attendance is good; teacher recognition for good classroom attendance.
- Publicize faculty attendance rates and create competitions between students and faculty.
- Ensure that faculty members are fully informed of attendance policy and that they understand their roles in implementing attendance procedures (e.g., attendance taking, calls home).
- Ensure that faculty members are aware that student attendance is related to teacher attendance.
- Encourage teachers to act as role models with respect to attendance.

Family Involvement

Approach families in a positive way by finding out how the school can help them get their children to school. Collaborate with families to identify and address underlying issues.

Use a variety of communication channels to reach families: letters, phone calls, meetings, home visits, orientation sessions, parent handbooks, PTO meetings, summer school, community forums, and community outreach efforts. Schools can also include absences on report cards.

Set expectations with families regarding their responsibility in ensuring their children come to school. When attendance problems arise, contact families immediately and consistently.
- Communicate with families regularly to educate them on attendance policies/procedures and consequences of absenteeism, including legal issues.
- Contact families as unexcused absences accrue, using multiple means of communicating.
- Be persistent in contacting families, setting expectations for improving attendance, and following up with feedback (either positive or negative).

Customize letters to families – include information about the number of absences or tardies and possible next steps or consequences. Letters should be customized by level (elementary, middle, high school) and available in multiple languages as appropriate.

Address cultural and language differences when interacting with parents and families.
- In one district, data showed higher levels of attendance in elementary schools that had one or more staff members who were fluent in students' native languages.
- Where possible and necessary, hire bi-lingual staff for the front office.
- Maintain a list of people in the school/district who speak various languages.
- Take into account cultural differences when identifying barriers to attendance (e.g., some cultures do not view attendance as important, so schools must work harder to raise awareness).

Take particular care in communicating expectations to parents of kindergarteners.
- Provide specific information about attendance, including laws, policies, and expectations.   - Ensure that parents understand that rules about "mandatory" school age cannot be used to justify absences once a student is enrolled.   - Contact parents immediately when students are absent to help establish good attendance habits from the beginning.   - Educate parents and students on strategies for minimizing student exposure to illness and identify symptoms that justify keeping students home from school.
An ongoing challenge at the middle and high school levels is that parents are less involved as students get older. Attendance initiatives should target parents and families in the elementary grades. As students get older, initiatives should focus more on the students themselves.
Community Awareness
Raise awareness throughout the community on the importance of attendance. Local media can help educate and influence students, families, and community members.
Involve businesses and community organizations in incentive programs for school attendance. Businesses may be willing to provide prizes or money to reward good attendance.
In some communities, businesses help to prevent truancy by actively discouraging students from patronizing their establishments during regular school hours.
Schools partner with a variety of community resources – police, state agencies, health providers, community organizations, youth services bureaus – to encourage attendance and help remove barriers that prevent students from coming to school.
Schools involve local business-people and other community members in student mentoring programs. Businesses may also become involved in school-to-work programs or may provide jobs or internships.

Establish Effective Attendance Policies
Ensure that effective attendance policies are in place and implemented consistently across the district and within school buildings.

Policy Considerations
Establish good attendance policies and procedures – and then enforce them. Absenteeism decreases when attendance policy is followed in a consistent and timely manner.
Attendance policies should be a means to provide help and support to families rather than being punitive. Attendance improvement efforts can help schools achieve overarching goals such as increasing parent involvement and improving school climate.
Establish attendance policies that are clear and consistent across school buildings and levels of schooling within the district. • Students should not face huge changes in expectations as they progress through the grade levels or move laterally within the district. • It is difficult for students entering high school if policies are loose at the elementary and middle school levels and then become very strict in high school. • Central office staff can help ensure consistency across buildings and levels.
Determine policies for dealing with exceptions, e.g., how to handle family vacations and school-sanctioned events that result in absence from school. • Make a policy decision and stick with it rather than letting each school or principal make decisions on a case-by-case basis. • Implement policies consistently to avoid situations where sibling absences are treated differently by school (e.g., whether a family vacation is considered an excused or unexcused absence). • Even consistent policies may be interpreted differently. Ensure school staff are trained and provided with regular feedback to identify and correct any inconsistencies in implementation.
Establish habits of good attendance early by placing heavy emphasis on monitoring attendance and providing early intervention at the elementary and middle school levels. Habitual truants at the high school level can be extremely difficult to reach.
At the elementary level, attendance policy and interventions tend to target parents/families. However, some schools have succeeded in working directly with elementary students to improve their attendance even when efforts to engage the parents have failed.
Policy issues are more complex at the middle school level. While schools should continue to educate and involve families, there should be additional efforts to change student attitudes and behaviors.
High school considerations: • High schools often tie attendance to course credit and/or graduation requirements. • If there are strict attendance policies at the high school level, it is important to give students opportunities to make up time in some way (e.g., allow students to "buy back" absences by spending extra time in school; provide an appeal process; provide waivers for severe illnesses). • Some schools question the effectiveness of withdrawing credit as a penalty for truancy because enforcement is often lax and students can use appeal processes to sidestep the penalty. • Some schools have had success in taking a positive approach in rewarding attendance rather than punishing students for absences. It is possible to create a culture where students are committed to attending school themselves and encourage their peers to do the same.
Review policy consistency with respect to tardies and early dismissals. • In some districts, four tardies results in one absence, and early dismissal counts as a tardy. • If there are strict consequences for being tardy (e.g., detention), students may choose to skip school altogether rather than signing in late. • Because the court system does not count tardies and early dismissals in defining truancy status, districts must track this data carefully to ensure accurate reporting and appropriate referrals.

Transportation can be an important issue as some students must miss the entire school day if they miss the bus. In some districts, attendance officers or police will transport students to school.

Poor attendance by special education students often leads to truancy and eventually outside placement. Districts should track special education students closely, require a PPT (or similar) process for those with poor attendance, and offer alternatives such as transitional centers and day treatment as needed.

Use caution when determining penalties for excessive absence from school. Some penalties, such as suspension, send students the wrong message about the importance of being in school.

- On-site suspension with certified teachers allows students to continue learning during punishment for poor conduct.
- Court referrals may lack meaningful consequences for students who are habitually truant. The court referral process can be slow and students are rarely referred to residential care for truancy.
- Districts have had difficulty requiring habitual truants to attend programs to make up time (e.g., detention, on-site suspension, Saturday school) as many will behave poorly to get thrown out.

Retention to grade level for truancy can become a real issue as age becomes a factor (e.g., 16-year-old eighth graders). Alternative settings provide a solution in some districts.

Establish consistent processes for DCF and court referrals for educational neglect and truancy. It is helpful to have knowledgeable central office staff review all referrals and ensure they are properly completed and documented. This saves time and builds better relationships with DCF and the court.

Ensure that district policies regarding disenrollment are in compliance with state regulation and that policies are implemented in accordance with those regulations.

- Provide a deadline for parents to register students in another school district when they move.
- Districts may disenroll students whose parents have taken them out of the country only if they have been gone at least three months and parents have been notified in advance.
- Compulsory attendance laws require students to attend school up to age 18, and districts must keep students enrolled unless they can get written parental consent to disenroll.

Implementation Planning and Support

It is important to plan for and manage the change process when implementing new attendance policies and procedures. Districts must commit the necessary resources to communicate changes, train staff, provide support to staff when changes are implemented, and handle potential increases in workload.

A key success factor for making policy changes is to involve those people who will be affected by them.

- Involve teachers, administrators, secretaries, nurses, etc. in designing policy changes so they will buy into the process, help implement it, and "sell" the changes to their peers.
- Front office personnel know the students and the current procedures, so they can help anticipate issues and problems that are likely to occur.

Involve leadership teams to build commitment to attendance within school buildings, and use them as channels for disseminating policy and procedure changes.

Attendance policy changes can lead to a spike in the amount of work for principals, social workers, teachers, and other staff, especially in the initial months.

- A focus on early intervention increases the number of students requiring attention.
- Districts can consider alternative procedures to help ease the burden in the short term (e.g., send letters home first for students who aren't historically a problem rather than immediately scheduling meetings with counselors or administrators).

Avoid giving building-level administrators too much detail before they are ready to receive it (they will ignore it). The groundwork must be laid first through leadership and communication; then provide appropriate information through relevant and understandable materials.

When implementing new procedures, teachers and administrators can easily become overwhelmed by a lot of paper (e.g., the thick attendance procedures manual). Spend time developing and testing reference materials to be sure they are concise and easy to use before introducing changes.

It takes time to educate parents and students on new policies/procedures. Communication with families and students will require significant effort until they get used to new policies and levels of enforcement.

Collect Data and Monitor Attendance

Collect and monitor attendance data to ensure effective intervention
occurs when students begin to exhibit patterns of poor attendance.

Data Collection

Full implementation of attendance policy and regulations requires good data. Interventions must be based on up-to-date, reliable data. Good data gives schools a better understanding of their attendance issues and increases their ability to quickly identify and address student absenteeism.

It is important to take the time to clean-up student data. Data clean-up requires careful planning and may require significant commitments of time and effort.

A challenging aspect of the data clean-up process, as well as ongoing data maintenance, is the need to resolve residency issues. It is difficult to obtain and maintain accurate residency and parent contact information, particularly in communities with high mobility.
- Some districts are moving toward centralized registration as a means for streamlining the registration process and improving the accuracy and consistency of data collection.

Standardize data collection and data entry procedures to ensure data integrity.
- Establish consistent coding rules based on a clear understanding of attendance policy.
- Clarify definitions to ensure that people enter the data in the same way (e.g., excused vs. unexcused absences; whether in-school suspension counts as an absence; rules for tracking tardies and early dismissals).
- Train data entry staff and ensure they have the time and resources to complete their tasks.
- Monitor the data entry process to ensure accuracy and consistency of data.

Collect attendance data close to the source. Ideally, schools should enable teachers to enter attendance data directly into the student information system from the classroom.
- The process must be simple and quick, and teachers must have access to computers (or other technology) in their classrooms.
- One district is pilot-testing the use of IP telephony, which allows teachers to record attendance using a simple touch-screen on their classroom telephones.

Provide the staffing necessary to collect attendance data and enforce attendance policies.
This may involve attendance clerks, secretaries, nurses, attendance officers, teachers, administrators, etc.
- School front offices are often busy and understaffed, so it can be difficult to check the accuracy of data and ensure staff members have time to follow up with students and/or families.
- Having secretaries or aides input data can result in delays because they may decide to do it when they have time. This can create backlogs of data during busy times.

Ask parents to explain why students are absent to help prevent casual absences. Monitor the reasons why students are missing school to identify patterns or common issues for a particular student or across student groups.

Develop a process for documenting interventions in a clear and consistent manner so a record of prior interventions follows students from one school to another either through progression or lateral transfers.

Monitoring and Intervention

Involve many people – teachers, nurses, administrators, social workers, guidance counselors, attendance officers, front office staff – in attendance monitoring and intervention efforts. Broad participation by school staff leads to a better understanding of attendance issues and lots of contact with families.

Track why students are absent and follow up as necessary:
- Nurses can follow up with families if students are repeatedly missing school due to an illness or condition and can contact doctors to verify medical excuses.
- Social workers can follow up with families to ensure they know what resources are available.
- Administrators can follow up with parents and families

Contact students' homes when they fail to come to school and a parent hasn't called.

- This is an important regulation to follow, yet it can be difficult for schools to find the staff and resources to make it happen.
- A variety of staff may make calls to homes – nurses, data entry people, secretaries, teachers, etc.
- It is often difficult to reach parents by phone.
- Some schools use automated calling systems to call home, while others have abandoned such systems as ineffective (students delete messages before parents come home) and/or due to difficulty getting them working properly (data issues, incorrect phone numbers).

It can be highly effective to involve teachers in making calls home when students are absent.

- Teachers can use attendance-related calls to express concern for the student's welfare and to emphasize the importance of keeping up with academics in the classroom. Teachers may also take the opportunity to provide positive feedback and/or discuss other concerns.
- In the higher grades, teachers can work in teams to contact parents daily and report absences.
- If teachers are uncomfortable with this responsibility, provide them with training on effective teacher/parent communication through written notes, on the phone, and in parent/teacher conferences. Effective training techniques include role-modeling, simulation, exemplary practice, and mentoring.
- Another approach is to require teachers to call home periodically (e.g., monthly) to discuss accomplishments, concerns, attendance issues, etc.

Monitor absences on a regular basis – weekly or bi-weekly – to identify students with declining attendance. Analyze individual attendance based on the number of enrolled days rather than absolute absences to identify students who started mid-year but have a high percentage of absences.

Develop procedures for early intervention when a student's attendance declines, as well as an escalation process if initial interventions prove ineffective (e.g., phone call home; letter from the principal; student/parents meet with principal; referral to school social worker; referral to district attendance officer; referral to attendance team or DCF/court).

Use data to "get visual" with students and their families and illustrate how many days are being missed relative to the total possible days. This portrays the loss from an educational standpoint.

- Create a color-coded calendar that shows the number of days absent, tardy, and present.
- At the end of a marking period, calculate the percentage of school time a student has missed. A percentage of 25-30% can get their attention.

Be systematic and persistent in monitoring student attendance and following up with students and families regularly. Be a "gentle nag" and express concern for the student rather than taking a punitive approach. Work with families and students to remove barriers (e.g., providing alarm clocks to parents or students who use the excuse of oversleeping).

Go beyond the data and talk to the students (e.g., some sensitive, fragile students cannot handle harsh teachers; simply reassigning a student to another teacher may solve the problem).

Focus on changing student attitudes as well as those of their parents/families. If attendance is important to students, they will communicate that to their parents (e.g., complaining about appointments scheduled during school hours).

Look at attendance as a year-round issue. Meeting with students and families in the summer months to set expectations on attendance underscores the importance of the issue.

Attendance Teams

Train school-based teams – such as Child Study Teams, Student Assistant Teams, Peer Leadership Groups (student to student) – on attendance policies and procedures and encourage them to address attendance issues in their ongoing interactions with students.

Establish district-wide attendance teams, with representatives from each school, to meet monthly to review attendance data, look for family patterns, manage students through transitions from one school to another, and discuss policy and procedural issues.

Establish school-based attendance teams to review cases where initial interventions are ineffective:
- Teams are comprised of administrators, counselors, attendance officers, teachers, nurses, and other school staff.
- Meetings are bi-weekly and focused, typically reviewing two to three students per meeting. These are not necessarily the most chronic cases – the team's focus is on early intervention.
- Meetings should follow a consistent process to review interventions to date and suggest additional services or approaches for dealing with the student's attendance issues.
- Attendance teams are linked with school-based student/family assistance programs and supported by building leadership teams.
- Middle and high school teams may involve students, e.g., asking students to attend meetings to talk about their former attendance problems and why they stopped skipping school.

Ensure that attendance teams have the support and resources they need to function:
- Attendance teams need manpower, good data, and support from administrators so meetings can be scheduled with the people who need to attend;
- Involvement by regular education teachers is critical to the process. They are powerful communicators to parents regarding the impact of absenteeism on student learning.
- Someone needs to be responsible for keeping the attendance team moving and focused (e.g., run attendance reports, schedule meetings, handle the paperwork, etc.).

Community Collaboration

Build linkages between the school system and community-based services, e.g., attendance officers and social workers who know the students and families and can refer them to available services.
- School personnel should actively pursue collaborative relationships with representatives of state agencies, community organizations, local government, police, etc.
- A difficulty in making service referrals in some communities is that there are long waiting lists, sometimes up to a year. This puts the burden back on schools.

Collaborate with local agencies to take a more comprehensive approach to improving attendance:
- Police – can provide support to schools by doing truancy sweeps, accompanying school personnel on home visits, and resolving residency issues. In some districts, such police activity is not funded by the school district, yet police are willing to help out on an as-needed basis.
- Department of Social Services (DSS)/DCF – attendance officers/workers have built close working relationships with local DSS and DCF personnel and may refer families for services based on identified needs (e.g., where to get medical treatment or eyeglasses).
- Judicial – maintaining good relations with the court is critical so school personnel can work collaboratively with probation officers and judges in addressing truancy.
- Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs) – some JRBs are dealing with truancy cases which enables communities to leverage those resources and serve students who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

Establish a school/community attendance committee with a goal of avoiding DCF and court referrals.
- Create a community-wide team representing local agencies – school, police, probation, community organizations, DCF – as well as the truant student and parents/guardians.
- Meet twice per month to review two to three cases each meeting – students who have received interventions at the school-building level yet continue to have attendance problems.
- This approach is cost-free because committee members attend as part of their regular job responsibilities. Success of the committee depends on good relationships with local agencies.
- A school representative coordinates efforts, identifies students, contacts families, schedules meetings, records results, and follows up with students and families to check progress.

Use Data for Program Planning
Select attendance improvement strategies based on *quantitative and qualitative analysis of local attendance data.*

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis
Clarify data elements to ensure reporting is accurate and meaningful, especially when making comparisons between schools or student groups and looking at trends over time (e.g., establish reporting cutoffs based on the absolute number of school days rather than on a calendar date; determine whether suspensions are counted as absences).
Run multiple versions of reports to disaggregate the data in a variety of ways: • By school building or level of schooling (e.g., middle school); • By student characteristics (grade level, free/reduced lunch status, race/ethnicity); • By time period (attendance by month and by day of the week, comparisons across semesters or school years); • By key dates such as early closings, testing days, class trips, etc.
Take time to design attendance reports carefully and test their usability. People are more willing to spend time reviewing and analyzing reports that are easy to read and contain useful information. • Ensure report titles, row headings, column headings, etc. are clearly labeled. • When reporting percentages, include the total number of students to provide a point of reference. • Consider using charts to illustrate data (e.g., bar charts illustrating absences by grade).
Analyze family patterns by looking at sibling attendance rates across school buildings. Identify families through address and/or phone number records.
Determine points of comparison for analysis, e.g., comparisons among schools within the district; comparisons with other districts or with national data; comparisons with "best practice" districts/schools or with an established goal.
Disaggregate data rather than looking at overall percentages. Attendance may look good at the district level, but disaggregating the data (e.g., the number of students with less than 90% attendance) often uncovers groups of students with excessively high absenteeism.
Analyze attendance data from one year to the next to identify patterns of attendance associated with particular programs, course assignments, etc. This can help districts begin linking attendance to school change initiatives.
Avoid creating expensive programs – sometimes a simple solution is more effective. Take time to reflect on the issue and look for systemic problems. Administrators' professional judgment about why students are absent and what to do about it may not be right.
Use data as a point of entry for asking more questions about why students are missing school and what can be done about it. • Disaggregate the data to look for trends and patterns (e.g., data might show that 7th grade Latino boys have a spike in absenteeism, but white boys don't spike until 8th grade). • Interview students, parents, faculty and staff about why students miss school. Pull people together to talk about the data and identify underlying issues.
Analyze student data by using database repositories and tools to ask "what if?" questions (hypothesis testing) and look for relationships in the data (data mining). • Some districts are purchasing software tools and data warehousing services to support the analysis of a wide array of student information (attendance data, discipline data, grades, test scores, demographic data, etc.). • Other districts are building custom data repositories and/or running queries using their existing student information systems. • Once trained, administrators can use data analysis tools in administrative meetings to analyze the effects of particular programs and model potential solutions to problems.

Ensure that reporting and querying tools are easy for staff and administrators to learn and use. They will resist tools that are difficult to use.

When training staff and administrators on the use of data analysis tools, be sure to train them both on the technical use of the tool – which buttons to press – as well as on how to frame questions for hypothesis testing. These are two different skill sets.

- People often require a significant amount of training and practice to become competent in data analysis.
- The first people to train are the administrators.
- Train school-building personnel to reduce reliance on central office staff for report generation. Custom reporting and data analysis is best done at the building level (rather than pushing reports out from the central office).

Provide building-level staff and administrators with a help desk to support their use of data and reporting tools. A good help desk person will act as a point-of-contact for staff members and will build rapport, answer questions, and encourage them to use the data/tools.

Attendance Improvement Strategies

After using data to find problem areas (e.g., ninth grade absenteeism) and conducting further analysis to identify the underlying issues, develop service plans or programs to address the issue(s).

- Choose a school or subset of students and try to create a model for improving attendance.
- Use data to assess and improve upon the model before implementing it broadly.

Consortium school districts question the effectiveness of targeted programs, such as after school programs for certain groups of students, in improving school attendance. Such programs may help, but they are often expensive and may not be the most effective way to improve attendance. What seems to make a difference is to enforce the attendance policy, remove barriers that keep students from attending school, and improve school climate. Students come to school when they want to be there.

Look for systemic problems that create barriers to attendance. For example:

- One district discovered that high absenteeism among teen parents was due to lack of child care on site. Paying a social worker to make home visits and talk to these students had no effect on absenteeism; rather, the district needed to focus on the underlying barrier.
- One third of students were absent on the first day of school in an urban district – why? Was it due to widespread apathy? Lack of communication? In many cases, the problem was that families did not have money to buy clothes for students because school started at the end of August and welfare checks were not available yet.

Data often show increases in absenteeism as students transition from one school building to the next (e.g., moving from elementary school to middle school or middle school to high school). Districts are testing several approaches for helping students transition more easily:

- Identify students who already have attendance problems and target them for services as they transition to the next level (e.g., 8th graders who are moving on to high school).
- View attendance as a year-around issue and use summer months to meet with families, provide summer mentoring programs, etc.
- Provide students with more effective orientation programs to ease their transition from one school to the next such as visits to the high school or opportunities to "shadow" an older student.
- Create small "orientation" groups that meet weekly during the first semester to help students adjust to their new schools. Use these groups to educate students on attendance policies.

Provide students with high absenteeism opportunities to catch up academically and form relationships with adult and peer role models.

- Homework clubs – after school clubs that mix truants and other students. This can be effective in helping truant students form new peer relationships and reduce feelings of isolation. It also addresses the problem of students skipping school because their homework is not done.
- Saturday morning make-up sessions with police for truant students – police go to students' homes and transport them to school. Programming consists of a combination of academics (study time) and legal/character education. This program works well when police officers are committed to the program and enjoy working with students.

School climate can have a strong effect on attendance, and districts are testing a number of approaches for making students feel more connected to school:

- Looping classrooms – where students are with the same student group and teacher for two or more years – may encourage attendance at the elementary level.
- Some schools are exploring the possibility of having looping classrooms at the middle school level or even between schools (e.g., from elementary to middle school). This could ease transitions, although certification could become an obstacle.
- Scheduling a brief home room period at the end of the day in middle school helps bring closure to students' day and enables teachers to address problems or concerns that arise during the day. This period can be used to re-check attendance.
- Ensuring that students have the same home room teachers and guidance counselors throughout high school promotes a feeling of consistency and provides a connection to those adults over time.
- Large, noisy cafeterias can be frightening and have a strong negative impact on elementary students. Some schools have created smaller lunch groups, manners clubs, or poetry reading programs during lunchtime to contribute to a calmer environment.

Provide alternative programs that focus on job skills for habitual truants at the high school level.

- One district provides a computer maintenance course where students in the program work with the technology director to maintain the school district's computers and network. The class is made up of students at high risk of dropping out of school.
- A program for young parents provides training in computer programming and guarantees them a job after graduation if they pass certification tests.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Map of School District Locations

Winchester

Killingly

Hartford

Windham

New Britain

Norwich

Danbury

Ansonia

Stonington

Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance
Location of Member School Districts
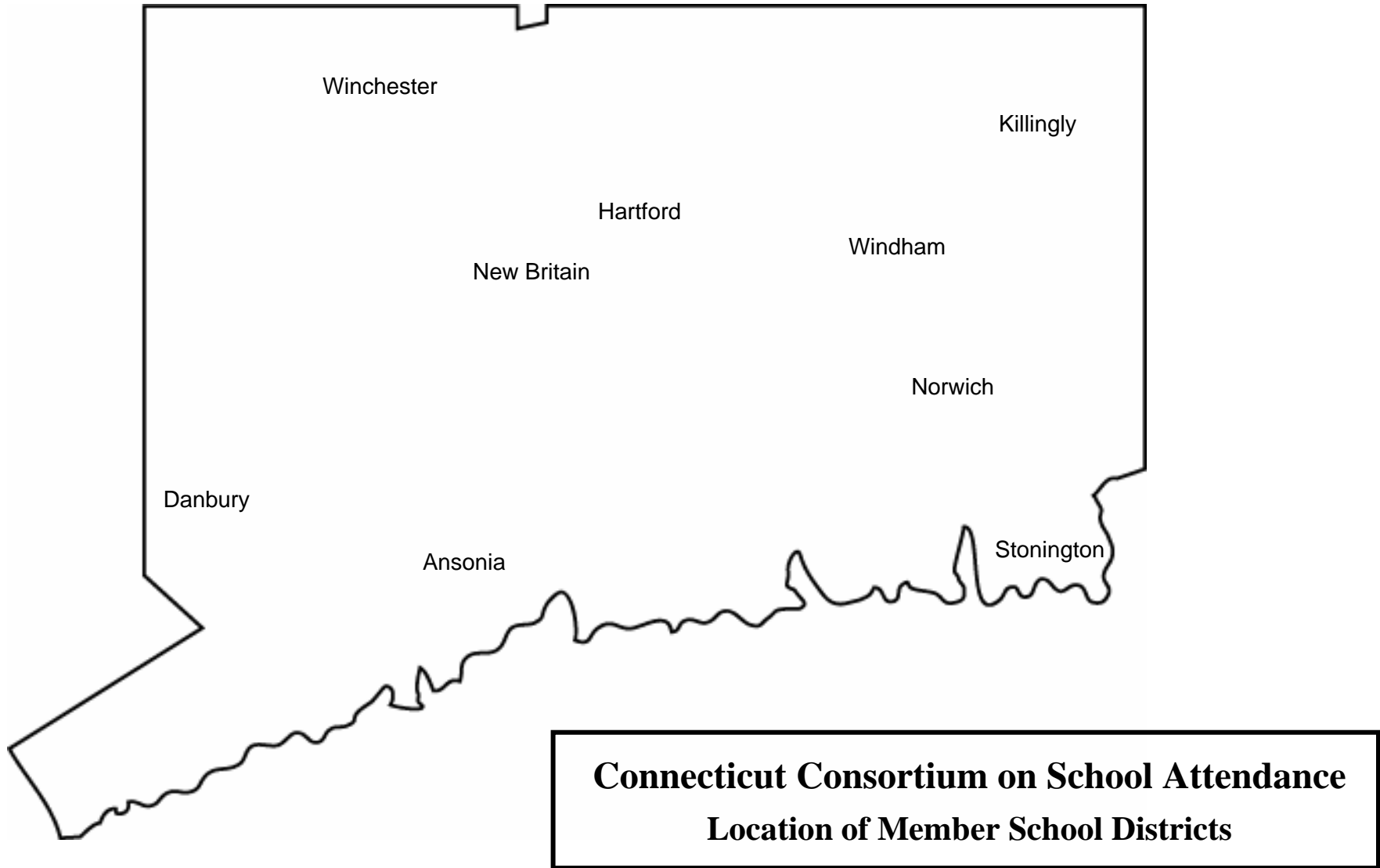
Appendix B: Consortium School Districts

Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance – Participating School Districts

	Ansonia	Danbury	Hartford	Killingly	New Britain	Norwich	Stonington	Winchester	Windham	Consortium Total/Avg.	State Total/Avg.
Population[1]	18,554	74,848	121,578	16,472	71,538	36,117	17,906	10,664	22,857	390,534	3,405,584
Student Enrollment 2002/2003[2]	2,585	10,763	28,137	3,022	11,382	4,195	2,137	1,115	2,959	66,295	550,000
# Public Schools	4	17	35	4	14	12	6	4	6	102	1,050
Per Capita Income[1]	$20,504	$24,500	$13,428	$19,779	$18,404	$20,742	$29,653	$22,589	$16,978	$20,730	$28,766
ERG[3]	H	H	I	H	I	H	F	G	I	–	–
Expenditures Per Pupil[4]	$7,913	$9,007	12,608	$8,700	$9,982	$9,711	$9,580	$10,945	$11,114	$9,951	$9,663
Average Daily Attendance 2002/2003[5]	94.1%	94.2%	90.9%	93.4%	91.9%	94.0%	95.6%	95.1%	93.9%	92.5%	Not Available
% Students with Less Than 90% Attendance 2002/2003	13.3%	15.5%	29.5%	18.5%	26.6%	19.1%	8.1%	10.1%	18.5%	23.4%	Not Available

Notes:
1. Population and per capita income figures are based on 2000 U.S. Census data
2. Student enrollment figures are based on data submitted to the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance data repository by the nine member school districts.
3. Economic Reference Group (ERG) is a classification of districts by the Connecticut State Department of Education whose students' families are similar in education, income, occupation, and need, and that have roughly similar enrollment. Districts are classified into ERGs A through I, with ERG I being the most needy.
4. Expenditures per pupil data are from the 2002/2003 Strategic School Profiles published by the Connecticut State Department of Education.
5. Average daily attendance (ADA) figures are from the Consortium-wide data repository. ADA is the number of days in attendance for each student divided by the number of possible days in attendance based on each student's enrollment.

Appendix C: Consortium Participants

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Ansonia Public Schools
Eileen Ehman
Susanne Murphy
Doreene Sullivan

Danbury Public Schools
Arthur Colley
Patricia Doyle
Lydia DuBose
Carlos Vas
Peter Walrath

Hartford Public Schools
Janet Babbitt
Joseph Borracci
Mary Beth Del Gaudio
Leah O'Neill Fichtner
Elizabeth Nieves
Sabina Schecher
Ramon Vega
Guy Walker

Killingly Public Schools
Karl Adams, Sr.
Jan Chapman Huber

Consolidated School District of New Britain
Roz Sternberg
John Taylor
Joseph Vaverchak

Norwich Public Schools
Lisa Allen
Pamela Aubin
Louida Jones
Penny LaReau
Bill Peckham

Stonington Public Schools
Clint Kennedy
Michael McKee

Winchester Public Schools
Harrison Baker, Jr.
Joseph Cifaldi
Diane Gieseking

Windham Public Schools
Bill Johnson
Debra Ledey
Jeff Mulqueen
Paul Perzanoski
Fadel Sesay
Millie Wheeler

STATE AGENCIES

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
Sheila McKay

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
Michael McKee, Stonington

Connecticut Association of Schools
Michael Buckley

Connecticut Consortium of Law & Citizenship Education
James Schmidt

Department of Children and Families
Les Horvath
DeAnna Paugas

State Department of Education
Nancy Aleman
Richard Cloud
Nancy Pugliese

Judicial Branch
Robert Hindle
Randy Roorbach

Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee
Tim Salius

Office of Policy and Management
Valerie LaMotte

CONSORTIUM STAFF

Karl Adams, Sr., Consultant
Gary Hoachlander, President, MPR Associates
Jack Hubert, Consultant
Kelly Ouellette, Consultant

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Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance
Meetings and Training Events

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November 29, 2001	Initial meeting of Consortium program and technology representatives
January 29, 2002	Consortium meeting
March 26, 2002	Consortium meeting
April 26, 2002	Training session on data-driven planning for Consortium members and others from their districts; conducted by Gary Hoachlander
May 28, 2002	Consortium meeting; review of 02/03 grant applications
July 25, 2002	Consortium meeting
October 19, 2002	Training session on data analysis for Consortium members and others from their districts; conducted by Gary Hoachlander
March 20, 2003	Training session on data analysis for Consortium members and others from their districts; conducted by Gary Hoachlander
March 21, 2003	Consortium meeting
May 16, 2003	Data subcommittee meeting
May 22, 2003	Consortium meeting; review of 03/04 grant applications
October 2, 2003	Program improvement workshop for Consortium members and others from their districts
October 30, 2003	Consortium meeting

ANSONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Attendance and Truancy Policy (Adopted May 2002)

Attendance

The Ansonia Board of Education believes that regular attendance is essential to the overall academic, social and emotional development of students. Parents and school personnel must work together to help students take advantage of their educational opportunities. In this respect, parental guidance is essential to encouraging regular school attendance.

The Ansonia Board of Education requires that each parent or other person having control of a child at least five (5) years of age and under eighteen (18) years of age, who resides in Ansonia, shall cause such child to attend school regularly during the hours and terms that the Ansonia Public Schools are in session, except as follows:

- the student has graduated from high school;

- the student is age five (5) or six (6) and a parent has personally appeared at the Ansonia Board of Education office and signed an option form setting out his/her election not to enroll the student in school for that given year in accordance with Board Policy.

- the student is age sixteen (16) or seventeen (17) and a parent has personally appeared at the Board of Education office and signed an option form setting out his/her election not to enroll the student for that given year in accordance with Board Policy.

- the parent shows that the student is elsewhere receiving equivalent education and/or has completed the necessary home-schooling paperwork with the Superintendent's Office.

Truancy

The Ansonia Board of Education will monitor the attendance of students who are between the ages of five (5) and eighteen (18), inclusive, in order to identify students who are truant. The Ansonia Board of Education will enlist the cooperation of parents and, when necessary, the juvenile justice system, in order to address the problem when it arises.

A "truant" is defined as a student enrolled in Ansonia Public Schools between the ages of five (5) and eighteen (18), inclusive, with four or more unexcused absences in any calendar month or ten unexcused absences within any school year.

A "habitual truant" is defined as a student enrolled in the Ansonia Public Schools between the ages of five (5) and eighteen (18), inclusive, with twenty (20) unexcused absences within any school year.

It is the responsibility of the Ansonia Public Schools to notify parents/guardians annually, in writing, of their obligation concerning this policy. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to provide the school with a telephone number or other means of contact during the school day.

Attendance and Truancy Guidelines/Procedures
For Grades K-8

ATTENDANCE

Ansonia Public Schools defines the following attendance procedures:

*"**Absence**" is when a student enrolled in Ansonia Public Schools is absent from school for an entire day, based on the criteria determined by each level.*

With official documentation, the following absences from school may be considered "excused" for students in Grades K-8:

- illness with written doctor's verification upon three (3) or more consecutive absences, or four (4) or more days in one month, or medical documentation for a chronic illness.

- appointment with a health professional for emergency purposes only.

- death in the family

- observation of religious holidays

- court appearances

- suspension from school

- expulsion from school

- limited absence from school with parental consent, subject to the approval of the Superintendent or his/her designee.

- high school orientation, subject to approval by guidance and/or building principal.

*"**Tardy**" is defined as any time after the scheduled start of the school day. "**Early departure**" is defined as a departure any time prior to the scheduled end of the school day. Tardies and early departures will be treated in a manner similar to absences. Any student in Grades K-8 arriving 30 minutes or more after the start of the school day should be accompanied by a parent/guardian. For students in Grades K-8, four (4) unexcused tardies or early departures will constitute one unexcused absence.*

Students who enter John G. Prendergast School, John C. Mead School or Ansonia Middle School after the start of the school year will be required to abide by this policy. The maximum number of unexcused absences shall be prorated on the basis of the number of the student's full months of enrollment in the Ansonia Public Schools.

Appendix E: Sample Attendance Policy (Ansonia)

ATTENDANCE AND POSSIBLE RETENTION – GRADES K-8:

For the K-8 level, students absent more than 20 days each school year shall be seriously considered for retention, unless the School Review Board – which is comprised of principals, teachers, and other appropriate staff members – determines that the student is eligible for advancement to the next grade. These absences include all legitimate illness absences and any or all other reasons a student may have for staying home or a parent may have for keeping a student home. Evidence of extraordinary illness must include statements from a physician.

If a student accumulates 20 days of unexcused absences, he/she shall be identified as a habitual truant and the School Review Board will meet to determine retention. Any appeal requesting an exception to the policy will be acted upon at this time. For students attending the elementary schools (Gr. K-5), appeals should be made in writing to the building principal, and for students attending Ansonia Middle School (Gr. 6-8), appeals should be made in writing to the Guidance Department.

TRUANCY

Ansonia Public Schools will enact these procedures when a student accumulates four or more unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences from school in any year:

1. *Meet with the parents of any truant child within ten (10) school days after the fourth (4th) unexcused absence. The Superintendent must file a "family with service needs" petition with the Superior Court if the parent or other person responsible for the education of a child fails to attend this meeting or otherwise fails to cooperate with the school in attempting to solve the truancy problem, or for any habitual truant;*

2. *Coordinate services and refer such children to community agencies;*

3. *Provide notification annually to parents of their obligations under the mandatory attendance laws;*

4. *Obtain a telephone number where parents can be contacted;* **and**

5. *Provide notification to parents when their child does not arrive at school.*

Parents and guardians are strongly encouraged to contact school authorities if they have any questions/concerns regarding their child's attendance.

Appendix E: Sample Attendance Policy (Ansonia)

Attendance and Truancy Guidelines/Procedures
For Grades 9-12

ATTENDANCE

Ansonia Public Schools defines the following attendance procedures:

"Absence" is when a student enrolled in Ansonia Public Schools is absent from school for an entire day, based on the criteria determined by each level.

With official documentation, the following absences from school may be considered "excused" for students in Grades 9-12:

- illness with written doctor's verification upon three or more consecutive absences, or medical documentation for a chronic illness.
- appointment with a health professional for emergency purposes only.
- death in the family
- observation of religious holidays
- court appearances
- suspension from school
- expulsion from school
- limited absence from school with parental consent, subject to the approval of the Superintendent or his/her designee.
- college orientation, subject to approval by guidance and/or building principal.

"Tardy" is defined as any time after the scheduled start of the school day. "Early departure" is defined as a departure any time prior to the scheduled end of the school day. Tardies and early departures will be treated in a manner similar to absences. For students in Grades 9-12, four unexcused tardies or early departures will constitute one unexcused absence.

Students who enter Ansonia High School after the start of the school year will be required to abide by this policy. The maximum number of unexcused absences shall be prorated on the basis of the number of the student's full months of enrollment in the Ansonia Public Schools.

ATTENDANCE AND POSSIBLE RETENTION – GRADES 9-12:

For those in Grades 9-12, students with more than eight (8) unexcused absences in a half-year or one semester course will receive a final grade of "F," and students with more than sixteen (16) unexcused absences in a full year course will receive a final grade of "F." This grade change will take place regardless of the student's grades in his/her individual classes. Failing grades shall be issued by teachers, not by the administration.

Parents will be notified by letter after the fourth (4th) day of absence, the eighth (8th) day of absence, and the twelfth (12th) day of absence.

Appendix E: Sample Attendance Policy (Ansonia)

The appeals process for all other absences will be handled in the following manner: Appeals for one semester courses will take place within five (5) working days after the date indicated on the report card. Similarly, appeals for full year courses will take place within five (5) working days after the date indicated on the report card.

Appeals may take the form of medical evidence and/or written documentation of extenuating circumstances surrounding the absences. Appeals must be requested within the time frame; failure to request a timely appeal will negate all rights and no appeal hearing will be granted.

After presentation of written notice, the attendance committee may request a parent to attend the informal hearing or may grant or deny the appeal based on written documentation only. The attendance committee will consist of school administrator(s), guidance counselors and other faculty designee(s).

TRUANCY

Ansonia Public Schools will enact these procedures when a student accumulates four (4) or more unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences from school in any year:

1. ***Meet with the parents of any truant child within ten (10) school days after the fourth unexcused absence. The Superintendent must file a "family with service needs" petition with the Superior Court if the parent or other person responsible for the education of a child fails to attend this meeting or otherwise fails to cooperate with the school in attempting to solve the truancy problem, or for any habitual truant;***

2. ***Coordinate services and refer such children to community agencies;***

3. ***Provide notification annually to parents of their obligations under the mandatory attendance laws;***

4. ***Obtain a telephone number where parents can be contacted; and***

5. ***Provide notification to parents when their child does not arrive at school.***

Parents and guardians are strongly encouraged to contact school authorities if they have any questions/concerns regarding their child's attendance.

Legal references:
       C.G.S. §10-184 – Duties of Parents;
       C.G.S. §10-198a – Policies and Procedures Concerning Truants;
       C.G.S. §10-199 – 10-202, inclusive – Attendance and Habitual Truants;
       C.G.S. §46b-149 – Family with Service Needs.

NORWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Attendance Procedures (Adopted June 2004)

POLICY STATEMENT

The Norwich Board of Education recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and the family.

MISSION

Education professionals and families must work as knowledgeable partners in order to work towards continuous educational improvement so that the students may achieve their potential.

On a daily basis, parent involvement translates into:
- Students who arrive at school regularly and on time.
- Students who have the necessary materials for learning.
- Students who have completed assignments and homework.

In return, schools:
- Build a bridge between home and school.
- Create an environment that is welcoming to parents.
- Strive to achieve two-way communication between schools and homes so that parents are aware of how their child is doing.
- Provide a curriculum and school climate that is designed to the students' intellectual and social/emotional needs.

If your child is having problems at school in the classroom, on the bus, with other students or with the work that he/she is assigned, it is important to tell the classroom teacher about it. This will help you and your child's teacher to determine the next step in identifying a solution to his/her difficulties. If you are experiencing problems at home, your child's teacher can direct you to the appropriate staff member who can assist you in finding help. In the case of a chronic or extended illness, your school nurse can work with you, your child, and with your permission, your child's doctor, to reduce the number of excused absences whenever possible. Many unexcused absences can be prevented when the school and parents work as a team.

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

Student Attendance - Unexcused Absence

In accordance with Board Policy 5110 and Connecticut General Statute (CGS) 10-198a, the following procedures shall be followed for monitoring, reporting and intervening with regard to unexcused student absences.

Appendix F: Sample Attendance Procedures (Norwich)

A. <u>Definitions</u>

1. "Student" – a student enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve in the Norwich Public Schools.

2. "Unexcused absence" – an absence from a regularly scheduled school day which absence is not excused as defined below.

3. "Excused absence" – an absence from a regularly scheduled school day for:

   a. Reasons of health, including illness, incapacity or doctor's visits. The District reserves the right to require a physician's note or other appropriate certification for absences at the discretion of the administration. Notes will typically be required in cases of absence of five consecutive days or a total of fifteen days in any school year.

   b. Religious holidays.

   c. Court appearance.

   d. Funeral.

   e. Approved school activities.

   f. Suspension or expulsion.

   g. Limited absences from school for special activities with parental consent, subject to the approval of the principal.

   The determination of whether an absence is excused will be made by the building principal. Parents or other persons having control of the child may appeal that decision to the Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee, whose decision shall be final.

4. "Truant" – a student who has four unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten unexcused absences from school in any school year. A student five or six years of age shall not be considered truant if the parent or person having control over such student has appeared personally at the school district office and exercised the option of not sending the child to school at five or six years of age. A student sixteen or seventeen years of age shall not be considered truant if the parent or person having control over such student consents to such student's withdrawal from school. Such parent or person shall personally appear at the school district office and sign a withdrawal form indicating such consent. If a parent or guardian of an expelled student chooses not to enroll the student in an alternative program, the student shall not be considered to be "truant."

5. "Habitual truant" – a student who has twenty unexcused absences within a school year.

B. <u>Procedures</u>

1. Attendance monitoring

   a. Annually at the beginning of the school year and upon enrollment of a student during the school year, the building principal shall notify the parent or other person having control of the student enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve of the obligations pursuant to CGS 10-184 to assure that children between the ages of five

and eighteen attend school or otherwise show that the child is elsewhere receiving equivalent instruction. Students aged five or six years of age, or students aged sixteen or seventeen years of age whose parents have appeared in person at the school district office to sign forms regarding decisions not to enroll five or six year old students or decisions to withdraw from school shall not be subject to these attendance monitoring procedures.

b. Annually at the beginning of school and upon the enrollment of a child during the school year, the building principal shall request from the parent or other person having control of a student enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve a telephone number or other means of contacting such parent or such other person during the school day.

c. Each school which includes any grades kindergarten through twelve shall maintain a system of monitoring individual unexcused absences for such students. Whenever such a student enrolled in that school fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day, school personnel or volunteers under the direction of the building principal or his/her designee shall make a reasonable effort to notify such parent or such other person by telephone of the student's absence unless school personnel have otherwise received an indication that such parent or such other person is aware of the student's absence. See p. 11, Attendance Procedure Documentation Form; Appendix A of Board Policy. Persons who in good faith make or fail to make such reports shall be immune from liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed for such action and shall otherwise be indemnified from liability in accordance with the provisions of CGS 10-235.

2. Attendance reporting

At the end of each school year, each school subject to these procedures shall report to the Superintendent the number of students enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve who are habitual truants. The Superintendent shall report this information to the State Department of Education annually.

3. Truants

Whenever a student is truant as defined above, the building principal or his/her designee shall schedule a meeting with the parent or other person having control of such child and appropriate school personnel to review and evaluate the reasons for the student's being a truant. This meeting shall be held not later than ten school days after the child becomes a truant. Should such parent or such other person decline to attend the meeting, that fact shall be documented and the meeting shall be held.

4. Referral to Superior Court

If the parent or other person having control of a student who is truant fails to attend the meeting held pursuant to section 3, above, or otherwise fails to cooperate with the school in attempting to solve the truancy problem, the Superintendent shall file for such truant a written complaint with the Superior Court pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46b - 149 alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the truant are such that his/her family is a family with service needs.

Appendix F: Sample Attendance Procedures (Norwich)

NORWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norwich School Health

HEALTH REASONS FOR EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL

Acute Gastroenteritis	Vomiting-2 or more times during the previous 24 hours. Diarrhea-2 or more times during the previous 24 hours or if the stool cannot be contained by toilet use or diapers.
Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)	Exclusion until 24 hours after the start of medication therapy.
Constant Cough	If a student coughs constantly and disruptively, he/she should be at home until the cough is controllable.
Erthema Infectiosum (Fifth Disease)	NO EXCLUSION.
Fever	100 degrees or greater, student to remain at home until he/she has 24 hours of no fever (afebrile).
Hepatitis A	Exclusion 1 week after onset of illness and/or resolution of jaundice (yellow skin color). Physician note required for school re-entry.
Hepatitis B (ex. Biting)	NO EXCLUSION unless unusually aggressive behavior is present.
Hepatitis C (ex. Biting)	NO EXCLUSION unless unusually aggressive behavior is present.
Herpes Simplex (Oral, cold sores, fever blisters)	NO EXCLUSION
Herpes Zoster (Varicella-Zoster, Shingles)	NO EXCLUSION, areas are to be covered. If areas unable to be covered, exclusion 7 days after onset of rash or until all areas have crusted.
Impetigo	Exclusion until 24 hours after the start of medication therapy and until purulent drainage can be controlled.
Measles (Rubeola)	Exclusion 7 days after onset of rash. Not from physician or school nurse before re-entry.
Mononucleosis	Primary care physician to determine if exclusion necessary for health and convalescence of individual student. Physician note required for activity limitations at school.

Mumps	Exclusion until 9 days after onset of Parotitis (inflammation and swelling of parotid gland). Physician note required for re-entry to school.
Pediculosis (Head Lice)	Exclusion until after treatment and nit (egg) free. Parent/adult must accompany student to school for re-entry. The school nurse must examine the student before school re-entry.
Pertussis (Whooping Cough)	Exclusion 3 weeks after onset of disease or 5 days after start of medication. Physician note required for re-entry to school.
Rubella (German Measles)	Exclusion 7 days after onset of rash. Physician note or exam by school nurse required for school re-entry.
Scabies	Exclusion until treatment (usually 24 hours).
Scarlet Fever (Scarletina)	Exclusion until 24 hours after start of medication.
Streptococcal Pharyngitis (Strep. Throat)	Exclusion 24 hours after start of medication.
Tinea Corporis (Ring Worm)	Areas must be covered during school hours. Exclusion until 24 hours after start of mediation. No contact sports (e.g., wrestling) until cleared.
Tinea Capitus (Ring Worm of head/scalp)	Exclusion until 24 hours after start of medication.
Tuberculosis (Active)	Exclusion until primary care physician and/or health director state that student is non-infectious.
Tuberculosis (Contact)	NO EXCLUSION. Situation will be re-evaluated if student does not follow through with diagnostic procedures and prophylaxis, if ordered.
Varicella (Chicken Pox)	Exclusion 7 days after onset of rash and/or until all areas have crusted. Physician note or exam by school nurse required for school re-entry. If treated with Zovirax (Acyclovir), physician note required for re-entry stating that Zovirax was ordered.

** REVIEWED AND REVISED AS NEEDED WITH MEDICAL ADVISORS **

Appendix F: Sample Attendance Procedures (Norwich)

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURE

*Please note: Each step should be documented on the form provided to all administrators, teachers, nurses, social workers/guidance counselors and secretaries. The form is necessary for documentation if a referral to community services is needed. If the problem is resolved, the student is moving, or at the end of the year, these forms will be placed in the student's cumulative file. After the first attempts to contact the parent/guardian and their results are documented, the form is passed to the next person involved in the next step as follows:

THE STUDENT IS ABSENT

The parent contacts the school or sends a note, or does not do either. The school will designate a person to be responsible for calling those parents who have not called the school that morning.

STEP ONE

The administrator or designee determines if each absence is excused or unexcused (per Norwich Public Schools policy), and this is logged onto StarBase. For excused absences, the person entering the information into the computer will also need to include a code for the reason given for the absence by the parent. The teachers are responsible for the monthly monitoring of their students' attendance. When a student has reached four unexcused absences (not necessarily in one month), or fifteen excused absences, the teacher will make a parent contact (i.e., completed phone call, phone message or letter). It is recommended that teachers make a copy of all correspondence to parents and attach it to the attendance form.

If the teacher believes that the absences may be related to educational concerns or that the student may be in need of academic or emotional support services in the classroom or school, a Child Study Team meeting (for regular education students) may be convened. A Planning and Placement Team meeting will be convened if necessary for special education students as determined by the student's case manager or other responsible staff member.

STEP TWO

After five days of *UNEXCUSED* absences, the teacher forwards the forms with his/her documented attempt to contact the parent to the administrator who makes one contact with the parent to determine the reason for the continued absences and to emphasize the need for regular attendance.

-OR-

After sixteen days of *EXCUSED* absences, the teacher should consult with the nurse to see if there is an underlying medical disorder that might explain the absences. If there are a number of absences affecting school performance that *ARE* due to a documented underlying medical disorder, consider holding a 504 meeting. The nurse should complete the attendance form and forward it to the guidance counselor/social worker.

Appendix F: Sample Attendance Procedures (Norwich)

STEP THREE

The administrator should then pass the form with his/her documented intervention to the social worker or guidance counselor for the student. The social worker/guidance counselor will then monitor that student's attendance.

IF UNRESOLVED

That is: Six unexcused absences or sixteen excused absences with no medical documentation of an underlying medical disorder:

STEP FOUR

School guidance counselor or school social worker intervention.

IF UNRESOLVED

That is: Four unexcused absences in one month or ten unexcused absences in the year to date or continued excused absences with no medical documentation of an underlying disorder:

STEP FIVE

A meeting with the parent or other person having control of such child and appropriate school personnel shall be held to review and evaluate the reasons for the student's being a truant. This meeting shall be held not later than ten school days after the child becomes a truant. Should such parent or such other person decline to attend the meeting that fact shall be documented and the meeting shall be held. (Policy 5110(b)). Consideration will be made for a referral to the Department of Children and Families for suspected educational neglect or to the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters for truancy. If a referral to Juvenile Court is being considered, a Planning and Placement Team meeting must be held to determine if evaluations are needed for possible special education needs or to document special education interventions.

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURE DOCUMENTATION FORM
Social Workers, Guidance Counselors, School Nurses

Student Name		School	
Homeroom Teacher		Grade	

Attempt #1:

Staff member making contact	Name of person whom you attempted to contact	Method	Date	Outcome: Check all that apply
				____ Left phone message ____ Sent Letter ____ Parent/teacher meeting *Parent response:* ____ Favorable outcome expected ____ Unable to resolve

Attempt #2:

Staff member making contact	Name of person whom you attempted to contact	Method	Date	Outcome: Check all that apply
				____ Left phone message ____ Sent Letter ____ Parent/teacher meeting *Parent response:* ____ Favorable outcome expected ____ Unable to resolve

If unresolved:

The student has sixteen or more excused absences. Referred to school nurse (please list date referred):

Date _____

The student has five or more unexcused absences. Referred to social worker or guidance counselor (please list name of social worker/guidance counselor and date of referral):

Referred to Social Worker/Guidance Counselor _____

Date_____

Appendix F: Sample Attendance Procedures (Norwich)

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURE DOCUMENTATION FORM
Teachers and Administrators

Student Name			School		
Homeroom Teacher				Grade	

Attempt #1:

Staff member making contact	Name of person whom you attempted to contact	Method	Date	Outcome: Check all that apply
				____ Left phone message ____ Sent Letter ____ Parent/teacher meeting *Parent response:* ____ Favorable outcome expected ____ Unable to resolve

Attempt #2:

Staff member making contact	Name of person whom you attempted to contact	Method	Date	Outcome: Check all that apply
				____ Left phone message ____ Sent Letter ____ Parent/teacher meeting *Parent response:* ____ Favorable outcome expected ____ Unable to resolve

If unresolved:

___ No medical documentation available to excuse absences.

___ Medical documentation may or may not be able to excuse absences.

___ Planning and Placement Team meeting scheduled.

___ 504 meeting scheduled.

___ Referral to community resources will be made.

___ Other

Comments:

_____

_____

Appendix F: Sample Attendance Procedures (Norwich)

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES
Sample Letter for Absenteeism and Tardiness

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Date

Parent Name
Street Address
Norwich, CT 06360

Student Name:
Teacher's Name:

Dear

Your child has been absent *unexcused* _____ days, absent *excused* _____ days, and *tardy* (late) _____ days this school year. Attached is a copy of the attendance record. If there are social, medical, personal or educational concerns that are affecting your child's regular and timely attendance, school personnel would like to be of assistance to you.

We firmly believe that regular school attendance can directly impact a child's academic performance and self-esteem. Consistent tardiness is also a disruption to other students in the class.

The Norwich Public Schools' attendance policy has been enclosed with this letter. As stated in the Policy, parents are required to call the school on each day that a child is absent or tardy. Please be sure to read and discuss together the information regarding the law and school policy. If you or your child has any questions regarding the law and the consequences of non-compliance, please contact the school. If the school does not receive a phone call (or note if you do not have access to a phone), the absence or tardiness will be considered unexcused.

Your child's attendance will be monitored and we look forward to a marked improvement. Please feel free to contact the school with any questions or concerns. We appreciate your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Enclosed:
- Copy of Attendance Record
- Norwich Public Schools Attendance Policy

Appendix F: Sample Attendance Procedures (Norwich)

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES
Script for Phone Call – Absenteeism and Tardiness

Hello, this is _____, your child's teacher at _____ School. I have noticed that your child has _____ unexcused and _____ excused absences so far this year (month). I am concerned that he/she is missing critical instruction needed to be successful in school (give examples of missed work/grades). Consistent attendance is necessary for your child's success in school.

Is there something we should know that is contributing to his/her absence from school? It is important that you notify the school every morning if your child will be absent explaining his/her absence. Our school handbook has a full explanation of unexcused vs. excused absences and the school phone number.

If you have any questions, you may contact the school principal.

Appendix G: Sample Attendance Committee Documents (New Britain)

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW BRITAIN
School Based Attendance Committee (SBAC)

TO: Principals/Assistant Principals

FROM: Attendance Officer

DATE: August 23, 2001

RE: **PROTOCOLS FOR THE SCHOOL BASED ATTENDANCE COMMITTEE (SBAC)**

As you know, in March of the 2000-2001 school year, the Board Policy and Procedures relative to attendance were amended. Part of the procedural changes involved eliminating the use of the PPT to address attendance issues with regular education students. As a result of these amendments, the School Based Attendance Committee (SBAC) was established to take the place of the role of the PPT in regular education student attendance issues. The following is the recommended procedures for setting up and using the SBAC; appropriate forms are attached:

1. From the regular education staff, designate a SBAC chairperson for the year.

2. Appoint two additional regular education staff members to serve on the SBAC for the school year.

3. Instruct the SBAC to meet as necessary when a staff member requests a SBAC meeting to address attendance issues regarding regular education students.

4. Teacher fills out SBAC Referral form and forwards it to the SBAC Chairperson.

5. SBAC Chairperson sets meeting date and time, fills out Notice of SBAC Meeting form and sends copies to parent/guardian, team members and the Attendance Officer. Notices should be sent out five school days prior to the meeting date.

6. SBAC meets and SBAC Meeting Summary form is completed.

7. Copies of the SBAC meeting form are to be given to the parent/guardian and the Attendance Officer; the SBAC Chairperson will retain a copy for the school file.

8. A folder for each attendance case should be maintained at the building by the SBAC Chairperson.

9. Attendance issues involving special education students will follow the standard PPT process as it has in the past.

I will be available to assist you and your SBAC as you begin to implement this protocol.

Thank you.

Appendix G: Sample Attendance Committee Documents (New Britain)

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW BRITAIN
Attendance Review Committee

The Attendance Review Committee is a collaborative 13-agency support team that provides proactive child and family assistance for the New Britain school district. Its purpose is to:

- ❑ Decrease referrals to Juvenile Court
- ❑ Increase student attendance
- ❑ Increase parent/guardian responsibility
- ❑ Foster collaborative partnerships among community agencies.

The committee meets bimonthly at the New Britain Board of Education building and is chaired by the district's Attendance Officer. Two cases are presented at each meeting. The parent/guardian and child attend the meeting.

_____

Procedures:

- Cases are referred to the Attendance Officer by school social workers, psychologists and guidance counselors.

   - A majority of cases are students who have eight to twenty (8-20) unexcused absences.

   - Intervention has taken place by school district staff before the Attendance Review Committee's involvement.

- The Attendance Officer makes a home visit to explain the district's concern for the child at inform the parent/guardian of the meeting date and location.

- Release of information forms are signed by the parent/guardian prior to the meeting.

- Pledge of confidentiality forms are signed by each committee member at the meeting.

- Cases will be documented and monitored by the Attendance Officer.

- Parent non-involvement results in immediate referral to Juvenile Court or the Department of Children and Families.

_____

Participating Agencies (2002-2003):

Big Brother/Big Sisters	Juvenile Court
Boys' and Girls' Club	Klingberg Family Centers Inc.
Catholic Family Services	New Britain Police Department
Consolidated School District of New Britain	New Britain Youth Services
Department of Children and Families	Wheeler Clinic
Department of Social Services	YWCA
Human Resources Agency of New Britain	

Appendix G: Sample Attendance Committee Documents (New Britain)

REFERRAL
School Based Attendance Committee (SBAC)

Student Name: _____ DOB: _____ Grade: _____

School: _____ Parent Name: _____ Home Phone: _____

Person Completing Form: _____ Date: _____

Attendance Issue (based on Board Attendance Policy):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Other Issues:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Submit form to SBAC Chairperson.

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW BRITAIN
Notice of Attendance Committee Meeting

_____   Date: _____
(Name of Parent/Guardian or Student)

_____
(Name of Parent/Guardian or Student)

_____
(Name of Parent/Guardian or Student)

Dear _____:

Please be advised that a School Based Attendance Committee meeting will be convened on behalf of _____ DOB: _____.
(Student's Name)

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

The purpose of this meeting is to address the following attendance issue(s):

_____

_____

_____

The following individuals have been invited to attend:

_____		_____	
Name	Committee Chairperson	Name	Attendance Officer
_____		_____	
Name	Referring Teacher	Name	Other
_____		_____	
Name	Committee Member	Name	Other
_____		_____	
Name	Committee Member	Name	Other

Parent participation in this process is very important. Please make every effort to attend.

Sincerely,

_____   _____
(Name)   (Title)

Appendix G: Sample Attendance Committee Documents (New Britain)

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW BRITAIN
Attendance Committee Meeting Summary

ID: _____   Meeting Date: _____

_____

Student: _____ DOB: _____ Age: _____ Current Grade: _____ H.S. Credits: _____

School: _____ Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male

Referring Teacher: _____ Ethnic: ☐ Am. Ind. or Alask. Nat ☐ Asian or Pacif. Is ☐ Black not Hisp ☐ White not Hisp ☐ Hispanic

Parent/Guardian: _____ Student Dominant Language: ☐ English ☐ Other (specify): _____

Address: _____ Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Parent Dominant Language: ☐ English   ☐ Other (specify): _____

_____

Committee Chairperson: _____ Committee Member: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Committee Member: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Guidance: _____

Teacher: _____ Nurse: _____

Student: _____ Other: _____

Other: _____ Other: _____

ATTENDANCE ISSUES:
_____
_____
_____

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS: ☐ Check here if additional pages attached   Date of follow-up meeting (if required): _____
_____
_____
_____

Recorder: _____

A MESSAGE TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS ON
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Students at risk of educational failure represent one of the most serious challenges in public education today. We are all aware that excellent attendance contributes to gains in student achievement. There is much to learn and many skills to develop each day in school. Each day a child is absent he/she misses many learning opportunities. With that in mind, we would like to remind parents of the following:

- The Connecticut Department of Education requires schools to monitor attendance and address issues of excessive absenteeism/truancy. A student is identified as truant when he/she has four (4) unexcused absences in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences in a school year. Children who are identified as truant may be assisted by the Student Assistance Team, Youth Services Bureau, Planning and Placement Teams, and the juvenile justice system. *Parents who are strong role models regarding attendance instill good habits in their children.*

- Late arrivals and early dismissals from school leave gaps in their daily responsibilities and learning. *The beginning and end of each day sets the pace for the present day and the next.*

- Dental, eye exams and other medical checkups should be scheduled during vacation days or after school hours. *Appointments should not rob a child of learning and participation.*

- Make-up work should be requested after the second consecutive day of absence. It may be picked up at the end of that school day or sent home with a sibling or neighbor. *All efforts should be made to make up missed assignments.*

- Cold and flu season offers many challenges to parents who must decide if a child is well enough to attend school. When in doubt, we encourage parents to send their child. Most children do better than expected after arriving. Children will be closely watched by our school nurse and sent home if necessary. *Our motto is: when in doubt.... send them.*

- Exercise, adequate rest, plenty of fluids and a well balanced diet (including fresh fruits and vegetables) will boost your child's immune defenses. *Attendance improves with a healthy lifestyle.*

- Children should return to school when their temperatures have been normal for 24 hours. If they are receiving antibiotics for bacterial infections they may return after 48 hours of medication. *Consult your child's physician for medication recommendations that will make them more comfortable during the school day.*

- Children need to dress appropriately with warm outdoor clothing during colder months. They will be outside for recess when it is not precipitating and temperatures are 20 degrees (including wind chill factors) or above. Participation in recess and gym classes will be required unless a written note from you or your child's physician is sent to school. *These scheduled activities are a valuable part of your child's day.*

Windham Public Schools District Attendance Office

"Be a success, not a mess.... stay in school because the streets have nothing to give."*

We want youth in school. Whose responsibility is it? YOURS....
When students have school attendance issues, the community as a whole is affected by this educational concern. Research shows that communities with a high level of high school graduates ultimately gain from the productivity and positive engagement of young people.

Benefits of Staying in School:

- Positive self-esteem
- Positive regard for others
- Increased opportunities
- Good habits for the future
- Better, higher paying jobs
- A brighter future

The District Attendance Office is committed to **decreasing truancy, increasing school attendance, and decreasing the number of high school drop-outs**. Program objectives:

- ✓ Increase parent awareness of the importance of daily school attendance.
- ✓ Increase the involvement of school departments, community agencies and businesses in procedures designed to address school truancy at <u>all</u> grade levels.
- ✓ Increase communication between the school and the community on the issue of school attendance.
- ✓ Establish a closer partnership between the school district and the local law enforcement agencies.
- ✓ Increase referrals to Peer Mediation Programs for student support.
- ✓ Increase support to vocational and educational programs for students with special needs.

Windham Public Schools is asking for the participation of all community members and residents in getting students to school. Our office is open Monday – Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
As a collaborating partner in our efforts, we invite you to call us if you:

- ❑ See a child/youth not in school during school hours;
- ❑ Believe a child is a risk of being truant;
- ❑ Would like to become involved;
- ❑ Have any questions, suggestions or ideas; or
- ❑ Would like to be a member of our Attendance Advisory Committee.

For more information contact:
Name, Title
(860) 555-_____

* DAO slogan by Sarah Mahoney and Savannah Bostick

Appendix H: Sample Attendance Letters (Stonington)

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Date

Parents/Guardians
Address

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The Stonington schools are committed to success for all students. With this emphasis in mind, we bring to your attention the number of days Student Name has been absent. These numbers have been determined to be excessive.

School Year	Days Absent	School Days to Date	% Days Absent
2003/2004	<<dayabsent>>	<<schooldays>>	<<percent>>

There is a direct relationship between school attendance, time spent in instruction, and academic achievement. Although these absences may have been excused, we bring this matter to your attention because of the potential negative impact this situation may have on Student Name's education.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call the school at (860) 599-_____. Thank you, in advance, for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Name, Principal

Cc: Name, Social Worker

Appendix H: Sample Attendance Letters (Stonington)

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Date

Parents/Guardians
Address

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I have received your letter requesting an excused absence for Student Name from February 12-14. I am approving your request and have forwarded the information to your child's teachers. I'd just like to bring to your attention the following statements from our Attendance Policy:

- "Student absence from class for purposes of family travel or vacation is a loss of valuable class time. If circumstances demand that students accompany their parents during the school year, disciplinary action will not be taken, but the number of days missed will be counted in the total number of days absent in determining course credit."

- "A passing grade cannot be earned when a student exceeds eight (8) absences in a semester course of fifteen (15) in a year-long course. In these situations, an "E" will be recorded on the report card indicating excessive absences. In such cases, an appeal can be made by completing an Attendance Appeal Form and submitting it to the administration.

Therefore, the three (3) days count as an excused absence; however, the three days will count in the total days absent in determining course credit.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Assistant Principal

Appendix H: Sample Attendance Letters (Danbury)

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Date

Parents/Guardians
Address

Dear Parents/Guardians:

We are concerned with Student Name's attendance so far this semester. He/she has accumulated **22 absences this year**. We hope, with your assistance, that we can help improve his/her attendance.

Attendance, in accordance with Connecticut State Law, is the serious responsibility of both parent/guardian and student. There are laws governing attendance at school, which place specific emphasis on truant students. The school system is required to document and forward truancy data to the State.

A student who accumulates more than ten (10) absences in a semester is in jeopardy of losing credit for the course. **At this time your son/daughter has exceeded the 10 absence limit. Your child must now go through the appeal process for restoration of credits.** Any documentation regarding absences should be submitted with the Credit Restoration form. Earning a passing grade is not sufficient for the awarding of credit because credit is awarded based on class attendance as well as grades.

The only excused absences are in-school or out-of-school suspensions and court dates. A student is absent if he/she is not physically present in the classroom.

Please contact your child's guidance counselor as soon as possible regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

Name   Name
Principal   Guidance Counselor

Appendix H: Sample Attendance Letters (Hartford)

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Student's Name: _____

Date: _____

All attempts at Hartford Public High School to assist you with your child's attendance problems have been ineffective at this time. We therefore strongly suggest that you seek outside family counseling to help resolve this matter.

Please understand that serious legal issues are involved and that you and/or your child may be referred to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and/or the juvenile court system.

Listed below are several local counseling agencies that may be able to help you with this problem. We urge you to contact them as soon as possible. If you have trouble reaching them, please let the school know.

Catholic Family Services	555-_____
The Village for Families and Children	555-_____
Institute for Hispanic Families	555-_____
Institute of Living – Children's Clinic	555-_____
Hispanic Health Council	555-_____

Feel free to call the Guidance Department or Ms. _____ (attendance worker) at 555-_____ if you need assistance. Your immediate attention to this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Name, Title

Appendix H: Sample Attendance Letters (Windham)

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Date

Parents/Guardians
Address

Re: **TRANSPORTATION POLICY**

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I am writing this letter to inform you of the District Attendance Office policy regarding transportation of students. We understand that a student may occasionally miss the bus or may, for some other reason, need a ride to school. Our office is willing to provide this service; however, we would like you to know that we must limit the number of times we will do so.

We have set a limit of two transportation requests in a month or a maximum of four in one school year. We ask that you try to make other arrangements (such as bringing the student to school yourself or sending him/her with a friend or neighbor) before telephoning our office. If there are special circumstances which prohibit you from obtaining other transportation, please call and we will discuss this with you.

The District Attendance Office is not a transportation office. It is the office through which student attendance is monitored and school and state policies are enforced.

Our primary goal is to have your child in school every day, and we are willing to work with you to achieve this goal. Please do not hesitate to call if you have any concerns regarding your child's attendance. Our office number is (860) 555-____ and we are open 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Name
Attendance Officer

Appendix H: Sample Attendance Letters (Windham)

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Dear Parents/Guardians:

STUDENT TRANSFER/WITHDRAWAL PROCEDURES

We welcome you and your child to WPS and look forward to a successful year.

Please take note that if you should decide to move to another school district, either within Connecticut or to another State, that you are required by law to notify the WPS of such a move immediately. In order to assist you and your child with a smooth transition to the new school district, you will be requested to complete a Transfer of Student Information form for your child(ren) of all ages, grades K-12. This form should be completed and returned to the WPS before you move. If you do not know the name and/or address of your child's new school, we will expect to receive a Transfer of Student Information from the new school within **ten** days of your move. If we do not receive a request for a Transfer of Student Information from your child's new receiving school within ten days, we will have to consider your child truant from school and the District Attendance Office will be notified.

Any child absent from school for ten or more days in any given school year, without an excuse, is considered to be truant by Connecticut State Law. Students who are truant from school are to be referred to Juvenile Court and/or the Department of Children and Families/DCF. We do not wish to refer your child to these agencies, but will be required to by law if you do not comply with the above request. Moving out-of-district without properly notifying the school could result in your child having an excessive number of unexcused absences as we must keep them on our books until we are formally notified by the parent or legal guardian that the child has moved. Ongoing communication with your child's school is always the best way to support academic success and promote smooth transitions. The transference of your child's school records at all levels is critical to his/her success, especially those records transferred from a high school.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Name   Name
Assistant Superintendent   Attendance Officer

End Notes:

[1] Truancy is only one criterion for identifying a **family with service needs**; the full definition according to Connecticut General Statutes Section 46b-120 is a family that includes a child who (A) has without just cause run away from the parental home or other properly authorized and lawful place of abode; (B) is beyond the control of parent, parents, guardian or other custodian, (C) has engaged in indecent or immoral conduct, (D) is a truant or habitual truant or who, while in school, has been continuously and overtly defiant of school rules and regulations, or (E) is thirteen years of age or older and has engaged in sexual intercourse with another person and such other person is thirteen years of age or older and not more than two years older or younger than such child.

[2] Truancy is only one criterion for identifying a **youth in crisis**; the full definition according to Connecticut General Statutes Section 46b-120 is any person ages sixteen or seventeen years of age who, within the last two years, (A) has without just cause run away from the parental home or other properly authorized and lawful place of abode, (B) is beyond the control of parents, guardian or other custodian, or (C) has four unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten unexcused absences in any school year.

[3] Student enrollment, or the number of students enrolled in a local school district, may be differ substantially from the number of students who live in a particular city or town because some students attend private schools or are enrolled out-of-district to attend specialized programs (e.g., special education and vocational programs). In two Connecticut municipalities, high school students attend privately-operated high schools that are open to all local high school students but are outside the jurisdiction of the local school districts.

[4] Nelson, 1990.

[5] Public Policy Institute of California, 2003.

[6] Barton and Watkins, 1997.

[7] "Risk factors are those characteristics, variables, or hazards that, if present for a given individual, make it more likely that this individual, rather than someone selected at random from the general population, will develop a disorder." "Protective factors are factors that reduce the likelihood of problem behavior either directly or by mediating or moderating the effect of exposure to risk factors." Arthur, et al, 2002.

[8] Dryfoos, 1990; Thornberry and colleagues, 1995.

[9] Stewart, 1984.

[10] MPR Associates, Inc. is an educational consulting firm that conducts research, policy analysis, evaluation, and curriculum and professional development for the U.S. Department of Education, state and local governments, higher education institutions, local schools and school districts, and charitable foundations (http://www.mprinc.com).

[11] Hoachlander, Dykman, Godowsky, 2001.

[12] School District of Philadelphia, 1998.

[13] In cities with population over 100,000. Children's Defense Fund analysis of 2000 U.S. Census data (http://www.childrensdefense.org/data/census00/states_counties_cities.asp).

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