

## Evaluation of Ramsey County's Truancy Intervention Programs: Implications for Court Diversion Programs

*Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.*

*In this issue, we presented findings from a rigorous evaluation of whether a court diversion program can improve attendance for students in grades K-2 through a combination of parent education, attendance contracts, referrals to services, and the threat of a petition to court.*

### Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This particular court diversion strategy did not improve school attendance. However, a randomized study found that a different court diversion program in Australia did improve attendance. This suggests that the specific actions that occur within a court diversion program may matter. What actions do you think should be incorporated into a court diversion program? Why? Examples could be specific restorative justice approaches, the inclusion of trusted people in the school to legitimize the authority of the county attorney, etc. In answering this question, be specific. For example, "restorative justice" could mean any number of things.
2. The study found that schools disproportionately code absences as unexcused for students of color, particularly Black and American-Indian students. This means that students of color are more likely to be contacted by a county attorney for attendance problems, even when they have the same number of total absences as White non-Hispanic students. What might be some of the causes of this disparity? Might there be any negative consequences to such a disparity in terms of school-family relations? What school data might you want to pull together in your own school district to see if this disparity is present?

### Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Absenteeism negatively affects academic achievement, regardless of the reason for the absence. The federal Every School Succeed Act (ESSA) and state attendance targets for 2020 are measured as number of total school absences. In other words, the federal and state goals do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. What are the pros and cons of making that distinction for achieving higher overall attendance rates? What are the pros and cons of making that distinction for other academic goals?
2. Status offenses are actions that are illegal for children but are not crimes for adults. They include drinking alcohol, truancy, and breaking curfew. In the 1990s and 2000s, youth who committed status offenses were often referred to the court system. However, the increase in juvenile court charges for status offenses was found to be ineffective at reducing problem behaviors and it increased racial disparities in juvenile justice involvement. What should the response be to status offenses by children/youth? What is the societal accountability for these actions? What consequences would you impose?