

# Updated Literature Review on Truancy:

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Key Concepts, Historical Overview, and  
Research Relating to Promising Practices –  
with Particular Utility to Washington State



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**June 30, 2011**

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# Detailed Executive Summary

Truancy, commonly defined as a student's unlawful absence from school without parental knowledge or consent, long has been identified as a serious social issue in need of increased attention. With many educational school districts reporting staggering truancy rates, truancy has been broadly characterized as a nationwide problem with serious individual- and family-level consequences as well as societal adverse impacts. Short and long term impacts of truancy for the truant student, for the schools and school districts losing students, and for the community within which truancy occurs have been identified in the research literature. Considerable research has been done on the topic, examining such things as the characteristics of the typical truant, family-related correlates and school-based predictors of truancy, and community-based correlates of school avoidance and truancy. Such research has informed our understanding of the link between truancy and delinquency, and has helped shape most traditional responses to the truancy problem. However, many limitations to traditional truancy responses have been noted, and various innovative policies and practices have been proposed and implemented in the effort to reduce truancy and school dropout rates across the country.

In addition to the proposal and implementation of some innovative policies and practices, culturally competent programmatic strategies have been developed to respond to the problem of truancy taking place among the rapidly growing racial and ethnic minority K-12 student population across the country. It has been widely noted that a substantial proportion of this growing racial and ethnic minority student population faces complex challenges attributable to disproportionate exposure to *adverse childhood experiences* that require a sophisticated response in order for this subpopulation of school-aged youth to experience positive educational experiences and achieve academic success. Educational researchers examining this growing student population have utilized the developing research on primary and secondary education in general, and truancy behavior specifically, to recommend and implement culturally competent programmatic strategies in the effort to promote greater educational success among racial and ethnic minority K-12 students.

A literature review originally prepared for the Benton and Franklin Counties ***Models for Change*** program in 2009 provides the basis of this updated review of relevant research and informed commentary on truancy behavior. Racial and ethnic minority demographic characteristics and population changes are examined within that context, while the current educational status of racial and ethnic minority K-12 students is explored -- both at the national and state level -- with a particular sensitivity to the research dealing with Latino youth given the character of truancy challenges facing the Benton and Franklin Counties ***Models for Change*** project. Barriers to educational attainment and achievement for racial and ethnic minority K-12 students are discussed, and how these educational barriers tend to affect educational, occupational and income status both at the national and state level are analyzed. The literature review also presents the typical recommendations that are made across the country to improve upon the educational experience (with respect to attendance and academic progress toward graduation) of all K-12 students, and reviews the noteworthy specific recommendations (generally made at the state level) to improve upon the educational outcomes of racial and ethnic minority students in public school systems. This literature review then concludes with recommendations for future research on truancy.

## Truancy, Cultural Competence, and Best Practices

Education researchers have arrived at a consensus that the programs which are the most effective in preventing or reducing truancy and school avoidance behavior have been those which have utilized a *multi-modal* approach. The multi-modal approach relies upon multi-agency coordinated and cooperative strategies that are based upon activities designed to address both macro- and micro-level problems that lead students to "fall through the cracks" of the school system and end up with engagement in the juvenile justice system as status offenders. In

Washington State, education researchers have advanced numerous policy recommendations similar to those made at the national level, seeking to improve upon the state's current educational system and its interface with the juvenile courts and social service systems. These recommendations have been designed to improve the overall quality of the state's K-12 system, including Washington's educational system's response to truancy. The recommendations made include those that are believed will benefit the general student population, but have also been designed to specifically address the unique needs of the state's racial and ethnic minority student population which is systematically over-represented among truant youth.

The policy recommendations offered include a strategic plan for investment in five key areas, including: (1) the development of a comprehensive data system and evaluation framework; (2) increased student support for academic attainment and achievement; (3) improved teaching and instruction with respect to cultural competence (e.g., more inclusive subject matter, more use of positive racial and ethnic role models, etc.); (4) more active promotion of parental engagement and volunteer involvement; and (5) the development of a seamless P-20 continuum of education at the state level. It is argued that through such improvements in the state's overall educational system, truancy behavior can be reduced significantly, particularly among the over-represented racial and ethnic minority youth. These recommendations arise from a two-year study of schools statewide conducted by some of the state's most highly respected education researchers located at the University of Washington and Washington State University who devoted many hours of their time over this period in intense work (2007-2008) to conduct focus groups, carry out in-depth interviews with students, teachers and parents, and pour over school district statistics.

The recommendations made by these distinguished education researchers in our state are particularly pertinent to this literature review in that they capture the essence of the challenges faced across the country in dealing with truancy in an era of high stakes testing and school accountability brought about as a consequence of the *No Child Left Behind* (2002) federal initiative. Their recommendations display awareness of challenges and barriers faced everywhere across the country in varying degrees, but their suggestions for priority concerns reflect an especially careful and timely look at truancy issues in our own Evergreen State.

All individuals involved in this research on public education in Washington agree on the idea that MULTIPLE ROUTES TO SUCCESS ARE NEEDED FOR ALL YOUTH TO SUCCEED – INCLUDING CULTURALLY COMPETENT CONVENTIONAL SCHOOLS, ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS, GED PROGRAMS, AND “CREATIVE HYBRIDS.” Virtually all researchers agree that the tracking of students longitudinally to evaluate academic achievement is a timely goal to be pursued. It is also a matter of consensus among these education researchers that our schools need to develop competencies in languages other than English and receive substantive cultural competence training, that the state should provide teachers with support for ongoing professional development, and that a broader adoption of effective English Language Learners (ELL) programs and culturally relevant curriculum is needed.

## Conclusions Drawn

Truancy has been a persistent problem since the initial state legislative enactments requiring school attendance as a step toward creating the Jeffersonian vision of a literate and civically engaged citizenry. Since that time, truancy has been of concern to school and law enforcement authorities throughout the country. In recent years, however, this problem has taken on **enhanced importance**. As the nation has taken on the challenge of public education reform it has adopted an approach to school accountability (codified in the federal legislation known as the *No Child Left Behind Act, 2002*) which features the practice of “high stakes testing” – that is, the use of approved, standardized tests of content mastery deemed essential for the award of a certificate of graduation. By reason of the adoption of this priority route to reform in U.S. public education, the likelihood of school avoidance by

students for whom traditional academic studies (highlighted in standardized tests) is difficult and/or frustrating was greatly enhanced.

It is no mere coincidence that the progressive implementation of high stakes testing – which meant the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in our state until recently when a more modest form of testing came into force with a new Superintendent of Public Instruction – and increased truancy have gone hand-in-hand. This same correspondence between the two phenomena has been witnessed throughout the country. A decade ago, the prescient scholar Nicholas Lemann noted the **unintended consequences** of adopting standardized tests for making key decisions on college entry and admission to professional schools. The SAT, GMAT, LSAT, GRE etc. have all proven to be the source of great business and reliable revenue for the Educational Testing Service (ETS), but close scrutiny of these tests has revealed a strong “middle class bias” in the content and format of these widely used tests. Lemann documents the track record of unintended discriminatory outcomes resulting from the adoption of these tests – with test-takers of working class and minority backgrounds performing systematically more poorly than middle class test-takers – even under statistical controls for basic aptitude and test-relevant experience (Lemann, 1999: 235-236). In reaction, many universities discontinued the use of the SAT as the primary aid to admission decision-making and replaced it with more comprehensive sets of criteria which resulted in the recruitment of much more diverse students vis-à-vis class, race and ethnicity. In conducting this review of literature it is clear that the documented correlates of truancy are virtually the same as those “disadvantaging background factors” found to discriminate in high stakes testing generally.

The importance of “cultural competency” – recognizing and rewarding the multiple competencies that contribute to the quality of life in a diverse society – to properly address the truancy problem in Benton and Franklin Counties was made clear by the warm reception accorded Dr. Francisco Villarruel of Michigan State University during his 2009 visit. The need for **more than one way to be successful in school** – whether by having more options for alternatives to the traditional school setting or by providing earlier access to technical and vocational training or by providing basic education funding for enhanced GED programs – was clear to virtually all present. The multiple class, race and ethnic group youth to be served in Washington’s schools requires that a broad range of options for demonstrating learning – NOT a single passage way through which all must pass regardless of their varying cultural and family heritages.

The literature review presented here demonstrates that truancy at the level of occurrence being experienced today carries with it significant social costs, ranging from directly educational, to more indirectly socio-economic, to long term justice system burdens. The impacts of the truancy problem are both immediate and long-term, making it essential to address the issue with well-conceived programs and initiatives that reflect evidence-based and/or promising approaches developed elsewhere around the country.

Fortunately, an excellent recent report entitled: ***Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report (May, 2007)*** was available as a primary source of reference in gathering the research literature featured in this review of literature. The report was issued by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) and Communities In Schools, Inc. (CIS), and was prepared by the team of Cathy Hammond, Dan Linton, Jay Smink and Sam Drew from NDPC/N and CIS.

The report in question identified risk factors and exemplary programs through a rigorous process of study. First, they conducted a thorough literature review making use of the powerful ERIC digital archive, focusing on publications and reports published between 1980 and the end of 2005 (netting 3,400 entries!). Of these entries, 44 studies met the demanding criteria that they were focused on the decision to drop out as a dependent variable, they collected original data in a systematic manner over at least two years, they examined a variety of potential predictors in several domains (individual, family, school, and community), used multivariate statistical techniques

to allow to appropriate controls to permit the isolation of race and ethnic group effects, **and** included a minimum of 30 students correctly classified as dropouts. Of these 44 studies, a subset of 21 studies featured high quality data of sufficient volume and scope to permit generalization with confidence.

The research reviewed in this report on the topic of truancy DIRECTLY PARALLELS that which has been done on the dropout phenomenon. Virtually the same predictors of dropouts are at play in the case of truancy. While truancy is treated as one step toward dropping out of school, the close correspondence between the research literatures on truancy and dropping out suggests that the “exemplary programs” for dropout prevention might well be commendable truancy prevention programs as well. In their summary of findings with respect to these exemplary programs, Cathy Hammond and her colleagues wrote the following:

A number of lessons can be gleaned from the research on risk factors and evidence-based programs for practitioners implementing either existing programs or developing new ones. First, multiple risk factors across several domains should be addressed wherever possible to increase the likelihood that the program will produce positive results. *Effective programs often used some combination of personal assets and skill building, academic support, family outreach, and environmental/organizational change.* [emphasis added] Hammond, et al., 2007: 7-8)

The review of the literature on truancy presented here comes to precisely the same conclusion. Multi-modal programs with active collaboration between school officials, the juvenile court, social service providers and law enforcement, along the lines described by Milliken (2007) in writing about the *Communities In Schools* concept, would appear to be the best, research-based guide to action planning for the reduction of truancy in Washington’s schools.

While the review of research on truancy and evaluation studies of programs designed to address the behavior have progressed considerably over the last four decades, it must be said that much remains unknown nonetheless. First, the problem of truancy would benefit from one uniform definition of the troubling behavior.<sup>1</sup> A uniform definition would allow consistency concerning how truancy laws are interpreted and how truancy data are collected in our schools. Consistent interpretation and collection of truancy information would allow statewide datasets – and in time a national dataset – to be developed which could be used to deepen our understanding of truancy and school avoidance behavior. Second, the established predictors of truancy – particularly those which research shows to be early indicators – need to be utilized more fully by school administrators, teachers and others who work with high risk youth in order to maximize the chances of effective school engagement. Third, school administrators, teachers, juvenile court personnel, social service agencies and law enforcement must make broader use of those multi-modal approaches that have been found to be successful in reducing or preventing truancy. In this regard, Cathy Hammond and her colleagues issue a wise alert in this connection, noting the following: “whether adopting an existing program or developing a new one, practitioners need to use evidence-based strategies to evaluate programs to assure effectiveness.” (Hammond, et al., 2007: 8)

Finally, given the racial and ethnic and cultural diversity that is present in many of Washington’s schools, it is essential to evaluate any multi-modal reform programs implemented to ascertain their effectiveness, not only overall -- but for the substantial Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander and black youth residing in the community. Are the early warning signs and risk factors the same for all youth regardless of race and ethnicity, or are there important aspects of cultural heritage at play that deserve attention? These are very important elements to document for the enhancement of cultural competence in the provision of juvenile justice services and effective school re-engagement for truant students in Washington in the years ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, distinguishing the habitual or chronic truant from the occasional class cutter (Bools et al., 1990; Cimmarusti et al., 1984; Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985b)

## Summary Tables

Summary tables are provided at the end of this document which provide a convenient overview of the findings regarding predictors of truancy, correlates of truancy, consequences of truancy, and effective programs combating truancy organized in terms of *Student-Specific*, *School-Specific*, *Family-Specific*, and *Community-Specific* domains. Each of the tables for these topic areas features a listing of the studies from which these conclusions were drawn.

Table 1: Predictors of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific

Table 2: Correlates of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific

Table 3: Outcomes of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific

Table 4: Intervention and Prevention Truancy Programs: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific and Community-Specific



# Introduction To The Review Of The Truancy Literature

Truancy, commonly defined as a student's unlawful absence from school without parental knowledge or consent, has been identified as a serious social issue in need of increased attention for many years (Bazemore et al., 2004; Bell et al., 1994; Henry & Huizinga, 2007a; Milliken, 2007; Zhang et al., 2007). With many educational school districts reporting rather staggering truancy rates, truancy has been broadly characterized as a nationwide problem with serious individual- and family-level consequences as well societal adverse impacts (Cimmarusti et al., 1984; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Hersov & Berg, 1980; Rumberger, 1987). Short and long term impacts of truancy for the truant student, for the schools and school districts losing students, and for the community within which truancy occurs have been identified. Considerable research has been done on the topic, examining such things as the characteristics of the typical truant, school-based predictors of truancy, and community-based correlates of truancy. Such research has informed our understanding of the link between truancy and delinquency, and has helped shape most traditional responses to the truancy problem. However, many limitations to traditional truancy response measures have been identified, and various innovative policies and practices have been proposed and implemented in the effort to reduce truancy and school dropout rates across the country.

In addition to the proposal and implementation of some innovative policies and practices, culturally competent programmatic strategies have been developed to respond to the problem of truancy taking place among the rapidly growing racial and ethnic minority K-12 student population across the country (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008). It has been widely noted that a substantial proportion of this growing racial and ethnic minority student population in our nation's schools faces complex challenges attributable to disproportionate exposure to *adverse childhood experiences* that require a sophisticated response in order for this subpopulation of school-aged youth to experience positive educational outcomes and achieve academic success. Educational researchers examining this growing student population have utilized the developing research on primary and secondary education in general, and truancy behavior specifically, to recommend and implement culturally competent programmatic strategies in the effort to promote greater educational success among racial and ethnic minority K-12 students (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

This literature review provides a general overview of the topic of truancy behavior. Racial and ethnic minority demographic characteristics and population changes are examined within that context, while the current educational status of racial and ethnic minority K-12 students is explored -- both at the national and state level -- with a particular sensitivity to the research dealing with Latino youth given the rapid growth in their numbers in Washington state. Barriers to educational attainment and achievement for racial and ethnic minority K-12 students are discussed, and how these educational barriers tend to affect educational, occupational and income status both at the national and state level are analyzed. This document also presents the most common recommendations that are made across the country to improve upon the educational experience (with respect to attendance and academic progress toward graduation) of all K-12 students, and reviews the noteworthy specific recommendations (generally made at the state level) to improve upon the educational outcomes of racial and ethnic minority students in public school systems. This literature review then concludes with recommendations for future research on truancy.



# Truancy

## The Definition of Truancy

The enactment of compulsory school attendance laws in the United States began during the period of 1852 to 1918, an historical period during which the movement to provide free public education through the elementary and secondary grades took hold in America (Levine, 1984). Such laws were adopted in response to growing pressures concerning the desire for universal education for all children, the need for a socialization agent for the growing number of recently immigrated children, and the growing objections of organized labor to the use of child labor (Levine, 1984). In response to such growing pressures, public schools became the principal institutions designated to educate children and enforce child labor laws. Education was seen as a way to protect children from exploitation, prepare youth for life outside the home, while also helping the next generation of citizens to acquire the learning needed to achieve an ever-better standard of living in adulthood.

By 1918 all states adopted compulsory school attendance laws. These laws generally make parents and guardians responsible for ensuring that school-aged children in their care attend school (Pasternak, 1986). Any child subject to compulsory continual education who is absent from school without a valid cause for a school day, or portion thereof, is considered to be *truant* (Bools et al., 1990; Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985b). While truancy is variously conceptualized, it is most commonly defined as a student's unlawful absence from school without a parent or guardian's knowledge or permission (Bools et al., 1990). States differ in regard to waivers and exceptions; some exceptions to the above rule are extended to students who attend private school or are home-schooled, students who have a serious mental or physical disability, students who have negotiated an approved educational employment agreement, or students who are pregnant (Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985b). Again, depending on state law, for those students who do not meet the above criteria a valid cause of absence is often limited to student illness, a death in the immediate family, a family emergency, a situation beyond the control of the student, a determination of expulsion by the board of education in the student's school district, or such other circumstances that cause reasonable concern on the part of the parent or guardian for the health and/or safety of the student (Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985b). Some schools accept special circumstances as an additional valid cause of absence from school; things such as temporary assignment to duties abroad of a family caretaker, pre-planned family vacations, or symbolic days or special events (Pasternak, 1986).

In addition to the frequently noted specifications permitted by state compulsory school attendance laws listed above, there tends to be wide variation across states and within states across school boards and school districts concerning how truancy definitions and derivative laws and regulations are interpreted (George, 2011; see Zinth, 2005). For example, "some districts calculate unexcused absences on a per period basis, while others distinguish only among entire school days" (George, 2011, 14). These varying interpretations make it very difficult to compare reported truancy rates across states and across school districts within states (Cairns et al., 1989; Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985b; Sundius & Farneth, 2008). While a number of states have adopted a broad "umbrella" definition of truancy, others states have taken a more deliberate approach by specifying specific types of truant youth. In addition, while some states have adopted legislation designed to homogenize the definition and interpretation of truancy, at the national level there remains no consensus concerning the definition of truancy and no standard method for computing truancy rates exists. This lack of uniform definition seriously affects what we know concerning the true extent of truancy in American public schools (Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985b).

### The Extent of the Truancy Problem

While there is general agreement among school administrators, teaching professionals, parents, and students alike that truancy is a very serious problem today – with both short and long-term consequences – some disagreement is present concerning both the extent of the school avoidance behavior and the amount of long-term damage

resulting to students from this form of juvenile deviant behavior (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bell et al., 1994; Cairns et al., 1989; Rumberger, 1987). Currently, data on truancy rates are not available for the nation as a whole (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Cairns et al., 1989; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Henry, 2007; MacGillivray, 2006; Sommer, 1985b; Sutphen et al., 2010). State boards of education are charged with releasing statistical data on truancy rates obtained from individual school districts at year's end. Such statistical data are known to be quite imprecise however; while truancy data of some type are available throughout the country, the lack of uniformity across school districts limits the use to be made of such data in the analysis of the problem of truancy (Enomoto, 1994; Pasternak, 1986). This lack of uniformity of definitions and practices is considered to be the main cause of the observed high degree of variation in truancy rates, both within and between states all across the nation. These observed differences remain, even after controlling for variables that could potentially explain such observed variations (Pasternak, 1986).

Although national data on the extent of the problem of truancy are not available, state-level data that could provide some insight into the true nature of truancy rates are available in many jurisdictions. Depending on the definition of truancy used, the way state laws are interpreted, how truancy data are collected, the population examined, and the geographic location selected, truancy rates have been reported to range generally between **10% and 19%** (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bell et al., 1994; Dekalb, 1999). In some large cities, truancy rates have been reported to be as high as 30%, with some of the nation's school districts reporting school absence rates as high as 80% on Monday mornings (Bell et al., 1994; Mulrine, 2001).

Recent statistics on truancy cases petitioned in juvenile court demonstrate the significance of the truancy problem (Baker, 2001a, 2001b). In 2004, over 159,000 status offense cases were formally processed through the U.S. juvenile justice court system. Of these cases, 35% were for truancy, an increase from 29% registered in 1995 (Stahl, 2008). There is considerable disagreement among truancy researchers concerning whether the observed increase in truancy rates is the result of an actual increase in school avoidance behavior, or is simply the result of the juvenile justice system's expanding boundary into what was traditionally the informal responsibility of public educators (Bazemore & Umbret, 1995; Bazemore et al., 2004; Enzell, 1992). Such an increase is widely thought to warrant formal attention regardless of the reasons for the rising rates of truancy being experienced. Even though definitive uniformly-collected statistical data on truancy are not readily available, similar characteristics of the typical truant student have been identified in a number of studies. Research on the topic of truancy has documented a myriad of demographic background variables characteristic of truant students based on gender, age, socioeconomic status, family background and race.

## Characteristics of the Truant Student

Empirical research on the topic of truancy has documented numerous characteristics associated with truant students. While some characteristics have been identified that have been unique to a particular research study and to a particular subpopulation of students, generalized patterns of association have been reported related to the **gender**, the **age**, the **socioeconomic status** and the **race and ethnicity** of students (Eastwood, 1989).

*Gender.* Empirical studies uniformly report higher truancy rates for males than females, but females are twice as likely as males to be absent with parental consent. Female truants are said to demonstrate lower anti-social behavior than truant males, while truant males tend to perceive the school experience more negatively than truant females, a factor thought to contribute to the higher rates of male truancy observed in virtually every extant study available for review (Bell et al., 1994; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Eastwood, 1989; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1982; Sommer, 1985a).

*Age.* Empirical studies examining truancy characteristics based on age reveal that as student age increases, there is a concurrent increase in student school avoidance behavior, with the upper grades in high school exhibiting the highest rates of truancy for both males and females (Bell et al., 1994; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Eastwood, 1989; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1982; Sommer, 1985a).

*Socio-economic status.* Examining truancy characteristics based on socio-economic status reveals that truant students tend to come from economically disadvantaged home situations. It is well established as well that single-parent households are another important family setting variable of consequence (Eastwood, 1989; Tittle & Meier, 1990).

*Race.* Racial and ethnic minority students have higher reported truancy rates than white students in virtually every study published. It is undetermined, however, whether this phenomenon is the result of higher levels of surveillance of racial and ethnic minorities by educational and juvenile justice systems, or a consequence of the fact that a higher proportion of racial and ethnic minorities come from economically disadvantaged environments (Bell et al., 1994; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Eastwood, 1989; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1982; Sampson & Wilson, 1994; Sommer, 1985a; Svec, 1986; Welsch et al., 1999). In the analysis of the problem of differential truancy rates of African American, Latino, Pacific Islander and Native American as compared to whites in Washington, the authors of studies (authorized and funded by the Washington State Legislature) identify the problem of inadequate cultural competence among school staff as an important contributing factor to the long-observed differential rates of truancy and dropouts in the state (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Hune & Takeuchi, 2008; Takeuchi and Hune, 2008; Contreras & Stritikus, 2008; and The People, 2008). Based in part upon the evidence of the predictive value of the characteristics noted above, many researchers studying truancy postulate that truancy risk factors for any particular area can be identified through appropriate research, and the empirical findings from such research would allow school administrators and teaching staff to anticipate which students are most likely to exhibit truancy-behaviors. Armed with such knowledge, dutiful educators could take appropriate, targeted intervention steps and provide focused prevention services (Bell et al., 1994; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1982; Sommer, 1985a).

## Predictors of Truancy Behavior

The utility of identifying empirically-based predictors of truancy behavior derives from the likelihood that truancy behaviors do not begin the first day a student is absent from class, but rather that such school avoidance behavior tends to develop early on in a chronically truant student's school career (Pasternak, 1986). Students who are defined as chronically truant late in their academic tenure often exhibit recognizable characteristics early on, starting as early as primary school. Predictors of truancy can be detected through student observation within or outside of the school setting, through observing or having knowledge of a student's family life, or having familiarity of the community within which the student resides or attends school (see Table 1). Being knowledgeable of predictors of truancy behavior allows school administrators and teaching staff to identify at-risk students early for truancy prevention and behavioral intervention. Such early prevention and intervention efforts are essential to prevent poor school attendance from leading to poor school performance, as well prevent the adoption of more severe poor attendance behaviors that can be difficult to alter, possibly resulting in early school withdrawal (Pasternak, 1986).

## Correlates and Causes of Truancy

Hypothesized correlates of truancy behavior are typically grouped into four separate categories with respect to student-specific variables, school-specific factors, family-specific setting characteristics, and community-specific influences (Alexander et al., 1997; Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bell et al., 1994; Bimler & Kirkland, 2001; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ford & Sutphen, 1996; Galloway, 1980, 1982, 1985; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henry, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007a; Jenkins, 1995; Kearney, 2008; Little & Thompson, 1983; MacDonald & Marsh, 2004; Oman et al, 2002; Reid, 2005; Teasley, 2004; Wandersman & Nation, 1998). Consequently, in addressing truancy behavior interventions and prevention programs were directed principally towards one or another of these areas. Since the 1980s, the longstanding view that the truancy problem lies within one single domain (i.e., the schools) has been broadly challenged, and new assertions have been made in many forums that such simplistic thinking places severe constraints on understanding the complex way in which truancy behaviors develop, ultimately impeding the ability of either schools or juvenile justice systems to address the problem of school avoidance effectively (George, 2011).

It is now widely understood that the truancy problem is most typically **multi-dimensional** in nature, with many possible contributing factors coming into play (Barth, 1984; Dekalb, 1999; George, 2011). Correlates of truancy are now known to be numerous and diverse, and truancy is now broadly believed to seldom result from the effects of one single factor alone (Pasternak, 1986; Rumberger, 1987). Truancy exists within a context of inter-action effects, including interactions between the traits of the student, the experienced school setting, the family support structure, and the broader community setting (e.g., presence of gangs, access to drugs, availability of sports and recreational programs, extent of police focus upon youth delinquency and crime, etc.) -- with each relationship being influenced by the others (Cimmarusti et al., 1984; Caldas, 1993; Cooper, 1984; Dekalb, 1999; Levine, 1984).

Currently, the four familiar categories of truancy correlates are identified as particularly salient; those factors include a range of student, school, family, and community-level factors (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bos et al., 1990; Brown, 1983; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Harding, 1996). Each of these factors are reciprocal in nature, with considerable overlap obtaining between and among variables, with a combination of factors (an “interactive syndrome” in medical parlance) best explaining the occurrence of truancy (Bell et al., 1994; McClusky et al., 2004; see Table 2).

## Outcomes of Truancy

Existing research indicates that truancy poses significant short and long term challenges for the school-avoiding student, and likewise poses difficult problems for the truant student’s school, family, and community (Bazemore et al., 2004; Dekalb, 1999; George, 2011; Henry, 2007; Robins & Ratcliff, 1978; Smink & Heilbrunn, 2005; Teasley, 2004; Zhang et al., 2007). The truant behavior often serves as an indicator of deeper problems (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Corville-Smith, 1995). Today, individuals working with truant students tend to embrace (either directly or indirectly) the idea that truancy has far-reaching implications with severe consequences for both childhood and adult outcomes, as well as for society as a whole (Bazemore et al., 2004; Garry, 1996; George, 2011; Henry, 2007). These impacts are reported to be individual, school, family, and community-specific (see Table 3).

*Individual-specific outcomes.* Individual-specific consequences of truancy are both immediate and long-term. The most obvious immediate result of truancy is educational, with chronically truant students reported to suffer serious to severe academic deficits (Baker et al., 2001a, 2001b; Bell et al., 1994; Bonikowske, 1987; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Caldas, 1993; Garry, 1996; Lamdin, 1996; Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Kandel et al., 1984; Reid, 1984; Sheldon, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Teasley, 2004; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Such educational failure most often culminates in poor future employment outcomes, with chronically truant students experiencing employment-related difficulties such as lower status occupations, less stable career patterns, higher unemployment rates, and low earnings as adults (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bell et al., 1994; Colorado Foundation for

Families, 2002; Elizondo et al., 2003; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Farrington, 1986; Garry, 1996; Hallfors et al., 2002; Hibbett et al., 1990; Rumberger, 1987; Sum et al., 2003). Chronically truant students also experience future relational difficulties, including those formed in early parenthood; they tend to produce a greater number of dependents, engage in early marriage, and experience more frequent marital breakdown as adults (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bell et al., 1994; Corville-Smith, 1995; Garry, 1996; Hibbett & Fogelman, 1990; Kandel et al., 1984; Robins & Ratcliff, 1980; Sum et al., 2003).

Poor health status is also documented as a negative adult outcome of early chronic truancy. Such individuals are said to be more likely to suffer from poor mental health, from substance abuse issues, as well as pose increased personal injury risk (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bazemore et al., 2004; Bell et al., 1994; Corville-Smith, 1995; Garry, 1996; Hibbett & Fogelman, 1990; Rumberger, 1987). Finally, engagement in deviant and anti-social activities has been reported as an immediate result of early truancy behavior, with long term effects believed to include adult criminal activity (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Barth, 1984; Bazemore et al., 2004; Bell et al., 1994; Corville-Smith, 1995; Farrington, 1980; Garry, 1996; Robins & Ratcliff, 1980).

*School-specific outcomes.* Truancy has a direct impact on educational institutions, with school-specific consequences of truancy behavior being largely revenue-based (Barth, 1984; Bell et al., 1994; Corville-Smith, 1995; Personal and Career Development Services, California State Department of Education, 1983). The most serious consequence of truancy for school districts is lost revenue; school funding is typically allocated based on daily attendance rates (Bell et al., 1994; Personal and Career Development Services, California State Department of Education, 1983). With less revenue, school districts have a reduced capacity to meet the educational needs of their students through educational services and programs, a situation that impacts all enrolled students regardless of their attendance behavior (Bell et al., 1994).

In addition to the revenue-based consequences of truancy, school administrators, teachers and staff also report that truancy behavior often results in major disruptions to the educational process (Barth, 1984; Corville-Smith, 1995). Whether these disruptions are caused by having to devote considerable amounts of time and effort to locating truant students and contacting parents/guardians, or from helping truant students to catch up or keep up with their school work, such disruptions are reported to be not only financially costly, but also burdensome in terms of the loss of educational progress toward learning goals and objectives (Barth, 1984; Corville-Smith, 1995).

*Family-specific outcomes.* Truancy behavior generally impacts family life quite negatively. This impact can take the form of family conflict with educational or social services providers, or stress among family members resulting from lost work or a lack of supervision for the truant student when not in school (Barth, 1984).

*Community-specific outcomes.* For communities, the effects of truancy can be economic, political, and social in nature (Personal and Career Development Services, California State Department of Education, 1983). Long-term outcomes of truancy for communities that are commonly cited include forgone income and tax revenues that can support government services, communities with members who place increased demands on the community's social services programs, communities with an increase in crime rates, and members of the community who have reduced levels of political participation, reduced intergenerational mobility, and poor levels of health (Barth, 1984; Bazemore et al., 2004; Catterall, 1987; Garry, 1996; Rumberger, 1987; Personal and Career Development Services, California State Department of Education, 1983).

## Truancy, Juvenile Delinquency and Subsequent Adult Criminality

The topic of truancy has received increased attention in recent years because claims have been made of the existence of a link between truancy and juvenile delinquency (Baker et al., 2001a, 2001b; Benner et al., 2010; Berger & Wind, 2000; Gavin, 1997; Henry & Huizinga, 2007b; Kaplan et al., 1994; Miller & Plant, 1999; Ventura & Miller, 2005; Wang et al., 2005; White et al., 2001; Wilson, 1993; Zhang et al., 2007). Investigations made by life-course criminologists and developmental psychologists suggest a possible link between unaddressed truancy and later adult criminality (Baker et al., 2001; Blumstein et al., 1985; Borduin et al., 1995; Clausen, 1991; Elder, 1985; Elliot & Menard, 1996; Garry, 1996; George, 2011; Hagan & Parker, 1999; Harlow, 2003; Henry, 2007; Henry et al., 1999; Kandel et al., 1984; Kelley et al., 1997; Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Sampson and Laub, 1993, 1997; Schroeder, Chaisson & Pogue, 2004; Sum et al., 2003; White et al., 2001). While an unequivocal causal relationship between truancy, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality has yet to be established, it is likely that truancy can be identified as a potent risk factor for both later events (Berg, 1988). Whether this relationship results from truant students developing deviant associations while not in school, culminating in delinquent behavior, or truant students' immersion into the juvenile justice system resulting in a form of peer contagion, a risk factor for later involvement in the adult criminal justice system does possibly exist (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Hawkins et al., 1998; Jarjoura, 1993; Lawrence, 1998; Thornberry, 1987; Thornberry et al., 1985).

Truancy has been linked empirically in some studies to specific types of serious juvenile delinquent activity such as substance abuse, gang involvement, burglary, auto theft, and vandalism (Baker et al., 2001; Bachman et al., 1998; Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Butler et al., 2005; Chou et al., 2006; Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1996; Garry, 1996; Hallfors et al., 2002; Henry et al., 1999; Henry, 2007; Henry et al., 2009; Loeber & Farrington, 2000; McAra, 2004; Miller et al., 1999; Pritchard et al., 1992; Soldz et al., 2003; Ventura & Miller, 2005; White et al., 2001). In addition, it has been proposed that early truancy behavior influences later adult criminality, with longitudinal studies revealing that early truants frequently go on to experience severe behavioral problems, commit more violent crimes, and suffer higher rates of incarceration than non-truants (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1996; Ensminger & Slsarick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Garry, 1996; Hagan & Parker, 1999).

While proponents of *Low Self-Control Theory*, *Labeling Theory*, and *Strain Theory* have all experienced a small measure of success in confirming the above relationship, researchers utilizing such theories suggest due caution when attempting to establish the relationship. It is purported that many of the studies examining the relationship between truancy, early juvenile delinquency, and later adult criminality fail to control for a host of intervening variables that may account for the observed truancy, delinquency, and criminality connection (Drennon-Gala, 1995; Jarjoura, 1993; Thornberry et al., 1985). It is suggested based on our reading of the literature that such a relationship is more complicated than traditionally assumed, and could potentially be more accurately explained by alternative variables such as measures of prior misconduct and other demographic and/or personality factors (Drennon-Gala, 1995; Famular et al., 1990; Jarjoura, 1993).

Regardless of the lack of firm conclusions concerning the relationship between truancy, juvenile delinquency, and later adult criminality, there is broad agreement that that topic needs to be addressed because of the serious negative impacts of truancy on individuals, families, schools and communities alike. This thought heavily influences the present nationwide attempt to address the growing problem of truancy and dropping out of school.

## Responses to Truancy

The nation's response to the problem of truancy has undergone significant changes over the last four decades (Farrington, 1985; Hersov & Berg, 1980). Prior to the 1970s, truant students typically received uni-dimensional remedial services, and chronically truant students generally were formally processed through the U.S. juvenile



justice system. Beginning in the 1970s, truancy was increasingly recognized as a complex social phenomenon requiring a similarly sophisticated programmatic response. A variety of intervention and prevention techniques were developed to address the multiple underlying causes of truancy behavior. During this time, the U.S. juvenile justice system's jurisdiction over truant students, defined as status offenders, was severely eroded. The U.S. Supreme Court Case *In re Gault* 387 U.S. 1 (1967) and the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Protection Act of 1974* shifted the juvenile justice system's focus away from juvenile's institutional confinement toward discretionary options when dealing with status offenders. During this time, the juvenile justice system emphasized court-ordered diversion, deinstitutionalization, and de-incarceration; status offending juveniles were generally handled informally outside the juvenile justice system (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bazemore, 2004; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Farrington, 1985; Hersov & Berg, 1980; McClusky et al., 2004; Steinhart, 1996).

Today, there is continued recognition among truancy researchers and school, court, law enforcement, social services and community practitioners who come into contact with truant youth that truancy approaches that are exclusively punitive and sanction-oriented are not effective at reducing or eliminating truancy behavior (Byer & Kuhn, 2003). It is commonly understood that truancy cannot be conceptualized exclusively as a disciplinary or student management issue, and that effective truancy programs must address both truancy behavior *and* its root causes (Dembo & Gulledge, 2009). There is general agreement that in order for truancy programs to be effective in reducing and eliminating truancy behavior, *"truancy programs must be comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and preserving in nature, much like the dynamic nature of truancy itself"* (Ventura & Miller, 2005, 103; also see Schorr, 1997). As such, multi-modal intervention and prevention services are currently considered to be the best strategy to address truancy behavior.

*The multi-modal approach.* With increased understanding of the nature of the truancy problem has also come the development of a number of intervention and prevention programs intended to address school avoidance behavior. Programs that have been developed have generally employed a combination of student, school, family, and community-based approaches (see Table 4). Multi-modal approaches consist of programs that employ collaborative efforts among truant students, teachers, school administrators, parents, community members, as well as governmental, non-governmental, law enforcement and legal advocate agencies most likely to come into contact with truant students. Multi-modal programs bring together multiple agencies to provide specialized services that address the root cause of the truancy problem, not just treat the symptom of school avoidance. Multi-modal strategies typically assess the needs of students and involve educators, administrators, and the community before instituting punitive sanctions (Bage, 1989; Beem, 2002; Clear & Karp, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gavin, 1997; Gullatt & Lemoine, 1997; Haslinger et al., 1996; Heilbrunn, 2004, 2006; Jones et al., 2002; Lauchlan, 2003; Miller, 1986; Mogulescu & Segal, 2002; Omni Institute, 1992; Pellegrini, 2007; Quinn, 1995; Quinn, 2004; Reglin, 1997; Reid, 2000; Reid, 2002; Reid, 2003; Rohrman, 1993; Twaite & Lampert, 1997; Ziesemer, 1984; Zigmond & Thornton, 1985).

Advocates of the multi-modal approach generally stress the need for early intervention efforts, starting in elementary school when truancy behavior first becomes manifest (Barth, 1984; Kozinetz, 1995; Levine et al., 1986). While interventions with older truant students tend to be more difficult because truancy behaviors have become more established, even efforts with such older youth can be successful with careful planning and dedicated effort (Roderick et al., 1997). Advocates of the multi-modal approach also suggest that prevention efforts should target students identified as high risk for future truant behavior. Advocates suggest such efforts can prevent truancy behavior from ever developing, thereby decreasing the need for mid-term and late intervention efforts (Gottfredson, 1990; Hawkins & Catalano, 1995; Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1977; McCaughlin & Vachu, 1992; McGiboney, 2001; Mogulescu & Segal, 2002; Morley & Rossman, 1997; Riley & McDaniel, 1999; Sigmon et al., 1999; White et al., 2001; Wilson, 1993).



Even for those truant students for whom the juvenile justice system has become their final stopping point, multi-modal advocates suggest that positive outcomes do exist. Juvenile justice programs that work collaboratively with truant students, parents, the community, and additional social service agencies, while also employing firm and consistent sanctions for truants, can provide meaningful incentives to truants and their parents/guardians. Ongoing school-based intervention techniques and the active involvement of youth-oriented law enforcement officers (such as School Resource Officers) are said to produce the best results for system-involved youth (Bazemore & Senjo, 1997; Berger & Wind, 2000; Garry, 1996; Gavin, 1997; Guarino, 1994; Gullatt & Lemoine, 1997; Mogulescu & Segal, 2002; Nessel, 1999; Swope, 1995; Waddington, 1997; Wilson, 1993). The U.S. juvenile justice system is engaged in expanding its use of a combination of community-based treatment and criminal justice and juvenile justice system penalties to address the complex issues underlying truancy (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bazemore et al., 2004; McClusky et al., 2004).

Multi-modal advocates suggest thoughtful and well-planned truancy intervention efforts utilizing a multi-modal approach can experience high to moderate levels of success at reducing school avoidance behavior among truant students in a short period of time; however, the most effective programs for sustained truancy reduction have been those which have utilized an established multi-modal approach of long duration (Bage, 1989; Dekalb, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Eastwood, 1989; Gavin, 1997; Gullatt & Lemoine, 1997).

Reviewing “emerging”, “promising”, and “model” truancy programs (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005), truancy researchers have identified several components they define as critical to the programs’ successful truancy intervention and prevention outcomes. These critical components include: 1) active collaboration between schools and community institutions; 2) student family involvement; 3) use of a comprehensive approach to problem-solving; 4) the use of incentives as well as sanctions; 5) operating in a supportive context of active encouragement as opposed to one focused on punitive reactions; and 6) rigorous and continual evaluation and assessment (Baker et al., 2001; Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 2002, 2007; National Center for School Engagement, 2007; Dembo & Gullede, 2009; Dukes & Stein, 2001; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Griffen, 1999; Reimer & Dimock, 2005; USDJP, 2007).

*Best Practices: Emerging, promising, and model truancy programs.* The first component identified as critical for successful truancy program outcomes is collaboration. Truancy programs that include a broad-based collaborative approach between the program, truant youth and their families and a multidisciplinary group including, schools, law enforcement, courts, social services, and the community are found to be the strongest in positive results and most sustainable over time. Truancy researchers also note that most funding and government agencies now expect that truancy programs will engage in collaborative community-based planning. Truancy researchers have found that the multidisciplinary collaborative approach ensures that truancy programs derive benefit from the many different perspectives and areas of expertise of those working together to motivate school attendance. Truancy researchers have also found that truancy programs using the multidisciplinary collaborative approach are successful at building a common goal around the truancy issue, avoiding multiple agencies exerting truancy efforts in isolation. Truancy researchers have identified emerging, promising, and model programs using the collaborative approach to truancy behavior (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for program examples, descriptions, and contact information). Truancy researchers have also identified strategies for establishing an effective collaboration (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for specific strategies). Additionally, truancy researchers have also stressed the importance of evaluating the collaborative effort to allow for midcourse correction and ultimately improvement where collaborative challenges exist (Reimer & Dimock, 2005).

The second component identified as critical for successful truancy program outcomes is family involvement. Truancy researchers have found that the most successful truancy programs, “*target family participation in school attachment activities, engage families in all truancy prevention and intervention efforts, and address family-based needs to support attendance*” (Reimer & Dimock, 2005, 4). This engagement is more than simply inviting family’s

attendance at school and court meetings. The most successful truancy programs seek out families for their advice on the truancy issue and experience within their community. Families are viewed as experts in their children's lives. The most successful truancy programs engage families early and on a continual basis, not just when a pressing concern is present. Truancy researchers have identified emerging, promising, and model programs that include family involvement in their programmatic efforts (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for program examples, descriptions, and contact information). Truancy researchers have also identified strategies for ensuring family involvement (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for specific strategies).

The third component identified as critical for successful truancy program outcomes is a comprehensive approach. The most promising truancy programs are flexible and broad enough to take into consideration the multiple and varied factors that contribute to truancy behavior and needs that are present among truant youth and their families. They also focus simultaneously on prevention and intervention efforts and are prepared to address truancy issues along the absence continuum including the very first to the very last unexcused absence. These programs employ a dynamic approach and respond with a comprehensive continuum of services. Truancy researchers have identified emerging, promising, and model programs that include a comprehensive approach to truancy behavior (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for program examples, descriptions, and contact information). Truancy researchers have also identified strategies for establishing comprehensive programs (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for specific strategies).

The use of both incentives and sanctions is the fourth component identified as critical for successful truancy program outcomes. A combination of motivating incentives, typically recognition-based, such as special experiences or monetary rewards, and accountability-based sanctions, typically punitive in nature, such as, detention, suspension, truancy petitions to juvenile court, or the denial of privileges, have been found to work the best with truant youth and their families. Truancy researchers have found that the most successful programs employ incentives that are motivating in nature, and sanctions that are clearly related to the behavior, imposed quickly, and sufficiently graduated to respond appropriately to each succeeding absence. Truancy researchers have also stressed the importance of employing incentives and sanctions that are *meaningful* to both the truant youth and their family. Truancy researchers have identified emerging, promising, and model programs that include a combination of motivating incentives and accountability-based sanctions in response to truancy behavior (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for program examples, descriptions, and contact information).

Operating in a supportive context is the fifth component identified as critical for successful truancy program outcomes. In this case, context refers to the program environment, including its infrastructure and prevailing policies. The most successful truancy programs recognize the importance of a supportive context on their effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Successful truancy programs survive and thrive when they operate in a context where they are not fighting against an existing system infrastructure or acting in isolation. Successful truancy programs spend time nurturing this supportive context and understand it is in their best interest to positively impact and influence this context to effectively address truancy behavior and be sustainable over time. Truancy researchers have identified emerging, promising, and model programs that create and maintain a supportive context (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for program examples, descriptions, and contact information). Strategies for creating and maintaining a supportive context have also been identified (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for specific strategies).

The sixth and final component identified as critical for successful truancy program outcomes is rigorous and continual evaluation and assessment of truancy program impact, outcome, and effectiveness. Truancy researchers have found that the most successful truancy programs evaluate their program's policies and approaches to determine whether they are obtaining their desired outcome, and if not, make midcourse corrections. Successful truancy programs understand that rigorous evaluation designs that measure the impact and outcome of their

program help sustain funding and generate positive political will. Successful truancy programs also appreciate the fact that in this current economic climate funding agencies have started to limit their investments to programs that have demonstrated success. As such, the managers of successful truancy programs understand that such data collection and systematic analysis is mandatory. Truancy researchers have identified emerging, promising, and model programs that employ a rigorous and continual evaluation and assessment of their truancy program's impact, outcome, and effectiveness (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for program examples, descriptions, and contact information). Strategies for developing and implementing a program evaluation and assessment have also been identified (see Reimer & Dimock, 2005 for specific strategies) (Baker et al., 2001; Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 2002, 2007; National Center for School Engagement, 2007; Dembo & Gullede, 2009; Dukes & Stein, 2001; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Griffen, 1999; Reimer & Dimock, 2005; USDJP, 2007).

Truancy researchers virtually universally feel that utilizing established best practices is a sound investment strategy because it allows practitioners and policymakers to avoid the task of "re-creating the wheel," thereby providing more time for thoughtful implementation and more time to spend on adapting their own truancy program to meet the unique needs of their community. In addition, that attraction of resources and grant or foundation support increasingly depends on a showing that one's proposed program has been demonstrated to produce success (Reimer & Dimock, 2005).

*Additional truancy programs and further recommendations.* In addition to identifying, emerging, promising, and model programs that incorporate the six critical components noted above, truancy researchers have identified some additional truancy programs that have experienced some measure of success at truancy intervention and prevention in particular settings which deserve attention. These programs are typically grouped by type of institutional setting in which they operate. The settings in question include: 1) **school-based programs** (for program examples and descriptions see Alliance for Children, 2003, 2004; Baker & Jansen, 2000; Brooks, 2001; DeSecio et al., 2007; Evelo et al., 1996; Finlay et al., 2004; Ford & Sutphen, 1996; Jones et al., 2002; Licht et al., 1991; Lehr et al., 2004; McPartland et al., 1998; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sturgeon & Beer, 1990; USDJP, 2007); 2) **family-based programs** (for program examples and descriptions see Baker et al., 1996; Brooks, 2001; Ford & Sutphen, 1996; Licht et al., 1991; USDJP, 2007); 3) **community-based programs** (for program examples and descriptions see Cantelon & LeBoeuf, 1997; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Promising Practices Network, 2005; USDJP, 2007); 4) **law enforcement-based programs** (for program examples and descriptions see Bazemore et al., 2004; Dembo & Gullede, 2009; Jones et al., 2002; Vance et al., 2008); 5) **court-based programs** (for program examples and descriptions see Byer, 2000; Byer & Kuhn, 2003; Mogulescu et al., 2002; Mueller et al., 2006; Richtman, 2007; Shoenfelt & Huddleston, 2006; Tennell, 2004; Zhang et al., 2007); and, 6) **combination programs** (for program examples and descriptions see Baker et al., 2001, Elizondo et al., 2003; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Garry, 1996; McCluskey et al., 2004; Mueller et al., 2006; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Sheldon, 2007; Sheverbush et al., 2000; Sutphen & Ford, 2003; USDJP, 2007; Ventura & Miller, 2005; White et al., 2001).

*Washington State and best practices.* Washington State truancy researchers and practitioners have examined the truancy issue, the states' response, and the responses' resulting outcomes in a number of studies over the course of the past decade (see Aos, 2002; Burley, 2000; George, 2011; Burley & Harding, 1998; Harding and Burley, 1998; Klima et al., 2009a; Klima et al., 2009b; Klima et al., 2009c; Miller et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2010; WSCCR, 2004). Similar to the broader truancy literature, they have found that the states' most successful truancy programs utilize a multi-modal approach incorporating the above six critical components (see Borko et al., 2003; Klima et al., 2009b, 2009c). They have also identified truancy programs that have demonstrated some measure of success at reducing or preventing truancy behavior (see Borko et al., 2003; Klima et al., 2009b, 2009c). Similar to the broader truancy literature, they have also made recommendations concerning Washington State's truancy prevention and intervention efforts.

Washington state truancy researchers recommend that the state expand their truancy intervention efforts to include truant students **aged five to eight**. Early intervention with students at this young age is thought to be successful at reducing truancy behavior because poor attendance patterns have not yet set in and younger students are more amenable to adopting good attendance behavior. Second, the state's principal truancy researchers recommend that the state should target students **transitioning from middle school to high school** when truancy behavior begins to become more prevalent. Third, they recommend that the state provide a **more stable funding commitment and equitable reimbursement system**. They suggest long-term truancy solutions require dedicated and sustained funding solutions and reimbursement systems should be tied to schools' truancy effort outcomes, not to just how many truancy petitions are filed with the pertinent juvenile court. Finally, they conclude by calling for **more school training on the truancy issue** and the states' response, more consistent truancy policies among the schools, and more leadership from the states' highest educational administrators (see Burley & Harding, 1998; Harding and Burley, 1998; WSCCR, 2004).

*Truancy research limitations.* The principal truancy researchers across the nation are unanimous in their view that more scientifically rigorous evaluation studies of truancy prevention and intervention programs are needed. While a few truancy program evaluation studies exist, they are primarily published as research reports, monographs, or appear in specialized journals or periodicals of limited readership and restricted distribution. Unfortunately, most of these studies feature significant methodological shortcomings. Lacking experimental or even quasi-experimental designs, the majority of such studies lack appropriate comparisons with a control group, do not report effect sizes, and do not utilize a consistent definition of truant behavior. Lacking scientifically rigorous designs and the scrutiny of scholarly assessment, researchers suggest the majority of truancy evaluation studies cannot be accepted as evidence-based literature and are limited in how much guidance they can recommend concerning effective truancy prevention and intervention efforts (Sutphen et al., 2010).

A few states have developed and instituted their own unique responses to their state's truancy problem. Washington is one such state, enacting a rather unique law designed to address the specific needs of at-risk, runaway, and truant youth in the overall effort to keep the state's K-12 student population enrolled in school and making progress toward graduation (Aos, 2002; Klima et al., 2009b).

## Washington State, Truancy, and the “Becca Bill”

In 1995, the Washington State Legislature enacted the “Becca Bill” named after a 13-year old runaway girl who was murdered in Spokane, Washington (Aos, 2002). Addressing at-risk, runaway, and truant youth, the main goals of the bill were to, *“develop better structures for tracking problematic youth behaviors, provide parents with increased options for dealing with at-risk youth, and ensure adequate assessment and treatment services”* (George, 2011, 7). The bill established or modified how truancy, At-Risk Youth (ARY) and Children in Need of Services (CHINS) petitions were handled by Washington State school districts and juvenile courts. In addition, the bill changed the state's compulsory school attendance laws to make them more forceful in dealing with student school avoidance behavior (Aos, 2002; George, 2011; Klima et al, 2009a; Miller et al., 2010; Webster, 1996). Informed by research linking truancy behavior to poor school performance, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality, and motivated by the desire to reduce the negative outcomes associated with truancy, the bill required school districts to file truancy petitions in juvenile court when students accumulated seven unexcused absences in a month or ten in a school year, an action that prior to 1995 was optional (Aos, 2002; George, 2011; Harding, 1996; Klima et al, 2009a; Webster, 1996).

As a result of the new truancy legislation, truancy petition filings increased from under 100 per year prior to 1995 to over 15,000 annually from 1997 to 2009, costing the state an estimated \$2.7 million per year (George, 2011; Klima et al., 2009a; Soder, 2008, 2001). The Bill resulted in increased responsibilities for Washington State school districts and juvenile court systems in the form of substantial changes to school data systems, juvenile court

processing methods, the implementation of school, court, and related system services and sanctions, and legal requirements related to juvenile justice civil proceedings (George, 2011; WSSCR, 2004). Today, the truancy process consists of a system of statutorily mandated steps to be performed by school districts and juvenile courts designed to decrease student unexcused absences and increase positive outcomes for youth engaged in such school avoidance behavior (see E2SSB 5439, Chapter 312, Laws of 1995; George, 2011, 7; RCW 28A.225; Webster, 1996, 8).

In the last 16 years, a number of studies examining various aspects of the Washington State truancy petition process have been performed (see Aos, 2002; Burley, 2000; George, 2011; Burley & Harding, 1998; Harding and Burley, 1998; Klima et al., 2009a; Klima et al., 2009b; Klima et al., 2009c; Miller et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2010; WSCCR, 2004). Study results reported in regard to the truancy law's overall effectiveness, impact, and outcomes have been largely mixed.

For example, studies commissioned by the Washington state legislature found that in the years immediately following the passage of the Becca Bill school districts began strengthening their attendance and monitoring enforcement policies, and school districts and juvenile courts began developing collaborative partnerships and innovative programs and practices relating to the truancy issue (see Burley & Harding, 1998; Harding & Burley, 1998; Klima et al., 2009b; Klima et al., 2009c; WSCCR, 2004). However, it was also found that school districts and juvenile courts had insufficient financial and programmatic resources to meet the requirements of the new truancy laws (see Burley and Harding, 1998; Harding and Burley, 1998; WSCCR, 2004). In addition, studies conducted by researchers at the Washington State Institute for Public Policy also found that there was considerable variation in the way school districts and juvenile courts were applying and implementing truancy laws (see Klima et al., 2009a; Miller et al., 2009; Webster, 1996).

Another study found that filing a truancy petition had no effect on student school continuance; however, it was also observed that the truancy petition process may have had a deterrence effect among non-petitioned truant youth (see Burley, 2000). In direct contrast, another study suggested that provisions of the Becca Bill appeared to result in statistically significant increases in high school enrollment across the state (see Aos, 2002). An additional study found that filing a truancy petition had no reliable effect on student school enrollment (see Miller et al., 2010).

In one of the most comprehensive Washington State truancy studies to date, it was found that there was no evidence that receiving a truancy petition improved any outcome for truant youth (see George, 2011). The study found that court-petitioned truant students did not fare any better than a matched group of non-petitioned truant students with respect to attendance, grade point average, graduation status, or juvenile offenses (George, 2011). When examining the current truancy petition process, the study found that the high volume of truancy petition filings coupled with insufficient funding to meet the requirements of the truancy laws led to a patchwork of truancy policies and practices across Washington State with varying levels of commitment by school district and juvenile court personnel. The study reported that while some school districts had implemented innovative truancy programs, other school districts had no form of intervention, while a few school districts filed a limited number of truancy petitions, or none at all. For example, the study reported that close to 1/3 of all truant youth in the state did not receive a truancy petition even after they exceeded the statutory threshold for unexcused absences. The study also reported that, similar to school districts, juvenile courts struggled to cope with the high number of truancy petition filings, responding to the issue with a myriad of different approaches the effectiveness of which is unknown (George, 2011).

When examining current trends in attendance, graduation, court filings and juvenile crime, the George study found that truancy rates in Washington State had improved slightly for 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, but had worsened

for 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, with the percentage of high school students meeting the statutory threshold of ten or more unexcused absences in a year at 12-14%. The study found that graduation and dropout rates had remained relatively stable over time, and while juvenile crime had significantly declined, no clear relationship linking this decline to truancy policy could be established in life-course data newly available for analysis in good part due to grant funding provided by the MacArthur Foundation (George, 2011).

When examining the characteristics of truant students, the study found that 40% had experienced multiple adverse childhood events such as abuse and neglect, individual or parental substance abuse, parental incarceration, family domestic violence, individual or parental low educational attainment or learning disability, individual or parental mental or physical health challenges, and individual or parental transportation issues. The study also found that truant youth in Washington State were at a very high risk of negative outcomes. For example, the study found that 1/3 of youth who received a truancy petition by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade failed to graduate on time. In addition, nearly 1/3 of youth who received a truancy petition by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade were also charged with a criminal offense within two years (George, 2011). Taken altogether, the study's results led the author to suggest that the findings raised important questions concerning the overall utility of Washington State truancy laws, especially in light of the cost to state finances and school district and juvenile court program efficacy (George, 2011).

The George study concluded with a few closing comments worthy of note. First, although the study found no evidence to indicate that receiving a truancy petition significantly improved outcomes for truant youth, data used for the study consisted largely of students who received a truancy petition between the years of 2004-2007. As such, the study did not assess the impact of receiving a truancy petition for more recent truants. There was some indication in the study's data that unexcused absences and chronic truancy improved slightly over the years. The study did not consider the potential positive impacts of recent school district and juvenile court truancy program development and reduction efforts on truancy reduction (George, 2011).

Second, the study called for more methodologically rigorous quantitative and qualitative evaluations of Washington State truancy efforts to contribute to the development of evidence-based truancy interventions. Included in this call for more research was advocacy for a study to determine why some high risk truants do not receive truancy petitions. In addition, the study suggested examining the role of race, ethnicity, and gender in truancy behavior. The study also suggested future research should examine how key individual-level and family-level factors intertwine with socio-cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations to affect truancy behavior as well as the response to the school avoidance behavior by other students, families, service providers, and the general community. The George study ended on a note indicating that such future research was necessary in order to advance our understanding of truancy behavior and develop effective intervention efforts. In addition, the study concluded by stating that truancy is a complex issue in need of an equally sophisticated response that requires consideration of the multiple factors that contribute to truancy behavior. Also required are the collaboration of schools, courts, legislators, and other stakeholders, and the development and improvement of diagnostic methods for early prevention, ongoing assessment, timely intervention, and systematic and rigorous evaluation.

In addition to questions being raised concerning Washington State truancy law's overall effectiveness, impact, and outcome, additional questions have arisen concerning the state's current approach to truancy in a variety of quarters. In some areas, the state's growing racial and ethnic minority student population is disproportionately involved in the truancy process (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008). With the state's racial and ethnic minority students overrepresented in the truant population, calls for more culturally competent programmatic responses have been issued in the effort to attain more effective truancy intervention, prevention, and reduction results with this specific population. It has been suggested that the adoption of culturally competent programmatic responses to the truancy problem represents



an *urgent need* in the state (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

## Truancy, Programmatic Response, and Cultural Competence

While a variety of definitions of cultural competence are available, the definition offered by Vihn-Thomas et al. (2003) expresses the most commonly understood meaning; that definition reads as follows:

...a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies, including a consideration for logistic, socioeconomic, and functional concerns that influence behavior, that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals, thus enabling the system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively with the target population, and resulting in services that are accepted by the target population (p. 482).

Definitions of the term can be found ranging from those that focus on individual behaviors to those that zero in on institutional practices. For example, Whitikar et al. (2007) define culturally competent services in a broad manner as follows: “individuals and organizations having the values, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and attributes to work effectively in cross cultural situations” (p. 192).

A **culturally-neutral** service provision approach has traditionally been considered the most appropriate type of service delivery for human service workers (Bent-Goodley, 2005). Researchers of the topic of cultural competence argue, however, that social service delivery is never color-blind (Gillum, 2008; Korbin, 2002). With knowledge construction largely Western-based, the significance of race, culture, and ethnicity in social service provision is often ignored, minimized, or entirely misunderstood (Bent-Goodley, 2005; Zellerer, 2003). As a result, social service agencies often displace or minimize the significance of culture, producing social services that are too often ineffective for certain racial and ethnic populations at best, and culturally insensitive and discriminatory at worst (Bent-Goodley, 2005; Williams & Becker, 1995).

As evidence of the occurrence of this phenomenon, in client follow-up surveys racial and ethnic minorities utilizing such social services often report dissatisfaction with formal mainstream social service agencies and the programmatic services they provide (Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006; Gillum, 2008; Williams & Becker, 1995; Whitikar et al., 2007). Cultural minorities often report that when trying to gain access to or when required to participate in such social services, their concerns are frequently marginalized, or they feel intimidated by the service providers and uncomfortable with their interactions with the social service agency. Many of them report that social service programs are often ineffective in addressing their specific needs, and they frequently view formal mainstream social service institutions as more of a hindrance than a help. Ultimately, many racial and ethnic minority social service clients report that they are more likely to turn to informal social networks for help than to the agencies established to address their needs, a phenomenon which may help to explain the low participation and completion rates of racial and ethnic minorities in some formal social services programs – including public schools (Williams & Becker, 1995; Zellerer, 2003).

In recent years it has been widely argued that the adoption of culturally competent social services is essential to the success of many forms of social service provision, including such efforts as the *educational re-engagement-focused, multi-modal approaches to truancy behavior reduction* so widely advocated as best practices in the literature (Bent-Goodley, 2007). It is argued by some that progress in this direction is not an option, but rather is *essential* in light of the changing demographic landscape of our nation and our own state (Korbin, 2002).



# Racial and Ethnic Minority Population Changes and Truancy

The United States is among the most racially and ethnically diverse countries in the world; its population is comprised of multiple racial, ethnic and religious subpopulations (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). The U.S. Bureau of the Census projects the nation's racial and ethnic minority population to increase substantially by the year 2050. Continued diversity is expected to be observed BOTH as a consequence of immigration and as a result of natural growth featuring greater fertility rates among racial and ethnic minority groups than among the white subpopulation (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). Currently, racial and ethnic minorities not only comprise a significant portion of the U.S. population, but they also constitute a disproportionately large segment of the citizenry that receives "social safety net-oriented" social services. Family structure instability, low socioeconomic status, residence in areas of concentrated poverty, the presence of gang activity, etc. are all conditions of living that frequently place racial and ethnic minority youth at a substantial disadvantage vis-à-vis their white counterparts.

## Population Distribution and Growth

Overall, over the course of the past 20 years there has been significant growth in the nation's racial and ethnic minority population (KewalRamani et al., 2007). However, such growth has not been uniform across all groups (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2001a, 2001b, 2004; 2005). Population growth among certain racial and ethnic minority groups has surpassed others at substantial rates (Crosnoe, 2005; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). For example, from 1980 to 2005 the population of Asian/Pacific Islanders in the U.S. grew from 3.6 to 12.8 million, while the American Indian/Alaska Native population grew at a far slower rate, going from 1.3 to 2.2 million (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). During this same time period the Hispanic population grew astronomically, going from 14.6 to 42.7 million, while the African American population grew substantially as well, going from 26.1 to 36.3 million (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). In 2005, minorities comprised of 33% of the U.S. population, with Hispanics being the largest minority group representing 14% of the population, followed by African Americans at 12%, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 4%, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives at 1%, respectively (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that this growth trend will continue, and it has published the prediction that minorities will represent 39% of the total population by the year 2020 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004).

In Washington State, the demographic characteristics of racial and ethnic minorities in terms of population growth are similar to those of the rest of the nation. In 2003, minorities comprised 22% of the state's population, or 1.4 million minority residents; this figure represents an increase from 16% in the year 1990 (Lowe & Zhao, 2004). In 2003, Washington ranked among the top ten states with respect to diversity, with the largest percentage of minorities for nearly all minority categories. That same year Washington State ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation for **minority population growth** (Lowe & Zhao, 2004). In 2003, the total state population was 6,131,445, featuring 5,243,441 white residents, 215,787 African American residents, 100,482 American Indian/Alaskan Native residents, 396,276 Asian/Pacific Islander residents, 175,459 Multi-racial residents, and 508,199 Hispanic residents (Lowe & Zhao, 2004).

The Hispanic population is the largest minority group in the state, and also features the highest rate of growth. When examining minority population demographics by county in Washington, the counties featuring the largest percentage of minority population all have substantial Hispanic populations, with Franklin County leading the state at 54%, Adams County being the next highest at 51%, Yakima County registering 45%, and Grant County having

35% (Lowe & Zhao, 2004). Nearly three quarters (74%) of African Americans live on the west side of the state in either King County or Pierce County, while 58% of the state's Asian/Pacific Islander population also resides on the west side of the state, principally in King County (Lowe & Zhao, 2004). It is projected that the state's minority population will continue to grow at a rate that will outpace the white population, with the Hispanic population experiencing the highest rate of growth (Lowe & Zhao, 2004).

With the knowledge that racial and ethnic minority students are more likely to engage in truancy behavior than their white counterparts, it is essential to understand and address the cultural competence aspect of truancy in light of the projected minority population growth trends detailed above. This aspect of truancy, particularly with respect to the question of school avoidance among Latino youth, is a critical part of the work being done in the Benton and Franklin Counties Models for Change project.

#### Family Structure and Origin of Birth

Family structure and origin of birth play an important role in how truancy is experienced in most communities. The research literature indicates that a student's family background heavily influences their educational status (progress toward degree completion and subject matter mastery alike) (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bos et al., 1990; Brown, 1983; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Glick, 2004). Factors such as parental instability, poor parental supervision, a large number of household members, low parental educational attainment, and foreign-born parents have all been identified as factors that correlate with truancy among U.S. public school students (Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Bos et al., 1990; Brown, 1983; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Glick, 2004). Type of family household and origin of birth in combination are seen as especially important when considering the problem of school avoidance.

In 2005, approximately 38.1 million families (household units) with children under the age of 18 were living in the United States (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). Within this group of families, 67 percent consisted of married couples, 25 percent were female-headed households, and 8 percent were male-headed households (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). When breaking down these statistics by race, significant differences across racial groups are observed. With the exception of African Americans, the majority of families with children under the age of 18 were married couples, with Asian families at 82%, white families at 74%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander families at 65%, Hispanic families at 62%, American Indian/Alaskan Native families at 53%, and African American families at 36% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). African American families with children under the age of 18 had the highest percentage of female-headed households at 55%, followed by American Indian/Alaska Native families at 36%, Hispanic families at 27%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander families at 26%, White families at 19%, and Asian families at 12% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). The highest percentage of families with children under the age of 18 that were male-headed in 2005 were Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Native families at 11%, followed by African American families at 9%, White families at 7%, and Asian families at 5% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004).

When examining the factor of origin of birth, the proportion of U.S. residents born outside the country has grown substantially from 8% in 1990 to 12% in 2005 (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). In 2005, 12% of the total U.S. population was foreign-born, including 4% of all U.S. children under the age of 18 (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). When examining origin of birth by race, variations similar to those observed for family structure can be seen. Of those residents born outside of the U.S., 1% were American Indian/Alaska Natives, 4% were white, 7% were African American, 21% were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 40% were Hispanic, and 68% were Asian (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). Foreign origin of birth rates for children under the age of 18

follow a similar pattern, with 23% of Asian children being foreign born, followed by Hispanic children at 11%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander at 10%, African American children at 2%, white and American Indian/Alaska Native children at 1% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004).

When examining family type in Washington State, in the year 2000, there were 1,509,395 total families (OFM, 2002). Of these family units, 1,201,324 involve married couples. Of these married couple families, 561,339 contained children under the age of 18. When examining another family type, 308,071 were male-headed households with no spouse present. Male-headed households with no spouse present contained 53,781 children under the age of 18. Another 216,983 families were female-headed households with no husband present, and of these female-headed households 142,838 featured children under the age of 18 (OFM, 2002). When examining origin of birth, in the year 2000, 5,279,664 Washington residents were native born, while 614,457 were foreign born. Of the Washington residents who were foreign born, 257,648 were naturalized citizens, while 356,809 were not U.S. citizens (OFM, 2002).

With respect to language spoken at home assessed by the ability to speak English in the year 2000, a total of 4,730,512 Washington residents reported that they spoke English exclusively. A total of 321,490 Washington residents indicated that they spoke Spanish, 176,722 indicated that they spoke an Indo-European language, 242,836 indicated that they spoke an Asian/Pacific Islander language, and 29,838 indicated they spoke a language classified as "other." All foreign language speakers indicated they speak English to varying degrees, ranging between speaking English very well to not speaking English at all (OFM, 2002).

Family structure and origin of birth are important variables to consider when examining the topic of truancy. The research literature indicates rather clearly that students who reside in single-parent households or are foreign born are more likely than students residing in a two-parent household or are U.S.-born to engage in truancy and school avoidance behavior (Glick, 2004; KewalRamani et al., 2007). While a definitive explanation for this observed relationship has not been formulated, a number of researchers have asserted that single-parent households are unable to provide the type of supervision that could prevent truancy behavior, and foreign-born students tend to come from lower socioeconomic conditions and perform lower on academic achievement measures, two variables that are known risk factors for truancy (Glick, 2004; KewalRamani et al., 2007). With a high U.S. single parent household ratio and a growing foreign-born population, the truancy problem has the potential to become an even more significant social issue, especially in Washington State where such issues are present and of increasing salience. In addition, as more families continue to face an increasingly difficult and uncertain economic future, addressing the topic of truancy becomes even more urgent.

## Socioeconomic Status

As with family structure and origin of birth, socioeconomic status is an important variable to examine when considering the behavior of truancy (Snyder et al., 2006). Low socioeconomic status is correlated with both poor school performance and with truancy. A number of theories have been offered to explain the relationship between low socioeconomic status and truancy. First, poverty has been implicated in the delayed mental, physical, and psychological development of children (Duncan et al., 1994; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Pollitt, 1997). A mother's poor pre-natal health, and a child's poor nutrition and lack of access to quality medical care, both common outcomes of poverty, have been identified as contributing to the incidence of learning difficulties among children (Duncan et al., 1994; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Pollitt, 1997). Children experiencing learning difficulties are known to have a higher probability of engaging in school avoidance behavior (Duncan et al., 1994; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Pollitt, 1997). Second, poverty has also been implicated in children's lack of access to quality education and out-of-school learning opportunities (Duncan et al., 1994; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Pollitt, 1997). Since a significant portion of a school district's budget is derived from local property tax revenue, schools in

low income areas have a diminished ability to provide quality educational opportunities to the students they serve (Duncan et al., 1994; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Pollitt, 1997). Schools in low income areas often report low levels of academic achievement on the part of their students, and they report high rates of truancy (Bailey & Dziko, 2008). Third, poverty has been implicated in children's difficulty to consistently attend or remain enrolled in school. Whether the result of remaining at home to care for sick or unsupervised siblings or dropping out of school to obtain employment, research indicates that children who come from a low socioeconomic background often engage in truancy at least in part because of their poverty status (Duncan et al., 1994; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Pollitt, 1997).

It is extremely important to understand the impact of socioeconomic status on poor school performance in general, and on the phenomenon of truancy in particular, because of the large number of children living in poverty in Washington. It is especially important to understand this adverse impact of poverty on racial and ethnic minorities because of the high rate of poverty existing among this segment of Washington's citizenry. In 2005, 38.1 million families with children under the age of 18 were residing in the U.S. (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). Of these families, 16% were living in poverty (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004). When breaking down these statistics by race, a substantial disparity in poverty rates can be observed. The percentage of families with children under the age of 18 that were living in poverty in 2005 was higher for African Americans, for Hispanics, for American Indian/Alaskan Natives, and for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (documented at 20-30% rates) than for whites and for Asians (documented at 10%) (KewalRamani et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004).

In 1999, of the 2,272,261 households living in Washington State, the median income of all Washington residents was \$45,776 (OFM, 2002). When breaking down household income by race, a considerable variation in income can be observed. For white households the median income was \$47,044; in comparison, African American households had a median income of \$35,919, American Indian/Alaskan Native households had a median income of \$32,670, Asian households had a median income of \$47,517, Pacific Islander households had a median income of \$41,656, Hispanic or Latino households had a median income of \$32,757, "Two or More Races" households had a median income of \$37,356, and finally "Other Race" households had a median income of \$31,363 (OFM, 2002). When examining poverty status of families by race, the same types of racial and ethnic disparities can be observed, with a higher percentage of racial and ethnic minorities in Washington State living in poverty when compared to their proportion in the population. In 1999 110,663 families were living below the poverty level in Washington. A total of 5.9% of white families were living in poverty, with 19,926 of these families containing a child under the age of 18 (OFM, 2002). A total of 14.9% of African American families lived below the poverty level, with 1,011 of these families having children under the age of 18. A total of 18.9% of American Indian/Alaskan Native families lived below the poverty level, with 692 of those families having children under the age of 18. A total of 10.6% Asian families lived below the poverty level, with 2,970 of these families having children under the age of 18. A total of 14.1% of Pacific Islander families lived below the poverty level, with 238 of these families having children under the age of 18. Finally, a total of 21.9% of Hispanic or Latino families lived below the poverty level, with 8,692 of those families containing children under the age of 18 (OFM, 2002).

When examining poverty status by race *and* sex, a more severe disparity can be observed. For white households living below the poverty level, 6,579 are male-headed households with no spouse present, while 35,916 are female-headed households with no spouse present. For African American households living below the poverty level, 813 are male-headed households with no spouse present, while 4,489 are female-headed households with no spouse present. For American Indian/Alaskan Native households living below the poverty level, 603 are male-headed households with no spouse present, while 2,412 are female-headed households with no spouse present. For Asian households living below the poverty level, 697 are male-headed households with no spouse present, while 2,519 are female-headed households with no spouse present. For Pacific Islander households living below

the poverty level, 105 are male-headed households with no spouse present, while 251 are female-headed households with no spouse present. Finally, for Hispanic or Latino households living below the poverty level, 2,341 are male-headed households with no spouse present, while 6,999 are female-headed households with no spouse present (OFM, 2002). Of the single-parent households, female-headed households with no spouse present are significantly more likely to report the presence of a child under the age of 18 residing in the household than male-headed households with no spouse present (OFM, 2002).

Research abounds demonstrating that socio-economic disadvantage is a significant predictor of truancy. Low socio-economic status is implicated in decreased academic attainment, with truancy serving as a frequent complement to poor school performance. Racial and ethnic minority youth are overrepresented in the low income and high poverty status brackets. With many racial and ethnic minority families and single-parent households reporting the presence of children under the age of 18 living within their residence, truancy among their children has the potential to impact this specific population at a rate disproportionate to their representation in the population, ultimately influencing their children's overall educational attainment and life-long earning potential.

# Current Educational Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

## Enrollment

Pre-primary school, or what is better known as pre-school, prepares children for a successful transition from the home setting into elementary school (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Campbell et al., 2001; KewalRamani et al., 2007). The mission of elementary and secondary schools is to equip students with the educational, social, and life skills necessary to excel in higher education and life in general (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Campbell et al., 2001; KewalRamani et al., 2007). Variations in enrollment in these institutions by race, socio-economic status, and geographic location are observed, serving as indicators of the different experiences racial and ethnic minorities have within these social institutions. For example, in 2005 57% of 3-5 year olds enrolled in pre-school programs were more likely to be Caucasian, African American, and Asian/Pacific Islander than Hispanic or Native American/Alaskan Native (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In 2005, children living at or above the poverty line were more likely to be enrolled in pre-school programs (60%) than those children living below the poverty line (47%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

In Washington State, the Head Start program, a school readiness program for low-income pre-kindergarten students, had the highest enrollment in 2006 for white students, at 50.4%, followed by African American students at 7.6%, Hispanic students at 37.8%, and Asian students at 4.2% (Contreras & Stritikus, 2008). Similar to national trends, since 1986, the minority K-12 student population in the Evergreen State has experienced significant growth. For the 2007-2008 academic school year, 65.8% of students enrolled in Washington State public schools were white reflecting a growth rate of 6%, 2.7% were American Indian/Alaskan Native reflecting a growth rate of 52%, 8.7% were Asian/Pacific Islanders reflecting a rate of growth of 134%, 5.7% were African American reflecting a growth of 92%, and 14.6% were Hispanic reflecting a rate of growth of 372 percent (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Stritikus, 2008).

## Academic Performance and Achievement

Academic performance and achievement among elementary and secondary students is measured through various methods such as with reading and mathematics assessments, international student assessments, courses taken, and ACT and SAT test performance outcomes. While each assessment type measures different aspects of educational mastery, similarities in academic performance and achievement are present across educational measures by race. Regardless of the type of academic performance and achievement measure examined, certain minority groups are consistently out-performed by their white student counterparts (see Crosnoe, 2005; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Fryer & Levitt, 2006; Hallinan, 2001; Hedges & Nowell, 1999; Johnson & Viadero, 2000; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Kao et al., 1996; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Lee, 2002; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Maruyama, 2003; Orr, 2003; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Rothstein, 2004; Thomas, 2004).

Although gaps in reading and mathematics scores have decreased somewhat between white and minority students aged 9, 13, and 17 since the 1970s, white students continue to outperform their African American and Hispanic student counterparts in all academic areas. In 2004, white and Asian/Pacific Islander 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students performed better on their reading assessments than did African American, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native students in the same grade, with the before-mentioned groups having higher percentages at or above “proficient” scores. During this same year, white and Asian/Pacific Islander 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students again performed better on their mathematics assessments than did African American,



Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native students in the same grade, with the before-mentioned groups having a higher percentage of at or above proficient scores (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

When examining international educational assessments, in 2003 U.S. 15-year olds scored lower than the international average on mathematics and literacy, with U.S. Asian/Pacific Islander students scoring higher than their African American and Hispanic student counterparts (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). When investigating student courses taken, white and Asian/Pacific Islander high school students were more likely to complete advanced mathematics and science advanced placement courses than were African American, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native students. Finally, while the percentage of minority ACT and SAT test-takers increased over the period 1996-2006, white and Asian/Pacific Islander test-takers outperformed their African American, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native student counterparts - scoring consistently higher in the verbal, mathematics, and English portions of the test (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

In Washington State, the academic performance and achievement of racial and ethnic minorities is similar to those reported for the nation. When examining academic performance indicators such as grade point average, the Washington State Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), participation in advanced placement tests, ACT and SAT scores and remedial program utilization, Washington State racial and ethnic minority students are consistently outperformed by their white student counterparts, and they are more likely to utilize remedial program services (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Stritikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008). When examining mean grade point average of Washington State middle and high school students by race and ethnicity in 2008, some racial and ethnic minority students had significantly lower grade point averages than their white student counterparts. The GPA figures were as follows: Hispanic average GPA 2.26; African American average GPA 2.31; white average GPA 2.74; American Indian/Alaskan Native average GPA 2.17; Asian average GPA 3.01; Native Hawaiians average GPA 2.32; and Multi-racial average GPA 2.55 (Contreras & Stritikus, 2008). When examining 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL scores in 2007, racial and ethnic minority students had lower levels of achievement in reading, writing, and math (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Cole, 2008a; Cole, 2008b; Cole, 2008c; Cole & Pennucci, 2007; Contreras & Stritikus, 2008; Pennucci, 2007). In 2007, racial and ethnic minority students were less likely to participate in advanced placement testing, and when examining the total mean scores of Washington SAT test takers in 2007 in Washington state by race and ethnicity, racial and ethnic minority students had lower SAT scores (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Stritikus, 2008). Finally, in 2008 racial and ethnic minority students in Washington State were more likely to utilize remedial services for reading, math, and English than were white students (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Stritikus, 2008).

## Student Participation

Examining “student participation,” traditionally understood to include absences, retention, suspension, expulsion, and dropout behavior, is critical to understanding truancy behavior because student participation data details student attendance activity. As with academic performance and achievement, across-race variations in student participation data are present (Alon, 2007; Johnson et al., 2001; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). These variations are important to an understanding of the minority student educational experience, as well as comprehending future impacts on minority student educational and employment opportunities.

In 2005, Native Americans/Alaskan Native 8<sup>th</sup> grade students had the highest absentee rates at 30 percent, followed by African Americans students at 25%, Hispanic students at 24%, and white students at 20% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Asian/Pacific Islander 8<sup>th</sup> grade students had the lowest absentee rates at just 12%. In 2003, 17% of African American public school



students had been retained or held back one school grade during their kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade tenure; this figure is significantly higher than that for Hispanic students at 11%, white students at 8%, and Asian/Pacific Islander students at 5% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In 2003, a significant portion of African American students had been suspended at some point in their K-12 academic tenure at 20%, as compared to Native Americans/Alaskan Natives at 11%, Hispanics at 10%, whites at 9%, and Asian/Pacific Islanders at 6% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

During this same year, African Americans also had a higher reported percentage rate for being expelled at some point in their K-12 academic tenure at 5%, compared to white students at 1%, Hispanic students at 1%, and Asian/Pacific Islander students at 1% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Finally, although a decreasing trend in school dropout rates was found for 16-24 years olds between the years 1989-2005, minority students were still quite overrepresented, having the highest dropout rates – with Hispanic students at 22%, African American students at 10%, white students at 6%, and Asian/Pacific Islander students at 3% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Trends for student dropout and graduation rates for racial and ethnic minorities in Washington State are also similar to national statistics (Aos & Pennucci, 2005). When examining the average estimated student cohort dropout rates in Washington State in 2008, racial and ethnic minority students were significantly more likely to drop out of school than white students (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008). In 2008, the average estimated cohort dropout rate percentage for all students in Washington State was 17.5%, with Hispanics at 29.4%, African Americans at 20.1%, whites at 16.9%, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives at 39.5%, and Asians at 16.5% (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008). When examining student cohort graduation rates in Washington State, in 2005 similar racial variations can be seen with the estimated cohort graduation rates, with Hispanics at 56.9%, African Americans at 51.8%, whites at 72.3%, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives at 42.7%, Asians at 75.5%, with all students at 68.8% (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

The national and state student participation statistics reported above are **alarming** considering what is known concerning the direct link between student participation, student performance, and educational outcomes (Baker et al., 2001a, 2001b; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Lamdin, 1996; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Roby, 2004). Reduced educational attainment puts students at risk for future reduced occupational and career opportunities.

# Barriers to Education for Racial and Ethnic Minorities

A number of factors may serve as barriers to educational achievement for primary and secondary school students. In the research literature these barriers are classified as student-based, as arising from the familial setting, as deriving from the school environment, or as being community-specific. While students of all demographic groups can face challenges in the above areas, racial and ethnic minority students are considered to be at a greater risk than their white student counterparts for experiencing such impediments to educational success.

## Student Barriers

Substance abuse issues, pregnancy, and special needs have all been identified as major student-based barriers to educational attainment and achievement for primary and secondary school students (Heyneman, 2005).

*Substance abuse.* First, students with drug and alcohol abuse and/or addiction issues are more likely to experience poor school performance and discipline-related issues, including truancy (Bryant et al., 2003; Bryant and Zimmerman, 2002; Butler et al., 2005; Henry, 2007; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). In 2004, 18% of 12-17 year olds participating in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported drinking alcohol in the past month, with white children reported at 20%, American Indian/Alaska Native children reported at 19%, Hispanic children reported at 18%, African American children reported at 10% and Asian/Pacific Islander children reported at 9% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). When examining cigarette use, 12% of all 12-17 year olds participating in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported cigarette use in the last month, with white children reported at 14%, African American children reported at 6%, Hispanic children reported at 9%, Asian/Pacific Islander children reported at 5%, and American Indian/Alaska Native children reported at 18% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). When examining marijuana use, 8% of all 12-17 year olds participating in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported marijuana use in the last month, with white children at 8%, African American children at 6%, Hispanic children at 7%, Asian Pacific Islander children at 4%, and American Indian/Alaska Native children at 17% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004).

When examining substance abuse among Washington State high school students in 2002, Washington State 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students had a lower prior 30-day use of alcohol, tobacco, and hallucinogen use than did students nationally (Einspruch & Hyatt 2004). The average age of first substance use among Washington State students was very young, with 12<sup>th</sup> graders reporting that on average they had their first alcoholic beverage at age 13.7 years, began drinking alcoholic beverages at least once or twice a month at age 15.2 years, smoked their first tobacco cigarette at 12.1 years, and smoked marijuana at 14.3 years (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). Alcohol was the most common substance use reported among Washington State students on three standard indicators of alcohol use: lifetime prevalence, 30-day use, and binge drinking (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). A total of 44.2% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students had tried alcohol at some point in their lives; 17.8 percent reported consuming alcohol in the last 30 days, and 10 percent reported consuming five or more drinks in a row, or what is considered binge drinking (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). For each grade level increase, there was a corresponding alcohol use percentage increase (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). By 12<sup>th</sup> grade some 75% of Washington State students reported having tried alcohol at some point in their lives, 42.8% reported consuming alcohol in the last 30 days, and 27.3% reported binge drinking in the past two weeks (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). Male students were considerably more likely to report engaging in substance use than were female students (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004).

Tobacco was the second most common substance use reported among Washington State students, with older students being more likely to have engaged in consistent tobacco use. A total of 28.6% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 52.1% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported trying tobacco at some point in their lives, while 9.2% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 22.1% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders had smoked tobacco in the last 30 days (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). Marijuana was the least likely substance to be used, with 10.4% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders using marijuana in the last 30 days (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004).

*Pregnancy.* Second, primary and secondary students who have children are less likely to complete school than those students who do not have children (Hofferth et al., 2001; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Kirby, 2001; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). For those students with children who remain enrolled, they are less likely to perform as well academically as those students who do not have children (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Although the birth rate for 15-19 year olds declined from 1991-2004 for all racial/ethnic group females, the birth rate for Hispanic, African American, and American Indian/Alaska Native teenage females was higher than that of the general population of teenage females (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). When examining students who do not complete school in Washington State, 161 students (0.9%) dropped out of school during the 2005-2006 school year because of marriage, family support, or child-related reasons (Ireland, 2006).

*Special needs.* Finally, while students with special needs such as a disability or English as a second language are protected under the Disabilities Education Act and the Civil Rights Act, and therefore are entitled to receive special services that are intended to enable them to complete primary and secondary school. Nonetheless, such students often face developmental and/or learning challenges that make educational achievement and graduation attainment challenging (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In 2004, there were an estimated 700,000 3-5 year old primary students; 6% of children in this age group received services under the Disabilities Education Act (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). American Indian/Alaska Native's were the highest population served at 9 percent, while whites and African Americans were represented at 6%, followed by Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders at 4%. In 2004, among an estimated six million secondary students 6 to 21 years old, 9% of this age group received services under the Disabilities Education Act. Once again, American Indian/Alaska Native's were the population most often served at 14%, followed closely by African Americans at 13%, whites at 9%, Hispanics at 8%, and Asian/Pacific Islanders at 5% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

In addition, in 2005 approximately 10.8 million primary and secondary students, 20 percent of all such students, reported English as their second language (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Of these students, about one quarter were reported to struggle with English proficiency. Of these students, Hispanics had the highest reported rate of English as a second language at 70%, followed by Asians at 65%, Pacific Islanders at 33%, American Indian/Alaska Native at 17%, and white and black students at 6% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

When examining Washington State annual school dropout rates by grade and program type for the 2005-2006 school year, 4% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 5% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 8% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders, and 11% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in special education classes had subsequently dropped out of school (Ireland, 2006). For those students with limited English proficiency, 7% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 8% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 9% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders, and 12% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders dropped out of school (Ireland, 2006). In 2007, 10.7% of white Washington State students were in special education, followed by 14.8% of African Americans, 10.6% of Hispanics, 6% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 16.4% of American Indian/Alaskan Natives (Bailey & Dziko, 2008).

## Familial Barriers

The educational research points to a strong link between parental educational levels, expectations, and engagement and child educational attainment, mastery achievement and standardized test performance (see Alexander et al., 1997; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Biblarz & Raftery, 1999; Boggess, 1998; Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Chen, 2001; Crosnoe, 2004; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henry, 2007; Hill et al., 2004; Hong & Ho, 2005; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Pena, 2000; Trusty, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2003, 2005, 2006). While the level of educational attainment and achievement has increased among all U.S. population groups, a difference in levels can be seen with respect to race and ethnicity.

In 2005, Asian/Pacific Islander and white children ages 6 to 18 were more likely to have parents with higher levels of educational than African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native children (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). When breaking this down by parent, mother with bachelor's degree were more likely to be white at 23%, followed by African Americans at 11%, Hispanics at 8%, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 33%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 4% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Mothers with graduate degrees were also more likely to be white at 9%, followed by African Americans at 5%, Hispanics at 2%, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 12%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 4% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). As with mothers, fathers with a B.A. degree were more likely to be white at 22%, followed by African Americans at 13%, Hispanics at 8%, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 27%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 8% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Fathers with graduate degrees were also more likely to be white at 13%, again followed by African Americans at 4%, Hispanics at 3%, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 21%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 4% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

With respect to the critically important aspect of parental educational attainment, substantial racial and ethnic differences can be observed in Washington. The likelihood that a minority youth has parents who have completed college and perhaps have an advanced degree is far lower than is the case for white youth. In 2000, 312,915 white males held a bachelor's degree and 175,007 had a graduate/professional degree as compared to African Americans at 7,871 and 3,490, American Indian/Alaskan Natives at 2,167 and 893, Asians at 23,522 and 14,237, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders at 508 and 247, and Hispanics at 7,305 and 4,155 (OFM, 2002). When examining this same statistic for females, in 2000, 300,890 white females had a B.A./B.S. degree and 138,572 had a graduate/professional degree as compared to African Americans at 6,349 and 3,138, American Indian/Alaskan Natives at 2,160 and 1,102, Asians at 28,494 and 10,683, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders at 510 and 141, and Hispanics at 7,382 and 3,493 (OFM, 2002).

## School and Community Barriers

A positive school climate is imperative for the continuation of education for students. School safety conditions that feature violence, threats of violence, gangs, and serious crime problems reduce the likelihood that students will attend and finish school (American Association of University Women, 2001; Anderson et al., 2001; Butler et al., 2005; Catterall, 1998; Chandler et al., 1998; Dinkes et al., 2009; Fineran, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Jaynes, 2003; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Kosciw et al., 2008; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Shaw, 2001). In 2006, the Youth Risk Behavior survey and the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization survey revealed that school safety is a significant issue for our nation's youth, with many students experiencing significant school and community barriers to achieving their education. These barriers are pronounced for racial and ethnic minority youth (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

In 2005, it is estimated that 6% of white students carried a weapon to school, followed by African Americans at 5%, Hispanics at 8%, Asians at 3%, Pacific Islanders at 15%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 7% (KewalRamani et

al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). That same year, 7% of whites reported being threatened or injured with a weapon, followed by African Americans at 8%, Hispanics at 10%, Asians at 5%, Pacific Islanders at 15%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 10% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). In 2005, 12% of white students reported engaging in a physical fight on school property followed by African Americans at 17%, Hispanics at 18%, Asians at 6%, Pacific Islanders at 25%, and American Indian/Alaska Native at 22%. With respect to gangs, 17% of white students ages 12-18 reported street gangs present at school during the previous six months, as compared to African Americans at 37%, Hispanics at 38%, and “others” at 23% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

With respect to school climate in Washington State in 2004, 6.8% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 4.7% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 3.4% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported not attending school in the previous 30 days because of feeling unsafe at school or on the way to or from school (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). A total of 31% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 29.6% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 22.2% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 14.3% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the state reported being bullied in the previous 30 days, and 5.5% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 6% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 6.9% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the state reported carrying a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club onto school property over the course of the 30 days prior to the survey (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). When examining the phenomenon of physical fighting on school property, 18.9% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 12.3% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 8.3% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported having been in a physical fight on school property at least once in the previous 12 months (Einspruch & Hyatt, 2004). Finally, when examining gang presence at Washington State schools in 2008, the Washington State Gangs in Schools Task Force reported that gang activity is on the rise in Washington schools, that this gang activity is observed frequently in the vicinity of schools, that intimidation is one of the most significant impacts to the school’s students, and that an overwhelming majority of the state’s school lack the resources and information to address the present gang issues (Bleecker & Town, 2008).

The student, family, school and community barriers noted above make attending school for many of our state’s K-12 students exceedingly difficult. For those students facing the above challenges and barriers to school success, the research shows rather clearly that they are more likely to display school avoidance behavior as compared to youth not facing these barriers. With Benton and Franklin Counties youth who are racial and ethnic minority being more likely to experience such barriers than white students, they are understandably more likely to be represented among the population of truant students affected by the Becca Bill and school policies and practices relating to truancy.

# Truancy, Educational Status, Occupational & Income Status, and Racial and Ethnic Minorities

## Completion Rates and Post Secondary Education

The link between educational attainment and post secondary education and occupational and income outcome has been well documented in the educational research (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004). A link has also been suggested to exist between educational attainment and overall quality of life over the long term (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004). While there has been an increase in educational attainment for all races and ethnic groups in the U.S., persistent gaps in educational attainment and post-secondary education can be observed according to race. In 2005, despite decades of efforts to promote affirmative action and diversity programs, the gaps between whites and others remain; 20% of whites had obtained a Bachelor's degree followed by African Americans at 13%, Hispanics at 9%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 10%. Whites obtained MA degrees at a rate of 8%, followed by African Americans at 4%, Hispanics at 2%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 3%. Finally, 3% of whites obtained a Doctorate or professional degree (M.D., J.D., etc.), followed by African Americans at 1%, Hispanics at 1%, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 6%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 2% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004). In Washington State, comparable racial and ethnic group variations in educational attainment can be observed (OFM, 2002).

## Employment and Income Outcomes

As with post-secondary education, there is also a link between educational attainment and employment/occupational placement and income outcomes. Those with lower educational attainment are more likely to be unemployed, employed in "dead end" jobs, and have a lower income than those with higher educational attainment (Greene, 2001; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Sum et al., 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004).

Unemployment is defined as the percentage of the total labor force population that is jobless, looking for employment, or available to work (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003). In 2005, 65 percent of the population was in the labor force, with the unemployment rate at 6 percent (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). As with educational attainment, rate of employment varies dramatically by race and ethnicity. Unemployment rates for all whites aged 16 and over in the United States in 2005 was 5%, followed by African Americans at 11%, Hispanics at 6%, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 4%, and American Indian/Alaskan Native at 12% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). When examining these statistics specifically looking at educational attainment and race and ethnicity, additional noteworthy variations can be observed. In 2005, whites with less than high school completion had an unemployment rate of 12%, followed by African Americans at 24%, Hispanics at 9%, Asians at 8%, Pacific Islanders at 12%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 21% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). In 2005, whites with a high school diploma had an unemployment rate at 6%, followed by African Americans at 11%, Hispanics at 7%, Asians at 6%, Pacific Islanders at 7%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives at 15% (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce,

2006). Racial and ethnic group disparities continue to plague American society, despite the important progress that has been made toward greater equality and the more even-handed dispensation of justice in America. In the important area of median earnings for persons 25 years and over by educational attainment, sex and race, the pattern of racial and ethnic group variations noted above can be observed in data for the year 2005. For males, white males with less than a high school diploma earned a median income of \$30,000, with a high school diploma they earned \$39,000, with some college or an associate's degree they earned \$46,000, with a bachelor's degree they earned \$60,000, and with a graduate degree they earned \$80,000. In contrast, African American males with less than a high school diploma earned a median income of \$23,000, with a high school diploma they earned \$28,400, with some college or an associate's degree they earned \$38,000, with a bachelor's degree they earned \$45,000, and with a graduate degree earned \$61,000. Similarly, Hispanic males with less than a high school diploma earned a median income of \$25,000, with a high school diploma they earned \$28,000, with some college or an associate's degree they earned \$39,000, with a bachelor's degree they earned \$49,000 and with a graduate degree they earned \$65,000. Asian/Pacific Islander males with less than a high school diploma earned a median income of \$25,000, with a high school diploma they earned \$30,000, with some college or an associate's degree they earned \$35,000, with a bachelor's degree they earned \$55,000, and with a graduate degree they earned \$81,000. American Indian/Alaskan Native males with less than a high school diploma earned a median income of \$30,000, with a high school diploma they earned \$35,000, with some college or an associate's degree they earned \$35,000, with a bachelor's degree they earned \$55,000, and with a graduate degree they earned \$81,000 (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). Virtually the same pattern of disparate earnings for equivalent levels of educational attainment is present for females (KewalRamani et al., 2007; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006).

In Washington State the same disparities in the area of family and personal income are evident as were witnessed in the area of educational attainment. In 1999, of the 2,272,261 total households in Washington State, the median income was \$45,776 (OFM, 2002). For white households, the median income was \$47,044 as compared to African American households with a median income of \$35,919, American Indian/Alaskan Native households with a median income of \$32,670, Asian households with a median income of \$47,517, Pacific Islander households with a median income of \$41,656, Hispanic or Latino households with a median income of \$32,757, and Two or More Races households with a median income of \$37,356 (OFM, 2002).



# Truancy, Cultural Competence, and Best Practices

As noted at the outset of this review of literature, education researchers have arrived at a consensus that the programs which are the most effective in preventing or reducing truancy and school avoidance behavior have been those which have utilized a *multi-modal* approach (Bage, 1989; Dekalb, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Eastwood, 1989; Gavin, 1997; Gullatt & Lemoine, 1997). The multi-modal approach relies upon multi-agency coordinated and cooperative strategies that are based upon activities designed to address both macro and micro-level problems that lead students to “fall through the cracks” of the school system and end up with engagement in the juvenile justice system as status offenders (Milliken, 2007). In Washington State, education researchers have advanced numerous policy recommendations similar to those made at the national level, seeking to improve upon the state’s current educational system and its interface with the juvenile courts and social service systems (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008). These recommendations have been designed to improve the overall quality of the state’s K-12 system, including Washington’s educational system’s response to truancy. The recommendations made include those that are believed will benefit the general student population, but have also been designed to specifically address the unique needs of the state’s racial and ethnic minority student population which is systematically over-represented among truant youth.

The policy recommendations offered include a strategic plan for investment in five key areas, including: (1) the development of a comprehensive data system and evaluation framework; (2) increased student support for academic attainment and achievement; (3) improved teaching and instruction with respect to cultural competence (e.g., more inclusive subject matter, more use of racial and ethnic role models, etc.); (4) more active promotion of parental engagement and volunteer involvement; and (5) the development of a seamless P-20 continuum of education at the state level (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008). It is argued that through such improvements in the state’s overall educational system, truancy behavior can be reduced significantly, particularly among the over-represented racial and ethnic minority youth. These recommendations arise from a two-year study of schools statewide conducted by some of the state’s most highly respected education researchers located at the University of Washington and Washington State University who devoted many hours of their time over this period in intense work (2007-2008) to conduct focus groups, carry out in-depth interviews with students, teachers and parents, and pour over virtual mountains of school statistics. Their recommendations are particularly pertinent to this literature review in that they capture the essence of the challenges faced across the country in dealing with truancy in an era of high stakes testing and school accountability brought about as a consequence of the No Child Left Behind federal initiative. Their recommendations display awareness of challenges and barriers faced everywhere across the country in varying degrees, but their suggestions for priority concerns reflect an especially careful and timely look at truancy issues in our own Evergreen State.

## Development of a Comprehensive Data System and Evaluation Framework

The first recommendation made by these education researchers is that Washington develop a statewide comprehensive data system (with standardized definitions and data summary protocols) and an accompanying evaluation plan. In order to fully understand truancy and school avoidance behavior, accurate student attendance records, discipline records, demographic background information, and educational outcome data (grades, progress toward graduation and standardized test scores) are needed. Such data (de-identified, of course) being available

on all students, but specifically racial and ethnic minority students, in Washington state is essential to understand the specific types of student, family, school and community factors that predispose youth to engage in truancy behavior. At present, however, the degree of variation across school districts and even among schools within a single district is so great that systematic statewide research is extremely difficult to carry out. As for any hopes of designing an appropriate evaluation plan that might be able to identify programs and policies that are successful at closing the school achievement gaps separating racial and ethnic minority students vis-à-vis their white counterparts, there is scant chance for this to take place without the prior standardization of data and effective sharing of de-identified data with researchers in the state (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

## Increased Student Support for Academic Attainment and Achievement

The second recommendation made by Washington State education researchers is to provide student support for academic attainment and achievement through a variety of methods, including greater use of curricular resources featuring a diversity and mutual respect theme, close monitoring of student progress early on in elementary schools, and the provision of greater “transition services” for the critical elementary-to-middle school and middle school-to-high school points of educational transition. In this connection, it is argued that school-based juvenile court personnel are a welcomed reform, but that ***school staff working with these school-based court personnel*** are needed to achieve a successful school re-engagement for many truant youth.

It is recommended that it is necessary to work toward reducing the low graduation rates of Washington’s students, most particularly those of racial and ethnic minorities. In this connection, making use of a *wider range of measurements to evaluate student performance* is a major recommendation. The authors of the separate reports prepared for each major group of racial and ethnic minority students – blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders – all agree on the idea that **MULTIPLE ROUTES TO SUCCESS ARE NEEDED FOR ALL YOUTH TO SUCCEED – INCLUDING CULTURALLY COMPETENT CONVENTIONAL SCHOOLS, ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS, GED PROGRAMS, AND “CREATIVE HYBRIDS.”** Some Washington State educational researchers call for an end to the use of the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) as an exit exam for high school graduation (Orlich, 2009), but virtually all researchers agree that the tracking of students longitudinally to evaluate academic achievement is a good goal to be pursued (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

## Improved Teaching and Instruction

The third recommendation made by Washington State education researchers is to increase teacher diversity and foster culturally responsive instructional approaches and practices. It is suggested this can be accomplished by requiring teachers to develop competencies in language and engage in cultural competence training, provide teachers with support for ongoing professional development, and adopt effective English Language Learners (ELL) programs and culturally relevant curriculum (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

## Promoting Parental Engagement and Involvement

The fourth recommendation made by Washington State education researchers is to more effectively engage families in the school environment by fostering a welcoming and supportive environment. More effectively addressing the needs of the families of truant youth generally, and the cultural and linguistic needs of the parents of minority youth in particular, will be difficult no doubt, but an investment made in this direction will strengthen the school-family partnership in a very important way. The wonderful accounts of successful engagement related

in Milliken's *The Last Dropout* (2007) attest to the power of the "community in schools" idea. Developing policies and implementing training for effective family and community engagement is suggested by Washington's principal education researchers as a major reform well worth the effort for reducing school avoidance behavior and reducing truancy (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

## **The Development of a Seamless P-20 Continuum of Education**

The final recommendation made by Washington State education researchers is to develop a pre-school through college continuum whereby all students, but specifically at-risk children, are provided information, encouragement, and timely support concerning how success in school studies leads to success in virtually all areas of life. For some, the choice made to exit the educational process after high school graduation may be entirely reasonable; however, the value of a college education and the appropriateness of emphasizing this goal should be a prominent theme of public education (Bailey & Dziko, 2008; Contreras & Striktikus, 2008; Hune et al., 2008; The People, 2008; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008).

# Conclusion

Truancy has been a persistent problem since the initial state legislative enactments requiring school attendance as a step toward creating the Jeffersonian vision of a literate and civically engaged citizenry. Since that time, truancy has been of concern to school and law enforcement authorities throughout the country. In recent years, however, this problem has taken on **enhanced importance**. As the nation has taken on the challenge of public education reform it has adopted an approach to school accountability (codified in the federal legislation known as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002*) which features the use of “high stakes testing” – that is, the use of approved, standardized tests of content mastery deemed essential for the award of a certificate of graduation. By reason of the adoption of this priority route to reform in U.S. public education, the likelihood of school avoidance by students for whom traditional academic studies (highlighted in standardized tests) is difficult and/or frustrating was greatly enhanced (Swanson, 2009).

It is no mere coincidence that the progressive implementation of high stakes testing – which means the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in our state – and increased truancy have gone hand-in-hand. This same correspondence between the two phenomena has been witnessed throughout the country (Orlich, 2006; Swanson, 2009). A decade ago the prescient scholar Nicholas Lemann noted the **unintended consequences** of adopting standardized tests for making key decisions on college entry and admission to professional schools. The SAT, GMAT, LSAT, GRE, etc. have all proven to be the source of great business and reliable revenue for the Educational Testing Service (ETS), but close scrutiny of these tests revealed a strong “middle class bias” in the content and format of these high stakes tests. Lemann documents the tract record of unintended discriminatory outcomes resulting from these tests – with test-takers of working class and minority backgrounds performing systematically more poorly than middle class test-takers – even under statistical controls for basic aptitude and experience (Lemann, 1999: 235-236). In reaction, many universities discontinued the use of the SAT as the primary aid to admission decision-making and replaced it with more comprehensive sets of criteria which resulted in the recruitment of much more diverse students vis-à-vis class, race and ethnicity. In conducting this review of literature it is clear that the documented correlates of truancy are virtually the same as those “disadvantaging background factors” found to discriminate in high stakes testing generally.

The importance of “cultural competency” – recognizing and rewarding the multiple competencies that contribute to the quality of life in a diverse society – to properly address the truancy problem in Benton and Franklin Counties was made clear by the warm reception accorded Dr. Francisco Villarruel of Michigan State University during his presentation on the topic to an overflow gathering of concerned professionals in education, law enforcement, social services, and the juvenile court (Borden, Perkins, Villarruel, Carleton-Hug, Stone and Keith, 2006). The need for **more than one way to be successful in school** – whether by having more options for alternatives to the traditional school setting or by providing earlier access to technical and vocational training or by providing basic education funding for enhanced GED programs – was clear to virtually all present. The multiple class, racial and ethnic group backgrounds of youth needing to be served in the Benton and Franklin Counties area require a broad range of options for demonstrating learning – NOT a single passage way through which all must pass regardless of their varying cultural and family heritages.

The literature review presented here demonstrates that truancy at the level being experienced today carries with it significant social costs, ranging from directly educational, to more indirectly socio-economic, to long term justice system burdens. The impacts of the truancy problem are both immediate and long-term, making it essential to address the issue with well-conceived programs and initiatives that reflect evidence-based and/or promising approaches developed elsewhere around the country. The Benton and Franklin Counties Models for Change team made strategic visits to innovative programs in Austin, Texas and Spokane, Washington and asked their WSU

research partners to help debrief those trips and conduct follow-up research into the evidence of similar programs being done elsewhere.

Fortunately, Tom George of the Washington State Center for Court Research shared with the Benton and Franklin Counties WSU research partner an excellent report being used to guide the development of a “streamlined” risk assessment instrument to be used for all status offenders in the coming years. The report in question is entitled: ***Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report (May, 2007)***. The report was issued by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network NDPC/N) and Communities In Schools, Inc. (CIS), and was prepared by the team of Cathy Hammond, Dan Linton, Jay Smink and Sam Drew from NDPC/N and CIS (Hammond, et al., 2007).

The report in question identified risk factors and exemplary programs through a rigorous process of study. First, they conducted a thorough literature review making use of ERIC, focusing on publications and reports published between 1980 and the end of 2005 (netting 3,400 entries!). Of these entries, 44 studies met the demanding criteria that they were focused on the decision to dropout as a dependent variable, they collected original data in a systematic manner over at least two years, they examined a variety of potential predictors in several domains (individual, family, school, and community), used multivariate statistical techniques to allow the introduction of appropriate controls to permit the isolation of race and ethnic group effects, and included a minimum of 30 students correctly classified as dropouts. Of these 44 studies, a subset of 21 studies featured high quality data of sufficient volume and scope to permit generalization with confidence. The analysis of risk factors included a review of elementary school, middle school and high school factors, and this review provided a strong foundation for the in-depth analysis of 30 cases – 10 single truancy cases, 10 2-3 truancy petition cases, and 10 system-involved cases – featuring the analysis of school records going back to elementary school being done by the WSU research team in collaboration with the Kennewick School District.

The research reviewed in this report on the topic of truancy DIRECTLY PARALLELS that which has been done on the dropout phenomenon. Virtually the same predictors of dropouts are at play in the case of truancy. While truancy is treated as one step toward dropping out of school, the close correspondence between the research literatures on truancy and dropping out suggests that the “exemplary programs” for dropout prevention might well be commendable truancy prevention programs as well. In their summary of findings with respect to these exemplary programs, Cathy Hammond and her colleagues wrote the following:

A number of lessons can be gleaned from the research on risk factors and evidence-based programs for practitioners implementing either existing programs or developing new ones. First, multiple risk factors across several domains should be addressed wherever possible to increase the likelihood that the program will produce positive results. *Effective programs often used some combination of personal assets and skill building, academic support, family outreach, and environmental/organizational change.* [emphasis added] (Hammond, et al., 2007: 7-8)

The review of the literature on truancy presented here comes to precisely the same conclusion. Multi-modal programs with active collaboration between school officials, the juvenile court, social service providers and law enforcement, along the lines described by Milliken (2007) in writing about the Communities In Schools concept, would appear to be the best, research-based guide to action planning for the next phase of Model for Change work in Benton and Franklin Counties.

While the review of research on truancy and evaluation studies of programs designed to address the behavior have progressed considerably over the last four decades, it must be said that much remains unknown. First, the

problem of truancy would benefit from one uniform definition of the behavior.<sup>2</sup> A uniform definition would allow consistency concerning how truancy laws are interpreted and how truancy data are collected. Consistent interpretation and collection of truancy information would allow statewide datasets – and in time a national dataset – to be developed which could be used to deepen our understanding of truancy and school avoidance behavior. Second, the established predictors of truancy – particularly those which research shows to be early indicators – need to be utilized more fully by school administrators, teachers and others who work with high risk youth in order to maximize the chances of effective school engagement. The first-year activities of Benton and Franklin Counties Models for Change included “Summits” for school principals and school counselors. These events allowed the kind of sharing of research findings with relevant practitioners that needs to occur on a more regular basis. Third, school administrators, teachers, juvenile court personnel, social service agencies and law enforcement must make broader use of those multi-modal approaches that have been found to be successful in reducing or preventing truancy. In this regard, Cathy Hammond and her colleagues issue a wise alert in this connection, noting the following: “whether adopting an existing program or developing a new one, practitioners need to use evidence-based strategies to evaluate programs to assure effectiveness” (Hammond, et al., 2007: 8). Finally, given the racial and ethnic diversity that is present in Benton and Franklin Counties, it is essential for the team to evaluate any multi-modal reform programs implemented to ascertain their effectiveness, not only overall but for the substantial Latino and black youth residing in the community. Are the early warning signs and risk factors the same for all youth regardless of race and ethnicity, or are there important aspects of cultural heritage at play that deserve attention? These are very important elements to document for the enhancement of cultural competence in the provision of juvenile justice services and effective school re-engagement for truant students in Benton and Franklin Counties in the years ahead.

In conclusion, the review of literature presented here provides a strong foundation for the types of action plans and reforms being contemplated for the next phase of Models for Change work in Benton and Franklin Counties. The preliminary planning for truancy prevention and reduction entails the development of more alternatives to traditional school settings and a multi-modal process entailing the *combination of personal assets and skill building, academic support, family outreach* achieved through the building of a strong school-based team for truancy intervention. That team will be composed of a school-based juvenile court counselor, a cadre of teacher partners trained by a truancy coach, and administrative buy-in from a school willing to pilot-test the idea. The goal of the reform is to gain a higher level of successful school re-engagement than is possible through the isolated effort of school-based juvenile court counselors. This review of literature was intended to be both comprehensive and of practical use, and over the course of the past year the articulated needs for background information on the part of the Models for Change team in Benton and Franklin Counties have been incorporated into this document as much as possible. It is hoped that this piece of scholarship will continue to serve the needs of the Benton and Franklin Counties Models for Change team and the other Models for Change projects working on truancy in Washington and elsewhere across the country.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, distinguishing the habitual or chronic truant from the occasional class cutter (Bools et al., 1990; Cimmarusti et al., 1984; Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985b). Of note, the 2011-2013 Washington State Biennial Operating Budget required the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop a statewide standard definition for unexcused absences. Beginning January 1, 2012, districts will report absence rates by school using this definition. An unexcused absence is defined as “any absence from school for the majority of hours or periods in an average school day...” The new definition provides ten exceptions which would excuse the absence, such as: participation in a district or school approved activity, illness, family emergency, religious or cultural purpose, court proceeding, an absence directly related to student's homeless status, and an absence resulting from suspension or expulsion.



## Nota Bene:

Summary tables are provided after a comprehensive listing of relevant literature underlying this review; they provide a convenient overview of the findings presented here regarding predictors of truancy, correlates of truancy, consequences of truancy, and effective programs combating truancy organized in terms of *Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific* domains. Each of the tables for these topic areas features a listing of the studies from which these conclusions were drawn.

## List of Tables:

Table 1: *Predictors of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific*

Table 2: *Correlates of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific*

Table 3: *Outcomes of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific*

Table 4: *Intervention and Prevention Truancy Programs: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific and Community-Specific*

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## Summary Tables

**Table 1: Predictors of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific**

<b>Student-Specific</b> Negative peer relationships Poor physical appearance Poor self-esteem and self concept Friends older in age Non-school oriented friends Behavioral problems requiring disciplinary measures Absent from home without parental consent Emotional problems Substance abuse issues Lack of motivation Aversion to authority
<b>School-Specific</b> Poor attendance Weak academic performance Limited participation in school activities and extra-curriculars Behind two or more grade levels in reading or math Failure in one or more years of school Frequent school change Negative attitude toward school or school work Frequent illnesses occur during school day School-related anxiety
<b>Family-Specific</b> Poor sibling school performance Negative family environment Abuse or neglect
<b>Community-Specific</b> Negative community environment vis-à-vis absence of social support and presence of criminogenic factors
(Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Barth, 1984; Bazemore et al., 2004; Bell et al., 1994; Bonikowske, 1987; Bos et al., 1990; Brown, 1983; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Cimmarusti et al., 1984; Caldas, 1993; Catterall, 1987; Cooper, 1984; Corville-Smith, 1995; Dekalb, 1999; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1980; Garry, 1996; Hibbett et al., 1990; Levine, 1984; Little & Thompson, 1983; McClusky et al., 2004; Pasternak, 1986; Robins & Ratcliff, 1978; Rumberger, 1987; Personal and Career Development Services, California State Department of Education, 1983).

**Table 2: Correlates of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific**

**Student-Specific**

Drug and/or alcohol abuse  
 Lack of understanding of attendance laws  
 Lack of social competence  
 Mental health difficulties  
 Poor physical health  
 School phobia  
 Poor social and emotional functioning  
 Ethnic or racial dissonance  
 Failure to learn  
 Learning style not at pace with classroom  
 Learning disabilities  
 Separation anxiety  
 Conduct disorders  
 Autonomy disorders  
 Bored with school  
 Dislike of school  
 Inability to feel part of school culture  
 Frustration with school because expectations too high  
 Dislike teachers and authority school has over them  
 Poor self-concept  
 Low self-esteem  
 Socially isolated  
 Poor inter-personal skills  
 Lack of positive peer relationships at school  
 Feeling of not belonging at school of being different  
 Feeling of lack of control over life  
 Little or no extra-curricular activity  
 Mental or emotional instability  
 Childhood depression  
 Unidentified learning disability  
 Vision or auditory problems that have gone undiagnosed  
 Language barrier  
 Older peer friendships  
 Non-school oriented friendships  
 Fear of school teachers or administrators  
 Experienced recent traumatic event such as divorce death in family  
 Fear of physical protection going to or at school  
 Teen parenting or pregnancy

**(Table 2 continued)**

**School-Specific**

Bullying  
Lack of attention to learning styles  
School climate issues  
Inflexibility in meeting diverse cultural and learning style of students  
Inconsistent procedures in place for dealing with chronic absenteeism  
No meaningful consequences available for truant youth  
School violence  
Age of school building  
Size of school staff provision  
Class size  
Teachers authoritarian  
Administrators punitive  
School truancy policies that lack adequate reporting recording follow consistent enforcement  
Relevance of curriculum  
Appropriate school placement  
Retention and promotion  
Suspension and expulsions  
Competent concerned teachers  
Teacher absenteeism  
Uninteresting and irrelevant curriculum  
Improper class placement (above or below)  
Failure to identify provide services for problem students  
Poor teacher-student relationship  
Insufficient counseling and guidance staff  
High student-teacher ratio  
Low teacher expectations  
Lack of parent-school communication and involvement  
Too weak or rigid administration policies

**Family-Specific**

Drug/alcohol abuse issues  
Child abuse and neglect  
Lack of guidance or parental supervision  
Domestic violence, poverty  
Lack of awareness of attendance laws  
Differing attitudes toward education  
Single parent homes  
High mobility rates  
Parents who hold multiple jobs  
Lack of affordable daycare  
High transportation costs  
High financial costs for school  
Child staying home to care for another while parent works  
Parental fear of loss of companionship and increase concern for child's welfare  
Parental knowledge of truancy  
Parenting skills  
Parental over-protectiveness overindulgence and rejection

**(Table 2 continued)**

Too many domestic responsibilities for child Parental lack of educational attainment Ineffective parenting supervision Parental physical or mental health problems Parental instability
<b>Community-Specific</b> Peer influence Interracial tensions Lack of support for school Lack of or unresponsive community service agencies Community upheaval and social change Loss of neighborhood schools High incidence of substance abuse/criminal activity Gang activity Inadequate provision of transportation
(Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Barth, 1984; Bazemore et al., 2004; Bell et al., 1994; Bonikowske, 1987; Bos et al., 1990; Brown, 1983; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Cimmarusti et al., 1984; Caldas, 1993; Catterall, 1987; Cooper, 1984; Corville-Smith, 1995; Dekalb, 1999; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1980; Garry, 1996; Hibbett et al., 1990; Levine, 1984; Little & Thompson, 1983; McClusky et al., 2004; Pasternak, 1986; Robins & Ratcliff, 1978; Rumberger, 1987; Personal and Career Development Services, California State Department of Education, 1983; Webster, 1996).

**Table 3: Outcomes of Truancy: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific, and Community-Specific**

<b>Individual-Specific</b> Low academic achievement Low educational attainment Low occupational attainment Poor physical and mental health Increased chance of living in poverty Increased juvenile and adult deviance Marital problems Violent behavior Loitering Vandalism Higher number of dependants Higher incidence of high school dropout
<b>School-Specific</b> Lost revenue Educational disruption
<b>Family-Specific</b> Familial stress Conflict with educational and social service systems
<b>Community-Specific –</b> Forgone national income Forgone tax revenues for the support of government services Increased demand for social services Increased crime Reduced political participation Reduced intergenerational mobility Poorer levels of health
(Baker, 2001a, 2001b; Barth, 1984; Bazemore et al., 2004; Bell et al., 1994; Bonikowske, 1987; Bos et al., 1990; Brown, 1983; Cairns et al., 1989; Caldas, 1993; Cimmarusti et al., 1984; Caldas, 1993; Catterall, 1987; Cooper, 1984; Corville-Smith, 1995; Dekalb, 1999; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1980; Garry, 1996; Hibbett et al., 1990; Levine, 1984; Little & Thompson, 1983; McClusky et al., 2004; Pasternak, 1986; Robins & Ratcliff, 1978; Rumberger, 1987; Personal and Career Development Services, California State Department of Education, 1983).



**Table 4: Intervention and Prevention Truancy Programs: Student-Specific, School-Specific, Family-Specific and Community-Specific**

<b>Student-Specific</b> Counseling Biography writing therapy Contingency contracting Extra tutoring Self-management strategies Contracts
<b>School-Specific</b> Lottery system Contingency contracting Revise overall attendance policy Installing system of monitoring and recording absences Creating alliance with teachers parents committed to reducing truancy Maintaining consistency in imposing penalties for repeat offenders Creating supporting intervention programs Development implantation of local school plans for approaches to truancy Installation operation of automatic telephone dialing systems Expansion improvement of attendance staff and monitoring Establishment of student attendance service center Creating make-up work policy for all absentees Scheduling attendance assemblies Involving truants in extracurricular activities Considering alternative schedules Rewarding publicizing good attendance Teachers set example Maintain accurate attendance records Create pleasant environment Create classroom attendance reward system Consider individual students capabilities Conduct in service training ongoing consultation with school personnel Reduce negative classroom management techniques Increase positive classroom management techniques Increase specificity and frequency of reinforcement given to students Develop classroom and school wide programs Increase neighborhood involvement Gain youth club involvement

**(Table 4 continued)**

<b>Family-Specific</b> Alter dysfunctional familial situation Achieve more parental involvement in child's education Family therapy Family growth and development Involve parents in education of students Social reinforcement of children's parents to improve attendance supply information Prevention programming Notifying parents Positive reinforcement Phone call home Letters sent to parents Conference with parents Home visit
<b>Community-Specific</b> Gang reduction
(Bage, 1989; Bazemore & Senjo, 1997; Beem, 2002; Barth, 1984; Berger & Wind, 2000; Clear & Karp, 1999; Dekalb, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Eastwood, 1989; Garry, 1996; Gavin, 1997; Gottfredson, 1990; Guarino, 1994; Gullatt & Lemoine, 1997; Haslinger et al., 1996; Hawkins & Catalano, 1995; Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1977; Jones et al., 2002; Kozinetz, 1995; Levine et al., 1986; McCaughlin & Vachu, 1992; McGiboney, 2001; Miller, 1986; Mogulescu & Segal, 2002; Morley & Rossman, 1997; Nessel, 1999; Omni Institute, 1992; Quinn, 1995; Quinn, 2004; Reglin, 1997; Reid, 2002; Riley & McDaniel, 1999; Rohrman, 1993; Sigmon et al., 1999; Swope, 1995; Twaite & Lampert, 1997; Waddington, 1997; White et al., 2001; Wilson, 1993).



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