

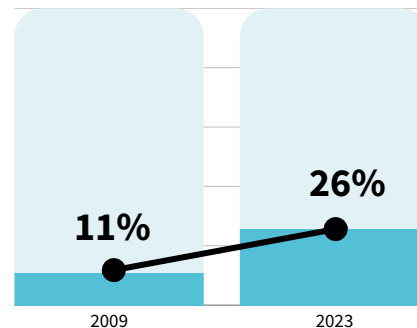
Reducing truancy with community services: A look at the research literature

A research overview compiled by Annabelle Atkin, PhD and Paul A. Robbins, PhD in collaboration with Project LINK staff for Executive Director Rebecca Humphrey

Truancy is a significant problem among youth

Truancy rates are much higher than in 2009, with dramatic increases since the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Research finds that truancy is linked to negative outcomes such as delinquency² and substance use,³ as truants may engage in delinquent behavior when not in school.⁴

Truancy rates in the US have more than doubled since 2009



What does the research say?

Studies on interventions to reduce truancy usually focus on school-based programs^{5,6} (see Appendix at end of this brief) but community programs are a promising avenue for supporting students.

A 2025 systematic review of programs⁷ found that **cognitive behavioral therapy** is commonly used in truancy interventions:

- Systematic desensitization and reinforcement of positive behaviors
- Psychoeducational techniques for understanding the situation of the student, offering tools to develop skills, and motivational-based interventions

Involving families is one key mechanism: half of the effective treatments simultaneously intervened with family.⁷

Are programs used in Indiana evidence-based?

Some, but not most.

Below is a list of programs derived from the [2025 Indiana YJOC Diversion Directory](#) that are a specific intervention (“Attend and Engage Program”) rather than a general approach (e.g., broadly “juvenile diversion program”) related to truancy and school-based offenses. For each program, we searched for published evaluations that assessed program effectiveness.

For seven programs, we found evaluations by external evaluators.

Program name	Evaluations or Evidence Base
Check & Connect	Multiple evaluations and rated as “Promising” and “Strong” in evidence clearinghouses (What Works Clearinghouse , Evidence for ESSA)
People and Animals Learning Services (PALS)	Not evaluated by a clearinghouse; a 2016 meta-analysis found moderate benefits of equine therapy in general for at-risk youth well-being
Restorative Justice Circles	Not evaluated by a clearinghouse; some case study evidence on the benefits of restorative justice circles in the peer-reviewed literature
Seeking Safety	Adult version rated as “Supported by Research Evidence” in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse and multiple meta-analyses on different outcomes
Victim-Offender Restoration Program	Grounded in tenets of restorative justice, which has some evidence of effectiveness (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and peer-reviewed meta-analysis)

For fifteen programs, we found no record of external evaluation.

Program name	Evaluations or Evidence Base
Attend and Engage Program (AEP)	No evaluations found
Leadership Infusion for Families and Teens (LIFT)	Informally evaluated by the program implementers, no formal evaluation found
Lifecraft	No evaluations found
Parent Project	No evaluations found
Project ATTEND (Aiming Toward Truancy Elimination and Non-attendance Decrease)	No evaluations found
Reducing Adolescent Aggression Program (RAAP)	No evaluations found
Stepping Up Class	No evaluations found
Steps to Success Class	No evaluations found
Student Attendance Review Board (SARB)	This approach is used extensively and districts report on outcomes (example here) but we were unable to find evaluations for effectiveness
Truancy Termination Partnership Program (TTPP)	No evaluations found
Voices	No evaluations found
WhyTry	Reports multiple benefits on their website, but most links do not lead to accessible studies to review for quality and accuracy

Examples of other evidence-based programs:

Here, we list four additional programs found via searching state initiatives and from an older systematic review on community-based programs addressing truancy⁸



Connecticut Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP)

Connecticut launched LEAP in 2021. It uses relational home visits: trained staff or community partners visit families, build trust, identify barriers, connect families to resources, and work toward getting the student reengaged with school. It was initially implemented across 15 districts and has been [evaluated twice](#), leading to sustained increases in attendance for students in all grades, with the largest benefits for students in grades 9-12.



Michigan Pathways to Potential (P2P)

P2P places trained Michigan Department of Health and Human Services caseworkers, or “success coaches,” in public schools to (1) identify and address barriers to attendance, and (2) connect students and families with public benefits, community resources, and other services while (3) working with schools and families to improve student engagement and attendance. P2P has been implemented in hundreds of Michigan public K–12 schools and a [statewide evaluation](#) found that P2P was associated with a 7.9% reduction in chronic absenteeism. This effect size is equivalent to approximately 21 fewer chronically absent students per school per year, with larger reductions associated with greater program exposure.



Oregon Attendance and Truancy—Universal Procedures & Interventions (ATI-UP)

ATI-UP is a school-wide program that uses a multi-tiered approach in which school staff monitor attendance, set attendance goals, communicate with families, recognize improvements, and provide additional support to students with attendance problems. ATI-UP was evaluated through a randomized study involving 27 elementary schools across 17 Oregon districts and 10,285 students. After one semester, ATI-UP schools increased average daily attendance and decreased chronic absenteeism, compared to controls. The results were not significant at the school level but were significant at the student level, qualifying ATI-UP for the [Evidence for ESSA](#) “Promising” category.



Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) groupwork

A therapy model that asserts the importance of building on the resources and motivation of clients because they know their problems best and are capable of generating solutions to solve their own problems ([California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse](#)). This approach is intended for adolescents and was evaluated via multiple studies in Oklahoma. It has been rated as “Promising” by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#).

Appendix:

School-based programs included in previous research

Ability School Engagement Program	
Clearinghouse	Rating
Crime Solutions	Promising, based on a single study
Program summary	
A police–school partnership that seeks to improve the legal understanding of truant and antisocial behavior for students and their parents by 1) raising awareness of truancy laws; 2) fostering perceptions of the legitimacy of the laws; and 3) empowering participants to willingly re-engage with school, and thereby increase their school attendance and reduce truancy.	
Target population	Eligibility
Youth, between 10 to 16 years	Students whose attendance in the three previous school terms is 85% or less and have no legitimate explanation for absences.
Country	Key Personnel
Australia	Four trained conference facilitators, a police officer, and a school representative (e.g., a guidance counselor or principal).
Program activities	
Family group conference involving the student, parents, police, and school representatives; discussion of the causes of truancy and relevant truancy laws; development of an individualized action plan to improve school attendance; home routines and school-based tutoring; referrals to social-support agencies when needed; and six months of monitoring by a police officer through phone calls, home visits, and school attendance checks.	

Appendix (continued)

Primary Project	
Clearinghouse	Rating
What Works Clearinghouse	Promising, based on a single study
Program summary	
A school-based early intervention program designed to improve school engagement and help young children with academic or social-emotional difficulties adjust to school.	
Target population	Eligibility
Children, Pre-K to 3rd Grade	Students whose (1) attendance rate in the prior year or semester was less than 90 percent and (2) social-emotional screening based on the Teacher-Child Rating Scale indicated moderate, but not severe, behavioral problems.
Country	Key Personnel
United States	Child associates (trained paraprofessionals) supervised by a school mental-health professional.
Program activities	
Students participate in individual, play-based sessions with a trained child associate for about 30–40 minutes, typically 12–15 sessions over one semester. Meetings occur in a designated playroom space within the school and focus on allowing children to express themselves by playing with particular toys.	

Appendix (continued)

Truancy and Assessment Service Centers	
Clearinghouse	Rating
Blueprints	Inconclusive evidence
National Gang Center	Promising, based on a single study
Program summary	
A school-based truancy intervention that identifies children at risk for chronic truancy, assesses the needs of children and families, and connects them with coordinated services to improve attendance and reduce later delinquency.	
Target population	Eligibility
Children, Pre-K to 5th Grade (or up to 6th Grade in K-6 schools)	Children who are at high risk for truancy and other academic/behavioral problems, identified through screening or referral.
Country	Key Personnel
United States	Truancy center staff, school personnel, social-service providers
Program activities	
Early identification and screening of truant students; assessment of the child and family's needs; development of individualized service plans; referral to appropriate community, school, and family services; monitoring of attendance and service plans; and use of the Family in Need of Services (FINS) process when necessary.	

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Methods

Findings presented in this brief come from a literature review of academic peer-reviewed studies, as well as a review of research and findings from non-partisan think tanks, foundations, and organizations. Given the rapid nature of this search, other relevant studies may exist. In addition, please note that we did not use formal statistical methods for summarizing results and exploring reasons for differences in findings across studies.

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