

SPOKANE COUNTY JUVENILE COURT DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION OF STATUS OFFENDERS

The Spokane County Juvenile Court, working with several schools in the West Valley School District, is targeting youth for whom truancy petitions with stays attached have been filed and who have gone through the West Valley Community Truancy Board. The Truancy Specialist meets youth and their families or guardians at the Truancy Board and, depending on continued absences and other presenting needs, intervenes with more intensive case management as required. In partnership with the Models for Change Grant in Spokane County, this project also aims to establish stronger partnerships with schools and community agencies, to develop systematic practices applicable to truancy boards and truancy petition filing, and to create a better methodology for assessing risks for status offenders.

Project outcomes are avoidance of instatement of petitions (lifting stays), avoidance of contempt petitions and orders, and avoidance of use of secure detention.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Deinstitutionalization Project has been funded for two years and has received \$73,314 in grant funding for each year. Key elements of the project include:

- Truancy Specialist is present at each meeting of the West Valley Truancy Board and meets each youth and their family or guardian.
- Check and Connect model of staying in touch with youth, particularly those at a higher risk level, or who do not self-correct after the Truancy Board. Check and Connect includes four components: mentoring, systematic monitoring, timely and individualized intervention, and enhancing home-school support.
- The project uses the Social History section of the Washington State Juvenile Court risk assessment to gather information about truant youth. A new assessment instrument (WARNS) was developed in conjunction with Models for Change and was piloted with project youth during the second year.
- The Truancy Specialist works out of each school, monitors the attendance of all youth after the Truancy Board, and sees every student in person during the year.
- More intense case management is available for youth who do not self-correct or who require additional services. The Truancy Specialist may also mediate between the school and the student to overcome barriers to continued enrollment or pose alternatives to lifting the stays on petitions.
- Youth at higher risk may be introduced to the multidisciplinary Child Study Team. The goal of the Child Study Team is to keep the student in school, including identifying alternate schools, when appropriate. In addition to the vice principal and Truancy Specialist (provided by the court), the meeting is attended by appropriate school staff, counselors, youth and family or legal guardian, and occasionally by outside agencies.

Barriers Encountered in the Second Year

- The Truancy Specialist is able to connect youth with critical services. However, families are experiencing more unemployment and continue to face hardships in this economy. Many families are facing critical basic needs.

- Success in working with youth and being known in the schools also increases demands on the Truancy Specialist, including from youth who are not currently truant.
- Budget shortfalls continue to threaten court and school staff, as well as community agencies.

Successes and Accomplishments

- Partnerships have continued to improve. The Truancy Specialist now has an office in each school and is regularly available to youth and staff. He has also been working this year with two ESD 101 student advocates (currently grant-funded) to create positive relationships with the youth.
- The Truancy Specialist continues to utilize the pre-screen risk assessment instrument, as was the case in the first year. The data collection process has been streamlined and the online form has been expanded. In part, this allows several questions from the risk assessment developed by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) in Washington.
- The Truancy Specialist is an active member of the West Valley Truancy Board. He also has become a resource in advising on the formation of boards in other districts.
- The Truancy Specialist is an active spokesperson on truancy, with other agencies, and other school districts, and sits on the Spokane County Gang Task Force.
- The West Valley Truancy Board is part of a study by Washington State University on the effectiveness of community truancy boards and is serving as a model for creation of a tool kit for implementation in other districts.
- The ESD101 NET School is a credit retrieval option with promise for some students. One student was referred last year and several students participated in the summer program. This is a unique approach to helping youth get back on track to graduate. Students in the summer of 2010, for example, attended an intensive 60-day course. The course of study was individualized, designed with real-life, practical applications of learning. The goal is to ready the student to complete the following year at a par for the grade level. Successful students have all credit deficiencies waived.

Concurrent Initiatives

Several programs were initiated in Spokane County during the 2009/2010 school year. Instead of sending students to alternative programs in West Valley School District, neighboring districts (Spokane and East Valley, in particular) have created options for youth. These include several alternative programs and more GED options. As a result, enrollment in West Valley alternative programs, such as CBE (Contract-Based Education) and Spokane Valley High School has been reduced. This means more options for youth in their home districts, but means reduced resources and enrollment in West Valley.

The Models for Change grant is partnering in several ways. A new risk and needs assessment instrument has been piloted in Spokane and parts of it are integrated in the current screening process employed by the Truancy Specialist. The West Valley Truancy Board is serving as a model for replication in another district in Spokane. A tool kit is being developed for use in creating truancy boards. The grant has also supported qualitative research to provide insight into truancy, the role of schools, perceptions of parents, and perceptions of youth.

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) grant has been in place in Spokane County since 2004. The grant supports building collaborations to develop alternatives to secure detention. While not

targeted specifically to status offenders, steps in assessing risk and developing detention alternatives benefit all juvenile offenders.

PROJECT YOUTH

Table 12 provides summary data on the 318 youth referred to the West Valley Truancy Board in the first two years of the grant. For 25 of the youth, this was the second petition.

Table 12: Spokane Participation

	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Petitions filed*	139	179	318
Closed during year	124	177	301
Open at end year two	15	2	17

*25 youth had petitions in both years.

Petitions are initially filed with a stay. If that stayed status remains in effect, the petition is dismissed at the end of the school year. Only 17 petitions were open at the end of the second year. Petitions filed late in the year, such as in May and June, and that remain stayed and are dismissed, have a short period for consequences. Presumably, however, since West Valley files consistent with state guidelines, additional absences at the end of the year or other circumstances that would lead to a fact finding hearing are not as likely for these students as they are for students with unexcused absences at the beginning of the year.

Table 13: Spokane Truancy Petitions

	Year 1	Year 2
Demographics		
• Male	47%	48%
• Female	53%	52%
• Minority*	10%	10%
Median age	16.0	16.0
• 11-13	9%	4%
• 14-15	28%	32%
• 16-17	63%	64%
Grade in school		
• 6 th -8 th grade	14%	6%
• 9 th -10 th grade	41%	65%
• 11 th -12 th grade	45%	29%
School		
• West Valley	55%	47%
• Spokane Valley	19%	18%
• CBE	14%	29%
• Centennial Middle	12%	6%
IEP**	14%	15%
Employed**	17%	14%
Prior truancy petitions***	38%	46%

*Non-white and/or Hispanic.

**Determined at risk assessment meeting.

***Since September 2006.

Table 13 provides information about youth with petitions in each of the grant years. Slightly more of the students were female than male in both years, although percentages were close to half. Ten percent of the students were minorities in both years.

The median age was 16 – over 60% of students with petitions coming before the West Valley Truancy Board were 16 or 17 years old. Only a small percentage was referred at the middle school level. Just 12% in the first year and 6% in the second came from Centennial Middle School.

Of note is that 14% of the students in the first year and 15% in the second had an IEP (individual education plan). These data were drawn from the risk assessment interview, which was completed on 247 of the students. A substantial percentage of the students had truancy petitions in earlier years (since 2006) – 38% in the first year and 46% in the second.

Risk Assessment

The risk assessment continues to provide valuable information to identify needs of the youth and barriers they face in being successful in school. The data in **Table 14** are from the Pre-Screen, Social History portion of the Washington Juvenile Court Youth Risk Assessment instrument. Assessments were completed on 250 of the 318 students in the first two years. (Some petitions are closed before the Truancy Specialist has an opportunity to work with the youth, such as those filed late in the year.)

Total number petitions	318
Number completed assessments	250
Risk element: Peers	
• All antisocial or gang	6%
Risk elements: substance abuse	
• Substance use (not disruptive)	56%
• Drugs/alcohol disruptive	6%
Risk element: Mental health	
• Mental health risk factor	26%
Risk element: DSHS	
• One or more placements	8%
Risk element: Runaways/placements	
• One or more events	16%
Risk elements: Abuse	
• Victim of abuse	13%
Risk element: Family/siblings	
• Jail or imprisonment	38%

*Washington Juvenile Court Youth Risk Assessment Pre-screen instrument.

Scoring on the social history section excludes criminal history and results in “moderate” risk scores as the highest attainable risk level. In fact, many of these youth have had criminal involvement, a risk not captured here. (The AOC risk assessment instrument includes questions that capture more of that information as well as past experience with violence.)

Based on the social history screening most youth were low risk. The Truancy Specialist completes a subjective assessment for his own preliminary use in working with these youth. He estimated that about one-third of the youth were fairly low risk, requiring little intervention other than monitoring and occasional check in. The other students were at greater risk and warranted more intense case management.

It is clear that the youth were facing challenges and had risks in areas beyond school attendance and performance. Risk assessment data supplement anecdotal reports of poverty, family problems, and even homelessness. Substance use and abuse was an issue for the majority (62%) of youth interviewed. Mental health was a factor for 26%. That 38% of these students had a parent or sibling in jail or in prison is notable.

OUTCOMES

Table 15 shows subjective measures on the level of intervention, level of involvement or engagement of the youth, regardless of the level of the intervention, and the highest consequence at the end of the petition. Some of the youth had more time for consequences because of earlier filing dates than others. The appellate court ruling (*Bellevue School District, Respondent V. E.S., Appellant*) in the first year had an impact on outcomes in that some of the petitions had to be reissued, giving students less time to go to the next level, if indicated.

Total number closed petitions	301
Level of intervention (n=245)	
• Initial meeting, monitor	47%
• Limited case management	36%
• More intensive CM	17%
Level of engagement (n=248)	
• Low	17%
• Medium	33%
• High	49%
Highest consequence	
• Stayed petition only	91%
• Stay lifted	9%
• Contempt order	0%
• Detention	0%

The Truancy Specialist was active in both years of the grant in seeking solutions and preventing stays on petitions from being lifted. For the first time, there has been a consistent procedure in place to review requests to lift stays on petitions. For that to occur, it requires the approval of the Truancy Specialist, the school administrator and the truancy coordinator. The Truancy Specialist acts as the gatekeeper.

While data are subjective, the project monitored the levels of intervention (extent of case management or other work with the student) and engagement (extent to which the student was actively participating). It is hoped that the third year of the grant will provide school performance data (credits earned and attendance). Levels of engagement and intervention may be useful correlates in looking at those data.

For the second year since 1998, West Valley did not have a single contempt order associated with a truancy petition. Stays were lifted on 9% of the project youth with closed petitions during the first two years of the grant. There was a single detention, but it was the result of a warrant on a prior petition, so not included below.

COMPARISON DATA

Comparison data were drawn from the court data system for a two-year period from September 2006 through August 2008. Data shown in **Table 16** are for all districts in Spokane County and the subset for just the West Valley School District. Petitions filed after April 2008 (those filed late in the second school year) were excluded. The remaining petitions were matched with outcomes through August 2008.

Table 16: Spokane Comparison Data

	County	WVSD
Petitions filed*	3,533	489
Number with 2 nd petition	491	64
Demographics		
• Male	53%	50%
• Minority	21%	11%
Median age	15	16
• Age range	5-17	6-17
Highest consequence		
• Stayed petition	66%	79%
• Stay lifted	26%	19%
• Contempt order(s)	7%	1%
• Detention	2%	1%

*Petitions filed in 06/07 and 07/08 school years.

Two-thirds (66%) of petitions in the county during this period had no consequences beyond the original petition; 26% had the stay lifted on the petition and 9% resulted in contempt orders or detentions. A lower percentage of youth in the West Valley School District had stays lifted (19%) and just 2% had consequences beyond the stay being lifted.

Roughly 15% of comparison youth with petitions had petitions in both the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years. The median age of youth was 15 countywide and 16 in the West Valley School District.