

COLLABORATING AGENCIES

- Baird Center for Children and Families (*community mental health agency*)
- Burlington Police Department
- Burlington School-Based Health Centers
- Burlington School District
- Champlain Initiative (*regional partnership*)
- Chittenden County State's Attorney
- Chittenden County Family Court
- City of Burlington
- Community Justice Center
- Linking Learning to Life (*school-to-career nonprofit*)
- Lund Family Center
- Spectrum Youth and Family Services
- Vermont Agency of Human Services
- Vermont Department of Corrections, Probation and Parole.
- Vermont Department of PATH, Burlington District (*social welfare agency*)
- Vermont Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Burlington District (*child custody agency*)
- United Way of Chittenden County

Funding support from:

- Vermont Children and Family Council for Prevention Programs.
- United Way of Chittenden County.
- City of Burlington.
- Burlington School District.
- Safe Schools / Healthy Students federal grant funded through the U.S. Departments of Education; Health and Human Services; and Justice.

For more information:

Burlington School District

Grants Director Betsy Liley

802.865.5383 ~ bliley@bsdvt.org

United Way of Chittenden County

Community Services Director Martha Maksym

802.864.7541 ~ Martha@unitedwaycc.org

Burlington (Vt.) Truancy Prevention Project

Students cannot learn if they are not in school. Absences from school for any reason (illness, vacation, religious holidays, family deaths and others) affect a student's ability to learn and succeed.

The Burlington community told parents and students we want our children to be in school. This project's collaboration

between the schools and many community and state agencies helped parents, students and the broader community hear an important message: *School attendance is not a school problem. Attendance is a community issue. All of us need to support school success.*

THE RESULTS

Attendance

In its second full year of implementation (2001-02), the number of students who missed five or more days of school (for any reason including illness) dropped by 19%. Absences were reduced another 2.5% overall in 2002-03; a significant flu epidemic (27% of students in one school were absent on the same day) affected Year 3 results.

Absences	2000-01	2001-02	Change '01 to '02	2002-03	Change '02 to '03
5 days	1101	896	-19	916	2.2%
10 days	400	305	-24	292	-4.3%
15 days	226	125	-45	111	-11.2%
20+ days	24	97	304%	69	-28.9%
TOTAL	1751	1423	-19%	1388	-2.5%

Dropout

The dropout rate has been cut by almost 50% in the past four years, as a result of the attendance project, a new alternative program, after-school programs, improved follow-up and other changes.

Year	Dropout rate
1999-2000	8.7%
2000-01	6.5%
2001-02	5.3%
2002-03	4.2%

Dates are as of March 31, the most consistent point for end-of-year data.

PROBLEM

Higher-than-average dropout underscored by high absence rate

Missing significant amounts of school affects a student's completion of courses.

High dropout rate: During the 1999-2000 school year, the rate was more than 9.5%, double the state average of 5%.

High student absences: 19% of students had missed 10 or more days of school during the school year beginning Sept. 1999 through March 24, 2000; 6% had missed 20 or more days. More than 22% of students in two elementary schools missed more than 10 days and the Burlington High School rate was 25%. (These absences include illnesses and other excused absences.)

Student dropout is related to incarceration:

- 90% of Vermont Corrections Department admissions (363 under 22 years old) were high school dropouts during the 27-month period between January 1997 and March 1999.
- 3.7% of those had attended Burlington High School, the largest percentage from any high school in Vermont.

High-needs school district

The Burlington School District is Vermont's largest K-12 school district, educating about 3,800 children. These students have much higher than county or state averages in poverty, speaking English as a Second Language, special education identification and other factors.

STEPS TO A SOLUTION

In 1997, the secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services approached the Burlington School District and asked it and three community partners – the agency, the city of Burlington and the United Way of Chittenden County – to investigate the dropout rate.

In September 1998, this community partnership reviewed the findings of a yearlong analysis by a systems analyst. The review examined activities within the schools and recommended system changes. Key findings: Dropout is a community not a school problem; and truancy is an underlying contributor to dropout. Three priorities were identified:

1. Improve school attendance and review discipline practices that do not include meaningful and effective consequences for behavior.
2. Develop a prevailing culture and norms that schools, agencies and the general public demonstrate that is understanding, supporting, accepting and nurturing of at-risk youth while retaining high expectations for performance and success.
3. Develop connections for students with adults who can provide intellectual, emotional and practical support through their developing years.

TO REPLICATE YOU NEED:

Broad community collaboration

The Burlington Attendance Project involves more than 25 community agencies and the School District, comprised of nine schools. These groups meet monthly to monitor progress and problem-solve on behalf of their respective organizations. Participating agencies are listed on the back of this brochure and include: mental health; police and courts; health providers; nonprofits; local government; state agencies; and school-to-work.

A "zero-tolerance for truancy" culture within the schools and community.

Commitment to gather data. This is a costly and time-consuming procedure but the focus on changing this outcome is necessary to create change.

Dedicated attendance social workers to work with a small, defined caseload of students at high-risk of dropping out due to high truancy. These social workers must do whatever it took to keep these students in school. Through intensive case management, many systems barriers can be identified that prevent students from staying in and succeeding in school.

Tight procedures and a evaluation process that will gauge success and monitor progress monthly:

- Attendance and dropout rates are the key indicator.
- Letters are sent to parents at 5-, 10-, 15- and 20-days of absence.
- School conferences held with parents at 15 days of absence to create plan to improve attendance.
- Court affidavits can be filed at 20-30 days of school absence.

Clear definition of absences. All absences are equal (ie: no excused absences, illnesses are counted) to assure consistency among the diverse student and parent population. Parents and guardians who document their student's illnesses are not taken to court.

Costs leveraged with partners. The collaborating partners each contributed to the project. The costs include:

- Two social workers (about \$100,000), offset by accessing mental health Medicaid reimbursement.
- A 25-hour-a-week clerk (\$10,000) who handles all paperwork.
- Ancillary expenses such as postage and copying.

BURLINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Building a Learning Community

Burlington High School Truancy Prevention Project

Year	Youth Dropout Total	Student Body Total	Drop Out Percentage (youth only)	Graduation Percentage (youth only)	Drop Out Percentage (including adults)	Graduation Percentage (including adults)
1999/2000	95	1093	8.70%	91.30%	9.00%	91.00%
2000/2001	70	1073	6.50%	93.50%	6.90%	93.10%
2001/2002	59	1116	5.30%	94.70%	5.60%	94.40%
2002/2003	49	1159	4.20%	95.80%	4.30%	95.70%
2003/2004	42	1203	3.50%	96.50%	3.50%	96.50%
2004/2005	66	1251	5.30%	94.70%	5.60%	94.40%
2005/2006	37	1224	3.00%	97.00%	3.40%	96.60%
2006/2007	41	1290	3.20%	96.80%	3.33%	96.67%
2007/2008	39	1284	3.04%	96.96%	N/A	N/A

JEANNÉ COLLINS ~ SUPERINTENDENT

150 COLCHESTER AVE. ~ BURLINGTON VT 05401

PHONE: 802-865-5332 ~ FAX: 802-864-8501 ~ WEBSITE: WWW.BSDVT.ORG

EEO: This material is available in alternate formats for persons with disabilities.
To request an accommodation, please call 1. 800.253.0101 (TTY) or 1.800.253.0195 (voice).

Burlington School District

TRUANCY PREVENTION/ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES

Updated 8.2001

Responsibilities:

Parents/guardians: Will notify the school, in writing, in advance of a student's absence, wherever possible.

School principal / attendance officer: Shall determine if it is a valid absence and attempt to contact a parent or guardian by telephone to confirm the cause of absence. However, it is the parent/guardian's responsibility to notify the school in advance if the student is going to be absent. An absence will be considered unexcused unless the school hears from the parent. Inability by the school's attendance officer or his/her designee to reach the parent does not alter the absence being unexcused.

Building administrator: shall be notified daily of student absences.

School: Shall annually document the cumulative absences on each student, as the number of absences will determine the thresholds for intervention as described in these procedures.

5 days absent

After 5 cumulative absences during any school year, the building administrator or designee shall make reasonable attempts to make telephone or personal contact with the parent/guardian to inquire about excessive absences.

If appropriate, support services shall be offered (e.g. social work, guidance, student assistance program services).

This contact will be followed up with the 5-day absence form letter, which outlines the consequences for subsequent absences and the warning of the possible prosecution for truancy.

If telephone or personal contact is not successfully made, the 5 day absences letter will still be sent to the parents/guardians.

The building administrator or designee will maintain documentation of all oral and written contacts regarding absences for each student. Such documentation may be used to support any filings pertaining to truancy, child in needs of care and supervision, or other matters.

10 days absent

After 10 cumulative absences during any school year, the building administrator shall again make contact with the parents/guardians, preferably in person, to inquire about the excessive absences.

If appropriate, support services shall be offered (e.g. social work, guidance, student assistance program services).

The parent/guardian must be reminded of the consequences for subsequent absences and the warning of the possible prosecution for truancy.

This contact shall be documented and put in the student's truancy file.

15 days absent

After 15 cumulative absences during any school year, the building administrator shall require that the parent/guardian attend a school conference attended by representatives from the school, including school resource officers where appropriate.

The conference may also be attended by the Chittenden County's State's Attorney's Office, SRS, and other appropriate community or independent resources as deemed appropriate by the school. This meeting may be facilitated by an independent/neutral person.

The student's absences will be addressed and a plan that may include supportive services such as prevention, diagnostic, intervention, and remedial services, alternative programs and other school and community resources will be developed for ensuring the student's future attendance.

A person will be identified who will follow-up with the family and student as to any problems they have following through on the plan as outlined.

The conference shall be followed up by a letter which outlines the plan agreed to for the student to return to school, and of the action to be taken or home visit if the student has subsequent absences as outlined in these procedures. A copy of the letter will also be sent to the Superintendent of Schools.

Parent/guardian do not attend 15-day meeting

If the parent/guardian fails to attend the conference, the school resource officer or other school personnel will make a home visit or other contact with the parent/guardian.

If the school resource officer or other school personnel determines that there was no valid reason for missing the conference, an affidavit regarding the absences will immediately be filed by the school with the Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office and a copy will be sent to the Superintendent of Schools. The Chittenden County State's Attorney can pursue the matter as truancy or as a child in need of care and supervision.

20 or more days absent

After 20 cumulative absences during any school year but before 30 cumulative absences, the school will, at its discretion based on its dealings with the student and parents/guardian, file an affidavit concerning the absences with the Chittenden County's State's Attorney's Office.

The building administrator shall notify the parent/guardian that the filing has been made with the Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office and the possibility of criminal prosecution for truancy or a petition to determine if the student is a child in need of care and supervision.

The court could determine that the child is in need of care or supervision under 33 V.S.A. §§5517 and 5528 could potentially result in loss of custody as the most serious consequence.

Truancy Court — Top 10 suggestions

1. **We've been there:** If we're in court, please know that the schools and agencies (law enforcement, mental health and others) working with this child or family have tried everything they have the authority to require and have likely recommended many other options. Schools and other agencies have limits on what they can require, especially as it relates to the behavior of parents or guardians.
2. **Tone** is critical. Authority is essential.
3. **The first court appearance** is the one in which families are paying the most attention. The tone is set there.
4. **Be bold and creative** in thinking of solutions that will help families. Among the effective and creative solutions of the past were requiring a parent to attend school with their child and a visit to Woodside.
5. **Ask for input from the schools, law enforcement and the state's attorney** when they're in court. Not everything can be written in the affidavit.
6. **Mental health** is an issue that challenges many children and their families. The court can ask to understand the impact of mental health issues on attendance.
7. **New information:** Schools and law enforcement often hear information for the first time in court, despite a history of working with the family. This is especially true in relation to health issues.
8. **School attendance is important.** If a child is being seen for another court issue, please remember that school attendance is an important and independent issue.
9. **Act 264 process:** This is a helpful process but not necessarily a solution to attendance issues. If an Act 264 process is recommended, please ask that the outcome of that process be referred back to the Court for review so that the participation of all parties (DCF-Family Services, schools and mental health) occurs and that a plan is enacted.
10. **Orders of the court:** If a child and/or family violates the order of the court, some oversight or follow-up is needed.

DOCTOR'S ABSENCE NOTE

Name of child _____

DOB _____

Child was seen _____ not seen _____ date _____

Diagnosis _____

Can return to school on _____ (date)

Comments: _____

Physician has family permission to share information with school:

Parent/guardian signature _____

Provider name _____

Signature of provider _____

Practice name & contact info here:

DOCTOR'S ABSENCE NOTE

Name of child _____

DOB _____

Child was seen _____ not seen _____ date _____

Diagnosis _____

Can return to school on _____ (date)

Comments: _____

Physician has family permission to share information with school:

Parent/guardian signature _____

Provider name _____

Signature of provider _____

Practice name & contact info here:

DOCTOR'S ABSENCE NOTE

Name of child _____

DOB _____

Child was seen _____ not seen _____ date _____

Diagnosis _____

Can return to school on _____ (date)

Comments: _____

Physician has family permission to share information with school:

Parent/guardian signature _____

Provider name _____

Signature of provider _____

Practice name & contact info here:

DOCTOR'S ABSENCE NOTE

Name of child _____

DOB _____

Child was seen _____ not seen _____ date _____

Diagnosis _____

Can return to school on _____ (date)

Comments: _____

Physician has family permission to share information with school:

Parent/guardian signature _____

Provider name _____

Signature of provider _____

Practice name & contact info here: