

Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program 2007-2008

The Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program, commonly known as truancy mediation, has grown in just over six years from 7 counties, 58 schools to 31 counties, over 500 schools in about 130 school districts. It has grown at this rate because it works. Research and evaluations at <http://disputeresolution.ohio.gov/courtcommunity.htm>

Programs are run locally, with technical support, training, mentoring, and grant writing assistance provided by the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management, and with training assistance from the Supreme Court of Ohio's Dispute Resolution Section.

Although it is common when districts first approach the Commission to ask about help with high school truancy and drop-outs, research and experience clearly show that a school district benefits most by building a program from the early years up. The Commission advocates having the program only in K-6 for two to four years, then adding the middle schools that those elementary schools feed, then in a year or two adding the high schools. If a district starts at the high school level they usually are dealing with students who have been missing days for many years, who are under-achieving, and who are close to dropping out – thus using time and resources but not addressing the systemic problem. If a district wants to permanently reduce truancy and tardiness it needs to be addressed in Kindergarten and the other early years, building the program upward. Every year there are thousands of K-6 truancy mediations, leading to a change in the way a neighborhood, eventually community, views the school district and the importance of regular attendance.

Here are some of the core values of the program:

1. Mediations take place in the school, during or immediately before or after school hours.
2. In K-6 the teacher always attends, and often is the only person meeting with the parent[s].
3. The goal is to, in a non-punitive, non-disciplinary way, identify the family problems that are causing the poor attendance, and to then help the family reach a voluntary solution. Those solutions often involve reaching out to a government agency, social service provider, or non-profit organization.
4. Confidentially is maintained.
5. The emphasis is on K-6 truancy and tardiness, with higher grades added only after the elementary school program is well established.
6. The family is asked to come in for a mediation very early in the pattern of truancy, usually the third to fifth unexcused absence. This is a significantly lower threshold than

the number of missed days for court referrals. The emphasis is on very early intervention and help in a respectful manner, as opposed to late intervention [15+ days is common] and a disciplinary attitude.

7. The mediator is a person trained in mediation in general and truancy mediation in particular, who does not represent any particular entity or interest but rather is in the room to facilitate the discussion and search for mutually acceptable solutions.

For information contact Ed Krauss at ed.krauss@cdr.state.oh.us. 614 752 9681