



**West Valley School District (Spokane, WA)  
Community Truancy Board Evaluation**  
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*Washington State University, Division of Governmental Studies and Services*

*Paul S. Strand, Principal-Investigator  
Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
Washington State University, Tri-Cities*

*Nicholas Lovrich, Co-Principal Investigator  
Regents Professor and Associate Chair  
Department of Political Science  
Division of Governmental Studies and Services  
Washington State University, Pullman*

**WSU Research Team**

**Charles Johnson**, Field Research Coordinator  
Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice  
University of Maine at Presque Isle

**Kevin Wright**, Statistical Analysis and Report Writing  
Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice  
Arizona State University

**Catherine Nichole Skaggs**, Graduate Research Assistant  
WSU Criminal Justice Program

**Maureen Erickson**, Graduate Research Assistant  
WSU Criminal Justice Program

**Starcia Ague**, Undergraduate Research Assistant  
WSU Criminal Justice Program

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# ***SPOKANE COUNTY JUVENILE COURT MODELS FOR CHANGE PROJECT***

## **Executive Summary**

**Paul Strand, Principal Investigator**

**Nicholas Lovrich, Co-Principal Investigator**

***Division of Governmental Studies and Services***

***Washington State University***

This report documents an evaluation of the West Valley School District (Spokane, WA) *Community Truancy Board* (WVCTB). Continuously operating since 1996-1997, the WVCTB seeks to address the problem of truancy by engaging truant youth and their families in a restorative justice-oriented program in which a variety of resources are brought to bear on school attendance and performance problems of truant youth. The goal of the intervention is successful school re-engagement and renewed progress toward school completion. Commissioned by the Spokane Juvenile Court and funded by the MacArthur Foundation's *Models for Change* initiative, the present study sought to document the historical development, operation, and effectiveness of the WVCTB with an eye toward facilitating its replication in other school districts in Spokane County and throughout Washington State. To achieve these goals a variety of data collection methods were undertaken that included: (a) interviewing key actors who participated in the development and/or functioning of the WVCTB; (b) facilitating focus group sessions of those key actors; (c) interviewing CTB-involved students and their parents; and (d) obtaining school outcomes data on truant youth who attended West Valley School District (WVSD) schools and comparable truant youth who attended other Spokane County schools.

Data collection revealed that the WVCTB is a multi-level intervention that has grown in complexity since its original inception. It is the belief of key actors that it is a positive intervention for youth and that it could be successfully replicated in other school districts. Interviews with CTB-involved youth and their parents suggest that a goal of any replication efforts, and indeed efforts to improve the WVCTB, should focus on identifying and intervening with truant youth at the earliest possible time and focusing on individual-specific barriers to school participation. This advice is consistent with the mandates of Washington's BECCA Law and the policy of the WVCTB to file court petitions when youth accrue five unexcused absences instead of delaying this action (as is done in most of the state's school districts).

In addition, the results of the quantitative analysis of archival school data are positive. Specifically, linked school and court data collected by the Washington State Administrative

Office of the Courts for school years 2004-2007 revealed that graduation/GED rates relative to dropout and transfer-out-of-district rates were higher for truant students attending WVSD compared to those for students attending comparison districts. These positive results support the effectiveness of an intervention that is less complex and presumably less effective than the current WVCTB model in operation. That is the case because since 2008-2009 the WVCTB incorporates greater school-court collaborations in the form of a court-based truancy specialist who operates within schools; the key actors interviewed believe that the addition of this element to the WVCTB model has improved program effectiveness principally through ongoing follow-up to the board's actions. The importance of the benefits of the older model should not be overlooked, however, because they support a replication process that would be more easily implemented and provide a foundation for a phased replication of the full scale WVCTB model in other sites.

Based on the information gathered and presented in this report, we conclude that the concept of a community truancy board as implemented by the WVSD is an effective and replicable intervention for truancy, and we recommend that it be replicated. It is further recommended that any replications that occur be evaluated along the lines of the mixed-methods approach used here in this study to determine if the community truancy board approach possesses potential as a best practice approach to reducing truancy in a variety of settings.

## SECTION I

### Background to Case Study

#### The Case Study Method

This document is best seen as *a case study report* based upon a rich set of qualitative and quantitative data which can be reviewed in its entirety by anyone seeking access to the evidence underlying this formal record of research findings. All requests for such access to the case study documentation can be directed to either of the principal authors at the Division of Governmental Studies and Services at Washington State University in Pullman. A case study evaluation is defined as follows:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context
- Addresses a situation in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident
- Uses multiple sources of evidence

[Robert K. Yin, “The Case Study Method as a Tool for Doing Evaluation,” *Applications of Case Study Research* (Sage, 1993)]

The West Valley School District Community Truancy Board (WVCTB) is the phenomenon in question. It is a school-based process with ongoing connection to the Spokane County Juvenile Court designed to address the problem of truancy and to comply with the attendance monitoring and court petitioning provisions of the state’s truancy statute (BECCA Bill of 1995—E2SSB 5439). The WVCTB addresses the problem of truancy by engaging truant youth and their families in a restorative justice-oriented setting wherein community resources, school resources, and juvenile justice resources are brought to bear on school attendance and performance problems of truant youth; the goal of the intervention is successful school re-engagement and renewed progress toward school completion. The Community Truancy Board process has been in place and operating continuously since the 1996-1997 school year, and it is highly regarded by people in our state who are knowledgeable about truancy. Despite its widespread reputation for innovativeness and effectiveness with a broad range of types of truant students, however, no systematic assessment has been made of the WVCTB. This report seeks to provide such an assessment for the benefit of those school jurisdictions wishing to replicate this process—either in part or in whole. At least two other school jurisdictions in Spokane County are currently in the process of replicating the process in their own settings, and officials in both school settings are very interested in reviewing the findings of the research set forth herein.

The case study method entails the investigation of an ongoing process such as the WVCTB as it operates in its own context in order to answer the following three main questions:

1. *Does the process produce the favorable outcomes for which it was established? If so, then...*
2. *How does it do this, as seen from the perspective of those key actors engaged in the process—school-based persons, juvenile court-based personnel, community resource-based citizens, and the students and parents/guardians who go through the process? If the dynamics of the process are identified, then the question becomes...*
3. *How transferable is this process—that is, can the same process be established and sustained in different contexts from that of the West Valley area of Spokane County?*

### **Carrying Out the Case Study: Collection and Analysis of Qualitative Evidence**

In order to perform our case study assessment it was necessary to gather a variety of forms of evidence, and then use that evidence to *triangulate* on the question of the effectiveness of the process and *speculate* in an informed way on the likely reasons for its persistence and successful operation over such a long period of time and its prospect for successful replication elsewhere. We received very useful advice on research design from the Vera Institute at the proposal writing stage of our work. As for the qualitative evidence required, substantial amounts of time and human resources were needed to conduct personal interviews and follow-up focus groups sessions with key actors who created and modified in adaptive ways the WVCTB process over time. These interviews and focus group sessions had to entail a cross-section of school, court, and community-based resource persons, and the board sessions in question needed to be observed and compared with similar truancy hearing settings carried out elsewhere in the state. For all of this work to be done the *Models for Change* project for Spokane County called upon three key Spokane-based associates of the Criminal Justice Program at WSU Spokane. Charles Johnson, a then-recent Ph.D. graduate of that program with a strong background and experience in qualitative research, served as a field research coordinator to facilitate the collection of interview and focus group data for the project. [Charles is now an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Maine at Presque Isle.] Two Criminal Justice M.A. students enrolled in a graduate seminar entitled *Evaluation Research* (Criminal Justice 540) participated in the project (Nikki Skaggs and Maureen Erickson) as part of their term project requirement, and then continued their connection with the project after the course was completed; they both continued with the project through the following spring semester and through the summer. Without the contributions of Charles, Nikki and Maureen to the collection and analysis of interview and focus group data this case study could not have been completed within the confines of the time and resources available for the work.

In addition to the interviews conducted with key actors, the field observations made of the WVCTB and comparison truancy boards in other jurisdictions, and the follow-up focus group sessions held, this case study also features interview evidence collected from students and parents/guardians who experienced the community truancy board process. Those interview data were collected by the Truancy Specialist (Juvenile Court probation officer operating as a school-based actor serving on the WVCTB) in the course of his normal outreach with truant youth and their families associated with the *Check and Connect* process. These data were collected in the context of the pre-established order of caseload contacts, hence they represent a cross-section of that caseload. These data are critical, of course, as a principal factor in the triangulation of evidence on the first and second questions posed above—namely,

does the WVCTB process work, and what is it about that process that accounts for favorable outcomes achieved. The data from these interview were analyzed by Kevin Wright and Starcia Ague; Kevin is now an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Arizona State University and Starcia is in her final semester of undergraduate school headed for a Research Coordinator position in the School of Medicine at the University of Washington working on issues of mental health involvement in the juvenile justice system.

### **Carrying Out the Case Study: Analysis of Quantitative Evidence**

Finally, an independent train of empirical evidence was available for incorporation into the case study. The *Administrative Office of Courts* in Washington is engaged in building linked datasets for research into juvenile justice with resources provided by the MacArthur Foundation. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Schools and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) have collaborated in a process whereby risk and protective factor information, court involvement information, and school record information can all be linked and subsequently de-identified so that researchers could make use of the data in their work. One such linked dataset was created for the careful and systematic comparison of school completion outcomes in the West Valley School District and three comparison districts within Spokane County. The data in question entail linked court and school records for three successive 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohorts (2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07). Counterfactual comparisons are possible both at the aggregate school district level AND at the individual level with 172 “matched pairs” of students in the WVSD and in the comparison school districts.

The comparisons in question and the statistical analyses to be carried out were determined in a collaborative process between the WSU research team and Dr. Tom George of the AOC. Dr. George created the datasets, performed the matching of cases, and carried out the statistical analyses in question. He prioritized his work to accommodate our many requests of his time and energy, and for this we are extremely grateful. The WSU research team relied exclusively upon the analyses performed by Dr. George for the formulation of findings presented in Section V.

### **Representation of Findings**

The report is organized in accord with fairly standard practice in the presentation of case study findings. This section sets forth the parameters of the study, provides an overview of the research team conducting the field work involved, and identifies the principal sources of evidence gathered in the study. The following three sections present findings on three types of qualitative evidence—face-to-face interviews with key actors (Section II), three focus group sessions (Section III), and interviews with students and parents/guardians who have experience the community truancy board process (Section IV). The following section sets forth findings from the quantitative analysis of linked school and court data as derived from the analyses carried out by Dr. Tom George at the AOC (Section V). The Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Directions section (Section VI) presents the results of the triangulation of the several streams of evidence and our informed speculation as to the third question to be addressed in the case study—namely, *How transferable is this process?* Finally, Section VII contains the full citation to references contained in the text.

In the tradition of case study reports there are some important appendices to the report. *Appendix A* contains the de-identified transcripts of the three focus group sessions held

as a follow-up to the personal interviews conducted. This record of the discussion of five key questions relating to the history of the WVCTB, the dynamics of the CTB process, the importance of the Juvenile Court's school-based Truancy Specialist, and the transferability of the program represent a rich, nuanced account of that process. *Appendix B* contains a power-point presentation given at the 2010 BECCA Conference in the Tri-Cities wherein a preliminary summary of findings was presented to conference attendees. *Appendix C* contains the abstract and table of contents for Dale McDaniel's doctoral thesis featuring an assessment of three community truancy boards operating in Cowlitz County, Clark County, and Thurston County, along with information on how a digital copy of that dissertation can be obtained. Finally, *Appendix D* contains the full text of the M.A. thesis prepared by Catherine Nichole Skaggs entitled: ***Preliminary Assessment of the MacArthur Foundation Truancy Reduction Project in Spokane County: A Grounded Theory Approach to Logic Model Specification for the Effective Replication of a Community Truancy Board.*** Nikki's thesis provides a rich account of the field research work conducted and the analytical framework developed to make sense of the multiple streams of evidence assembled.

## SECTION II

### Interviews with Key Actors

#### Interview Process and Results

As part of the process of evaluating the WVCTB, we conducted interviews with key personnel and stakeholders both past and present. We conducted two types of interviews, referred to as *Documentary Interviews (D)* and *Documentation of Process Interviews (DP)*. Documentary interviews utilized a semi-structured interview format. They were conducted to generate historical information about the WVCTB and its relationship to the juvenile court and school district functioning. Interviewees were also asked to identify others who should be interviewed. [see *interview recruitment letter* and *consent form* at the end of this section of the report]

DP interviews also utilized a semi-structured interview format, although these sessions were more structured than the D interviews. DP interviewees were chosen who played some specific role in the WVCTB such as board member, court employee, community professional or school employee with some interaction with the WVCTB. The goal of these interviews was to identify what these key participants felt were the most important components of the WVCTB, and to learn from them the influence of the Becca Law on the WVCTB.

*Documentary Interviews.* As noted above, the two types of interviews were designed to provide us with qualitatively different data. The D interviews were conducted in a relatively unstructured way so as to allow for a more spontaneous generation of information. We felt that these interviewees could provide us with the questions that needed asking and the key themes of the CTB process. Therefore, our goal was to ask very open-ended questions and listen for what the interviewees perceived to be the key elements of the CTB. We also listened for information regarding individuals who were historically important to the effort, so that we might interview these people in the future. Individuals identified for Documentary Interviews included school superintendents, school principals, Superior Court Judge and Commissioner, and juvenile court staff. In total, 26 individuals were identified for D Interviews and a total of 22 were interviewed. The D interviews also provided information used to generate a template for the semi-structured DP interviews.

*Documentary Process Interviews.* Individuals identified for DP interviews included those who currently were or had in the past participated in some capacity on the CTB, and who were not identified for a Documentary Interview. The individuals who participated included current and former board members, Public Defenders with some history of interacting with the WVCTB, and school attendance secretaries, counselors and administrators. In total, 30 individuals were identified for DP interviews and a total of 28 were interviewed.

Based on what we learned from the D interviews, a semi-structured interview format was created for conducting DP interviews (see following 2 pages). These DP interviews were conducted by the authors of this report (Strand and Lovrich), a WSU post doc in Criminal Justice (Charles Johnson), graduate students in Criminal Justice (Maureen Erikson and Nikki Skaggs), a Gonzaga University Law School student, and an advanced undergraduate Criminal Justice student who had worked in the juvenile division of the Spokane County Prosecutor's office as an intern. All students were trained in this type of interviewing by Charles Johnson, who helped

create the interview template and who has extensive experience conducting semi-structured interviews related to his published dissertation on information sharing and cross-jurisdiction coordination (*Police Use of Intelligence Networks for Reducing Crime*, LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2010).

The participants in the interview process were invited to take part in the interview process with the following letter of invitation, informed consent form and interview protocol.

Dear West Valley School District Current or Former Community Truancy Board Member,

We are asking for your help with an important effort to improve strategies utilized to intervene with truant youth. In this effort, the Spokane County Juvenile Court is working in partnership with the West Valley School District (WVSD) and researchers at Washington State University (WSU). Working together, we are attempting to understand more fully the dynamics behind truancy and strategies used to address truancy.

Our experience leads us to believe that early intervention to address school attendance issues helps to improve school performance and prevent future involvement in the juvenile court, at least for some school avoidance-inclined youth. The Community Truancy Board (CTB) is an intervention used by the WVSD which reflects this early intervention idea. Your reflections on your current or past involvement with the CTB can provide valuable feedback to document the board's intervention process.

WSU will be conducting voluntary, individual interviews and focus group sessions to document the CTB process. A researcher will contact you to arrange an appointment for a 45-minute interview. The interview will be at a time and location convenient for your schedule. This information will be used by Washington State University researchers to prepare a report for the MacArthur Foundation and the State of Washington regarding the degree to which the CTB represents an effective evidence-based practice to address the problem of truancy which other school districts across the state and across the nation could adopt for their own use.

Please review the attached protocol and consent form for information about the research. If you have any questions regarding either this partnership or the research being done, please feel free to contact Professor Nicholas Lovrich or Courtney Meador.

Sincerely,

**Nicholas Lovrich**

Project Director

Division of Governmental Studies and Services Models for Change

Washington State University Spokane County

509-335-4811 or 509 335-4796 509-481-1219

**Courtney Meador**

Courtney M. Meador

*Models for Change* Coordinator, Spokane

Cell: (509) 481-1219

**WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Division of Governmental Studies and Services (DGSS)**  
**Pullman, Spokane and Olympia Offices**

**Research Study Consent Form**

**Study Title: Evaluation of the West Valley Community Truancy Board in Spokane County, Washington**

**Researchers:**

*Paul Strand, PhD, PI, Department of Psychology, Washington State University—Tri-Cities, 2710 University Drive, Richland WA 99345-1671. Tele: 509 372-7177*

*Nicholas Lovrich, PhD, Co-PI, Director, DGSS. Washington State University—Pullman, PO Box 644870, Pullman WA 99164-4870. Tele.: 509 335-4811*

*Charles Johnson, PhD, Spokane Field Coordinator, DGSS. Washington State University—Spokane, 534 East Trent, PO Box 1495, Spokane WA 99210-1495. Tele: 509 220-7718*

*Nikki Skaggs, Graduate Student in Criminal Justice, WSU Spokane. Washington State University—Spokane, 534 East Trent, PO Box 1495, Spokane WA 99210-1495. Tele: 509 220-7718*

*Alisha Grow, Graduate Student in Criminal Justice, WSU Spokane. Washington State University—Spokane, 534 East Trent, PO Box 1495, Spokane WA 99210-1495. Tele: 509 220-7718*

*Maureen Erickson, Graduate Student in Criminal Justice, WSU Spokane. Washington State University—Spokane, 534 East Trent, PO Box 1495, Spokane WA 99210-1495. Tele: 509 220-7718*

*Nichole Lovrich, JD, Legal Research Specialist, Graduate Student in Criminal Justice, WSU Spokane. Washington State University—Spokane, 534 East Trent, PO Box 1495, Spokane WA 99210-1495. Tele: 509 432-4358*

**Sponsor: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation**

**Spokane Co. Models for Change Project (Courtney Meador, Project Coordinator)**

You are being asked to take part in a research study carried out by Professors Lovrich and Strand. This form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to participate in the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. Ask the researcher to explain anything you don't understand. You can decide not to join the study. If you do decide to join the study, you can change your mind later or quit at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of services or benefits if you decide to not take part in the study or quit later. This study has been approved for human subject participation by the Washington State University Institutional Review Board.

**What is this study about?**

This research study is being done to document the process of intervention into truancy which the West Valley School District has developed and sought to refine over time to the potential benefit of other school districts seeking to create a comparable community truancy board for their students and families dealing with truancy issues. You are being asked to take part because of your special knowledge and experience with the community truancy board.

Taking part in the study by providing an interview will take about one hour of your time. If you consent to follow-up contact, you may be asked some follow-up questions via the telephone or e-mail. If you wish to participate in focus group sessions for interviewees, you may be invited to take part in those sessions. There are approximately 40 persons being interviewed, and there will likely be 3 or 4 focus group sessions held.

**What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?**

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to provide commentary on a series of questions pertaining to the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board. Your interview will be confidential, and the transcript of your interview will be available to you for review prior to its finalization for analysis. ALL comments and observations will remain confidential, and no revelation of which interviewees made any particular comments will be made public at any time.

**Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?**

The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are perhaps limited, but real nonetheless. You will be able to add to the process of documenting a process in which you have been involved and record your own perceptions of that process upon some reflection. This may add to your own understanding of truancy and effective measures to deal with it. This study, and your contribution to it, may help others in the future who are considering creating a comparable intervention process to deal with truancy and school dropout issues in their communities.

**Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?**

The potential risks from taking part in this study are that some recollections from your participation in the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board could bring about unpleasant memories. If this occurs, please feel free to discontinue the interview and continue at another time if desired.

**Will my information be kept private?**

The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by federal and state law. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. Under certain circumstances, information that identifies you may be released for internal and external reviews of this project.

Interview transcripts will be prepared from a digital recording of the interview session, and assigned an Identification Number. That number will be used instead of your name on all data retained for analysis. Only the study Principal Investigator and Co-Principal Investigator (Lovrich and Stand) will have access to a key linking Identification Numbers and individual interviewees. That information will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer in the Division of Governmental Studies and Services at Washington State University, Pullman.

Those who will have access to the **de-identified** data (i.e., digital recordings and transcripts produced from those recordings) are the following:

- The research team identified on page 1
- The WSU Institutional Review Board which monitors team compliance with the protection of rights of human subjects of WSU research
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Model for Change Project

The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous  
The data for this study will be kept for 5 years.

**Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?**

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study.

**Who can I talk to if I have questions?**

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact the Nicholas Lovrich with the following contact information: Cell: 509 432-4358; Office: 509 335-4811; Mail: 220 NW Brandon Drive, Pullman WA 99163; e-mail: [faclovri@wsu.edu](mailto:faclovri@wsu.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Washington State University Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-3668, or e-mail [irb@wsu.edu](mailto:irb@wsu.edu), or regular mail at: Albrook 205, PO Box 643005, Pullman, WA 99164-3005.

**What are my rights as a research study volunteer?**

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

**What does my signature on this consent form mean?**

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

**Statement of Consent**

I give my voluntary consent to take part in this study. I will be given a copy of this consent document for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect. I certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and potential risks of participation. I also certify that he or she:

- Speaks the language used to explain this research
- Reads well enough to understand this form or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her
- Does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Role in the Research Study

## Interview Protocol (Confidential/Voluntary)

*John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Models for Change Project, Spokane County*

### West Valley School District Community Truancy Board

Interview Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Times: Start \_\_\_\_ Finish \_\_\_\_

#### Preface & Ground Rules

- Purpose—documenting the WVCTB process for replication
- Condition—Confidential discussion; no attribution to individuals
- Condition—Informed consent and right to discontinue at any time
- Audio recording request; *best evidence* is standard for systematic evaluation research

#### Questions of Interest

- Do you have a clear idea of the purpose of the WVSD Community Truancy Board?

Yes [  ] No [  ] Please describe your own sense of the board's purpose.

Notes:

- As a member of the board, do you see your role as one of holding the juvenile client *accountable* for his/her actions, or do you see your role more as a *provider of help*?

Notes:

- Please describe the training you received for service on the community truancy board.

Notes:

- What background information on the juvenile client are you provided with before the community truancy board meeting, and how is that information conveyed to you?

Notes:

- Please describe the community truancy board hearing process as you have observed it.

Notes:

- Please describe the follow-up process after the board hearing, as you best understand it.

Notes:

- What is your own definition of a **SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME** with respect to the board?

Notes:

Probe Question: In addition to regular school attendance, what are some other desired outcomes?

- Based on your own experience, what IMPROVEMENTS might be made in the West Valley School District Truancy Board?

Notes:

- Are you aware that the Becca Bill is the basic legislation giving rise to the creation of the West Valley School District community truancy board? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Probe 1: Are you familiar with this law? Yes [ ] No [ ]  
 Probe 2, if YES above: What is your view of this law?

- What have you learned from your involvement in the board?

Notes:

- In what ways have YOU PERSONALLY BENEFITTED from your experience with the board?

Notes:

- Would you recommend this process as an effective countermeasure to truancy in other school districts? Yes [ ] No [ ] WHY?

Notes:

**CLOSING—Thank You for the Privilege of the interview**

- [ ] Is it OK to follow up with you if the transcription process occasions the need for clarification? Contact number or e-mail \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Would you like to review the transcript of the interview upon its preparation?
- [ ] Would you be available to participate in a *focus group* to discuss the themes drawn from the interviews being conducted with other persons who have participated in the work of the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board?

In order to systematize the results of the DP interviews a Coding Template Scoring Sheet was generated to allow for extracting the major themes of the interviews. The template allowed for scoring the interviews on 12 items corresponding to important themes. This template took the following form:

<b>Theme Extraction Variable List/Coding Template Scoring Sheet</b>	
Name: _____	Case # _____
<b>INSTRUCTIONS: For each question, circle the answer that applies or respond to the scale provided. (Please note that: dnc=Did not comment, and dk=Don't Know)</b>	
1. Has this person served on the board member? 1=Yes or 2=No.	
2. Position: 1=School Administrator, 2=Teacher/Counselor, 3= Community/Court member, 4=other.	
3. Opinion about what the primary role of CTB SHOULD BE: 1=Restorative, 2=Accountability, 3=Both, 0=dnc/dk	
4. Opinion about what the balance between Restorative/Accountability ACTUALLY IS: 1=about right, 2=too restorative, 3=too accountability focused, 0=dnc/dk	
5. How often is a successful outcome achieved, based on this scale: 1=Not often, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 0=dnc/dk	
6. CTB Process: time with individual kids: 1=need more, 2=need less, 3=about right, 0=dnc/dk.	
7. Adequacy of Information distributed to board members (confidentiality issues): 1=Adequate/fair, 2=NEED MORE, 3=NEED LESS (problem of confidentiality), 0=dnc/dk.	
8. Configuration of Board: 1=Satisfied with board make-up, 2=Suggested adding different or more community members. If 2, who? _____	
9. Opinion about school-based court employee (Martin): 1 = This position has been good or very good development for the board 2 = This position has been ineffective or not very effective for the board 3 = dnc/dk	
10. Opinion/influence of BECCA Law: (1=positive, 2=mixed, 3=negative, 0=dnc/dk)	
11. Personal experience of CTB work (circle all that apply): 1=overall positive experience, 2=mixed, 3=overall negative experience, 0=dnc/dk	
12. Would you recommend CTB as an effective countermeasure to truancy for other communities? 1=yes, absolutely, 2=yes, with reservations, 3=no, 0=dnc/dk	

The first two items concerned information about the position of the interviewee (i.e., board member, teacher, administrator, community/court member, etc.). Nine of the next ten items were concerned with the interviewees' opinion about the structure and functioning of the WVCTB, personal experience with the CTB, and whether or not the interviewee would recommend the CBT as an effective counter-measure to truancy for other communities. The one other question was concerned with the opinion of the interviewee about the influence of the BECCA Law on truancy.

All interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews were then coded by graduate students. Nine of the 28 interviews were double-coded to examine inter-rater reliability which was calculated for each variable using an intra-class correlations coefficient [ICC] (Shrout and Fleiss, 1979). For 11 of 12 variables the ICCs ranged from .73 to 1.0, indicating good to excellent inter-rater reliability. The one item for which the ICC suggested poor reliability, item #4, was discarded from the analyses.

Given the good reliability of the instrument, we proceeded with scoring and interpretation. Scoring involved calculating the percentage of responses for each item. This information can be found as the percentages reported for each item. In addition to this quantitative analysis, we also discuss the interviews at a qualitative level. These qualitative analyses refer to both the D and the DP interviews, taken together.

*Quantitative Results of the Interviews.* One of the most informative aspects of the interview process involved the creation of an instrument that yielded good inter-rater reliability. The fact that independent observers obtained similar ratings of the interviews illustrates that we did in fact identify categories for which trained individuals could agree. Confident in this regard, we completed the statistical analyses. We will briefly discuss the results of these item-level analyses.

Eighty-two percent of the 28 DP interviewees were board members (Item 1). Of those 39% were school administrators, 21.5% were teachers/counselors/secretaries, 36% were community/court personnel, and one person did not fall in these categories (Item 2). These responses indicate that the sampling procedure did result in responses from individuals who might play different roles in the lives of truant youth. This is consistent with the goals of the CTB, which is to make available to youth a wide spectrum of adults with different areas of interest and expertise. The hope is that with many resources at the disposal of the Board, the multiple problems that interfere with school attendance can be identified and addressed.

Interviewees were queried about their opinion regarding the primary role of the CTB (Item 3). Thirty-two percent felt that role should be restorative and 68% felt it should be a balance between restorative and accountability. None of the respondents indicated that the primary role of the CTB should involve accountability principally. This response pattern illustrates that the prevailing opinion regarding these individuals is that a CTB should be a forum for restoring youth into their community and school, as opposed to being a forum for punishment. That the majority of respondents endorsed both of these juvenile justice alternatives suggests, however, that an element of accountability is necessary or complementary to actions that are more restorative in nature.

Item 4 inquired about the balance of the WVCTB regarding restorative justice and accountability. Poor reliability led to this instrument being disregarded. Interestingly, however, the problems with poor agreement involved distinguishing between whether the WVCTB had the right balance or as overly focused on accountability. None of the respondents felt it was too restorative. This confirms the belief in a restorative focus exhibited in the responses to Item 3.

Item 5 queried interviewees about the effectiveness of the CTB, asking how often a successful outcome was achieved. The responses were as follows: 25% Not often, 14% Sometimes, 36% Often, 25% Don't Know/Did Not Comment. The responses to this scale are interesting in that they suggest that the board members do not believe the CTB is a panacea for

the problems of truancy, nor are they naïve about the problems of chronic truancy. That is, only 36% felt that individuals who went before the Board were “often” likely to have a positive outcome. Nearly 25% of respondents felt that positive outcomes are “not often” achieved.

An issue that was asked of interviewees had to do with whether enough time was spent with individual students during the CTB process (Item 6). The majority of respondents (71%) did not comment or did not know. Of the 29% of interviewees who commented, 60% felt more time was needed and about 40% felt the time was about right. No one said that less time should be spent with each individual youth.

Confidentiality issues must be considered in the creation and running of a CTB. There are many aspects of a child’s file that are off limits to Board members who are not school or court staff. Therefore, we queried individuals about the adequacy of the information they received (Item 7). The majority of interviewees indicated that the information available to them was either adequate or fair. Seven percent said they would like more information, while 4% said they needed less information than was provided. Twenty-one percent either did not know or had no comment on this issue.

A primary aspect of our attempt to understand the CTB was spent attempting to understand the make-up of the Board. Therefore, we inquired about this with the interviewees (Item 8). A large majority said they were satisfied with the make-up of the Board (82%). The remainder suggested a need for greater mental health presence (14%), or did not comment (4%).

A recent change to the WVSD occurred when a court-based employee, Martin, began working with youth in the schools in the role of Truancy Specialist. This aspect of the work done by WVSD with troubled and truant youth is covered in other aspects of this report. In the context of these DP interviews, we inquired about interviewees’ opinions of this arrangement (Item 9). Sixty-eight percent of interviewees indicated that this position has been a good or very good development for the Board. No interviewees felt the position to be ineffective or not very effective. Thirty-one percent had no opinion, did not know, or did not comment.

The Becca Bill has been an important piece of legislation dictating to some extent how schools should respond to truancy. With respect to these quantitative analyses of the interview data, the interviews were coded for an opinion about the influence of this law on the functioning of the WVCTB (Item 10). Responses were as follows: 36% indicated the law has been positive for truancy efforts, 29% felt its impact has been mixed, 18% negative, and 18% did not know or did not comment. At the very least, these data suggest that most interviewees see the Becca law as neutral or positive, and only a relatively small minority saw it as a negative influence on truancy efforts.

Many early interviewees (D interviews) indicated that participation on the Board is a personally and professionally satisfying activity. Therefore, we inquired about this in the DP interviews. Those interviews were coded for the interviewees’ personal experience of CTB work (Item 11). The results indicated that 82% of interviewees felt it to be a positive experience and 14% did not comment. One interviewee indicated it to be an overall negative experience.

The final item (Item 12) involved coding the interviews for whether the interviewee would recommend CTB as an effective countermeasure to truancy for other communities. With

this item we wanted to determine the extent to which Board members felt it worthwhile to translate this model to other schools and communities. All but 1 interviewee said yes to this question, either strongly (67%) or with reservations (29%). The “Yes with reservations” was coded for any interview in which they spoke of their being any downsides to CTB, such as feeling it may not be a good use of time in some communities or schools. One interview was coded as didn’t know or did not comment. This issue, as with many others, is further addressed in subsequent areas of the report.

*Summarizing the Quantitative Results of the Interviews.* In sum, the quantitative analyses of these interview data reveal several important findings that are followed up throughout this report. First, the majority of individuals who participate in the CTBs feel it is a worthwhile experience for them, and they also believe that the model is worthy of consideration by other communities and school districts. Although this optimism exists in their responses as a whole, many interviewees indicated some reservations. These reservations primarily had to do with weighing whether the time commitment and costs of CTBs would provide sufficient payoffs. The idea most frequently expressed was that CTBs may work best in districts, such as WVSD, that have a large number of students seeking or enrolled in alternative programs. With this population of students, which included many with a history of truancy, this model was thought to be a valuable component of an overall plan to provide options to youth at risk for truancy.

The questions involving the format of meetings and whether the program should reflect restorative justice or accountability principles resulted in a majority who expressed a preference for restorative principles as a guiding framework. However, it was a widely held belief that such an approach was more effective if it was paired with more heavy-handed possibilities from the legal end of the school-legal continuum.

#### *Qualitative Results of the Interviews*

In addition to a formal quantitative analysis of the interviews, we also conducted a less formal, qualitative review of the interview data. This qualitative analysis, involving the collection of comments from WSU team members who read the corpus of interviews, proved to be consistent with the formal quantitative analysis. That is to say, readers were struck by the commitment of individuals to youth in the throes of difficult circumstances and their belief that individualized attention was necessary in these cases. It was clear also that there were no illusions that positive outcomes were guaranteed as a result of a CTB process. However, interviewees from multiple backgrounds felt the process was valuable to truant youth for reasons that differed across individuals.

What one could not easily discern from the individual interviews was how the different elements of the CTB “fit” into a cohesive whole. That is to say, different individuals spoke of their own experiences or role, but were less sure how what they did related to other aspects of the process or the contributions to the process made by others. In addition, we did feel that there were some potentially contradictory viewpoints expressed by individuals. In order to clear up any inconsistencies and to further evaluate the extent of agreement or disagreement across CTB individuals, we decided to convene focus groups to investigate these issues. A description of the process of selecting participants for three separate focus group sessions, for convening the focus groups, and the insights derived from these efforts are set forth in the next section of the report.

## SECTION III

### Focus Group Analysis: Follow-Up to Group Sessions

#### Background and Group Participants

Upon the careful analysis and coding of the 50 interviews conducted with a wide range of participants it was possible to extract themes for discussion among key actors with substantive knowledge of the Community Truancy Board process as it is carried out in the West Valley School District. Specifically, the interview transcripts revealed issues of concern where the perceptions and preferences of the interviewees differed in some important ways. We sought to further our understanding of the WVCTB by exploring these differences of opinion, and how they relate to the roles played by these key actors. For school districts interested in replicating the process it is important to know how aspects of CTB implementation are perceived by those who have filled different roles with respect to the Board across the lifespan of the Board. In this way, focus groups allow for identifying underlying dynamics that strengthen or weaken a complex phenomenon like a truancy board.

The de-identified transcripts of the focus group sessions are a *critical resource* for school districts wishing to consider the establishment of a community truancy board. Appendix A of this report contains these transcripts; it is strongly suggested that potential replicating school jurisdictions make use of this important resource (three sustained facilitated conversations on key aspects of the operation of a community truancy board) as they think through their own implementation designs and processes. In the paragraphs that follow, we provide a description of how the focus groups were formed and operated, and an analysis of what we believe to be important insights that derive from them.

#### Focus Group Participants and their Recruitment

The Models for Change Project Coordinator collaborated with the WSU research team to compose three focus group sessions held in May of 2010 featuring three sets of persons of diverse background and somewhat differing views regarding five key questions posed to each group independently. The interviewees were asked at the conclusion of their respective interviews if they would make themselves available for participation in a focus group session; all agreed to do so. A total of 30 persons among the interviewees were hence invited to take part in one of the three sessions, and 28 duly took part in one of them. The list of participants in the focus group is as follows:

1. Traditional High School Principal
2. Director of Special Services and Principal of an alternative high school
3. 2 Principals of a middle schools
4. 2 Principals of elementary schools
5. Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court
6. Youth Director of a local church

7. 3 Attendance Secretaries at traditional and alternative schools
8. Counselor who splits time between elementary and high school
9. School District Superintendent
10. Traditional high school Assistant Principal
11. Principal of alternative high school
12. Assistant Principal of a middle school
13. Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist
14. Coordinator of Community Truancy Board
15. Staff member of Community Agency who provides youth with employment assistance
16. School District Substance Abuse Counselor
17. Assistant Superintendent
18. Traditional High School Assistant Principal
19. Dean of Students of Alternative School
20. Staff member of local Community Center
21. Traditional high school Counselor
22. Principal of alternative high school and Administrator of the WVSD Community Truancy Board
23. Counselor of a middle school
24. Prosecuting Attorney

### **Focus Group Session Process and Ground Rules**

Each of the two-hour focus group sessions held on May 13<sup>th</sup> featured a preliminary framing of the process and a setting forth of the objectives and logic of the process to be followed in documenting viewpoints and recording the reasoning underlying the participants' perspectives on the community truancy board as it operates in the West Valley School District. What follows is the typical text of that framing of the sessions; the first session was facilitated by Nicholas Lovrich, the second by Paul Strand, and the third by Maureen Erickson. Each session was staffed by a facilitator, a recorder (using two high-fidelity digital recording devices), and three process observers. The introduction to each group took the following general form. [Process adapted from: David Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. (Sage, 1997)]

We are here today to explore in an objective, *open forum* way if the West Valley Community Truancy Board is “really as good as it is cracked up to be.” People associated with it tend to feel good about it, true enough, and other school districts have initiated plans to institute similar processes in their own school settings based on the program’s reputation. However, the formal documentation of your process is lacking with respect to what is taking place here and why it works to often re-engage truant students in school. Of course, one of the best sources of information on these questions is people that have direct and lasting experience with it. So, given this background we want to try to learn from your experience. You should know that the concept of a community truancy board is found in statute in the state of Washington; it is a recommended practice for addressing truancy and dropout issues. As you know, we usually do legislation **after** a documented success, so in this case we are going back retrospectively to 1997 and going up to the present to document how your process started and how it has worked and changed over the years. Since the concept is recommended for school districts that have a truancy problem, what lessons should they learn from your experience? This is a key question for us to address here today. These lessons and insights are what we tried to capture in our interviews with you. In those interviews we saw that there were some differences of opinion, and that some issues exist concerning how it should ideally work in practice. Conceptually everyone agrees what the process is about, but in fact there are differences of opinion on how to run it and make it successful. So what we are trying to capture in this setting is—as you discuss these questions—how does your listening to someone else’s point of view serve to simulate your thinking so we might capture the arguments that underlie varying viewpoints. The people replicating the process in a different school district might say the circumstances in our place are different, our kids are different, our teachers are different, our community resources are different, and our parents are different. One of the questions we will address is precisely this one—should other school districts endeavor to replicate the community truancy board process given inevitable differences in their circumstances from those you face in the West Valley School District.

So, that is what we are trying to do today—to get a sustained discussion going with everyone having an equal chance of participating. No one needs my permission to speak. This is *a conversation*, and our job as the Washington State University research partner to the Spokane County Models for Change project on truancy is to **facilitate** it rather than guide it. We have five particular topics that we want to talk about, and that list is on the material sent to you prior to our session.

Now, allow me to introduce my associates. I’m Nicholas Lovrich and I am the ‘old professor’ and quite forgetful, so when I screw up I need to have people who keep me on track and moving ahead. I am a Professor of Political Science and have been serving as the Director of the Division of Governmental Studies and Services at Washington State University for the past 34 years; I have been doing this kind of research with public agencies for that entire period of time. My reliable and energetic colleague Paul Strand is an Associate Professor of Psychology from WSU Tri-Cities specializing in Clinical Child Psychology. Paul is the principal investigator on the project and he will correct me (always tactfully) when I make a mistake or move too far off script. Paul

and I are both somewhat typical absent-minded professors and make occasional mistakes as a team, so we need to have someone working with us who is extremely well organized and deeply experienced in focus group work... and that person is Dr. Charles Johnson. Many of you met Charles during your interviews; he is a recent Ph.D. in Criminal Justice and is heading out for his first academic job at the University of Maine at Presque Isle mid-summer. He will be packing up his family and moving across the country shortly after our work here today. In addition, we have two students who are in the graduate program in Criminal Justice at WSU Spokane—the first is Nikki Skaggs who is sitting at the table serving as the recorder for this session to make certain we get everything on the tape for subsequent transcription, and the second is Maureen Erickson who is sitting here behind the meeting room table doing process observation.

The process observation people in focus groups are very important. We will have a transcription of what is said and that is really good documentary evidence, but the non-verbal cues and reactions won't be present in the transcription. So, when someone is making a comment and all the heads are going like this (head motions of approval or disapproval) that doesn't show up in the transcript unless someone is keeping track of things such as that. When we prepare the record of the focus group we want to have the two kinds of evidence on record—that is, the things that were said and the things that were displayed in actions and non-verbal gestures. As process observers we are looking most closely for signs of consensus and disagreement.

So, as for the ground rules of our focus group session, they are as follows. Because it is nearly impossible for the transcriber to transcribe more than one person at a time, please try to avoid talking when others are speaking. For the transcriber it would be most helpful if you say your name [such as “this is George and my comments are” .... “this is Melvin speaking...”]. We are not going to share the names of participants with anybody. That information will be taken out of the transcription when it is done, but we do ask that you identify yourself so the transcriber can keep track of who is talking. We also might need to say “Sam, we've heard enough from you and we want to hear from Roberta who has been rather quiet.” As noted, no one needs permission to speak; this is a *conversation* and we are going to keep the conversation going on each of the five topics we will be discussing. We have only two hours, and there are five particular topics we want to talk about. These topics relate to some tough issues we saw featured in the interviews where people had thought about them for a while and took us up on the opportunity of participating in a focus group session.

All three focus group sessions were started in this way, and each session resulted in a lively, sustained discussion with some degree of participation by all persons taking part. The fact that virtually all persons invited chose to attend, and that the two persons who did not attend were most apologetic that workplace duties precluded their participation, signifies very strongly the degree of interest in contributing to the documentation of the community truancy board process as it has evolved in the West Valley School District. All three focus groups were conducted on the same day in the same facility where the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board conducts its work.

## Focus Core Questions

The interviews held with 50 key actors in the process—ranging from those with status as “founding fathers and mothers” to those who are recent volunteer recruits to the process—indicated that there were five distinct issues of importance to the operation of the truancy board process that should be considered carefully in any attempt to replicate. The participants in the focus group sessions were asked to provide the benefit of their thoughts on each of the following:

Is the community truancy more of an **accountability** process or more of a **problem-solving** process?

*Follow-up:* How is a proper balance best maintained?

What is the proper amount of **information** to be shared about the youth brought to the board hearing? Should more, the same, or less information be shared with board volunteers?

What explains the success of the community truancy board -- is it a powerful **CONCEPT** or is its success a result of having **recruited exceptional people** to the effort?

What factors explain the **SUSTAINABILITY** of the community truancy board in the West Valley School District?

What lessons are there for those seeking to replicate the process?

What is the value of adding a "**Martin**" (Court Truancy Specialist working out of a school setting) to the process? Should any replication include provision for such a position, or can successful replication occur without it?

The following sections present an overview of the discussions documented on each of these five questions, with some illustrative passages taken from the transcriptions. Again, while this summary is perhaps useful, anyone considering replication of this process would be wise to *read the entire transcript of the three sessions* to get the full benefit of insight derived from the experience of the people taking part in the focus group sessions. A very clear idea of how the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board came about, how it operates, how it has adapted itself over the years since its inception in 1997, and how its new strengthened connection between school and court via the Truancy Specialist relates to the work of the board is fully documented there.

### Question #1

*Is the community truancy more of an accountability process or more of a problem-solving process?*

***Follow-up:** How is a proper balance best maintained?*

In response to this question posed in the interviews virtually everyone opined that A **BALANCE** of the two goals is very important. No one suggested that the board served only an accountability function, and no one suggested that the board served only a problem-solving function. Virtually everyone expressed the view that some effective combination of the two

should be maintained in the work of the board. That said, people did differ in how that balance of two important elements should be carried out. An insight into this dimension of the process is seen in the following two sets of observations regarding the tradeoffs and mixing of the accountability and problem-solving dimensions of the process:

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I think that a good mix has been present because not only are you finding out the problem why are they not attending school, but then it is also the accountability afterwards. The process is pretty intimidating, no doubt. They walk into this room and there are all the people sitting up there. It's like a courtroom and there are chairs sitting here, and we have tried it both ways. We have tried it having it here at the boardroom, we have tried it having it at schools, and our experience is that it really does not work when it's at the school. I think it's just because it is not intimidating enough. They don't take it as seriously. It's just like any other meeting with the principal they have every time they get in trouble. Then, after the board hearing the accountability piece comes in afterward. I really think it's an important element—after this they either have to have a school nurse or doctor's note to be excused from school. It's not really a point of going to the doctor, or even seeing the nurse; it's the accountability piece of coming into the school. Once they get in there, usually they will stay, but to **have to** show up is a big piece of it.

The choice made by the West Valley School District to maintain the quasi-Courtroom setting for the process, which some—particularly the students and their parents as is noted in the section of this report documenting their experiences with the process—see as “intimidating,” reflects a firm belief that such a setting is inductive of behavior adjustment and correction. The following response to these observations is quite insightful (and a frequently noted perspective) helps place into proper perspective the balancing of goals that characterizes the district's community truancy board process.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** It's been really a nice thing to see because I appreciate what the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is saying about needing students to take it seriously, and location (setting) is everything sometimes. It is not just another conversation with the principal. Usually we have had a lot of those before they come to truancy board. So it's a different setting, it has a different feel to it. While I agree we are trying to make it a more formalized process, I would also want you to know the feeling when students come in. While it's formal, it is *friendly formal*. That is the hard part to describe—the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board goes to great lengths to make the family feel welcome. There are introductions, and there are conversations that feel more inviting than threatening. Then it's not just a punitive feeling; when they walk in the room and families are treated kindly and with respect the *friendly formal* setting is in place. They are obviously there because their kids are not going to school, and we are there with them to see how we work on that accountability piece. So the location is important.

**Nick:** So one of your jobs is to get people there and then make them feel comfortable that they are there before the formal session takes place.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Actually, I send a letter and call the day before and usually that's when I try to have them realize it is not a punitive action at all and so they feel friendlier to me when I meet them that morning. So, yes, I do try to

make it very friendly and indicate that we are on their side and that we want to help them, not punish them. So that is totally true.

Perhaps the most typical view expressed in the focus groups was the following from a person with a considerable degree of engagement with the board. She made a distinction between two general types of students who come before the board—those who “self-correct” after a single engagement with the board and those who need more help to achieve successful school re-engagement.

**District Substance Abuse Counselor:** Well, when you are talking about accountability and problem solving I think they have to be **equal**. I don’t think the board would be successful without both of those; moreover, it is different for each student that comes in. Some, just the fact of having to come to the truancy board is enough for them to change. Those are the kids that it is helpful for if there are no big problems going on—drug or alcohol issues, family problems or anything like that. So just coming to the board is saying “Okay, I am going to quit skipping my classes or whatever.” For other kids, however, there are big problems going on and so if you don’t have both of those pieces on the board, it won’t work. I think they are equally present.

Any school authorities who consider implementing a community truancy board will need to find their own balance between the accountability and problem-solving dimensions of their process. The administrator who served as the first manager of the West Valley School District’s process (Dale McDaniel) went on to study for a doctorate in education. For his dissertation he studied three other truancy boards in western Washington—in Clark County, in Cowlitz County, and in Thurston County. He carried out extensive on-site research, conducted many interviews, and did a good deal of process observation. A principal finding he reported was that every school adapts the process to its own setting, and in each case the schools in question strike a balance between the accountability and problem-solving elements of the process in their own way. For those school district officials who decide to attempt a replication of the community truancy board the views expressed and the underlying arguments advanced in this regard serve as a useful backdrop against which to formulate their own understanding of balance.

## **Question #2**

***What is the proper amount of information to be shared about the youth brought to the board hearing? Should more, the same, or less information be shared with board volunteers?***

In the 50 interviews conducted it was clear that a number of participants in the board process wanted to have more information about the students coming to the board. They tended to express the view that they could do a better job of problem-solving if they had more information about the situations and circumstances facing these students. The members of the board are given a packet of information for each student, but the information in that packet is restricted primarily to attendance and academic progress assessments. The school counselors interviewed pointed out in their respective sessions that while they possess a great deal of information about some of the students coming before the board, they are not at liberty to reveal that information—and in many cases they believe it would not be proper to share that information with members of the board. It was clear in each of the three focus group sessions that the discussion of this issue served to bring the board members into agreement on how the

questions they raise with the students and parents typically bring to the surface voluntarily the major issues underlying school avoidance and make available to the board the most relevant types of information required for effective problem-solving. The following observations from the focus groups shed considerable light on the information sharing issues which arise in the community truancy board process.

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** I think in terms of the proper amount of background information, it's not necessarily that we need to know more about the individual students coming in, but speaking as someone who doesn't work in the district every day when I first came in it was difficult for me because I didn't know how to read the attendance sheets. I have figured it out since, but it took me a while. Then things like knowing how many credits it takes to graduate from different high schools might be helpful to determine how far behind that person is. Then you start asking questions after you sit on the board and soon enough you start learning that sort of stuff. I don't think you need to know more about that individual student because it's a new chance for them, if one person doesn't know anything about them. It's a brand new chance for that person to come in and make a first impression on that person. The only thing we know is that they are coming to truancy board.

**District Substance Abuse Counselor:** I have to say though, last year when I sat in pretty often that wasn't completely consistent. We wouldn't get to hear from the counselor or someone else right before the student came in what was going on with the family and this is how it went down. A lot of times we have kids that come in late so a lot of times it backed up, and then it's like the next kid comes in right away so then we don't get to hear anything before hand and we are just looking at what is provided.

**Nick:** So, if you have to recommend from your experience, should there always be this caucus prior to the formal?

**District Substance Abuse Counselor:** Yes.

**Nick:** And what are the boundaries on what is shared? How do you deal with that? Some of it is a privacy matter and some of it is HIPPA-protected, and some of it is this and that? There is a group of professionals with a kid at risk and that kid is going to a new forum. Where are your boundaries? That's one of the things that people are going to want to know if they try to replicate this process.

**District Substance Abuse Counselor:** It is difficult in my position with the drug and alcohol piece because there are certain things I can't share before hand. A lot of the kids I am there to see I haven't worked with yet so any of the kids where the counselor has some information that they feel comfortable sharing is helpful, but I'm sure there are things they don't want to share in front of the board too... so I don't know.

**Nick:** So, Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, do you know a lot that you don't share and for good reasons?

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** I guess at the beginning I used to share a lot more, and I don't do so now because I notice that if kids have history in the district or people know them or know things of them, it ends up backfiring and I noticed that for most of

the kids—like when Dr. X (Psychologist) and I are dealing with a kid you know—there are certain things that we know that we don't think everyone else should know. If it's an issue with gender identity or abuse or whatever and I don't think that is what this board is designed to do, and it's like sometimes more ammo for the board to be like "Well, why are you not doing this." Well, there is always more to every story than what just comes across. I used to share a lot more. And I do a lot more homework on my own now, and there are certain things—that's why I walk out with the families afterwards to kind of hit on those things I need answered. So the information is great, but can be very dangerous too.

**Nick:** So, when you participate in the board are you seeing yourself as an advocate for the kid and family? Do you try to represent the family—not their interests, but to make sure they get the most benefit from the board setting?

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Well, I think so. Like one thing I notice—if you are a board member you kind of get complacent in thinking one certain way. I told people here—well not all the people here—but a young man came in two weeks ago with a totally bad attitude. Half the people thought he was stoned or whatever the case may be. It humbles you to just reflect on this—but I was irritated. I was a little bit louder than I usually am, and then when I sat down with the kid last week I got an entirely different impression of him. I was like "Man, what are you doing?" Another thing, when you are on it all the time it's kind of just like you get complacent in thinking well this has got to be the issue, this is the issue, he has attitude with Mom. Well, long story short -- Mom picks really bad husbands who beat on her and now she is wondering why the kid is doing it. So, the point is that there is more to it. My role is 150% advocacy. If I believe a kid will do better if he or she leaves, my whole focus will be to get the family to see it that way. In the end they have the choice where they want to go, or if they want to go to Spokane Valley—but that is my whole goal to do what is best for the kid. Obviously, something is not working where they are. It is very rarely that I have to do this; I can probably think of five kids right now, and I have 126 I'm working with, that are just *punking* the school system by saying I'm not going to school. There are other issues at play for these kids and it's just when to capture the moment for positive change—like in my eyes, I think there is a downfall with the middle school system because we don't have an alternative to send the kids to at that level. It's a struggle for me even just talking to some of the counselors sometimes. They are often burned out because the family has been with them the last three years.

It is quite apparent that any school replicating the community truancy board process will have to make decisions about what information to share about the students involved and determine how that information is best shared prior to and during the sessions held with students and parents/guardians. It was noted that between what the students and their parents/guardians voluntarily share with the board and the questions posed to them by the board, much of the information directly relevant to school truancy does get out for the board's consideration. In this regard, it is important that the board be *diverse in composition* so that good questions stemming from multiple perspectives are raised during the problem-solving phase of the process. The outcome of that process entails an agreement between the school and student, the terms of which constitute the basis of the accountability element of the process. One important aspect of the information sharing issue relates to the information

dissemination role of the board vis-à-vis the students and parents/guardians. The community-based resource persons participating on the board are a vital part of the process. This role is evident in the following observations made by one such person.

**(Unknown Speaker):** There are a lot of things involved in the next steps. It's not just "go to school, study table, check in with the Truancy Specialist." For example, *Next Generation Zone* a lot of times works with these kids. [Note: Next Generation is...]They are a great advocate. You know they get jobs for kids also... so there are a lot of things involved in the process.

**Nick:** Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance, are you at all the boards or just at some of the board sessions?

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** What we do is we have four people from *Next Generation Zone* who rotate through because it takes up every morning every week. So, we rotate so that we can spend the rest of the time with our caseloads. But I would guess there is always someone from *Next Generation Zone* there.

**Nick:** So, if they were going to replicate this board in East Valley or other places, there should be something like *Next Generation Zone* participating in that process?

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** Probably.

**Nick:** This is what we are really trying to get at here. What is making this work?

**(Unknown Speaker):** I think the question is a good one. The answer is, you have to be very **strategic** about the people on the board. So if you really step back and if what you are trying to do is provide options, you need resources to bring to bear. So a kid is struggling to find a place to work you got the Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance and her friends who could possibly link something up. They spend their days understanding what the employment picture is and understand the difficulty in finding work. And how do you put together a resume and resources to get bus fare and work clothes, the kinds of things that are necessary. I don't know the composition of the board this year as well as I should. If you put your mind together, every community would want to have some key people.

One of the most important elements of the "not enough information" theme raised in some of the interviews pertained to the lack of information on FOLLOW-UP. Once the board session is concluded there is little prospect of finding out how the students who came before the board are doing. In this regard, the addition of the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has contributed greatly to the follow-up element of the board's work. Virtually everyone who had noted prior experience on the board as it operated without the participation of the Truancy Specialist opined that the follow-up with truant youth was far better now than in the past. In this regard the Truancy Specialist and the Coordinator of the Community Truancy Board noted the following:

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** One thing I want to add, about the time we spend with the families. The people that are members of this board are not scared to ask

their questions; if they want to ask a question and there is 30 seconds left, they are going to ask it when it is important. Because there are certain key things that are important to different members on the board and they will ask it, and if they don't ask it then they will ponder the possibilities. They do that a lot. Often the board members will do follow-up and ask me to find out and I'll tell them next week. Time is a constraint, but we manage to work it out in most cases.

**Nick:** That is another thing related to information. What do you get afterword's if someone is interested in whatever happened to that one truant student? Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, are you the source of follow up if anyone wants to have follow up information?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Well, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist does meet with the truancy kids once a week. I run all their attendance once a week, every week to make sure who is on board and who is not. As far as the District Drug Counselor meeting with the kids to do drug and alcohol, I call her and leave a message that she needs to meet with that student. And I have to say I'm not good about going back to say "did you do that?" I just know she does. But you know, if it comes to it and they are relapsing, go and find out exactly what had happened. As far as meeting with the teachers and the principals the next day, they have a time and they have to meet. They **do** let me know if that student doesn't show up.

**Nick:** Does that failure to make the meeting show up on Skyward where you can monitor that compliance if you want to?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** If that was included under discipline it would show up, but I don't think all those are in discipline... are they Traditional High School Assistant Principal?

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** The recommendations are not, but the fact the student went to the truancy board is recorded.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I do put everything from the board process if a case ends up going to court. I make sure everything is in discipline and I print that out now and take it along with the attendance material to the Prosecuting Attorney. This is so the court can see exactly what was ordered to the kid, and I tell them what has been followed up on and what hasn't.

From this discussion it is clear that any community truancy board process will have to have good record-keeping processes in place and those persons who volunteer to serve on the board will have to be reassured that they can keep informed on the progress being made -- or alternatively the remaining problems to be overcome among the students coming before the board. It is clear as well that the addition of the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has contributed greatly to the effective of the information sharing processes which the board is designed to serve.

### Question #3

***What explains the success of the community truancy board -- is it a powerful CONCEPT or is its success a result of having recruited exceptional people to the effort?***

In any attempt to replicate a successful pilot project it is essential to know whether the “success” in question was a result of the quality of the concept underlying the effort OR a consequence of the remarkable qualities of a few key people who are able to sustain the effort even though the concept is flawed in important ways. In the interviews conducted prior to the focus group sessions this question was posed to each interviewee, and it was evident that few people had thought much about this question and were required to “think aloud” with us as they reflected on their experience. While all eventually came to the conclusion that the concept was a powerful one, one which should and could be replicated elsewhere, they each made note of various “key actors” they have met in the course of their service on the board whose dedication and commitment to the community truancy board idea served as an inspiration to them to continue to volunteer their time on the board. It is important to note, in this regard, that there are substantial costs to the operation of a community truancy board—some of which are not particularly evident. In this regard, the following observations are insightful:

**Superintendent:** You know there has been a concern by the district about the cost of the program. I don’t know what the costs of doing this process are. Obviously, we are dedicated to it. So, there is something we should do about resources. In the past it’s not one of the things we have never put in the budget cut, and I think that is because I believe we realize it’s such a great investment for the kids. If someone is going to be spending their time doing that kind of budget cut thinking it’s probably going to be vice principals and counselors who already have too big of a case load, so this is just one more level of support on options. But the cost of it...yes, there is some cost. **I think we tend to think we just volunteer our time for the community truancy board. It’s part of our jobs that we do, with the understanding that such volunteering is essential to maintaining a quality school district.** So, in my case I get some hours off of my main superintendent job to come sit here. We kind of say it does not cost much, but actually it’s quite expensive if you really look at everyone’s time and the value of it that people are carving out. But anyway, like the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board said, I guess over time it has seemed effective enough that it has never been ended by the cuts we’ve had to make periodically.

The original concept, rooted in a restorative justice framework of a community-wide sharing of responsibility for the truancy problem, has been far from static and unchanging. As the Superintendent went on to observe:

**Superintendent:** It’s interesting when you asked the questions about training earlier. I’ve never really thought about formal training. It truly has evolved for us and become much more sophisticated over time. But thanks to these good professional people who have helped us out over time...

While many key actors have come and gone over the course of the past decade+ of the existence of the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board “institution” in Spokane County, it is clear that some core group of “good professional people” is essential for the initiation and maintenance of such a process. It would appear that good

professional people are attracted to the effort, and that in working with others of similar mind they deepen their own commitment to sustaining the effort. It was particularly telling in the interview with Dale McDaniel that he made note of how he was most happy to learn that upon his departure from the school district to pursue his doctoral studies the community truancy board process “did not suffer a bit from my departure. While a bit disappointing in one regard given my ego investment in the process, it was good to learn that the IDEA was a compelling one for many others who took up responsibility for the program.” This is powerful testimony for the durability of the concept, indeed.

In this specific regard, the Program Coordinator observed the following:

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** So I think our first principal administrator was Dale McDaniel. I think I might have thought “Oh Dale is leaving!” and the board will collapse—but instead the transition to new leadership worked out because the concept was a good one. The Assistant Principal of a Middle School stepped in next and he did a fabulous job, then it became time for rotation and it works still... so, that’s what makes things better—periodic leadership change with new elements of the process brought in by each succeeding leader.

Perhaps equally telling is an observation made by the Program Coordinator with respect to requests made of community resource people. She noted the following in this important regard:

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Actually, I just send out letters requesting volunteers. There were some community resource people that I already knew that work within our schools, but I sent letters telling them what this was about, and stating the major provisions of the Becca law. **I have not had one person turn us down.** I have had some that can’t be here as often as others, but I have not had one group turn us down.

In the area of school personnel involved in the community truancy board process, perhaps one key change made in the process has been movement away from the assignment of a few individuals to responsibility for the maintenance of the board to rotation among a broad range of administrators to insure awareness of the benefits of the board process across the district. In this regard one focus group participant noted the following:

**Assistant Principal of a Middle School:** I had my say at the beginning of our session here. I think this is a good thing that we all rotate now because when I was a principal at Contract Based Education and also chaired the board for a few years at that time, I got a lot of my kids coming to the board and I had already had my go-rounds with the kiddos in my office. The way it has evolved—namely, having a different administrator there every week and on the average we do that about 2 or 3 times a year now—is great. In being in my position here at Centennial I want to talk about the same student you were talking about too, because ultimately what we’re trying to do is helping kids. We want to get kids back in the bus, back at school and being successful and get them squared away and turned around. I think having different administrators here is a good thing. We have the continuity, we have the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, the Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth

Employment Assistance, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, but yes different administrators being here over time is good.

Given the observations of these key actors in the community truancy board process it seems clear that the CONCEPT is a **powerful one**, and that “good professional people” dealing with students for whom truancy is a problem can be found. These people will be attracted to a program wherein they will meet, interact with, learn from others of like interest, and they will likely receive confirmation of the value of their contribution to a collective effort to address the needs of the students for whom school attendance is problematic.

#### **Question #4**

***What factors explain the SUSTAINABILITY of the community truancy board in the West Valley School District? What lessons are there for those seeking to replicate the process?***

One of the key insights to be gathered from the focus group sessions is noted in the Program Coordinator’s observation that each new leader brought new ideas to the board to strengthen its operation. It is likely that program sustainability has resulted at least in part from timely adaptation and learning. In this regard an observation made by the Superintendent is quite telling:

**Superintendent:** Originally I think we had a principal as the main facilitator who stuck through it the whole year. The truancy board facilitator is one of many jobs that principals all have as a district responsibility. An Assistant Principal of a Middle School had it for many years. Others have too, now Larry Bush has it. I think he is the one who chose to step back a little bit and said I don’t need to be there with the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board at the table every time. Now he has spent more time getting in the community agencies, especially getting the juvenile court folks in a closer partnership with the board and the schools.

I was hesitant at Larry’s change in focus at first, saying “wait a minute Larry, you’re not going to be there every time?” But now that he has put work in that outreach piece I see clearly that this effort has worked out to be great and paid off huge.

**Nick:** So you think it’s a good concept... I mean this concept as it has changed over time? So, have we captured today **how the concept can be refined?** Can it be even better?

Yes, this process has definitely gotten better over time. The resource people have for sure made it better because there are more options for the kids. We can say, “Oh, there is an Adult Ed center down town, oh, there is Running Start. Now we have Job Corps, we have Next Generation, we have the Valley Community youth minister—he does a lot of youth stuff at the high school. The process has brought a lot to it.

It was also noted insightfully that “innovative leadership” and an organizational philosophy featuring a “culture of caring” are likely *sine qua non* elements of the successful replication and long-term sustainability of the community truancy board process. In this regard the observations made by the Spokane County Prosecutor are particularly telling.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** There are a lot of good ideas that never get off the ground because the ideas are not well structured. I know Dale, I know the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, I don't know the Superintendent—but I would assume there was a lot of thought and effort into putting the structure together first. It follows that, as this group did, you have to shift and change as a plan or idea starts to take full bloom and develop. When you bring in new people like Larry, it's a great example of a visionary in a different area you can grow it even more—but that sound, kid-serving philosophical foundation is always there. And so, in my view the people creating and maintaining the board did a wonderful job in terms of not only getting an idea, but putting together a good foundation and that continues to provide sound footing right now.

With regard to the challenge of successful replication, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist built upon this insight making note of the following key elements for other school districts considering the replication of the community truancy board concept.

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** I think more than anything that the combination of a good replication tool kit and a school setting where they want this makes the idea available to duplicate elsewhere. I think it's a *philosophy*; it is a culture that starts at the top with the Superintendent. I can talk with her about the issues and she is fully knowledgeable. If you don't have that philosophy and structure at the top, like the Principal of Alternative High School said, it is going to be really hard to do. And maybe that is the biggest struggle point. When people say is it people or concept, if you don't have the head guys invested in it then it's not going to work.

From these observations and reflections it is likely that school settings wherein replication is most likely to be successful are those where top level management support is present and commitment to sustaining the program is clearly stated, where a supply of "good professional people" is on tap and available for engagement in the process, where a kid-serving philosophy predominates, and where local community resources can be mobilized to take part in the effort. If these elements are present, it would be the near-consensus view of the 28 people who took part in the three focus group sessions that this process can be replicated in other districts seeking to deal with truancy and drop out issues because it is a powerful idea which can be sustained over time. It is clear from the interviews and focus group sessions alike that many participants in the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board effort are committed to this program and believe that other districts can learn from their experience and implement a similar process in their own school settings. The "tool kit" to be developed as part of the Spokane County Models for Change project will provide a convenient guide to implementation, and the "lessons learned from practice" featured here and in the Appendix containing the focus group transcripts will provide useful resources for replication.

The final section of this analysis of focus group evidence features the matter of the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist position. This position is funded by a grant from the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (GJJAC) which provides two years of funding for a Juvenile Court Probation Officer to be assigned to truancy cases exclusively and to carry out those duties by maintaining a presence in West Valley School District schools, by serving on the Community Truancy Board, and by maintaining contact with all truant youth through a version of *Check and Connect* which requires periodic follow-up contact with the truant youth

and their parents/guardians. The person who is filling this role, Martin Kolodrub, is broadly seen as a person of enormous ability and special talent for relating to at risk youth. In all interviews conducted with persons who have come to know Martin the expression of high regard for him as a remarkably able and highly motivated person was strongly voiced. Given this high praise and deep respect displayed in the interviews, the final question posed in the focus groups dealt with Martin vs. Martin's role—that is, is Martin “one of a kind” and indispensable to securing the benefit of a **boundary spanner** between the Juvenile Court and the schools or can other persons become as proficient and effective as Martin has become? The following section of this analysis of the focus group sessions moves to a consideration of this key question.

#### **Question #5**

***What is the value of adding a "Martin" (Court Juvenile Probation Officer Assigned as Truancy Specialist working out of a school setting) to the process? Should any replication include provision for such a position, or can successful replication occur without it?***

It is not in the least an exaggeration to state that the people associated with the community truancy board in the West Valley School District are “great fans” of Martin Kolodrub. His passion for his work, his extraordinary commitment to the welfare of the youth with whom he works, and his ability to establish rapport with them and their parents/guardians is acknowledged by all with whom we conducted interviews and hosted in focus groups. The “testimonials” to Martin are ubiquitous, and the following are meant to serve as illustrative of the many more observations that could be set forth here. What is quite evident from these few examples is that people have deep respect for Martin, they appreciate his passion for his work, and they value his contribution to the effective operation of the community truancy board. By way of illustration the following set of observations are set forth here.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** He definitely helps a lot because he does get out there and he knows the kids individually. He meets with them, you know. I don't have time to go and meet with every kid after truancy board, and it's enough to try and run all their attendances from every school. But Martin goes out and meets with these kids. He takes me around kids I need to serve that I actually file court dates on. He actually takes me around to serve these kids. He has made a big, big improvement because he can go see those kids and he keeps on top of them after the board hearing process establishes a plan for them.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** I got to serve on the truancy board before Martin and after Martin, and I think the only comment I would like to make at this point is that the he also fits the general philosophy that we believe in. Not just his position, but many times on the board you hear him make remarks and comments that make me know for sure that he likes kids. He is there to be a problem solver for kids. He is not there as a community probation officer; that would be another critical piece. You can't just have anyone do it. They have to have the right philosophy that fits with what you are trying to do. He is on board with making the process an intervention rather than a punitive session. For example, there can be what you might call a snooty teenager in front of you. Martin will say I like those kids when they are like that. He likes those kids he sees as the *spicy ones*. He can deal with them being spicy in ways

that are way more successful and sometimes bump up against us as administrators and teachers. So, it is partly his philosophy that jives with ours to make the whole thing work.

**Principal of Alternative High School:** From my stand point I spend a lot of time with Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist... he is in my building a lot. Tracking these kids and what he brings is sort of vague but essential; he has a certain presence about him that has creditability. He represents the next step. I'm playing with Principal of Alternative High School who is a school guy and Martin is a court guy. He is going to help me to stay out of jail; he knows jail and he knows how kids get here and he knows what happens while you're in there, so he can talk straight talk. I mean you gotta understand that as Principal of an Elementary School I say that not anyone can do this. Aside from having a good philosophic sort of alignment with what we are about, Martin can get down and dirty with kids. That means he can get their attention and he has creditably so the fact that kids know he is going to show up puts a little extra pressure that they show up at school. Just by that notion by him coming around. And we double team a lot, and he can come to me on tough cases. The other day, for example, a kid was about ready to run out of my school because he had a confrontation with a teacher. The teacher was sort of playing John Wayne and the kid didn't need John Wayne at that time, and he said to hell with it, I'm out of here. These people don't know what they are doing. And Martin came to me and said to me, "you know, John Wayne is just about to drive one of these kids out of school. I had to get the kid and Martin in and we calmed the waters and worked through it. He understands, and has a *sixth sense*.

**Nick:** He is a boundary spanner; this is what we would call him in social science. He is a person that can be equally comfortable in the down and dirty, and in the discussion of sophisticated ideas about restorative justice. Is this another special person? Or is the concept of a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist the thing that can be replicated?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** I think they started with a concept and then they said "given the range of probation officers available, who might have the best flare or feel for this kind of job?" I don't know how he ended up being selected, but if it was an open bid and people had the opportunity to apply I don't know how that all happened, but I think it's concept and followed by somebody who could create more intentional relationships between the schools and the court system. It turns out that what this position would that look like is what Martin has created in his work.

**Nick:** *From the school side, then, are you looking towards the courts and saying they should offer us something like this, a juvenile justice truancy officer, and you think the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is the role model to follow?*

**Principal of Alternative High School:** Yes, he has been the only one I've seen, and I don't know who else is out there, but he's certainly got my resounding endorsement.

**Nick:** *Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist uses something called **check and connect** in going back to the parents. Has that made the truancy board process better? How does all that fit together?*

**(Unknown):** I think he uses a little bit of it in the truancy board, but most of it is after the truancy board. But after he actually meets with the kids at the school and goes to the home and meets with them at home with the parent too. Yes, he definitely makes good use of the tool. I think that is a big part of it too with the parents. You wouldn't believe how they call him. All the time, the parents or even the kid, is calling him. So I mean he has made a very big effect on the kids in our district.

**Assistant Superintendent:** He sits on all this stuff, and a lot of those kids that are at Child Study Team have also had truancy issues. So back to his personality, Martin is not judgmental, so you can tell when he is talking to a parent you can tell they feel like here is a guy that is trying to help me...not here is a guy who thinks I'm a bad parent. So they are willing to have those conversations with him. I'm not sure how one person can say the same thing and not be judgmental as someone else who says it and is considered judgmental, but Martin is one of those people that does not come across as judging people. So for the people we are dealing with that is critical because they have been judged as lacking often in the past. People have been complaining to them about their kid's lousy attendance for years. They are tired of getting the bad news, and along comes Martin. They think this guy is going to help me get out of this. He is not here telling me that I'm a bad mother because I have been hearing that for years from these people, and that's important. He is also persistent. You will see him and he will be at the child study team and a kid will come up and go Martin's here. He finds those kids, he follows them everywhere, he even shows up at the house. At some point they give up, and realize Martin realizes where I am going to be. Besides not being judgmental he is dedicated. When you're working with Martin, and I have seen him work with a lot of parents and kids, what comes across to the parents and kids is he is ever hopeful for the kids. This is very attractive to the parent...they get the sense that there is hope here for my kid.

While it is difficult to separate the regard people have for Martin and their feelings about the value of the role of Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, some of the focus group participants were able to address the value of the role. The following observations are insightful in this particular regard.

**(Unknown Speaker):** I don't know a lot of the juvenile probation officers personally. I know some of them. All of them that I know have the right kind of personalities because that is what they have done for a living, work with these kids. So, they know how to react with a kid and be on their level and yet step that up to a stricter level with the parents if need be. I think that is their training.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** I think *the proof is in the pudding*, in the sense that this year District 81 has also had a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist on a smaller degree, obviously, because it's a bigger school district. But they have seen the benefits involved in what's going on with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist here at West Valley. The beauty of the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist from the court standpoint is that he is kind of the eyes and ears of a probation officer for us. In fact, I just had a case yesterday. Martin and I resolved the case this morning because of his input, and the question I asked him was if we don't move forward on this case is the youth going to bolt on us? He said no, and gave me the reasons why. So there is a perfect example

of the influence and the resource and the effect he has had on the school district, but also on the court as well.

The discussion of the role of Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is amplified in an additional observation made by the Spokane County Prosecutor:

**Prosecuting Attorney:** I think that it's interesting when I look at the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and who he is, and the program he is in at West Valley, and then I look at Kathleen Law who is somewhat of a counterpart at District 81. There are some similarities between them in terms of -- I think juvenile probation officers—I think there is an affinity in helping them to get through the struggles with what is going on in general. I think the concept is good that you put together at West Valley; District 81 is replicating that, but it looks somewhat different though. I mean the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is who he is and Kathleen is Kathleen. Even though they may do things differently... for example, Kathleen comes to court and gives information to the court there. Martin doesn't want to do that, and I respect that, but what I think is happening is that we shouldn't think you can "cookie cut" these people; instead, I think you can put a road map together and a set of guidelines to move them and be able to do the job and be effective being who they are. The concepts are good. There are certain traits that I think the individuals in this role need to have, and based on that I think you are going to have success in the role with different types of people doing it in their own way. They are not going to look the same, Kathleen is not Martin and Martin is not Kathleen, but I see that with the concept we have and with what we are doing here that the types of personalities of these juvenile probation officers have show that the concept is working well.

On the question of replication of the community truancy board process with or without a Martin-type position there was substantial division evidenced in the focus groups. The findings from the first two focus groups were that a Martin-like position was so critical to the effectiveness of the truancy board process that any replication should feature plans for such a position. For example, this sentiment was expressed by a Middle School Principal:

I agree the Martin position is hugely important. I was pre- and post-Martin. His presence on the board is huge and he does sit on the end there and talks the language of the kids and flips his computer open and they know he could be looking at anything or documenting anything. His presence in our building is powerful; he is doing the critical follow-up. The Martin position—that is a critical component of the process. Even though we don't want to talk about Martin specifically, personality is huge...whether it's a teacher or an administrator the personality of that person is critical. Interacting with the kids and families effectively takes a certain kind of personality. Yesterday he shared he got stuck at the gas station with a parent for an hour and half. Because of that relationship with the family he takes that type of time and demonstrates that type of commitment needed to have a positive impact on truant kids. I just can't say enough positive things about having that position. We have been blessed to have it in West Valley.

However, a significant noteworthy dissent from this general viewpoint did emerge in the third focus group session. The Administrator of the Community Truancy Board, who

also serves as Principal of an Alternative School in the West Valley School District, opined that the process need not provide for a Martin-like position in its initial stages of development. His observations on this question are noteworthy; his statement on this matter is as follows:

It doesn't just have to be Martin, it can be what we have identified is the resources, what needs to happen and now that we know that is a very successful piece of the model—then we would have to figure out how we can implement that missing part. As the Assistant Superintendent said, resources are tight everywhere, but that is what I go back to—the **system** is reformed, and how do we as systems figure out how can we share what we have most effectively? So it isn't just the education system saying, "Well, how do we support a \$60,000 person" or the court saying "how do keep funding a \$60,000 position that now we are shipping out personnel to the educational system?" The real question is this: How can we start sharing that cost and making it work as wells as grants? There are a lot of different grants that are out there in the world. How do we share the work in terms of who writes them? We're working with the ESD in this way...that is how that student advocate model came out; we share resources... and get away from the separate silos.

**Nick:** If a replicator is doing this on grant funding and they only have so much funding, would you say start small without a Martin, or would you say start small **with** a Martin-type position?

**Larry:** Yes, if you can't afford to start with it, then start without the community probation truancy specialist piece and build out.

**Nick:** With the community resources...

**Larry:** Yes, because you will make an impact on those kids. So if you're basing your whole model of replication or start up -- if we can't do it all we're not going to do any of it -- then that is kind of ridiculous. That comes back to can we save two kids a year? ... then let's go for it, let's start with that...and then we will build up from there.

## Concluding Observations

The focus group sessions were designed to provide a valuable source of insight into and provide documentation of the operation of this process for those jurisdictions considering the adoption of a comparable process. While these goals were accomplished, it was also clear that the group sessions were seen by the participants as an important forum for the expression of their commitment to a “culture of caring”—and showing how the community truancy board relates to and reinforces that commitment. This connection is perhaps best expressed in the following observations made by one of the participants in the third focus group session:

**Assistant Superintendent:** So, one of the things that has been new to us is that we have been involved in, in a big way—through Larry—with the courts. While we have had some prior connection to the court system for quite a while to get better information to help us do a better job, this stronger connection really helps us do a better job with the at risk kids. So, through the grants that we have had that have helped support this project, like the things we are doing right now in this group, these help a great deal. We have time to reflect and be a little retrospective, and every time something like this happens we get a little bit more focused on our mission and get a little bit better at everything we do—including doing a better job at truancy next week because of this conversation today.

Upon further reflection he noted the following bit of personal history:

When I started I would hear that someone isn’t coming to school, and I’d think now I have to go and talk with him and his mother with all these people and talk about why they are not going to school... but our attendance secretary stood right outside my door and got me by the ear and said come on. She was like “No, you’re going.” And low and behold we started seeing in school that there were fewer discipline issues with these kids. So some of these kids were the ones causing trouble too, so once you make a connection with the kids and the family and you get them on the right track other things tend to get worked out. I was a reluctant participant the first few times I came. But I have now, some 12 or 13 years later, been present on the board 100 times a year as a principal or as district office and I **always** look forward to coming. In my day sometimes it’s hard to look back and see what you did that was worthwhile, and I always feel like being on the truancy board gives me that feeling of accomplishment.

It is perhaps best to conclude this portion of the report with the observation that the participants in the interviews and focus group sessions held as a follow-up show clear evidence of four noteworthy conclusions: 1) the West Valley School District staff and their community-based partners are strongly committed to the process and believe deeply that it is effective based on the anecdotal evidence they have and their own personal experience; 2) they believe that the concept underlying the process is a powerful one, and it is transferrable to other school settings; 3) they believe the people representing community-based resources participating in the board are extremely important to the effective operation of the board; and 4) they believe the strong connection established with the juvenile court via the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist operating out of the school setting is of **great value**—in reality taking the board “to the next level” in its work with truancy reduction and prevention. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Martin’s position

has been funded from a grant from the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee with pass-through federal funds from the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Title II program. In her first two evaluation reports the evaluator Linda Rinaldi has made note of "successes and accomplishments" beyond those that members of the WVCTB would be aware of, adding further to the clear value that he and his activities on behalf of truant youth bring to bare on school attendance and drop-out problems.

The next section of this report sets forth the results of a personal interview-based survey conducted with students and parents/guardians.

## SECTION IV

### Interviews of Community Truancy Board Involved Students and Parents

[Interviews conducted in Spring 2010]

Prepared by: Kevin Wright and Starcia Ague  
Division of Governmental Studies and Services  
Washington State University

#### OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section of the report provides the assessment of truancy and the community truancy board (CTB) response from the perspective of 68 students and 32 parents who have gone through the CTB process in the West Valley School District. The report is organized into six sections — student characteristics, initial attendance issues, current barriers to school attendance, perceptions of the CTB process, outcomes, and conclusions and recommendations. Findings indicate that causes of truancy are often specific to each individual, but that relatively minor changes and earlier communication could potentially have avoided the student reaching the CTB. In general, students have a positive view of the CTB and its effectiveness in its current form; however, they are nearly uniform in their call for earlier communication about the truancy process as well as the need for more care to be taken to meet their individual needs. Recommendations include recognizing the importance of transitional periods and health issues, communicating earlier about the consequences of truancy and the CTB process, and understanding the individualized nature of truancy.

Important findings include:

- Attendance difficulties began in the ninth grade specifically for almost one-third of the students (21 individuals). This could be considered a year of significant transition from junior high school to high school and it is likely that students experienced a tough time making the necessary adjustments.
- A variety of reasons were given for initial attendance problems by students. Most prominent among them was the difficulty of getting out of bed and being motivated to attend school (10 students). Another 10 students identified health problems as leading to missing school, and school being either too hard or not liking school/teachers were equally identified as causes of initial truancy by students. In terms of current causes of truancy, health reasons were most often identified (16 students), followed by those who did not like school (6), had transportation issues (6) and students who did not have their work completed (5) or were bored or unmotivated (5). It is also important to note that parents often had different ideas on why their children were missing school, which potentially could indicate a lack of communication.
- Several needs and desired supports were identified by students. The most common need involved relatively minor changes in schedule (14 students). Students also desired “someone” to talk to about school and truancy (9) and wanted teachers to take interest in students or provide help (10). Parents were more likely to identify the need for school involvement in general rather than identify specific needs of students.

- Fifty-three students (**78%** of those interviewed) stated they had received no help or assistance prior to the CTB. Twenty-six of thirty-two parents agreed.
- The majority of students (63%; 69% of parents) believed that the CTB process was a positive one, and 82% (81% of parents) believed the CTB process to be helpful.
- One-in-five students interviewed found the process to be intimidating, and nearly all respondents mentioned that their friends either had a negative opinion of the CTB or that they did not talk about it at all.
- Nearly all students and parents believed that the process could be improved. One major theme was the need for more communication about truancy **before** reaching the CTB stage. A second major theme was the need for relatively minor adjustments to individual schedules in order to avoid truancy problems.

### REPORT OF FINDINGS

The interviews with students and parents provide a valuable alternative assessment of the perceived efficacy of the community truancy board (CTB) in its current form. Their input represents the knowledge gained by individuals who *actually go through* the truancy board process. Thus, it is likely that these recent personal experiences will go beyond what can be offered by key actors sitting on the other side of the board. It is therefore essential that any toolkit designed to aid in the replication of truancy boards include this valuable information.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by a court-appointed truancy specialist, Martin Kolodrub. Martin employs the *Check and Connect* process. This is a program developed by researchers at the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota with resources provided by a five-year grant from the Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education in 1990. The process is intended to engage and motivate students (and their families) experiencing difficulty attending school. Martin has adopted elements of the Check and Connect process to develop strong rapport with the parents and the truant youth on his caseload, allowing for the expression of truthful and insightful responses in the interviews he conducted with them. It can be expected, therefore, that the results reported here are accurate and would not be attainable without the help of someone the students and parents could trust. In order to maintain this rapport, interviews were kept fairly short and were administered throughout the course of Martin's daily work with the students and their parents and in line with the *Check and Connect* process. The WSU research team developed the set of questions in collaboration with Martin and the Spokane County Juvenile Court Models for Change project members. Responses were then entered into a database developed by the Juvenile Court staff in a manner that maintained the rich qualitative nature of the data while also allowing for quantitative assessments to be made as well. The interview participants were not pre-selected in any way; the interviews were done in the course of the normal work of outreach required in the *Check and Connect* process.

The remainder of this report is organized into the following six sections. First, a brief overview is given of the 68 students interviewed. Information about the respondent's gender, age at interview, and current grade is provided in order to give a better picture of who the truant youth are. Although more demographic information would be helpful, the informal nature of the semi-structured interviews did not allow for the collection of extensive background information on each student. Indeed, the time and sensitivity of such data

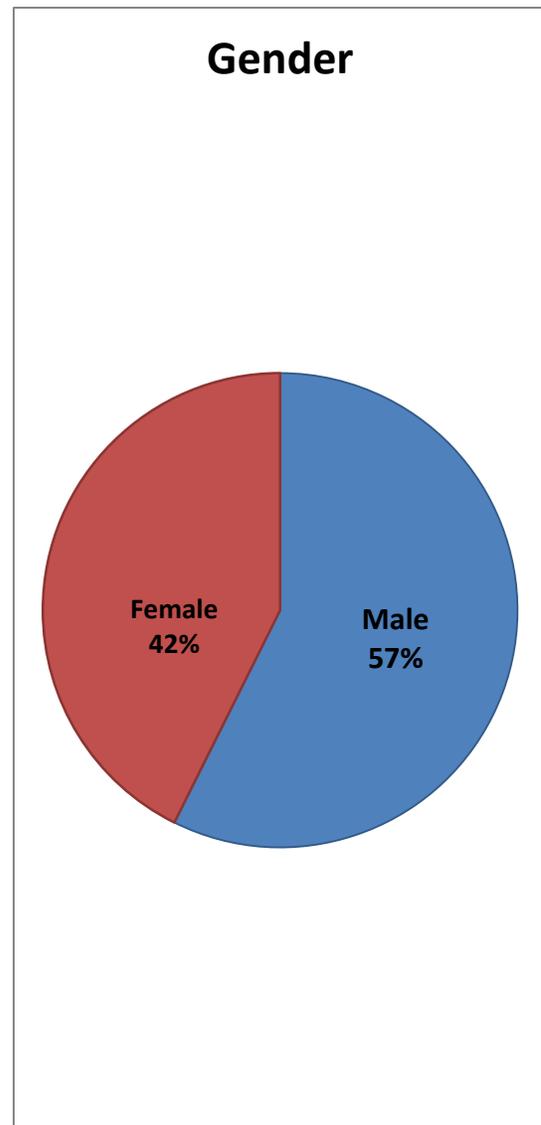
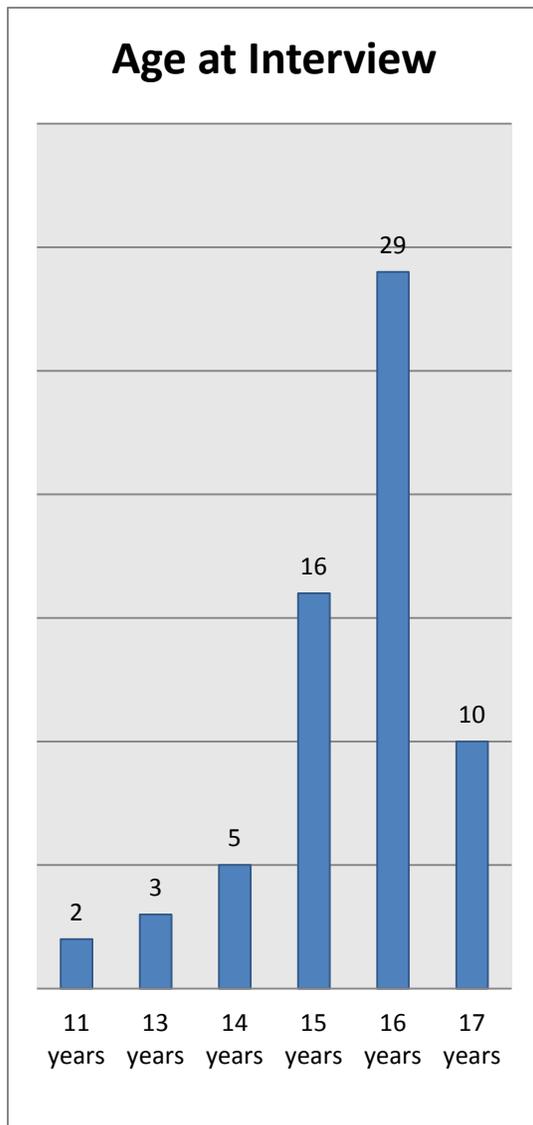
collection would be detrimental toward the overall goal of obtaining an accurate assessment of the community truancy board process.

Second, information is provided on the initial attendance issues experienced by the student. This includes when the attendance difficulties first started, as well as the identification of potential causes of those absences. Third, a section is included that describes the needs of students and any help that may have been provided prior to the truancy board. Also included in this section are the reasons that the student is currently missing school. Fourth, a discussion of the actual CTB process is offered. This section includes student understanding of the BECCA Bill, how the student was notified of CTB, and both student and peer perceptions of the process. A fifth section examined the outcomes of the CTB as perceived by students. This included questions on whether the student thought the CTB was helpful and the expression of recommendations the students made for an improved experience. The parent responses were included throughout the report in order to provide additional feedback on each of the relevant areas. Instances in which parent responses differed noticeably from student responses are highlighted, with particular emphasis placed on the responses of the 19 students for whom which their parents are also included in the dataset.

Finally, the report concludes with a brief recommendation section based on student and parent responses.

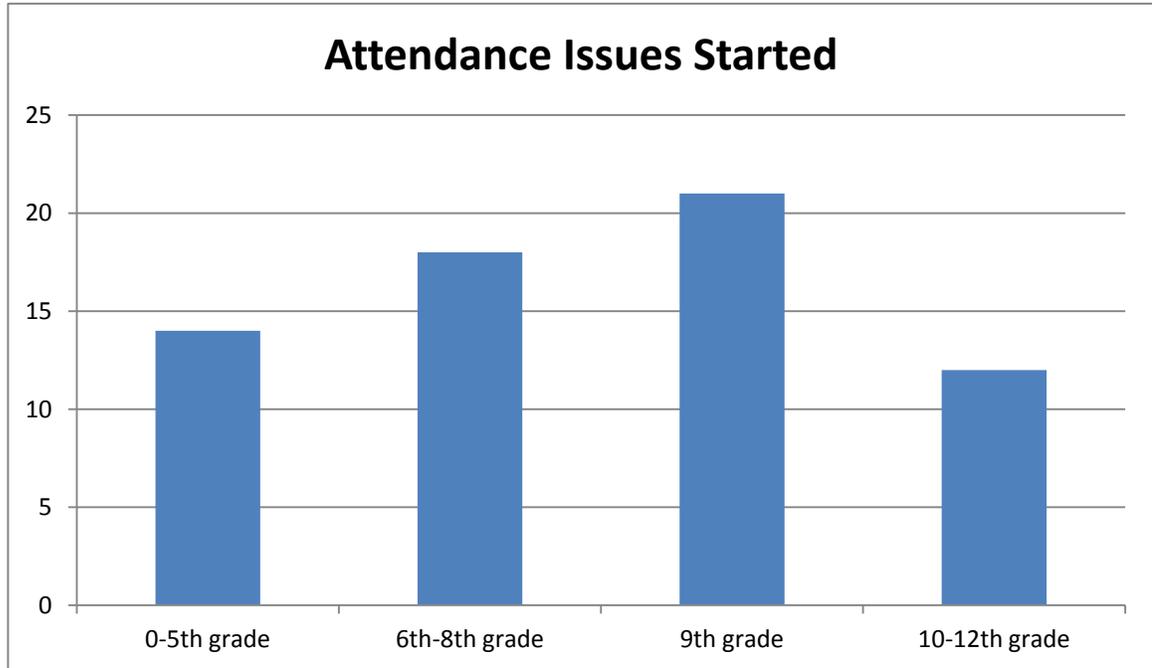
## I. STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

On average, students included in the interview dataset were slightly over 15 years old at the time of interview. The youngest individual interviewed was 11 years old, and the oldest was 17; the majority of students were 16 years old (29 of 68 students). These ages corresponded with a wide range of grade levels represented, with the average grade level being the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Finally, slightly more males were represented in the dataset than females (57% male, 43% female).



## INITIAL ATTENDANCE ISSUES

Several categories were created in order to provide a succinct quantitative assessment of when attendance issues began for these students. The responses were varied, but it is clear that the transition to high school in particular proved to be a difficult time for students (21 of 68 responses).



A wide variety of reasons were provided for why initial attendance problems began. The largest group (10 students) represented students who were unable to wake up in time for school. It is possible that this response is a function of another issue (e.g., health problems, motivational issues), but it is also plausible that minor modifications in the student's bedtime or school schedule could conceivably alleviate attendance problems. Responses from this category included:

- "I didn't want to get out of bed. No motivation"
- "Getting up late and formed a habit"
- "Couldn't get up in time, school started way too early"

An equally large group was composed of students who had health problems (10 students) representing a wide variety of ailments. Responses from this category included:

- "I had swine flu and didn't get notes"
- "I have bad allergies"
- "I got sick with Crohn's"

Finally, two related groups were similarly represented. First, not liking school or teachers was a frequent topic (9 students). Responses included:

- “I didn’t really care about school”
- “I don’t attend because I don’t like the people”

Second, students often noted that school was too hard (8 students). Responses from this group included:

- “I got bored with school, but really it was too hard”
- “The change from elementary to junior high”

Additional responses included family/peer influence (7 students), transportation issues (4), and issues at home (4).

Fifteen students were unable to be placed in any of the above categories, indicating further the varied and individualized nature of why attendance troubles began for these students. Responses from this group included:

- “The main reason was moving out”
- “I kept getting in trouble”
- “My classes were wrong”

Finally, given that the 9<sup>th</sup> grade was the most frequently occurring category for when attendance problems began, this group was explored further for possible common themes as to why students were missing school. It is important to note that 5 of the 8 total students who said some variation of “school was too hard” came from this group. An additional 4 students began missing due to health reasons, which means that nearly half of the health category came from this one grade alone.

Parents were most likely to identify health issues as being responsible for students initially missing school (9 respondents). Another important category identified was peer or family influences (6 respondents). This sentiment took the form of the child missing school because he or she was now hanging out with the wrong crowd. Importantly, of the 19 student/parent sets that data were available for, 10 gave discrepant answers (i.e., the students and their parents responded differently). Examples of this included:

- “No motivation and school felt like a waste of time” (student)
- “Health issues” (parent)
- “I just didn’t want to sit in class and when I was feeling sick they made me wait in the office” (student)
- “People she was hanging with” (parent)
- “Friends were skipping, so I followed” (student)
- “Depression” (parent)

## I. CURRENT BARRIERS TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: Reasons and Needs

### Current Reasons

The most frequently occurring category for why students were currently missing school was related to their health (16 students). Responses in support of this included:

- “My mom forgot to call when I was sick”  
(3 students)
- “I was sick with bladder infections”
- “I had the flu”

Two categories had 6 total students. The first group was composed of students who did not like school or the teachers. Responses included:

- “I was skipping school because I hate it and this school is the worst school ever. I only like 4 teachers”
- “Skipping all my classes and it was my choice, I didn’t want to attend”
- “I hate the teachers”

The second group was composed of students who identified transportation issues, most commonly living far from the school or not having transportation available.

Finally, two related categories had 5 students each. These groups included students who did not have their work completed as well as those who had no motivation or were bored with school. Responses from these two groups included:

- “I didn’t get my homework done, so I wouldn’t go in”
- “School work is too hard and my parents can’t help because they can’t read or write in English”
- “I wasn’t doing my work, but I was attending”

Eighteen students could not be fit in the above categories. Responses included:

- “I was pregnant”
- “I was the only freshman in photography class”
- “Teachers wouldn’t let me get out of honors classes and suspended me for missing school days”

The most common response from parents of why students were currently missing school also involved health issues (11 respondents). Only 5 sets of students/parents gave discrepant answers for this question. It is important to note that it is likely that parent responses are more congruent with their children (as compared to the initial reasons missed) for this question because of the discussions that took place between students and board during the CTB process.

## Needs

Several related needs and supports were raised by students, the most common of which included the need for an individualized agenda or other relatively minor changes in schedule (14 students). Responses in support of this need included:

- “I wish WVHS would have put me in normal classes from the beginning and not special ed classes. They only review easy stuff”
- “Working out a different schedule. Mead only had a 6 period day”
- “Changed my schedule. My meds keep me up”

The next largest group included the need for teachers specifically to take interests in students or provide help (10 students). Responses from this category included:

- “I needed school teachers to teach me how to learn. I was shocked by the high school experience”
- “My teachers needed to talk to me about my work. I think they noticed, but didn’t ask me if I knew what I was doing”
- “I needed to get makeup work and my teachers never offered or even cared”

A similar group included the need for “someone” to talk to in order to motivate the student or explain the truancy process (9 students). Responses from this category included:

- “Adults need to be involved more and actually talk to me”
- “I wanted to have someone to talk to about issues like skipping or why I was skipping”
- “I needed both parents and school people to help me”

Additional categories mentioned were: need for the school to listen (i.e., administrators specifically; 5 students), health needs (5), transportation needs (5) and family support (4).

Twelve students were unable to be placed in any of the above groups, again indicating the individualized nature of the causes and remedies of truancy. Responses from this category included:

- “There were no rules and city school wasn’t into attendance”
- “It was a family issue, so the school couldn’t help”
- “Nothing it was all on me”

The most frequent parent response was the need for school involvement and communication (16 respondents). Thus, there is quite a bit of difference between student and parent responses. Indeed, of the 19 sets of student/parents in the data, 11 provided different responses. Examples included:

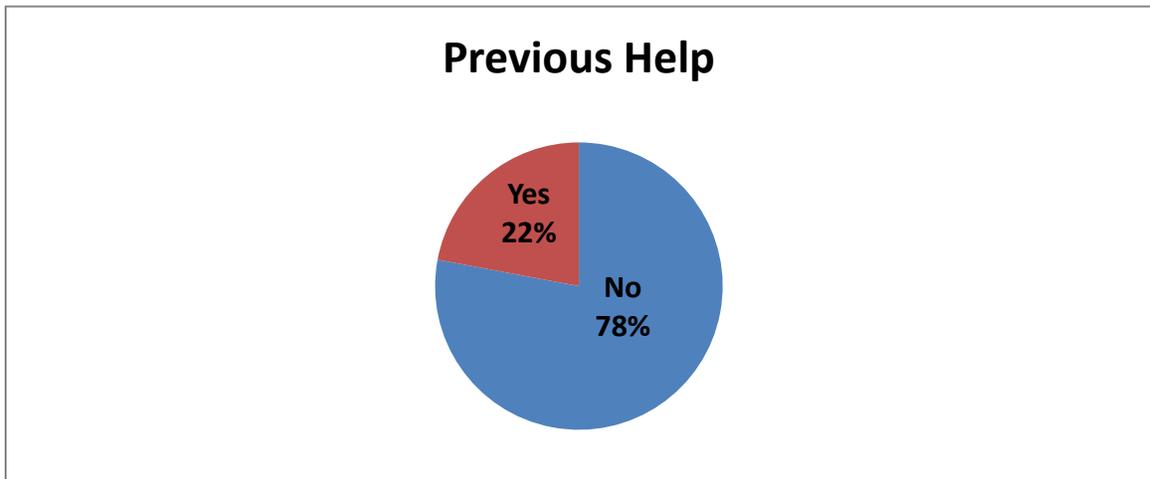
- “I wish WVHS would have put me in normal classes from the beginning and not special ed classes. They only review easy stuff” (student)
- “He needed to be held accountable by his middle school” (parent)

- “I needed to have teachers ask me why I was missing” (student)
- “I don’t really know” (parent)
- “More understanding with medical issues and more help with homework” (student)
- “The middle school helped and were kind to him” (parent)

It is important to acknowledge, however, that parents may have interpreted this question as asking what supports and needs they themselves (as parents) would find helpful. Several responses indicated that it would have been helpful if they were contacted earlier about their child’s attendance issues.

**Previous Help**

Students were asked if they had received any help from school individuals prior to their CTB experience. Overwhelmingly, students stated they had NOT received prior assistance (53 students). A similar breakdown was evident in the parent responses, as 26 of 32 parents identified no prior help. It should be noted that many students who take part in the WVCTB have transferred into the district from other districts, and this comment could refer to their experience in their previous school setting.



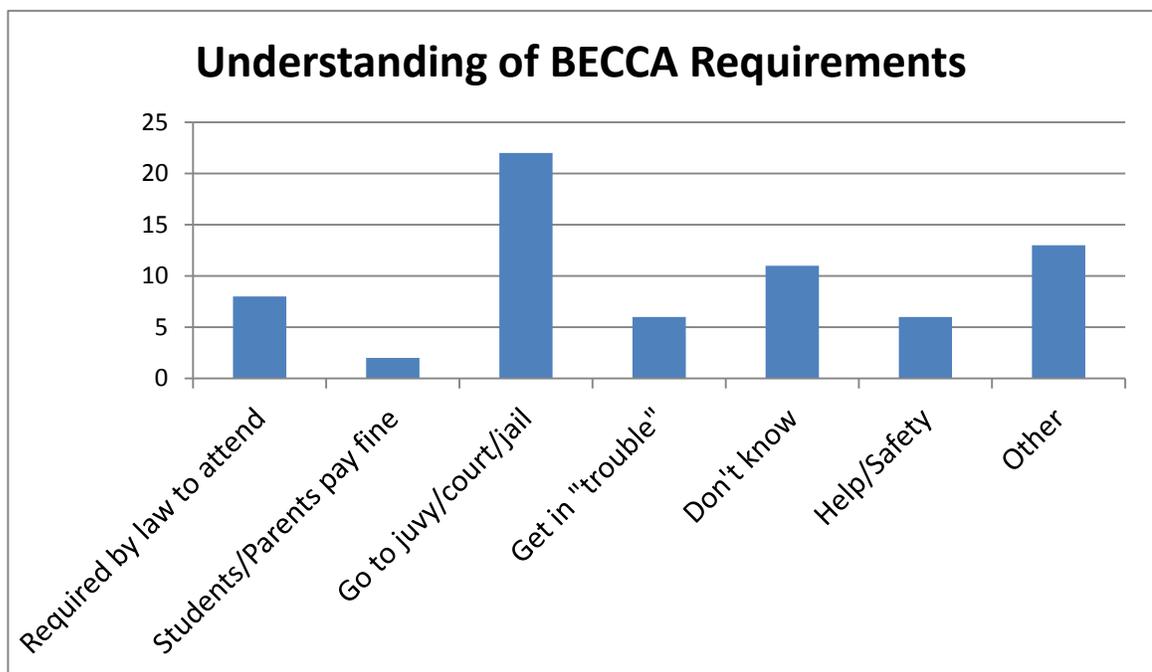
Responses in support of this contention included (“you” below refers to Martin):

- “No, it seems like nobody cared. You are the only one to talk to me.”
- “No, you are the only one that talked and still talks to me about my health and school”
- “No, I wished the school would have talked to me about truancy”
- “No, you're the first one to talk to me about grades and attendance”
- “No, my counselor only talks to me about grades”

## II. CTB PROCESS

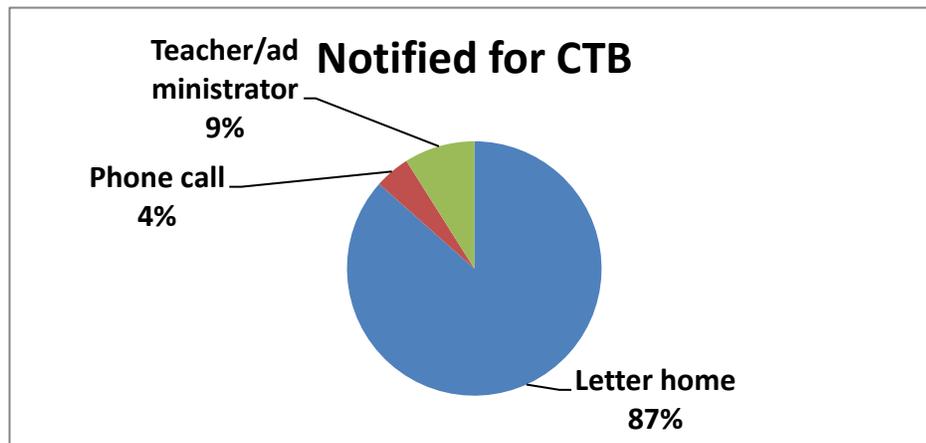
### Understanding of BECCA Bill

Most students were familiar with the BECCA Bill to some extent, and the most common response given was that you go to court and/or jail if you do not attend school (22 students). Eight students noted that they were required by law to attend school. Another six students identified BECCA Bill as intending to help or protect the safety of students. Despite this overall general knowledge of the bill, eleven students were unaware as to what it was and another six students gave the vague understanding that they would be in “trouble.” Finally, the rest of responses fell into an “other” category, which included students who simply stated that you need to go to school as well as those who offered their opinion of the usefulness of the bill (usually negative). Parent responses focused more on the law aspect of the bill (12) as compared to the consequences. Only four parents were unaware of the bill.



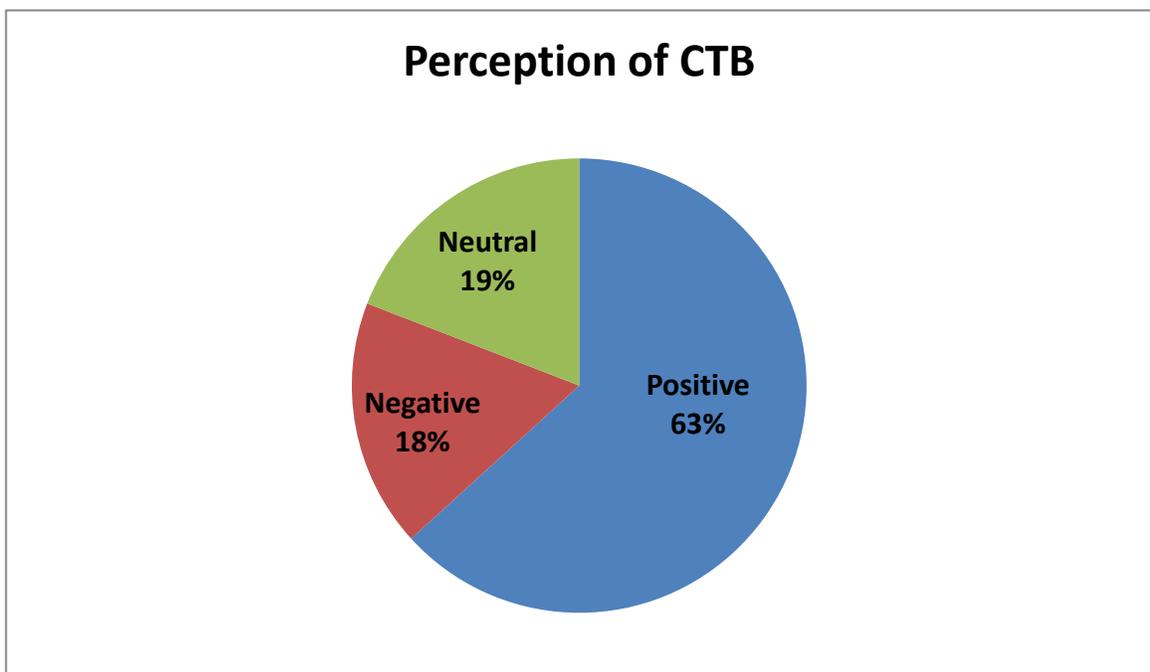
### Notified for CTB

The majority of students were notified by a letter home of their need to attend CTB (58 students). Another 6 students were told by a teacher or administrator. Thus, the beginning of the CTB process was largely an impersonal communication, and, as noted below, students were often unaware of the CTB being a response to missing school. Parent responses confirmed the usage of letters and some expressed dismay at this interpersonal process (e.g., “Letter in the mail only.”)



**Overall Perception of CTB Process**

Students were asked about their overall perceptions of the CTB process and responses were grouped into three overall categories.



The majority of students believed the process to be positive (43 students), with many stating that it was a better option than going to court. Responses in support of this included:

- “Good process. It made me feel like I disappointed my mom”
- “It opened my eyes. Good people”
- “I think it’s way better than going to court. TB is a nice warning. Good questions”
- “It was ok. It made missing school feel like a bad thing”

- “It made me feel like I was the center of attention in a good way”

Only 12 students found the process to be a negative experience. Responses included:

- “It was pointless. It went in one ear and out the other. I hate authority”
- “It was retarded. I’m not used to having people care about me”
- “It was stupid. I felt like I walked in and walked out”

Another 13 students had neutral responses, which included:

- “It was ok, but there needed to be people there that work at my school”
- “It was ok, but didn’t help much about school start time”
- “It was ok, but all they told me was to go to school”
- “It was ok, but I felt like I couldn’t talk”

Parents were also generally positive about the CTB process (22 out of 32 responses). Examples included:

- “It was good and directed the focus on my daughter”
- “It was good and got him going”
- “Worked great. I would rather explain myself to a group of caring people than a judge”

Only 8 parents provided negative responses, yet they were often strongly worded. Examples included:

- “The TB group needs to think about what is going on at home instead of scrutinizing”
- “It was wrong. I felt we were less. It was terrible.”
- “It was a huge waste of time. We didn’t need to be there”

Importantly, when examining the 19 sets of parents/students, there was no instance in which both student and parent felt the process was negative. Stated differently, at least a student or his/her parent believed the process to be positive in all cases in which both parent and their child were interviewed.

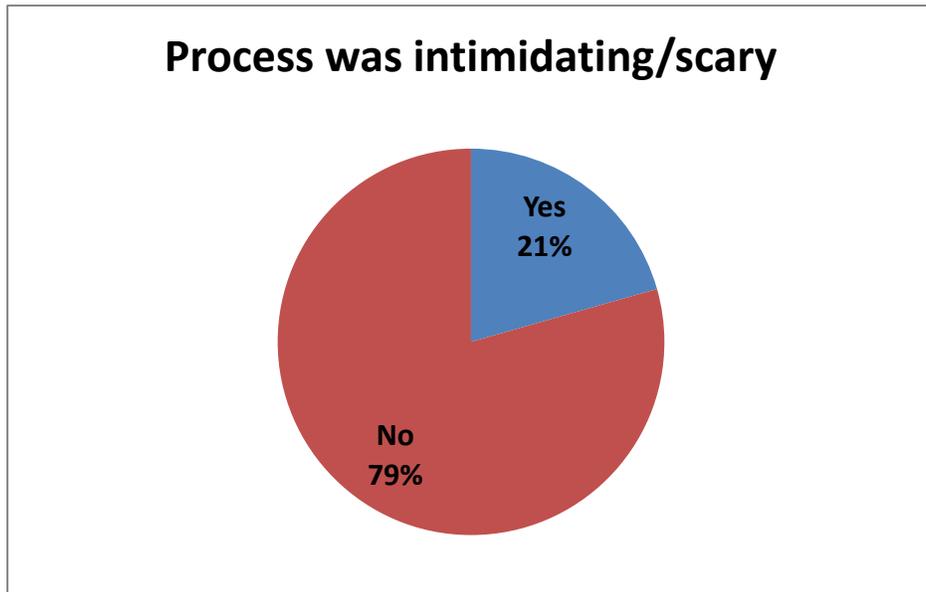
Another way of gauging student perception of the process is to determine whether they believed CTB to an intimidating experience.

One in five students (14) indicated that they felt intimidated, scared, or nervous. Responses in support of this included:

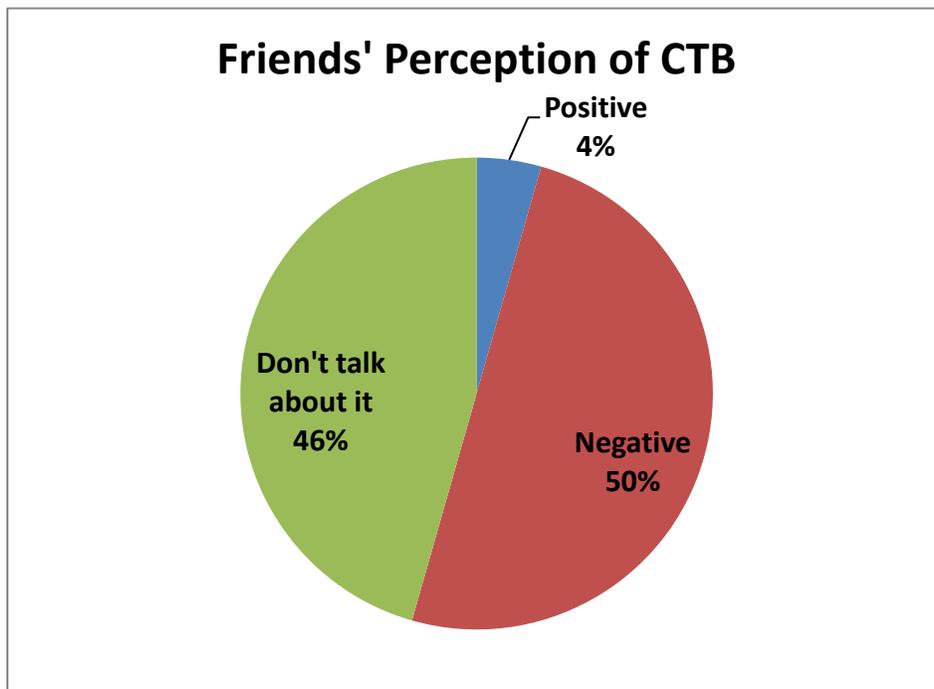
- “It felt intimidating because you are the center of attention. It was good except for the setup”
- “It seemed like a bit much, but I think it was designed to scare you”
- “It made me really nervous”

Five of thirty-two parents indicated they felt intimidated, scared, or nervous. Responses included:

- “Nerve wracking and kind of scary”
- “It was very intimidating to me and my family. It was like facing a jury. I felt domination”

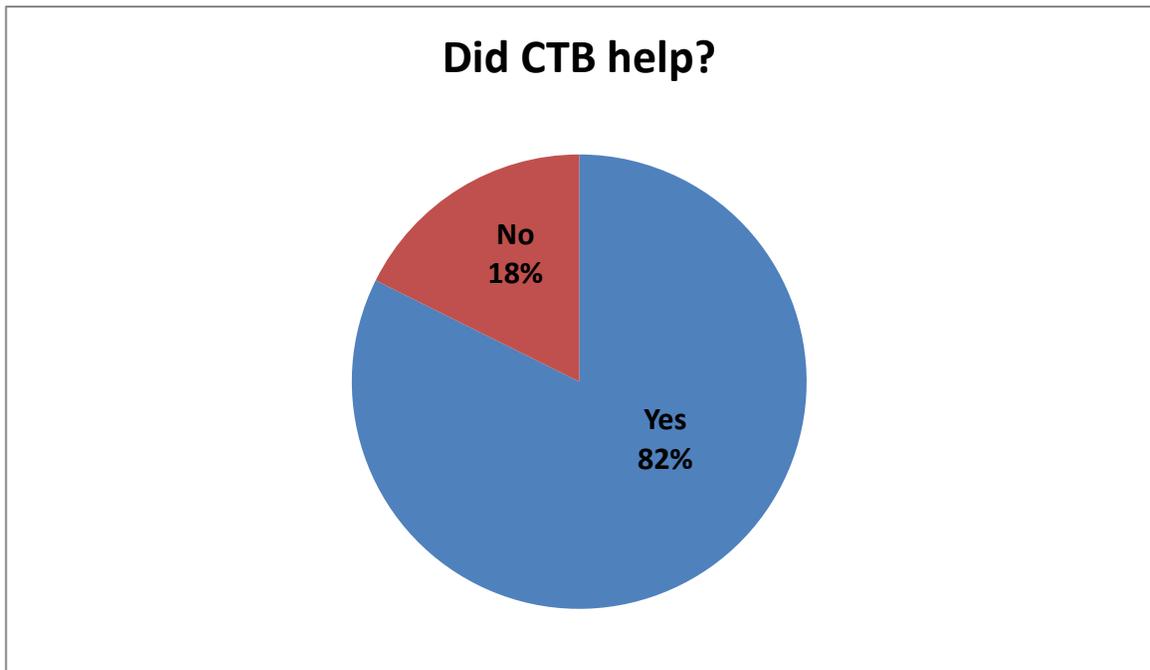


Finally, students were asked about the perceptions of the CTB that their friends held. In contrast to their own perceptions, the majority of students indicated that their friends thought poorly of the CTB or did not talk about it. Only 3 students stated that their friends had positive thoughts about the CTB. The most common response was that CTB was “stupid” and a waste of time.



## V. OUTCOMES

Two broad questions were asked of students in order to determine their perceptions of the overall *helpfulness* of the CTB process in addition to whether it could be improved further. First, students were overwhelmingly positive on the helpfulness of the CTB as fifty-six believed the process was beneficial.



Positive responses included (“you” below refers to Martin):

- “Yes, I am on track and you worked with me to help with school and now GED”
- “Yes, my mom reminds me about the consequences everyday”
- “Yes, it motivated me and I get to work with you”
- “Yes, the group motivated me and made me aware of all the issues. You also talked to me all the time.”
- “Yes, I am now at school. They gave me options with my schedule”

Negative responses included:

- “No, it felt like a slap on the hand”
- “No, it made me feel defensive”
- “No, the only help I received was when you gave me a tour of the other schools and help me move over”

Parents were equally positive about the helpfulness of the CTB process (26 out of 32 respondents). Positive responses included:

- “Yes, it helped 100 percent. It made us realize there was an issue”
- “Yes, I use it as a tool to motivate my son”
- “Yes, it helped turn my daughter around”

Negative responses (6) included:

- “No, not strict at all”
- “Not really, I had to miss work”

Second, students identified two clear themes for how the process could be improved. The first was better/earlier communication (36 students). This theme centered on the need for more involvement on the behalf of teachers as well as communication about the seriousness of truancy before reaching the CTB process. Comments included:

- “I should have been warned before having to go to TB and not just get a letter in the mail”
- “The school should have talked to you earlier. Nobody said anything. They need to notice”
- “I wish that my counselor [name removed] would have talked to me earlier. My counselor only cares about the good kids and not the ones with issues”
- “Teachers need to communicate more with me. Teachers are with us all the time, so they need to deal with our issues instead of vice principals who we don't really know”
- “I wish that somebody from the school would have talked to me before I had to go to Truancy Board”
- “Schools need to talk to us before they send us to TB. You should talk to kids way before they get to TB”

Another common theme was for the need of individual adjustments to schedules and routines (19 students). Responses illustrating this theme included:

- “I am impatient, so a different schedule would help. The school needs to talk to you more about what is going on”
- “School should start later and it feels like a waste of my time because I am late because of my walk”
- “The school should adjust kids schedule more and talk to us why we are skipping. Nobody and school cares”
- “I needed to get makeup work and teachers need to know that we have medical issues. I didn't want to be sick”
- “I wish the school would provide better transportation”

The bulk of parent responses (23 of 32) were focused on the need for earlier communication. Concerns included:

- “I had no idea that this was going on with (my child). More communication from school and staff.”
- “The school should contact families earlier. We need more Martin's who follow up with these kids.”
- “The Becca law stated that we have to have meetings with school. I never had a meeting with anyone from the school and was shocked when we had to go to TB.”
- “Need better counselors that communicate with parents. The school needs to meet the parents and child way earlier than the TB.”
- “More communication, definitely. My son needed intervention last year and the school didn't do anything. The school didn't do what they promised.”

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The responses from students and parents who have gone in front of the CTB allows for a unique opportunity to refine the process based on participant feedback. To that end, a few common themes throughout lend themselves toward recommendations for an improved CTB, particularly for school districts who may be considering implementing a board in the near future.

1. ***Pay special attention to transition periods.*** A large majority of students had attendance issues that started in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Indeed, the other categories that were created included at least 3 grade levels, yet the 9<sup>th</sup> grade group specifically had just that level and still wound up being the largest group. This relatively late onset of problem attendance behavior is likely created and exacerbated by difficulties in making the transition to high school. Some students may need more of a “bridge” from junior high into high school (the same could be said from the elementary school to junior high school transition). It is possible that relatively minor adjustments in this manner could avoid larger issues related to attendance and school performance later on.
2. ***Pay attention to student health.*** Several students identified a wide variety of health issues as leading to initial and current difficulties in attending school. It is important for schools to take these concerns seriously—as one student put it “I didn’t want to be sick.” Student health issues can be verified with health officials and often what may seem like other behavioral or motivational problems may be health-related. Additionally, several miscommunications between parents and schools over student health seem to have led to undocumented absences. If the students interviewed here are truthful about their ailments and their consequences, then they may be unfairly labeled as truant due to circumstances that may be beyond their control.
3. ***Communicate earlier about the consequences of truancy and the CTB process.*** A resounding number of students noted that they wished they had been contacted earlier about truancy before reaching the CTB. This concern was even more apparent among parents. It is possible that several students would have never appeared before the board if this was done, and valuable resources in the form of time and effort by CTB actors would be saved and devoted to the students requiring the most assistance.

Similarly, most students were aware of the BECCA Bill, but many had only a vague understanding of what it meant and some knew nothing about it at all. Accordingly, it would be important for schools to communicate the process to ALL students and parents, perhaps at the beginning of the school year. This should **not** be done in a threatening manner, but rather one that documents clearly what will happen if a student misses school. Further, a deeper understanding of the CTB and its purpose might lead to more favorable perceptions among students about its utility and fairness.

4. ***Understand the individualized nature of truancy.*** There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to reducing problem attendance behavior, and sometimes relatively small adjustments such as a change in schedule can fix the issue. Martin’s position allows for a more individualized approach through *Check and Connect* that identifies concerns that may be missed through the more formal approach of the CTB. Many students mentioned that he was the first to have worked with them and understood what was going on, and Martin was able to envision remedies such as a change in school when necessary. Thus, it is imperative that future CTBs create a position in which a specialist can connect with students and then connect them with the needed resources and options within the community.
  
5. ***Involve parents in the process as well as solutions.*** It is important to acknowledge that students and parents were not always on the same page for certain characteristics of truancy. In particular, divergent reasons were often given for why the student was missing school. This could potentially indicate a lack of communication between students and parents. Also, parents were more likely to identify a need of more general school involvement with students rather than recognize specific needs. Although it is clearly not the intention of the truancy board to take the place of effective parenting, it could plausibly save resources to serve as a mediator of sorts between parents and students. By involving both in the identification of the problem as well as the solution, it is likely that a better understanding of the causes of truancy will result and therefore future attendance problems could potentially be avoided.

## SECTION V

### Quantitative Analysis of Outcomes: Cross-District Comparisons of Truant Youth

We sought to obtain data relevant to evaluating the effect on school outcomes of the presence of the CTB in the West Valley School District. The difficulty of this endeavor lies in identifying a satisfactory comparison group against which to compare the outcomes of students who attended the WVSD. Toward that end, we worked with Dr. Tom George of AOC to obtain access to comparable data. Dr. George accessed data on students for whom a court petition had been filed due to truancy who attended WVSD and students who attended three other school districts in Spokane County which feature similar student populations. These data were privileged (restricted to use by AOC by agreement of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) such that we did not obtain raw data; the data were secured and analyzed by Dr. George working in collaboration with us; only the results of the analyses were shared with us.

The analysis carried out utilized samples of petitioned truants who attended as 9<sup>th</sup> graders either WVSD or one of three other comparison Spokane Co. school districts during the school years 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007. These years were chosen to allow longitudinal analyses for a four-year period in order to evaluate graduation outcomes. Also included in the analyses was a sample of children who attended the Contract-Based Education (CBE) school program during those same years. The data allowed for two distinct types of analyses; the first utilized complete data obtained from all three educational settings, and a second that involved matched comparisons of 344 students (172 matched pairs).

**Analysis 1.** The following table provides sample size data for each of the three groups used for the complete sample comparisons identified as Analysis 1.

Entering 9 <sup>th</sup> grade Cohort	WVSD (no CBE)	CBE	Combined Comparison Districts		
			District A	District B	District C
2004	239	107	175	na	416
2005	335	80	176	305	351
2006	269	136	171	307	375
	843	323	522	612	1,142

The table reveals that over the course of three years a total of 843 9<sup>th</sup> graders matriculated to WVSD, and 323 and 2276 9<sup>th</sup> graders matriculated to CBE and the three comparison districts, respectively.

The next table shows the number of students for whom a truancy petition was filed within 4 years of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade year.

<b>Students (from above) with Truancy Petitions during High School</b>					
<b>WVSD (no CBE)</b>		<b>CBE</b>		<b>Comparison Districts (combined)</b>	
<b>Truants</b>	<b>Non-truants</b>	<b>Truants</b>	<b>Non-truants</b>	<b>Truants</b>	<b>Non-truants</b>
239	604	182	141	200	2,076

The table reveals that within WVSD, 28% (239/843) of students were served with a truancy petition during their first 4 years of High School as compared to 56% (182/323) of CBE students and 9% (200/2276) of comparison district students. These differences are dramatic, and reflect important procedural and population differences that exist across these educational settings. Before discussing those differences, however, it is valuable to first present a third table that reports on student characteristics for the three populations. These data are organized according to truants and non-truants for each of the three educational settings.

	<b>WVSD</b>		<b>CBE</b>		<b>Comp Dist</b>	
<b>Student Characteristics:</b>	Truants	Non-truants	Truants	Non-truants	Truants	Non-truants
Gender (% female):	49%	49%	48%	47%	38%	47%
Race (% minority):	16%	11%	12%	13%	11%	10%
Over age for grade:	36%	16%	86%	81%	25%	17%
Grade 9 Credits:	4.4	5.9	1.9	2.7	4.2	5.6
Age at truancy:	15.8	--	15.7	--	16.0	--
Prior Truancy (before age 15)	22%	2%	33%	13%	18%	1%
Prior Offense (before age 15)	22%	5%	35%	21%	13%	4%
Dropout/Unknown	28%	5%	59%	43%	43%	7%
Transfer Out	20%	12%	15%	19%	30%	18%
Grad/GED	52%	83%	26%	35%	27%	75%

The table provides a breakdown for each educational setting of truants and non-truants in terms of gender, race, percent over-age for grade, credits at Grade 9, age at truancy, truancy prior to age 15, offense prior to age 15, and in terms of *educational outcome*—which involved categorizing all students as one of the following: dropout/unknown, transfer out of district, and graduated/GED completion. The table reveals similarities across the three settings with respect to gender, race, and age at truancy. Differences emerge for CBE compared to WVSD and comparison districts across the three settings with respect to percent over-age, Grade 9 credits, truancy prior to age 15, and offense prior to age 15. That is, CBE students are more likely to be over-age, have fewer credits, and have higher rates of truancy and offense prior to age 15. These differences reflect the fact that children with early legal problems and who lag behind with respect to school completion are more likely to be referred out of conventional school settings to CBE. More importantly for the present report, the WVSD and comparison district students are quite similar to one another on gender, race, overage for grade, grade 9 credits, age at truancy, prior truancy, and prior offense.

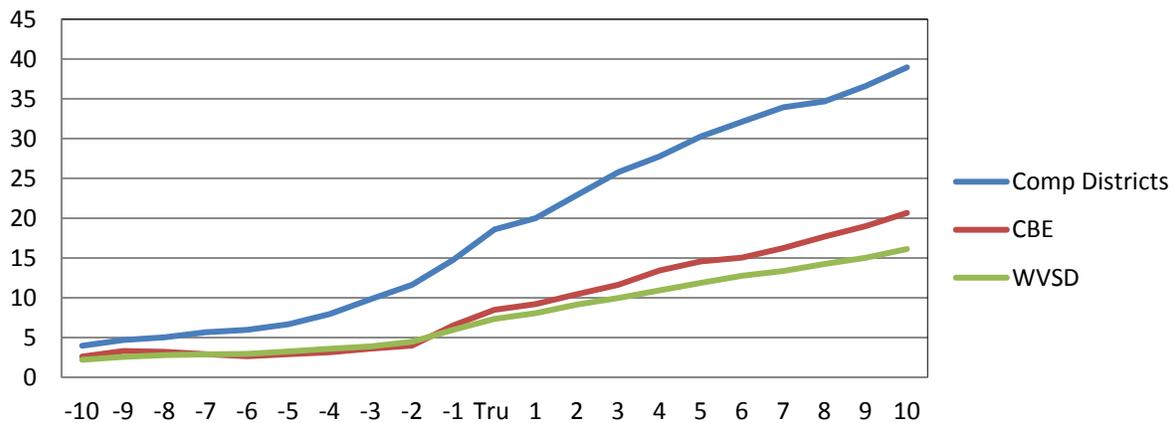
The data of greatest concern for the present study have to do with educational outcome. For purposes of comparison, the data presented in the last panel in the table above are re-organized below so that one can compare the different results across the three educational settings.

	<b>Dropout/Unknown</b>	<b>Transfer Out</b>	<b>Grad/GED</b>
<b>Comp Districts</b>	43%	30%	27%
<b>CBE</b>	59%	15%	26%
<b>WVSD</b>	28%	20%	52%

A chi square statistical analysis was performed to determine the extent to which the outcome distributions differed across groups. The results revealed significant statistical differences with respect to the distribution of outcomes for the three educational settings (chi square (4) = 50.3,  $p < .001$ ). The percentages reveal that the WVSD children had lower dropout rates and also higher graduation rates than did students from the other two educational settings. Dropping the CBE cases from the analysis, a comparison of the WVSD and comparison districts also yielded significant results (chi square (2) = 20.8,  $p < .001$ ).

Although the results of the chi square analyses are supportive of positive outcomes for WVSD, there is at least one sample difference between the WVSD truants and the comparison district truants that may in fact serve as a confound with respect to making sense of the outcome differences. The sample difference involves the average number of unexcused absences that each of these groups have accumulated. These differences are illustrated in the figure below.

## Cumulative Unexcused Absences by Months before and after Truancy Petition



The figure shows the slope of the accumulation of unexcused absences for all three groups. The term “Tru” in the graph represents the point at which a truancy petition filing occurred. Negative numbers on the x-axis reflect months prior to filing, while positive numbers on the x-axis reflect months post filing. The average number of unexcused absences at the time of filing differs for the groups, with the averages at time of filing being 19 for comparison district students, 8 for CBE students, and 7 for WVSD students. These mean differences reflect procedural differences in how truancy filings are conducted across the three educational settings. Consistent with the standard stated in the Becca Statute, WVSD utilizes 5 unexcused absences as the benchmark for filing. The fact that an average of 7 unexcused absences occurs probably reflects the lag time between beginning the process of filing a truancy petition and the time at which it is officially registered. CBE apparently has a similar process. The other districts, in contrast, are more lenient with respect to when they file truancy petitions with the Juvenile Court. That is to say, a higher number of unexcused absences are accumulated by these students prior to the filing of a truancy petition by the school district.

One ramification of these procedural differences is that 28% of WVSD students had truancy petitions filed, compared to only 9% of comparison school district students. How does this difference affect our analyses? The primary issue has to do with how it affects the two samples. Since WVSD files on many more youth, it is likely that its sample of petitioned youth is less at-risk, on average, than is the sample of youth from the comparison districts. This is very important because it constitutes an alternative explanation for why the rates of graduation are higher, and rates of dropout are lower, for WVSD truants than comparison school district truants. That is to say, one’s confidence that the differences in graduation rates (and dropout rates) are due to effective interventions for truant youth at WVSD—including the effectiveness of CTB policies—is reduced by the possibility that these rates reflect pre-existing sample differences in which the WVSD sample is simply more high functioning and therefore at less risk of dropping out.

**Analysis 2.** In an attempt to overcome this problem, Dr. George employed a *sample matching* procedure. That procedure sought to build two samples of children who were matched on gender, race, language, over age for grade, most recent credits, and unexcused absences at time of truancy. The procedure yielded 172 non-CBE students from the comparison districts and 136 non-CBE students from the WVSD. Comparisons across these two groups represented a better evaluation of outcome differences across the two educational settings (WVSD versus comparison school districts) than the overall sample because they control for differences in the number of unexcused absences at time-of-petition-filing observed across the educational settings.

The variable of interest in this analysis concerns the percentage of students in each educational setting whose status after four years included “dropout/unknown,” “transferred out of district,” and “graduated or obtained a GED.” The percentage of students in each category for both WVSD and the comparison districts is presented in the table below.

	<b>Dropout/Unknown</b>	<b>Transfer Out</b>	<b>Grad/GED</b>
<b>Comp Districts</b>	29%	36%	35%
<b>WVSD</b>	33%	23%	44%

The results of a test to evaluate differences in the distribution of outcomes revealed a statistical trend suggesting that the two groups differed with respect to outcomes (chi square (2) = 5.6,  $p < .10$ ). These findings are difficult to interpret because it is unclear where, among the three categories, the differences lie. It makes sense, therefore, to collapse the three outcomes down to two, allowing for more easily interpretable results. To accomplish this, the next two analyses involve comparing the educational settings with respect to (1) dropout/unknown versus Graduated/GED, and (2) dropout/unknown and transfer out combined versus Graduated/GED.

	<b>Dropout/Unknown</b>	<b>Grad/GED</b>
<b>Comp Districts</b>	46%	54%
<b>WVSD</b>	43%	57%

The above table illustrates the percentages for the two settings of truant students who subsequently are identified as “dropout/unknown” and “Graduated/GED.” Students in both settings who “transfer out” were excluded from these analyses. Therefore, the total sample for this analysis consisted of  $n = 250$ .

The table above suggests that the two groups are very similar with respect to these two school outcomes. Consistent with this, the results of a distribution analysis reveals no differences across the groups (chi square (1) = 0.12, ns). Therefore, it can be concluded that there are no differences across the two settings with regard to what percentage of students for whom a truancy petition was filed are subsequently identified as either dropout/unknown or Graduate/GED.

Although the above-mentioned results reveal no differences across the groups, they were conducted without a large proportion of the sample. Excluded were those students who transferred out of district. Although not as negative of an outcome as dropout/unknown, transferring out of district can certainly be considered a negative outcome—especially for at-risk students. This point is supported by the fact that children who experience more family and school transitions are at higher risk for criminality than those who do not (Krohn, Hall, & Lizotte, 2009; Patterson, 1996). It is also true that one method by which school districts can relieve themselves of the burden of these students is to facilitate their transfer out of district. Indeed, one step toward a policy of responsibility to truant children must involve trying to keep them in the school they are currently attending, thereby reducing problems associated with transitions (Milliken, 2007). Therefore, one might identify as a negative outcome the extent to which children are transferred out of district.

With these considerations in mind, we grouped the students into two categories, one of which included “Graduated/GED” and the other of which combined “dropout/unknown” with “transferred out.” The percentages of children across the two school settings who fell into these groups is presented in the next table.

	Dropout/Unknown Transfer Out	Grad/GED
Comp Districts	65%	35%
WVSD	56%	44%

We conducted distributional analyses based on this grouping and found a significant trend in which students attending WVSD were more likely than student in the comparison districts to graduate or obtain a GED compared to dropping out of school or transferring out of district (chi square (1) = 2.72,  $p < .10$ ). These results provide support for better outcomes for truant youth attending WVSD compared to those who attended comparison districts. The difference involves the likelihood of a student graduating or obtaining a GED rather than dropping out of school or transferring out of district. This result is consistent with the goals of the WVCTB. They are seeking to retain students with the hope that remaining in school increases the chances of subsequent graduation.

**Shortcomings of the present analyses.** There are at least two primary shortcomings of the present studies that must be noted. First, neither study involved random assignment to groups, which means they are subject to unidentified selection effects. For instance, it may be that WVSD students differ from those attending other districts in unidentified ways of relevance to the comparison of outcomes. Only random assignment could completely control for that possibility. Analysis 2 did seek to control for this problem via a matching procedure, which does reduce the likelihood of this type of selection effect contamination to a considerable degree.

A second shortcoming of the present study is that it does not directly test the WVCTB. While the students selected attended WVSD, they were not chosen based on CTB attendance. We cannot say with certainty that the WVSD students classified as truant actually went before the Community Truancy Board. Given what we know of the district policies during the years of the study, we believe strongly that virtually all students identified as having a truancy petition filed would have had an appointment with the Board; however, we do not have definitive

evidence that they met with the Board. Consequently, it is more accurate to characterize our analysis as investigating the outcomes associated with the overall policies of the WVSD rather than being specifically an investigation of the effectiveness of the WVCTB.

**Study Conclusions.** The results of both analyses are **positive** with respect to the policies of the WVSD, and by extension the WVCTB. The first study illustrated that compared to students identified as truant and attending CBE or comparison districts, truant students attending WVSD had a higher rate of graduating or obtaining a GED, and correspondingly lower dropout and transfer rates. Although promising, conclusions that can be drawn from these data are tempered by the possibility of subject selection effects. Specifically, given different procedures for filing truancy petitions, it may be the case that the WVSD sample was, on average, less at-risk for school failure. As noted above, the comparison group was restricted to students who, on average, had a higher number of unexcused absences, a trait which is predictive of school failure.

Given this limitation of cross-district comparison, Analysis 2 involved identifying samples of students across the districts that were **matched** on relevant variables including unexcused absences. The results of chi square analyses carried out revealed that when comparing students who graduated or obtained a GED to those who dropped out or became status unknown, WVSD students were no different than those who attended comparison districts. However, WVSD students were more likely to graduate or obtain a GED rather than drop out of school or transfer out of district. That is to say, when one identifies keeping youth in the district as a positive outcome, noteworthy differences emerge across the settings with respect to school outcomes.

In evaluating the importance of these results, it is critical to note that these data were obtained from 2004-2007, **prior to** the full development of the WVCTB model. The WVCTB now incorporates more community-based resources and exhibits stronger court-school connections that are recognized by court and school personnel alike as having improved efforts at the successful re-engagement of truant students. For a more detailed review of these model improvements and their perceived benefits, see the sections of this report having to do with school and court personnel interviews and focus groups. In addition, it is this new, more comprehensive model—featuring a strengthened court-school connection—that will be made available via the CTB Replication Tool Kit being developed by the Spokane County Models for Change team.

Given these improvements, we believe that the effectiveness of the current program is likely *underestimated* by the results reported above. Although not a perfect reflection of the impact of current practices, the present results are relevant and encouraging with respect to an *incremental* replication of the WVCTB. This is important because it may not be possible for a school district to implement all components of the WVCTB at once. Instead, it may be necessary to begin with the community-school connections that appear in the form of convening and having students appear before a Board. This is basically the intervention that was being implemented at WVSD during the years relevant to the analyses reported here (2004-2007). The adoption of the stronger school-court connections may need to be a “phase two” component of any replication attempts. To the extent that this 2-phase model is a more realistic implementation of the CTB procedures, the present results are *most encouraging*. That is to say, they represent a test of a more modest CTB program and reveal positive educational

outcomes. These include lower negative outcomes, defined as dropout and out-of-district transfers, relative to positive outcomes that include higher graduation and GED attainment levels.

As a final word with respect to the present results, it is worth emphasizing the importance of reducing not only drop-out rates, but also out-of-district transfers. It is likely that the first indicator of success of any efforts by school districts to improve the educational outcomes of truant youth will take the form of reducing geographical instability for those students. Truant youth too often fall between the cracks. Transfers across schools represent a form of instability, and a risk factor for failure (Krohn, Hall, & Lizotte, 2009; Patterson, 1996). Of course, there will always be transfers given that families move. However, to the extent that a district reduces the extent to which students leave that school, they increase the likelihood that positive school attachments are formed. The formation of such attachments is thought to be crucial for reducing truancy and school avoidance. In light of these observations, we suggest that reducing transfers from one school to another—both within and across districts—be identified as an important goal and a measured outcome variable for any district that implements a CTB or any other intervention aimed at reducing truancy.

## SECTION VI

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The West Valley School District Community Truancy Board (WVCTB) is a school-based process established during the 1996-1997 school year. Since 2007 it has operated in collaboration with the Spokane County Juvenile Court, seeking to address the problem of truancy by engaging truant youth and their families in a restorative justice-oriented setting wherein resources are brought to bear on school attendance and performance problems of truant youth. The goal of the intervention is successful school re-engagement and renewed progress toward school completion. Despite its widespread reputation for innovativeness and effectiveness, no systematic assessment exists evaluating the processes and outcomes of the WVCTB. This report was commissioned to provide such an assessment. In addition, the report was written to support the Spokane County *Models for Change* team in the development of a replication tool kit to facilitate the development of effective Community Truancy Boards in other Spokane County school districts and throughout Washington State.

In the tradition of systematic case study research (George and Bennett, 2005), this report provides a detailed accounting of procedures and outcomes of data collection efforts that utilized a variety of sources and methodologies. In this concluding section we provide a short summary of the results of those efforts. This summary mirrors the organization of the overall report such that we touch upon the following components: (a) interviews with key actors who have participated in the development and/or functioning of the WVCTB, (b) analysis of focus group sessions that involved those key actors, (c) interviews of CTB-involved students and parents, and (d) quantitative analysis of outcomes based on data provided by the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts. Following these brief summaries of the multiple streams of evidence gathered in the case study, we draw conclusions and make recommendations for future directions with respect to addressing the problem of truancy.

#### Summary of Findings

**Interviews with key actors:** Interviews were completed with over 50 individuals who had some role to play in the development and functioning of the WVCTB. These key actors interviewed included school, court, and community-based organization personnel. The interview sessions ranging from 30 minutes to more than an hour allowed for the identification of the component processes that comprise the WVCTB. These processes include how the Board works in terms of recruiting and convening Board members, identifying and calling before the Board students and parents of students who meet criteria for the filing of truancy petitions, and informing process participants about the shared philosophy of Board members and school personnel who work to sustain it. The interviews reveal a strong sense that the Board serves an important purpose, with Board members identifying it as having a positive impact on the lives of many truant youth. Interviews revealed that the effectiveness of the Board derives in good part from the commitment of community members who care about youth and seek to help them find alternatives to traditional schooling and connect with opportunities for meaningful and gainful community engagement. The Board is sustainable to the extent that community members are identified and recruited who implement in their engagement with truant youth the principles of

restorative justice (Bazemore and Schiff, 2001; Van Ness and Strong, 2006) and personal responsibility and who seek to identify and generate novel and supportive school and community settings that allow youth to re-engage with school in realistic and valuable ways.

**Focus group analysis:** The results of the focus groups mirrored, in many ways, the results of the individual interviews. However, the value of the focus groups lies in the process comments and viewpoints regarding the role served by the many individuals who make up the truancy board and who work to sustain it over time. Highlights of the conversations include a strong sense that the CTB galvanizes a community around the issue of truancy, enabling an ongoing forum that reduces the likelihood that the problems facing truant youth are ignored (See Milliken, 2007). The focus groups also identified many sources of evidence that the effectiveness of the WVCTB was not a phenomenon dominated by unique personalities or extraordinary people; rather, it involves ordinary individuals who are notable for their commitment to community and to youth. The focus group sessions provided support for the notion that a well run and successful CTB could be implemented in districts other than West Valley with the success of those efforts relying heavily on generating novel school and community solutions for students for whom a traditional school experience has failed. According to focus group transcripts, generating these environments and channeling students to them in effective ways is facilitated by formal and active interactions between schools and courts. A key breakthrough for the WVCTB involved the development of a model in which a court officer was located in the schools, whose job it was to work with truant youth to formulate a successful formula for school re-engagement. Focus group transcripts reveal that identifying ways to fund this court-school collaboration should be a high priority for school districts seeking to reduce truancy. (See discussion of such collaboration in Smink and Schargel, 2004:65-78.)

**Interviews with CTB-involved students and parents:** Sixty-eight students and 32 parents who presented before the WVCTB were queried for their assessment of truancy and their experience with the community truancy board. Findings from an analysis of their responses indicate that causes of truancy are highly varied and rather specific to individual life circumstances. Despite this variability of problems leading to truancy, a majority of respondents indicated that relatively minor changes and earlier communication could potentially have avoided the student reaching the CTB. With respect to opinions about the CTB process, the students generally view the CTB positively. However, while supportive in an overall sense they are nearly uniform in their call for *earlier communication* about the truancy process as well as the need for more care to be taken to meet their individual needs. One means of earlier communication involves stricter adherence to the BECCA Law's insistence that a truancy petition be filed after 5 unexcused absences, as opposed to waiting until children accumulate more than that number. In addition, recommendations from students and parents include recognizing the importance of transitional periods and health issues, communicating earlier about the consequences of truancy and the CTB process, and understanding the individualized nature of truancy. (See Peacock and Collett, 2010:145-163 for a review of research literature relied upon to frame this aspect of the study.)

**Quantitative analysis of outcomes:** Linked school and juvenile court data obtained by the Administrative Office of the Courts were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the WVCTB with regard to school completion outcomes. These data included information on educational

outcomes of students who matriculated to 9<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07 school years. Those students were identified as having had a truancy petition filed in their names, and attending either West Valley School District, a comparison Spokane County district, or Contract-Based Education (CBE). The data gathered for analysis were de-identified and allowed for two distinct types of analyses; the first analysis utilized complete data obtained from all three educational settings, and a second analysis involved matched comparisons of 344 students (172 matched pairs). (See Rathvon, 2008 for similar types of analyses of school outcomes.)

The results of both analyses are **positive** with respect to the policies of the WVSD, and by extension the WVCTB. The first study illustrated that compared to students identified as truant and attending CBE or comparison districts, truant students attending WVSD had a higher rate of graduating or obtaining a GED and correspondingly lower dropout and transfer rates. The second study controlled for the possibility that the groups differed in terms of their at-risk status due to the fact that petitioned students at WVSD had, on average, fewer unexcused absences than did the students from the comparison schools. Analyses of a matched control group study revealed that WVSD students had higher graduation/GED rates relative to dropout and transfer-out-of-district outcomes compared to students from comparison districts. These results support the CTB-based truancy program operative at WVSD during the years represented by the study. The fact that the CTB-based program has been improved in important ways beginning in 2008-2009 leads us to believe that the outcomes for the program would at present be even more impressive. Of course, this hypothesis has yet to be tested.

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

We conclude, based on the above information, that the concept of a community truancy board as implemented by the WVSD is an effective and replicable intervention for truancy. We recommend therefore, that attempts be made to replicate the WVCTB in other districts. These efforts should involve partnering with WVSD and Spokane County Juvenile Court personnel in order to put into practice the policies and procedures that characterize the WVCTB. These will soon be codified in a toolkit that is under development by the Spokane County *Models for Change* team. We recommend that school districts that replicate the WVCTB take steps to evaluate the effectiveness of those replication efforts. Such an evaluation would ideally identify the extent to which the policies and procedures documented in the toolkit can be effectively implemented at other sites, and establish a realistic timeline for their implementation. In addition, the evaluation should also seek to measure changes in unexcused absences, transfers, and school outcomes that may or may not result from the implementation of this intervention.

## SECTION VII

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Transcripts of Focus Group Panels**

- **Group 1, pp. 71-99**
- **Group 2, pp. 100-121**
- **Group 3, pp. 122-149**

## Appendix A

### Transcripts of Focus Group Panels

**Focus Group A from 8:00-10:00 am:** Superintendent, Traditional High School Assistant Principal, Principal of Alternative High School, Assistant Principal of a Middle School, Principal of an Elementary School, Prosecuting Attorney, Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance, and District Drug Counselor

**Nick:** Okay, there are two people still on their way but I want to introduce some staff to you and give you some background on what this phase of our study is about. As you know we have interviewed all of you and each of you has agreed to come. It appears that nothing we asked you in your interview was enough to scare you off because everybody volunteered to be available for focus groups. I have been doing this kind of work for 30 years and I have never had that type of engagement in a process, and I am very pleased to see that. My name is Nick Lovrich and I have been at WSU for the past 34 years serving as the Director of the Division of Governmental Studies and Services. The Division of Governmental Studies and Services is a “research partner” for the Spokane County Juvenile Court, and for the Models for Change project.

So, we are here today to explore in an objective, open forum way if the West Valley Truancy Board is really as good as it is cracked up to be. People associated with it tend to feel good about it, true enough, but the documentation is really lacking in what is taking place here and why does it work. Of course, one of the best sources of information on these questions is people that have direct and lasting experience with it. So, we want to try to learn from your experience. You should know that the concept of a community truancy board is found in statute in the state of Washington; it is a recommended practice for addressing truancy and dropout issues. Well, we usually do legislation **after** a documented success, so in this case we are going back retrospectively to 1997 and going up to the present to document how it started and how it has worked and changed over the years. Since the concept is recommended for school districts that have a truancy problem, what lessons should they learn from your experience?

These lessons and insights are what we tried to capture in our interviews with you. In the interviews we saw that there were some differences of opinion, and some issues concerning how it should work in practice. Conceptually everyone agrees what the process is about, but in fact there are differences of opinion on how to run it and make it successful. So what we are trying to capture in this setting is—as you discuss these questions—how does your listening to someone else’s point of view simulate your thinking so we can capture the arguments that underlie varying viewpoints. Someone replicating the process in a different school district might say the circumstances in our place are different, our kids are different, our teachers are different, and our parents are different. One of the questions we will address is precisely this one—should other school districts endeavor to replicate the community truancy board process given inevitable differences in their circumstances?

So, that is what we are trying to do today—to get a sustained discussion going with everyone having an equal chance of participating. No one needs my permission or Nikki’s permission to speak. This is *a conversation*, and our job is to facilitate it rather than guide it. We have five particular topics that we want to talk about, and that list is on the material sent to you prior to our session.

Now, allow me to introduce my associates. Again, I’m Nick Lovrich and I am the old professor and quite forgetful, so when I screw up I need to have people fix it for me. My reliable and energetic associate Paul Strand is an Associate Professor of Psychology. Paul is the principal investigator on the project and he will correct me (always tactfully) when I make a mistake. Paul and I are both absent-minded professors and make occasional mistakes, so we need to have someone who is well organized and experienced in focus group work... and that is Dr. Charles Johnson. Many of you met Charles during your interviews; he is a recent PhD in Criminal Justice and is heading out for his first academic job at the University of Maine at Presque Isle mid-summer. He will be packing up his family and moving across the country shortly after our work here today. In addition, we have two students in the graduate program in Criminal Justice at WSU Spokane—the first is Nikki Skaggs who is sitting at the table being the recorder for this session to make sure we get everything on the tape, and the second is Maureen Erickson who is sitting here doing process observation.

The process observation people in focus groups are very important. We will have a transcription of what is said and that is really good, but the non-verbal cues and reactions won’t be present in the transcription. So, when someone is making a comment and all the heads are going like this (head motions of approval or disapproval) that doesn’t show up in the transcript unless someone is keeping track of things like that. When we prepare the record of the focus group we want to have the two kinds of evidence on record—that is, the things that were said and the things that were displayed in actions and non-verbal gestures. As process observers we are looking most closely for signs of consensus and disagreement.

So, as for the ground rules of our focus group session, they are as follows. Because it is nearly impossible for the transcriber to transcribe more than one person at a time, please try to avoid talking when others are speaking. For the transcriber it would be most helpful if you say your name [such as “this is George and my comments are” ... “this is Melvin speaking...”]. We are not going to share the names of participants with anybody. That information will be taken out of the transcription when it is done, but we do ask that you identify yourself so the transcriber can keep track of who is talking. We also might need to say “Sam, we’ve heard enough from you and we want to hear from Roberta who has been rather quiet.” As noted, no one needs permission to speak; this is a conversation and we are going to keep the conversation going. We have only two hours, and there are five particular topics we want to talk about. These topics relate to some tough issues we saw featured in the interviews where people had thought about them for a while and took us up on the opportunity of participating in a focus group session.

Someone walked in room.

**Nick:** This is our Traditional High School Assistant Principal?

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** Yes.

**Nick:** I will go through a very brief introduction; we are the WSU people working with Courtney Meador to document the community truancy board process for the Spokane County Juvenile Court and the MacArthur Foundation. Charles Johnson, Maureen Erickson and Nikki Skaggs and Prof. Paul Strand will try to catch up the Superintendent when she gets here.

The topics that came up in the interviews that are really important ones for replication will be our focus of attention today. If you were going to establish this process in another school district setting what are the things those who have the most experience with the process see as the most important questions to work out in the process of replication elsewhere. What is your reasoning for having the process be light (or heavy) on accountability, emphasize or reduce the court-like setting of board hearings? These issues will be the really tough ones for the school districts that try to replicate the community truancy board process.

We know what will happen with the report that emerges from the interviews and these focus groups. It will be widely read in Washington, and—thanks to the MacArthur Foundation—it will likely be read in other states where the foundation is engaged in important efforts to reduce truancy. So, it is really important that we get the benefit of your experience. In addition, you need to be advised that at the end of the process we have a question that deals with Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's position—so we are going to have the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist leave because we don't want you to be intimidated by his imposing presence. That position is a very important addition to the community truancy board process that we want to be able to talk about, but we need the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's input on all the other questions as well. So, by prior arrangement the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is going to stay until we get to the fifth question, and then we are going to talk about Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist behind his back!

Okay, given the limited time we have available I guess we will start without the Superintendent. Normally we don't wait for people. We will catch her up as best we can.

The first issue is the following: The community truancy board is at its foundation a restorative justice kind of approach which brings together people from the community to help with a shared problem. As such, it has a problem-solving foundation. However, the BECCA bill is about accountability and the need to have school avoiding kids be accountable for their behavior and change that behavior. How important is that accountability aspect compared to solving the problem that might lie behind kids' failure to attend school on a regular basis? When we interviewed you we asked you to characterize the process, and some of you talked about this as an accountability process while others talked about it being principally a problem solving process of getting at the reasons why there are barriers to attendance. So, let's start with Assistant Principal of a Middle School. *How do you feel about the board's composition and the people's feelings about accountability vs. problem solving as the dimensions as to what is going on during that board process.*

**Assistant Principal of a Middle School:** I chaired the board when I was the principal for a few years. My president of the board was Dale McDaniel who at that time I think was a principal of an elementary school, and he is now superintendent somewhere in the Onalaska school district on the west side. He is the one who fathered our West Valley Community Truancy Board. He was my mentor when I assumed the chairmanship at that time. We had the Coordinator of the Community Truancy Board on board then...

**Nick:** ...was this 1997 then?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I think 1996, actually.

**Assistant Principal of a Middle School:** ...and we had community members on the board. In our school district we do have Spokane Valley High School (alternative school), contract based education, so we have a large amount of kiddos. We had a lot of kids that were not from the West Valley school district. And so a lot of those kids—a lot of the issues that they have, the reason they are at a contract based education or Spokane Valley High School is they were not successful in a traditional setting and they had attendance issues. A lot of them did. They were not successful at a traditional West Valley High School, East Valley High School, or other traditional high school setting—so the alternative was a good fit for them. If they had attendance issues at that time, then they would go to CBE. At that time contract based education, when I was a principal there, was more of a student coming in once or twice a week, but now that has changed and metamorphosed over the years under the Principal of Alternative High School's leadership there. But when I chaired the truancy board for West Valley, we got a lot of kids that were at CBE that just fell out of the other side of the world and were not coming to school any more. We did a lot of good things. When you get parents and guardians in with those students that have attendance issues you find out what is going on, what is making the student not be successful, not wanting to go to school. What is going on in his or her life. Is it a drug issue or something like that? Whatever it may be in the home or among the student's friends is uncovered, things like that causing them to not go to school. We did some good work, I mean we got to the bottom of the things that were hindering them from going to school. And so we had some emotional times where parents and kids would come in and they actually found out things about their own kids and why they were not going to school. So when I look back at when I chaired the truancy board I look at that as something that was one of the boards that was very positive and proactive and doing good things for kids. Things kind of have changed a little bit, both pro and con, I think. One thing now, we don't have a set administrator or person who is on point outside of the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, which thank God she is there every week to show that continuity and stuff. And then we also have some other folks that come every week too, that are on board with the process. When I look back, not to say geez I was responsible for all that, but rather WE just—again I emphasis the word “WE”—did a lot of good things.

**Nick:** We read Dale McDaniel's dissertation because he took his experience here and studied three other community truancy boards elsewhere in the state, and they are all **different**. Everyone does it in their own way. He said I didn't want to study West Valley, obviously because that is too much of me in there, but he has shown how others take this concept and then makes it work in a different way. So, this is what we are looking for—you and Coordinator of Community Truancy Board have been here for a long time and have seen the whole thing “up close” and in detail. You have seen it go up and down and sideways on this issue—namely, accountability versus problem solving. So, allow me to restate the issue -- Why are we here -- to make the kids understand how serious the consequences are, or to convince the kids that we are on their side to make them be successful. Is it one or the other message, or does that message get mixed in every board? This is what we are looking for, for people's thinking about how can we make this process work for the kids and parents who are brought to it.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I think that a good mix has been present because not only are you finding out the problem why are they not attending school, but then it is also the accountability afterwards. The process is pretty intimidating, no doubt. They walk into this

room and there are all the people sitting up there. It's like a courtroom and there are chairs sitting here, and we have tried it both ways. We have tried it having it here at the boardroom, we have tried it having it at schools, and our experience is that it really does not work when it's at the school. I think it's just because it is not intimidating enough. They don't take it as seriously. It's just like any other meeting with the principal they have every time they get in trouble. Then, after the board hearing the accountability piece comes in afterward. I really think it's an important element—after this they either have to have a school nurse or doctor's note to be excused from school. It's not really a point of going to the doctor, or even seeing the nurse; it's the accountability piece of coming into the school. Once they get in there, usually they will stay, but to **have to** show up is a big piece of it.

**Nick:** You're going like this (pondering, looking up and contemplating)...what are you thinking about when you hear this conversation?

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Well, I agree a lot with what has been said and I have had the opportunity to work at the high school level in a couple different settings—alternative high school, traditional high school, and now I am at the elementary level. I do appreciate...

**Nick:** All in West Valley?

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Yes, all in West Valley. It's been really a nice thing to see because I appreciate what the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is saying about needing students to take it seriously, and location (setting) is everything sometimes. It is not just another conversation with the principal. Usually we have had a lot of those before they come to truancy board. So it's a different setting, it has a different feel to it. While I agree we are trying to make it a more formalized process, I would also want you to know the feeling when students come in. While it's formal, it is *friendly formal*. That is the hard part to describe—the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board goes to great lengths to make the family feel welcome. There are introductions, and there are conversations that feel more inviting than threatening. Then it's not just a punitive feeling; when they walk in the room and families are treated kindly and with respect the *friendly formal* setting is in place. They are obviously there because their kids are not going to school, and we are there with them to see how we work on that accountability piece. So the location is important.

**Nick:** So one of your jobs is to get people there and then make them feel comfortable that they are there before the formal setting.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Actually, I send a letter and call the day before and usually that's when I try to realize it is not a punitive action at all and so they feel friendlier to me when I meet them that morning. So, yes I do try to make it very friendly and indicate that we are on their side and that we want to help them not punish them. So that is totally true.

**Nick:** Sorry I interrupted.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I think as we were talking about location, but the feeling is a little harder for people to capture—that is, what families do come in for. Because I know myself when I walk with families, if they are walking in and feel like it is just a punishment we won't be very successful. One of the things we are big on is **relationship**, and the relationship is really a key piece even in this on how you go about doing that and if you look at some other things that tie in for us as a whole school district. We're all about *rigor, relevance and relationship, college, career, and citizenship*. And there are overlaps with our truancy

board, and it is our philosophy as a district so when they walk in we have already done relationship with most of our families, but we need more.

**Nick:** The three R's and the three C's. Okay, so do people who serve on this board get some training of the philosophy of the district, school district philosophy of education, or does that come through participating? How does that translate? How does it happen?

**(Unknown)** Well, people that are employed by the school district like the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board and the administration and people that are employees that come and serve on the board of course have all of that knowledge, but I think some of that happens behind the scenes. But I don't think it's as important for some of our community members at that point to be totally up to speed on that. I think that is why we set it up this way -- because it's **our** board that we set up and we invite people to come and participate in reflection of our philosophy of education. So I would hazard to guess that some of the people that are selected and why we have people like the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and staff from the Community Center... for those people partly why they come is because they fit. They fit what we know and how we want to operate, so we have invited people that also had that orientation even though they might not know the three R's and the three C's. We select them for that compatibility.

**Nick:** Prosecuting Attorney, you haven't been part of the board but you have seen some of the consequences of the board.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** I guess, Professor. I do know some people here, but can we do introductions? You have some great stuff, but I don't know how you want me to fit into this.

**Nick:** Let's start with the Superintendent since she had to come a bit late...no more than 10 minutes, please.

**Assistant Principal of a Middle School Smith:** Assistant Principal at Centennial Middle School.

**District Drug Counselor Perdue:** Drug and alcohol counseling for the district.

**Principal of an Elementary School Davis:** Principal, Pasadena Park Elementary.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** One of the principals at West Valley High School.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** Prosecuting Attorney. I do all the truancy cases for West Valley.

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Juvenile Court Probation Officer who works in West Valley as a truancy specialist.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Truancy Coordinator for the West Valley School District.

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** Worksource Specialist, Next Generation Zone.

**Nick:** Thanks for the introductions, again I'm Nick Lovrich, professor of political science and Director of Division of Governmental Studies and Services at WSU, working as research partner with the Spokane County Juvenile Court. My colleague is Paul Strand, Principal Investigator for our project, and he is serving as an observer for this session. We are going to have three focus group sessions and we are going to rotate positions. I am doing the facilitating in this first one and Nikki Skaggs is recording; Nikki is a graduate student in Criminal Justice and Maureen

Erickson is also a graduate student in Criminal Justice at WSU Spokane, and Paul is at WSU Tri Cities. Charles Johnson, who interviewed a large number of you, is a recent PhD and will be moving to the University of Maine at Presque Isle for his first academic position towards the end of summer.

OK, we still need to get more feedback on this process. District Drug Counselor, from your perspective, how do you see the board working for the students and the parents and guardians who have come into contact with your board?

**District Drug Counselor:** Well, when you are talking about accountability and problem solving I think they have to be **equal**. I don't think the board would be successful without both of those; moreover, it is different for each student that comes in. Some, just the fact of having to come to the truancy board is enough for them to change. Those are the kids that it is helpful for if there are no big problems going on—drug or alcohol issues, family problems or anything like that. So just coming to the board is saying “Okay, I am going to quit skipping my classes or whatever.” For other kids, however, there are big problems going on and so if you don't have both of those pieces on the board, it won't work. I think they are equally present.

**Principal of Alternative High School:** One of the things I think is important in terms of projecting out other possible replication models, the thing that is unique about West Valley is when a kid comes in here... I used to be a principal of West Valley high school for 11 years, and you know a kid who might or might not be successful over there ends up sort of getting in a place where they have to appear in front of the truancy board. They walk in here and there is a *continuum of next possibilities*. A district that does not have some alternative places for kids to be sent is really going to struggle with this because it is going to force it back on the traditional school or wherever that problem is nesting at the moment. These school districts are going to have to start making some structural institutional accommodations. Big public high schools have a problem doing that in many ways and so there are certainly people that can do it, parts of the program that are flexible and adaptable, but the fact is that you have institutional options here. So, you have contract based education (CBE), you have Spokane Valley (alternative high school), you have River City leadership, you have other sorts of programs sort of *inside* the high school.

**Nick:** And the board has this information?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** Yes.

**Nick:** And can help make a good choice in that setting?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** In terms of the board, there is always some sort of administrator there, either a principal or someone from the district office. We rotate that. There is a counselor who has worked with the kid. There is usually someone else from the building who has worked with the kid, and the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is very much sort of the facilitator that keeps this steady. Then its people like the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, the District Drug Counselor, the community agencies members... so it is that **combination** that addresses some of these questions about “do we understand the options.” Yes, absolutely we do understand because of the makeup of the board.

**Nick:** Are you saying not all school districts are going to have the options that exist here?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** Yes.

**Nick:** So part of the reason the board works is because you've got various...

**Principal of Alternative High School:** This is the reality. The kid gets to this point and there is clearly an identified overt problem. The kid is not showing up, or not producing if they are in an alternative school. So you have attendance issues and productivity issues. So there is a problem. So how do you solve a problem? Well, you can sort of keep going back and change the kid, change the setting, you're going to change the relationship to delivery of school, and if you don't have those institutional options you're going to have a more difficult time moving towards a level of success. You are going to be repeating some of the same old patterns if you have to, by definition, send the kid back to the school where he has been totally unsuccessful so far. Now you can shake the kid up and wake the kid up and do all of those things, but there are some outcomes that are different in some of these environments. For instance, a kid who is overwhelmed in a 6-period day will have trouble—but the 6-period day is a tradition. A lot of kids can't handle 6 things at once. And I metaphorically say a juggler on the street corner is only juggling three things not six, and yet we take a 14-year old kid and assume they can do six things well. Every teacher wants the best out of the kid for seven hours a day. You know that works for certain kids, and for others it doesn't. If you don't have settings where you don't do six things all at once and you might be able to slice and dice it differently and deliver it differently, then it's a deeper set of problems. I would think if you don't have those options you'd have a tough time. Part of the success in West Valley is we do have different places where we can change the style that are different and intentionally different because we are all different.

**Nick:** So, how do you treat relapse or failure, or the truancy board's plan and the student can't make it work.

**(Unknown):** Well, the next step, I mean usually the schools are still working with them. But the next step is generally juvenile court—you know, to go in front of the judge. You know it's not 100%, but it's darn good, only how many of our children end up at our court?

**Nick:** Prosecuting Attorney, that's where you come in at the end of the process?

**Prosecuting Attorney:** Let's go back to the process, and I think one of the beauty's of the West Valley truancy board. It provides a forum for the school and the parent and student to look at some problem solving issues up front. Some of the things we deal with are where school doesn't have a truancy board, the kid may have a sleeping disorder, the kid may have social anxiety. When we have a forum together and I'll ask the school and they will say they had no idea. And so it stops the whole process, so now we are not quite dealing with accountability of the student attending. Obviously, that behavior is a symptom—whether this problem is real or not. We have to address that issue first before we can get back in the accountability of the student attending. So, the beauty of what is happening here in West Valley for the most part is being addressed here at the truancy board. Then, in addition you have people like the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and the District Drug Counselor who are doing things to help in terms of resolving the issue so that when we come to the court portion of this process we're really dealing with the accountability of the student. While the student isn't attending, they are at least going over the hurdles that were initially put in place.

**Superintendent:** So just to comment further on that, it is unbelievable the stories that come out in this setting and the way it operates. There is that chance for the parents and students to tell their story. But then the people that are on the board, even though we rotate a little bit,

we are used to asking those tough questions of the kids. And, for some reason, in the setting it feels like they spill their guts. Is there an alcohol problem? Do you use drugs? Do you smoke pot? It's amazing--they just unload their stories.

**Nick:** That is the next question. When we interviewed people some said "I wish we had more information before that setting." And we said okay that's good, then you could be more effective—but, on the other hand they don't know you, they don't trust the process until you demonstrate that you are there to solve problems whatever the dynamics are. So that is what the replicators are going to face too. How much information do you get other than attendance and they miss this many classes and these particular classes. What else do they need to have for this cathartic, life changing event or behavior changing event?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** The main thing is too, they are getting the academic and report card and attendance, the person who is here from the school always has some information and like the Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance, she is there every week from Next Generation.

**Nick:** OK... Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance, you haven't talked yet.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** You can ask her that question.

**Nick:** We need to hear from you, clearly.

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** I think in terms of the proper amount of background information, it's not necessarily that we need to know more about the individual students coming in, but speaking as someone who doesn't work in the district every day when I first came in it was difficult for me because I didn't know how to read the attendance sheets. I have figured it out since, but it took me awhile. Then things like knowing how many credits it takes to graduate from different high schools might be helpful to determine how far behind that person is. Then you start asking questions after you sit on the board and soon enough you start learning that sort of stuff. I don't think you need to know more about that individual student because it's a new chance for them, if one person doesn't know anything about them. It's a brand new chance for that person to come in and make a first impression on that person. The only thing we know is that they are coming to truancy board.

**Nick:** You think that is enough?

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** Yes, I think so. I mean the information provided in terms of the transcript you can see how far behind they are or not. You can see what their grades are, and you can see their attendance. So we can see: Is there a lot of illness that went on part of the year? Are there a lot of unexcused absences? Are the parents excusing absence frequently? I think that is enough to start out. We are able to see patterns. What's going on here? Are you sick? You missed three weeks in September....

**(Unknown):** There are two layers of information you get when you are on the board. One is the formal information which is the demographic information about the kid, quantitative data. Then you have the others sitting on the board, as the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board

and others suggest. The counselor who has already been around this road with this kid says, “listen, before Mr. and Mrs. Jones walk in with the daughter Jane...”

**Nick:** This discussion happens prior to the kid and family walking in?

**(Unknown):** Right before the kid and parent walk in you get some inside scoop, the fact that the kid ran away there is domestic violence and you get some context. So you are not sitting in and not knowing what’s going on. Is there any drug use or discord in the family? Professionally, you have a little bit of leverage to go in and ask that question and see what you get and that is important to understand.

**District Drug Counselor:** I have to say though, last year when I sat in pretty often that wasn’t completely consistent. We wouldn’t get to hear from the counselor or someone else right before the student came in what was going on with the family and this is how it went down. A lot of times we have kids that come in late so a lot of times it backed up, and then it’s like the next kid comes in right away so then we don’t get to hear anything before hand and we are just looking at what is provided.

**Nick:** So, if you have to recommend from your experience, should there always be this caucus prior to the formal?

**District Drug Counselor:** Yes.

**Nick:** And what are the boundaries on what is shared? How do you deal with that? Some of it is a privacy matter and some of it is HIPPA protected, and some of it is this and that? There is a group of professionals with a kid at risk and that kid is going to a new forum. Where are your boundaries? That’s one of the things that people are going to want to know if they try to replicate this process.

**District Drug Counselor:** It is difficult in my position with the drug and alcohol piece because there are certain things I can’t share before hand. A lot of the kids I am there to see I haven’t worked with yet so any of the kids where the counselor has some information that they feel comfortable sharing is helpful, but I’m sure there are things they don’t want to share in front of the board too... so I don’t know.

**Nick:** So, Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, do you know a lot that you don’t share and for good reasons?

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** I guess at the beginning I used to share a lot more, and I don’t do so now because I notice that if kids have history in the district or people know them or know things of them, it ends up backfiring and I noticed that for most of the kids—like when Dr. Poage and I are dealing with a kid you know—there are certain things that we know that we don’t think everyone else should know. If it’s an issue with gender identity or abuse or whatever and I don’t think that is what this board is designed to do, and it’s like sometimes more ammo for the board to be like “Well, why are you not doing this”. Well, there is always more to every story than what just comes across. I used to share a lot more. And I do a lot more homework on my own now, and there are certain things—that’s why I walk out with the family’s afterwards to kind of hit on those things I need answered. So the information is great, but can be very dangerous too.

**Nick:** So, when you participate in the board are you seeing yourself as an advocate for the kid and family? Do you try to represent the family—not their interests, but to make sure they get the most benefit from the board setting?

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Well, I think so. Like one thing I notice—if you are a board member you kind of get complacent in thinking one certain way. I told people here -- well not all the people here—but a young man came in two weeks ago with a totally bad attitude. Half the people thought he was stoned or whatever the case may be. It humbles you to just reflect on this—but I was irritated. I was a little bit louder than I usually am, and then when I sat down with the kid last week I got an entirely different impression of him. I was like “Man, what are you doing?” Another thing, when you are on it all the time it’s kind of just like you get complacent in thinking well this has got to be the issue, this is the issue, he has attitude with Mom. Well, long story short -- Mom picks really bad husbands who beat on her and now she is wondering why the kid is doing it. So, the point is that there is more to it. My role is 150% advocacy. If I believe a kid will do better if he or she leaves, my whole focus will be to get the family to see it that way. In the end they have the choice where they want to go, or if they want to go to Spokane Valley—but that is my whole goal to do what is best for the kid. Obviously, something is not working where they are. It is very rarely that I have to do this; I can probably think of five kids right now, and I have 126 I’m working with, that are just punking the school system by saying I’m not going to school. There are other issues at play for these kids and it’s just when to capture the moment for positive change—like in my eyes, I think there is a downfall with the middle school system because we don’t have an alternative to send the kids to. It’s a struggle for me even just talking to some of the counselors sometimes. They are often burned out because the family has been with them the last three years.

**Nick:** So, there is only the option of fitting in to the traditional middle school system...

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Yes, granted we are really creative with periods and moving them around, but still it’s environmental. Getting them totally out of this building is often the best route to improvement.

**Nikki:** *Can we go back a step, when you mentioned you kind of get caught up in a certain attitude or perspective because you worked with someone for so long? Does that happen to a lot of people here where it is good on one hand to have a counselor who knows the student more because it’s a source of information, but is there a sense of biased attitude that gets caught up with working? I mean, is that an issue that others of you have seen?*

**Principal of an Elementary School:** I know myself that you know when you work with a family prior to coming to truancy board sometimes you get tired. And there are battles you are fighting, and so when I come to truancy board and it’s not my students I am a fresh set of eyes because I haven’t dealt with them. I haven’t gone over all this ground. So sometimes you are just a different person who can give maybe perhaps a little different suggestion in a little different way. Sometimes it’s the same suggestion that someone else would have made, but now it has been said by 2 or 3 people so all of a sudden that makes a difference. So sometimes we do get a little jaded when you deal with the same problem and then you come to truancy board and you can deal with someone with a fresh set of eyes. I think it’s a good thing to have more people, different people looking at the problem. That feels more like an advocate than a punitive thing when you are viewing it from that perspective.

**Superintendent:** I guess this is more of a question. I know when I am there I don't know the kids so it's always a fresh view for me, but the question for the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is, do you think that most always there should be somebody there that really doesn't know much about the particular kids—probably several there that don't so there are some fresh eyes in the room for every student?

**(Unknown):** And I think sometimes we find out a lot of things the schools didn't know before the kids came, because kids are so honest. When we ask a question it always amazes me how they answer.

**Nick:** Are their parents surprised sometimes?

**(Unknown):** They often are. I think the other thing is just the body language. I mean you are seeing them face-to-face, and lots of times I think you can pick up on what you need to talk about next because of the way and the students are interacting with each other.

**Nick:** OK Nikki, you need to do a little follow up here.

**Nikki:** Well, I also kind of had another question here which is not too much about the information but is more focused on the time frame. I did sit in one time where kids didn't show up and it kind of got backed up on time. And I know they are set up during work periods, so does it sometimes work against you when you know you don't have enough time to talk about it with each other? Do you get that sense that sometimes not everyone is informed because you are running out of time? Does that happen a lot?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** That does happen. I can't say it doesn't because I put a lot of kids through, but I also have to say that a lot of times we as a board maybe will kill an issue and take more time. So I have to step in and cut it short, otherwise it will go on forever.

**Nick:** So, do you allocate an hour per case?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** No, we allocate 20 minutes, but we hardly ever go 20—we usually go 30 minutes. Like I said, it's easy to go over because there are so many things going on that you could talk forever. Once you get those main things out you have to stop it at some point or you know we are going to be so far behind, and already the school knows other things have come out now and we need to decide of what we are going to do.

**Nick:** So, are you responsible for recording what the determination recommendation or the conditions are?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I write it up, but everyone there signs it, including the student and the parent. At the end I always tell them once again that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is going to be meeting with them once a week and I tell them that every student goes through this thing and he is more of an advocate for them --another mentor in their life. I tell them that they can go to him and he will be seeing them and that is always the last thing said when they leave. And he always walks out with them.

**Nick:** Before the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, what would happen at that point?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I would just read what our recommendations are and I tell the parent that this is what we expect.

**Nick:** Do you tell them the consequences?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Well, the consequences are those that are there in the beginning. I tell them what will happen if we can't reach or resolve an issue, or if they continue with the behavior they have had.

**(Unknown):** And the other piece of that, which I have observed is in addition to the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist there are also directions from the counselor saying "I need to see you at 8, to go over this again and we are going to change your schedule out of this one period that is causing you so much grief." So, in addition to the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist there is usually one other school person involved. They are given a direction, or change of school—for example, this is the time set for when you go to contract to meet with Principal of Alternative High School. So, the students and parents have some next steps to follow after the board hearing.

**(Unknown):** There are a lot of things involved in the next steps. It's not just go to school, study table. Next Generation a lot of times works with these kids. They are a great advocate. You know they get jobs for kids also, so there are a lot of things involved in the process.

**Nick:** Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance, are you at all the boards or just at some of the board sessions?

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** What we do is we have four people from Next Generation Zone who rotate through because it takes up every morning every week. So, we rotate so that we can spend the rest of the time with our caseloads. But I would guess there is always someone from Next Generation Zone there.

**Nick:** So, if they were going to replicate this board in East valley or other places, there should be something like Next Generation Zone participating in that process?

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** Probably.

**Nick:** This is what we are really trying to get at here. What is making this work?

**(Unknown):** I think the question is a good one. The answer is, you have to be very **strategic** about the people on the board. So if you really step back and if what you are trying to do is provide options, you need resources to bring to bear. So a kid is struggling to find a place to work you got the Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance and her friends who could possibly link something up. They spend their days understanding what the employment picture is and understand the difficulty in finding work. And how do you put together a resume and resources to get bus fare and work cloths, the kinds of things that are necessary. I don't know the composition of the board this year as well as I should. If you put your mind together, every community would want to have some key people.

**Nick:** This is the next question.

**Laughing.**

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** One thing I want to add, about the time we spend with the families. The people that are members of this board are not scared to ask the question, if they want to ask a question and there is 30 seconds left, they are going to ask it when it is important. Because there are certain key things that are important to different members on the board and

they will ask it, and if they don't ask it then they will ponder the possibilities. They do that a lot. Often the board members will do follow up and ask me to find out and I'll tell them next week. Time is a constraint, but we manage to work it out in most cases.

**Nick:** That is another thing related to information. What do you get afterword's if someone is interested in whatever happened to that one person? Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, are you the source of follow up if anyone wants to have follow up information?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Well, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist does meet with the truancy kids once a week. I run all their attendance once a week, every week to make sure who is on board and who is not. As far as the District Drug Counselor meeting with the kids to do drug and alcohol, I call her and leave a message she needs to meet with that student. And I have to say I'm not good about going back to say "did you do that?" I know she does. But you know, if it comes to it and they are relapsing, go and find out exactly what had happened. As far as meeting with the teachers and the principals the next day, they have a time and they have to meet. They do let me know if that student doesn't show up.

**Nick:** Does that failure to make the meeting show up on Skyward where you can monitor that compliance if you want to?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** If that was included under discipline it would show up, but I don't think all those are in discipline... are they Traditional High School Assistant Principal?

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** The recommendations are not, but the fact the student went to the truancy board is recorded.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I do put everything from the board process if a case ends up going to court. I make sure everything is in discipline and I print that out now and take it along with the attendance material to the Prosecuting Attorney. This is so the court can see exactly what was ordered to the kid, and I tell them what has been followed up on and what hasn't.

**Nick:** When does the Bellevue decision regarding legal representation enter... upon relapse after the board process?

**Prosecuting Attorney:** Upon the fact that the school files an amended petition for a court hearing.

**Nick:** Is that the "fact finding" hearing?

**Prosecuting Attorney:** Yes, that is the fact finding.

**Superintendent:** So, back on information on another level. There are several times when the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board updates the data, and for me that is what I am interested in. How many kids did this turn around and they are now back in school as opposed to those who may have left our system as opposed to those who you actually have to refer to court. It seems among us we have different levels of what we would like to know about this range of outcomes.

**Nick:** How does the "learning over time" take place? This process has been going for some time, so how would you describe the learning from experience which has taken place to have the board improve with time?

**Superintendent:** I was actually the one who wrote the grant...

**Nick:** Yes, I know. You've got a particularly good perspective on this issue.

**Superintendent:** It's interesting when you asked the questions about training. I've never really thought about formal training. It truly has evolved for us and become much more sophisticated over time. But thanks to these good professional people who have helped us out over time...

**Nick:** We were talking about design for this study and Courtney Meador (MacArthur Foundation Models for Change Spokane Project Coordinator at the time) said training...hmmm. I said maybe we should view these focus groups as a training event in a way because you don't get a chance to talk separate from the kids' problems and their plans. Maybe this type of focus group session should be a recommendation for replication, i.e., that you should do this periodically. You could have someone come in from outside and ask dumb questions like I am doing. In those sessions you could, as a group, fix the dumb questions and discuss the issues we've addressed here—but get those discussions on the record. Then when someone wants to know "How does this work?" you'd have a transcript of a discussion on it, and then the person who needs to know can read the transcript and ask your own questions of knowledgeable persons. I think this is part of what the foundation was trying to do—namely, if someone has got something to address truancy they are proud of, and if it hasn't been documented for everyone else who might want to try it, then that process of documentation needs to take place. When we had that session for the BECCA bill in Spokane two years ago you had that session with Larry and the Principal of Alternative High School. The house was packed with 300 people from all over the state. I couldn't even get any of the handout materials, they were all gone when I got there... I had to come and beg Larry for copies later. The community truancy board is a great idea. This is why we want to spend some time getting it nailed down. *The next question was this idea; we heard about these remarkable people, but is it the people or the concept that is working here?*

**(Unknown):** I think a lot of it is the idea **and** the people because when Superintendent...

**Nick:** Well, that is not fair—it has to be more of one or the other!

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** The superintendent first started with this idea. The superintendent was doing the court papers and then I came and another gal and we started the truancy board. The idea was clearly a great idea, on how to find out what is keeping these kids from going to school, and our numbers were really good from the beginning. We started out with fifty kids that first year, and we have built and built over time. But just today listening to this information I have already learned a lot of things. We haven't ever trained, as far as what the Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance said about our attendance and stuff, I'm concerned. We have four schools and the attendance record is different in all of them...the codes are even different in a few of them. So, it is hard for someone to come in and say here is a kid from high school, figure it out. So that is a very good piece of information; I hadn't thought of that problem up to now.

**Superintendent:** You know there has been a concern by the district about the cost of the program. I don't know what the costs of doing this process are. Obviously, we are dedicated to it. So, there is something we should do about resources. In the past it's not one of the things we have never put in the budget cut, and I think that is because I believe we realize it's such a great investment for the kids. If someone is going to be spending their time doing that kind of

budget cut thinking it's probably going to be vice principals and counselors who already have too big of a case load, so this is just one more level of support on options. But the cost of it...yes, there is some cost. I think we tend to think we just volunteer our time for the community truancy board. It's part of our jobs that we do, with the understanding that such volunteering is essential to maintaining a quality school district. So, in my case I get some hours off of my superintendent job to come sit here. We kind of say it does not cost much, but actually it's quite expensive if you really look at everyone's time and the value of it that people are carving out. But anyway, like the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board said, I guess over time it has seemed effective enough that it has never been ended by the cuts we've had to make periodically.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** What do you use for the selection criteria for the non-district people who sit on the board?

**Superintendent:** I have to toss that question to the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board...honestly, the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is kind of the on point person for the program. And you know, if there is a big problem I might jump in and say what is going on here. But...

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Actually, I just send out letters requesting volunteers. There were some community resource people that I already knew that work within our schools, but I sent letters telling them what this was about, and stating the major provisions of the Becca law. **I have not had one person turn us down.** I have had some that can't be here as often as others, but I have not had one group turn us down.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** Do you guys do background checks and stuff like that?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** No.

**(Unknown):** Typically across the district there is a background check; they could run their information to Sue and she does it to 100's—so it should be easy.

**(Unknown):** That would affect our community resource people as people who don't have a check.

**Nick:** Looking for people that are willing to volunteer their time, is that just a personal network or is there more formal process for getting the kind of people you would like to see present on the board like Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance. In saying it's important to have a "the Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance kind of person" on the board, is there some mechanism you use to locate and recruit such people?

**(Unknown):** Actually the people that are there now are already really involved with kids, and that's kind of how I know of them because they are already involved with kids. But community members who are not involved in this way are rather hard to come by. I try to find parents that already volunteer within a school and are great volunteers, and the thing you have to watch is it's all confidential. So you have to pick and choose those people, and it's harder to get people to stick with it.

**Nick:** You know there is practically nothing written down about this. This is the only record we have as to how it really works. *To give good recommendations to people trying to make this process work for their kids, what would be the three or four things they would need to know in*

*putting the first year board together?* In terms of diverse membership, resource mobilization, reliable volunteers, etc.

**(Unknown):** I think the way they do our administration is great, where it is a different principal or administrator every week. I think that is really good.

**Nick:** Is that an agreement you have among your people? Or do you say you all better sign up or else...

**Laughing.**

**Assistant Principal of a Middle School:** I had my say at the beginning of our session here. I think this is a good thing that we all rotate now because when I was a principal at contract based education and also chaired the board for a few years at that time, I got a lot of my kids coming to the board and I had already had my go-rounds with the kiddos in my office. The way it has evolved—namely, having a different administrator there every week and on the average we do that about 2 or 3 times a year now—is great. In being in my position here at Centennial I want to talk about the same student you were talking about too, because ultimately what we’re trying to do is helping kids. We want to get kids back in the bus, back at school and being successful and get them squared away and turned around. I think having different administrators here is a good thing. We have the continuity, we have the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, the Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, but yes different administrators being here over time is good.

**Superintendent:** Originally I think we had a principal as the main facilitator who stuck through it the whole year. The truancy board facilitator is one of many jobs that principals all have as a district responsibility. Assistant Principal of a Middle School had it for many years. Others have too, now Larry has it. I think he is the one who chose to step back a little bit and said I don’t need to be there with the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board at the table every time. Now he has spent more time getting in the community agencies, especially getting in the juvenile court folks in a closer partnership.

**Nick:** The outreach to the other elements of the community and the partnership with the court, is this Larry Bush’s job? Does there need to be “a Larry job” of this type for the community truancy board to work effectively?

**(Unknown):** Larry took that on. When he stepped into that role, at first a little reluctantly, he was a little uncertain about the change. However, it’s clear someone needs to take on this role. Then I think he can kind of see the bigger picture...he always has a bigger vision out there than most of us. The way we can strengthen this image is to do a lot more with the court system.

**Nick:** This is directly related to the question we are pursuing: Is it **concept** or **people**? The Coordinator of Community Truancy Board says it is both. For someone replicating this process, should I say **special people** are needed...and go with this concept?

**(Unknown):** No, it would be easier if they could replicate an idea. I mean when we replicated from someone else’s great ideas we have stumbled on, but these ideas have worked out well over time. I was hesitant at Larry’s change in focus at first, saying “wait a minute Larry, you’re not going to be there every time?” But now that he has put work in that outreach piece I see clearly that this effort has worked out to be great and paid off huge.

**Nick:** So you think it's a good concept... I mean this concept as it has changed over time? So, have we captured today how the concept can be refined? Can be even better?

**(Unknown):** Yes, this process has definitely gotten better over time. The resource people have for sure made it better because there are more options for the kids. We can say, "Oh, there is an Adult Ed center down town, oh, there is Running Start. Now we have Job Corps, we have Next Generation, we have the Valley Community youth minister—he does a lot of youth stuff at the high school. The process has brought a lot to it.

**Nick:** You're sitting in the best position, having been there from the beginning to the end. You and the Superintendent are able to see how the idea or the concept has matured over time. Is it the case that have key people have come and gone, but the concept keeps getting better? Or, is it instead the case that key people leave and the board process stumbled and its goals have to be recaptured?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** So I think our first principal administrator was Dale McDaniel. I think I might have thought "Oh Dale is leaving!" and the board will collapse—but instead the transition to new leadership worked out because the concept was a good one. The Assistant Principal of a Middle School stepped in next and he did a fabulous job, then it became time for rotation and it works still... so, that's what makes things better—periodic leadership change with new elements of the process brought in by each succeeding leader.

**Nick:** We (Charles Johnson and I) interviewed Dale on Christmas Eve; we spent a couple hours with him. I am going to put some words in his mouth in noting that he observed that "I was a little bit shocked how easily I was replaced." He said this was likely the case because the concept was strong and people rise to the concept and make it better. That is really the critical part I am getting at.

**[Observation note: Process observers noted signs of strong non-verbal agreement with this assessment.]**

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** I think more than anything that the combination of a good replication tool kit and a school setting where they all want this makes the idea available to duplicate elsewhere. I think it's a *philosophy*; it is a culture that starts at the top with the Superintendent. I can talk with her about the issues and she is fully knowledgeable. If you don't have that philosophy and structure at the top, like the Principal of Alternative High School said it is going to be really hard to do. And maybe that is the biggest struggle point. When people say is it people or concept, if you don't have the head guys invested in it then it's not going to work.

**Nick:** If President Obama offered the Superintendent a job in DC, in the Department of Education—when she left some new person came...

**Laughing.**

**Nick:** *Do you think anyone coming in would say it costs too much? We don't really need to do this... or would they likely look at it and say I don't want to mess this up?*

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** I would hope in that situation they would hire someone with the philosophy that continues to support it.

**(Unknown):** That takes it to the school board level because they hired the Superintendent. And the board any more, this is a well oiled machine and they don't ask for much detail on

programs. We have always said to board members that they are welcome to sit on the board if they wish. We have had some board members which like to do that. Some just come and sit to see if they like it. Consequently, if I went to the board and said this program should this continue they would want to see the data and see how successful it has been. The kid-serving philosophy is truly present in the district, from the top down it is a supportive philosophy.

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** If the Superintendent were to leave I would be worried though—you know, because this is really Superintendent's project and she started it and it means a lot to her. I think when I leave—and when others in the district who are veterans leave, that there is a culture around the community truancy board which goes beyond any individual. So, I guess that's what I would hope. I will have to remember to mention that to the board when I leave.

**Laughing.**

**Prosecuting Attorney:** There are a lot of good ideas that never get off the ground because the ideas are not well structured. I know Dale, I know the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, I don't know the Superintendent—but I would assume there was a lot of thought and effort into putting the structure together first. It follows that as this group you have to shift and change as a plan or idea starts to take full bloom and develop. When you bring in new people like Larry, it's a great example of a visionary in a different area you can grow it even more—but that sound, kid-serving philosophical foundation is always there. And so, in my view the people creating and maintaining the board did a wonderful job in terms of not only getting an idea, but putting together a good foundation and that continues to provide sound footing right now.

**Superintendent:** So, a little bit of history... Spokane Valley is doing a truancy board in that early period of time. I don't know what they are doing any more, but I spent too much time in the board, spending my time in hearings, and I didn't have that time to spare at that time. The Principal of Alternative High School and I were the two people in the high school, now they have three administrators so that helps some, but we didn't have security officers in that era either. So for me to spend parts of a day every week down there... I couldn't take care of the kids in the high school. At any rate, a lot of that early learning came from the judge. Boy, I wish I could remember the name. He scared me to death.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** It was Fred Aronow?

**(Unknown):** Yes, but you know.

**Nick:** Scared you to death how?

**(Unknown):** He put the fear of God in the kids. He was very generous with his time outside of that, helping us get going. So was the leadership of Spokane Public Schools; we sort of looked at it and said we can do that differently.

**Nick:** Does the concept require the court and school to be partners, or did you decide to make it that way?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** No, because what happened was, I think, that it all kind of just started like a fire, back when it first started we didn't have an attorney, we were the attorney. And so the Superintendent...

**Nick:** So this is in reaction to BECCA?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** And so the Superintendent was actually in the court room with these cases, so when I was hired she just took me, showed me what to do at court, and introduced me to Commissioner Aronow. Then we just flew with it. It was something that matured as we went along.

**Nick:** *How did the people rally to this concept? Were you the recruiter? Was there natural talent in the system?*

**(Unknown):** Actually, early on they were just neighborhood people. They weren't old school board members. Mostly they were older volunteers, and acted more like the providers of fatherly talks to the kids. They were not coming from the professional background.

**Nick:** Was it set up like this courtroom-like setting?

**(Unknown):** Yes, from the beginning we wanted it to look like court. We wanted to have that feel of you're going to court. That's going to be here in West Valley, and we are going to help you. So this evolution into having actual people that know how to reach into their lives and offer resources and time and things that make the difference that we are not trained to do is all added to a much more modest beginning model.

**Nick:** OK Nikki, your turn.

**Nikki:** *I feel like we touched a little bit on how this was sustained over this long period of time. Does anyone else want to elaborate on what exactly contributed to the sustainability of the truancy board since 1996?*

**Nick:** *In our area, good ideas typically don't get off the ground. Or, they tend to last for a short time and then fizzle out. This is one that hasn't fizzled out. So what does someone who wants to make this work for them need to know about keeping it going? Do you have to have Superintendent stay until she is 112?*

**Laughing.**

**Nick:** *Do you consciously replace people that move on with likeminded people? Do you socialize people?* The Principal of an Elementary School is going like this (nodding agreement). OK. Principal of an Elementary School, please talk for the record.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** As I said in some of my beginning comments, it's about the vision and the strategic plan of the district. I think if you live and work here and find yourself in a successful place that you like. You have the philosophy and that is why you are here and why you like your job and why you want to come and do this. So, I think it's a philosophy that's encouraged and our administrators are given opportunities to have some vision around that and to do some parts in their own direction—like Larry took his little piece and went off and did it with the support of the district. This room for creativity is embodied in the vision of the district. I think we can continue it because it is how we operate on a daily basis as we look at our kids and families. We are really encouraged to do that, and we start at kindergarten and work up. Of course, truancy doesn't just start at high school, but we're all working on the same sorts of things on all levels. I do think we recruit and cultivate people to work in our district that share that vision and that come to us wanting to provide the best opportunities for kids. For a small district we have more opportunities than some of the big districts, really. And so we have cultivated that and people have been allowed to go forward with those things which

makes the whole concept of the truancy board as just another key factor that continues to work because it is a key part of the overall philosophy.

**Nick:** OK, this next question is about replication. Out of 10 school districts, will 8 of them have these pieces necessary for a successful community truancy board present?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** You know I have been thinking about what we talked about. In fact we used the logo pathways to success. That is sort of a brand, because we do have many small programs which a lot of people see as cost effective, um...not sure. But anyway, I look at a school the size of Spokane Valley and I think what if it was a different district community a little smaller than ours but they wanted to do something like this. So Spokane Valley has 300 kids enrolled and yet there are three very different programs within one school. They have an all-day program, pretty traditional, not like its only four days a week. They have a transition as they call it—that is more of the contract sort of program that they do at their school. And then they have this little after hours for the kids that have been expelled and nobody else is going to take them back if they have been expelled for a year. That is one-on-one after hours, with no other kids on campus. Where the parents are hugely bought into, we hope this is safe. I admire the people that are willing to take those kids on. They are meeting with those kids once a week to give them more of the “you have to do this at home but here is the guidance to do it.” In this stage of online learning I think a school of 300 could decide to have a few different options so another thing that has come out in this conversation is hum...this middle school thing. We have tried out some alternatives for middle schools and they just haven’t worked for us. All of a sudden you have a bunch of kids thinking that would be the way to do my education as a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grader and an hour in school. For 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, most of the time their parents don’t want that. And it just isn’t going to get them ready for high school. We have really struggled with that. We do have two middle schools in our district, but city schools like the high end alternative and have a waiting list that won’t go away. So that is not a place we can refer kids to. So Centennial is our 600 student middle school. Pretty traditional, and they do have a behavioral room, but that only accommodates 9 or 10 kids. And that room is reserved for really bad behavior. That is not for non-attendance. And so maybe we need to explore some online or different options for middle schoolers. Do we really believe that school should be shepherding them day in and day out? So, that’s a hard one to say how you would do that at the middle school if that is a real need.

**Nikki:** *What about a larger school district? Do you think they would have difficulty creating this kind of culture where you have all of these personal net-workings and things like that?*

**Principal of Alternative High School:** We have scaled that up actually because the Valley schools—East Valley, Central Valley and West Valley—(and again this is principals) saying you know some of this stuff works pretty well. So now they actually do a “child study team” process that is for all of our districts. Now we are talking 20,000 kids, and it is for those kids that you are wondering where in the Valley is the best placement for them. Because East Valley has a couple of options, Central Valley has a couple of options along with those at West Valley. We have the most options, but we have choice within each other and we co-op a lot. And so we are able to bring this kid from Central Valley in and really have that conversation with the child and adults. Is contract the best place in the whole valley? Could and should the kid go right now? So, I think if a bigger school district had more of that mind set, then absolutely they can do it. If we can do it as three school districts, others can too. But again, its sort of moving away

from yourself, reinventing a little bit, and seeing how a set of school districts could we be open to that.

**Nick:** That is very unusual.

**Principal of Alternative High School:** Part of that was tied with some dropout prevention money through Building Bridges, the state grant from OSPI. And what we were seeing there is that dropping out is a regional issue and kids are shopping for high schools that suit them best. You know they will drop out of Shadle Park High School or refuse to go back, and then they are down at the bus plaza and they find out some kid is getting on the 90 bus to go out to the Valley to this funky school that I am running right now.

**Nick:** Exactly.

**Principal of Alternative High School:** And that is how it works. The way this culture works is sort of a street beat. Sort of a tom-tom downtown and people move accordingly. So, we had a reason for the solution to the problem. Rather than all sort of putting our heads down around the territorial boundaries as a district, we say what we are going to do given the fact that kids don't care about districts. They want to find a place where they feel save.

**Nick:** Does this process have spin off benefits? Does the fact that you are doing this lead to these other things developing across school district boundaries?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** I'm not sure exactly, you know when we were writing this dropout prevention grant we were writing it as a consortium of four different districts because we understood the problem. First of all, it was beneficial for us to write it that way in terms of money. But it was also based on the principle we were "all in this thing together." Literally, in the course of a day a kid could disappear from East Valley and check out Barker School and check out Central Valley and the next thing he will be over at Larry Bush's place (Spokane Valley High School), then in the afternoon he will be having a cup of coffee with me. The kid is trying to figure out what is available for me. So, we had to get our minds adjusted to this reality for some of our potential dropout kids...

**Nick:** So, the money came and went but the process is still there?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** Yes. What it means again is that is it a matter of concept, purpose and principle. And once you believe in it, it doesn't take a lot of money to sustain it. What it means is that the process happens twice a month. This valley child study team, for lack of a better term, meets twice a month at contract school, at 7:30 on a Thursday morning. What the hell does that take, get out of bed and go there for an hour and a half and you're talking about kids that just got out of rehab and just got out of jail, just got bounced back and forth.

**Nick:** *Does everyone have the freedom to talk about whatever they wish to talk about that kid in that setting? It's not a formal determination of anything?*

**(Unknown):** Yes it's formal, because the kid is out of school, either because here they were expelled or decided they don't want to go back. They might be over 18, so this whole BECCA thing doesn't affect them.

**Nick:** So, in many cases this is about post-BECCA kids?

**(Unknown):** Yes, you have a whole range of things. But I don't know how to say it other than the fact that it sustained itself because **it makes sense**. We're helping each other. One of the

things you have to understand in replication is that if you are sort of serious in your profession you realize you don't know very much a lot of times. So there are people who are doing it better than you. And, in a good setting ideas sort of go around the table without a big ego thing going on and saying this is the sort of limitations of what I have. And I understand on my case I have a school where kids can go twice a week or four days a week or whatever. Some parents say they don't want this coming and going—they want their kid to be there six days a week. They want it in a different kind of setting. Well, I do not have that; East Valley has one of those so we share. It's an example of reasonable people working together to help the kids that need it the most you know.

**Nick:** *What if you didn't come along when you did? Would the idea still have appeal without your personal advocacy?*

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I'm sure there would have been someone else who would have come in.

**Nick:** Someone is going to ask us, "I keep hearing the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board this and the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board that." Were you hired to do this?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** Yes, I was.

**Superintendent:** So I think we decided we were going to hire someone to coordinate this.

**Nick:** So what were you looking for?

**(Unknown):** A person like the one we hired!

**Laughing.**

**Nick:** What abilities does the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board have that we need to make clear for replicating school districts?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** So it's a person you know can interact well with kids, with parents, with staff. A person that is organized, that gets a sense of important data I need to keep and update religiously. A person that is a good communicator at a lot of levels, and especially to the people who are coming in to us—to the students and their parents—and to the people in the district.

**Superintendent:** They have to view this as a full time job, and I think that is what a district needs to have—a full time person with Coordinator of Community Truancy Board's ability and personality. You can't have someone who only does this once in a while.

**Nick:** *Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, what did you bring to the job that prepared you for it?*

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I learned it by doing it.

**Nick:** You don't have to have a PhD in child psychology?

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** No, but you have to care about the kids. That's what you have to do. And you have to be empathetic to the parents. You have to come out saying, "we all have kids, we have all gone through problems, and we are here to help you get through this. And they do grow up and they do become great individuals...just right now they are having a tough time of it." Sometimes, you know, especially to a parent, this kind of understanding goes a long way toward making things better.

**(Unknown):** I think the other part to the empathy is the need for accountability; to set some clear expectations and note that there are boundaries around this.

**Nick:** *This is the crucial part, how do you balance your welcoming—noting that while this is a serious matter, it is also a time when genuine help is available to make things better. What do you do to set the balanced tone?*

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** I do the introduction for them when they first come. I don't necessarily say this is how it is going to happen. They learn by sitting there; a lot of times a lot of them don't even speak up. But they give a lot just by their cards at the end that they let that child know, I have jobs if you're interested in this. Or we have information on training sessions for Job Corps...that kind of thing. And they end up all jumping right in once the kids' needs are identified.

**Nick:** So, is it safe to say that community truancy board members don't need to have a lot of training to serve effectively?

**Staff Member of Community-based Organization Providing Youth Employment Assistance:** When I first came two years ago I had someone who sat on the truancy board previously as a member of Next Generation Zone. The Coordinator of Community Truancy Board came up and introduced me to everyone. You didn't receive much else, you received the packet. Apart from that you needed to understand some of the attendance codes, which are confusing. There were some sample questions in there you could ask if you felt comfortable. I don't feel like there was a lot of formal training needed to do this. It was just being willing to be here and participate and learn from others with more experience.

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** The thing I think people forget to is that the process has been going on for 14 years now. All the people growing up here expect this. They know that this is the process here. But we get a lot of kids though CST who are from District 81 (Spokane School District), where people say what is this? Is this real court? It's the way things are out here. People expect if you are having truancy issues that you are going to end up at truancy board, and because so many people talk they know it's kind of court room, but they are really not mean people. Some people are on guard, but most people tend to relax and share openly with the board.

**Nick:** So, you have a tradition now, and to maintain a tradition isn't as hard as establishing it. So, the question would be, you can sustain this tradition in part by philosophy and in part by socialization of people who work here, in part by taking advantage of other good ideas that are related and building on that, and that becomes a tradition of how you do it. The last question then, did this tradition change two years ago when you created the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's position? That was a big decision. It looks like a big decision from the outside. And so we want to talk about that, but you can't be here for that part—is that OK with you Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist?

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Dang it. Don't worry, I have it bugged.

**Nick:** Before you depart, do you wish to leave a statement about what you think the reason was for having this position with the board? We'll start our discussion with that statement in mind.

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Well, I think a lot of it was our state of Washington being out of compliance on how many kids are truant. My grand focus is on kids being detained in juvenile detention for not going to school. So, that is the GJJAC's reason for why the position is here. The reality is I think people have seen over years that just incarcerating these kids doesn't really fix the problem. I think that is Bonnie Bush's (Juvenile Court Administrator) philosophy and the philosophy behind all the other programs we have going on at the juvenile court now. Like when I started this job I remember sitting back in my office not knowing anybody, saying "Why am I even here. Because what I do is what school people **can** do. Why aren't the school people here?"

**Nick:** And you're a "court guy."

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Yes, and I'm a court guy and I sat back checking my emails going you know some of this is pretty basic, why are the counselors not doing some of this, why aren't vice principals dealing with this? What is the deal? But then I got in the culture of the school and started seeing that the Principal of Alternative High School is an administrator dealing with scarce resources I began to understand the problem better. Let's say he hires this Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist character who is supposed to work with these truancy kids, but before you know it the Principal of Alternative High School gets another task dropped on him and he already pawned some of his work on Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, and now the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist only has 60% of his time. As being from another agency that helps because Larry Bush doesn't come to me and say hey Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, you need to help us with the plant sale. That is the beneficial part of that too. I think there is another part of it. There is a place for the court. I think there will always be a place for it in the job, but the issue is these kids have issues that, how do I say it — there is so much going on in their lives that they need to have someone to help **follow through** or guide them. With some kids it's as easy as taking them to another school and seeing them periodically. Or explaining to them what a power struggle with a teacher is, and why this vice principal tends to call this kid out every day. It's not that he wants to pick on you, it's that you are late every day. Don't give him ammo and he won't fire at you. It's one of those kinds of things. When you are at the court you are neutral with these kids. Because I say, hey... it is the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is really the one who sends you to court if you're bad, and this makes you the middle person. As that middle person there are a lot of strategies available to me, and I tell the kids all of this after they come through the board hearing process...

**Nick:** They have more strategies with you there than if we they didn't have a you?

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Oh, I think so... because I can say the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is getting ready to do this. There is one young man I am thinking about from the high school right now. When I told him the school is sending him to court I thought he was going to pass out and fall on the ground. But the kid is moving back with Mom and everything is good because of our talk. But it's that middle person and the kids know I don't go to court if they'll work with me. Like when the Prosecuting Attorney has our kids go to court I don't go to court with them because I am going to deal with them when they come back after court, so I don't want to be another person saying the Prosecuting Attorney didn't do a-z here. I want to be like "see, I told you what could happen." Most kids come back and say forget that crap I don't even want to go down there anymore and we had to go through a metal detector and stuff like that. So it's here, I'm kind of car sales men in a way, the middle man

dealing with this range of options because sometimes a youth may have a power struggle with a principal where I can be the middle person saying if you do this, this, and this it won't be as bad. Every kid is different, that is why can you write up something about your kids on paper, but the relationship part is really the key. The middle man position helps to create that relationship.

**Nick:** *Before we kick you out, how come there are not any contempt's this year and there always have been in the past?*

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** Well, I know when I started working here the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board and I caucused a lot. I look at more than attendance. I care about their behavior in school, how they are doing at home, the parent piece and how they are doing overall—and more than anything this year reengagement is the primary goal. Like, all I have been doing the past month and a half at the high school was making sure those kids that have the 59% can turn it into a 60% or a 65% so they can get their credit. So the caucusing part and the talking part are what is most important—in particular with respect to the transparency of the process and the rich communication that can occur. That is a remarkable accomplishment.

**Nick:** That is a remarkable accomplishment, indeed.

**Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist:** And it is huge, but I don't want you to think—and I have a lot of people that are evaluating my grant -- as other people are thinking "well you guys are not sending because you have all this discretion." I tell the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board to send some youth to court—as in the case of the young man that was before the Prosecuting Attorney yesterday. In that case I told her to send that young man to court because he wasn't getting any of what we were doing. Is he doing better? Yes, he is in fact doing better. Is he still struggling in certain areas? Yes, of course he is. We struggle sometimes because she is like "I'm going to send that kid to court" and I'm like "The heck you are." He is doing this, that and the other thing to make progress. At the end of the day it's working out best for the kids and the schools and the courts.

**Nick:** Thanks Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. Now we are going to send you packing so that the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board can tell us about you.

**Charles:** This is the only time you will see Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist escorted out.

**Laughing.**

**Nick:** OK, our last topic is a very big one. The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist position was added to the process and in replicating the process, would you recommend making this position part of replication or not? You didn't have a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist for a very long time. You have a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist now. Is it a complement worth saying "if you're going to replicate the community truancy board do it with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist type position?"

**Coordinator of Community Truancy Board:** He definitely helps a lot because he does get out there and he knows the kids individually. He meets with them, you know. I don't have time to go and meet with every kid after truancy board, and it's enough to try and run all their attendances from every school. But Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist goes out and meets with these kids. He takes me around kids I need to serve that I actually file court dates on. He actually takes me around to serve these kids. He has made a big, big improvement because he

can go see those kids and he keeps on top of them after the board hearing process establishes a plan for them.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** I think *the proof is in the pudding*, in the sense that this year District 81 has also had a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist on a smaller degree, obviously, because it's a bigger school district. But they have seen the benefits involved in what's going on with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist here at West Valley. The beauty of the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist from the court standpoint is that he is kind of the eyes and ears of a probation officer for us. In fact, I just had a case yesterday. The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and I resolved the case this morning because of his input and the question I asked him was if we don't move forward on this case is the youth going to bolt on us. He said no, and gave me the reasons why. So there is a perfect example of the influence and the resource and the effect he has had on the school district, but also on the court as well.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** I got to serve on the truancy board before the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and after the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, and I think the only comment I would like to make at this point is that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist also fits the general philosophy that we believe in. Not just his position, but many times on the board you hear him make remarks and comments that make me know for sure that he likes kids. He is there to be a problem solver for kids. He is not there as a community officer; that would be another critical piece. You can't just have anyone do it. They have to have the right philosophy that fits with what you are trying to do. He is on board with making the process an intervention rather than a punitive session. For example, there can be what you might call a snooty teenager in front of you. Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist will say I like those kids when they are like that. He likes those kids he sees as the spicy ones. He can deal with them being spicy in ways that are way more successful and sometimes bump up against us as administrators and teachers. So, it is partly his philosophy that jives with ours to make the whole thing work.

**Principal of Alternative High School:** From my stand point I spend a lot of time with Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist... he is in my building a lot. Tracking these kids and what he brings is sort of vague but essential; he has a certain presence about him that has credibility. He represents the next step. I'm playing with Principal of Alternative High School who is a school guy and Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is a court guy. Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is going to help me to stay out of jail; he knows jail and he knows how kids get here and he knows what happens while you're in there so he can talk straight talk. I mean you gotta understand that as Principal of an Elementary School said not anyone can do this. Aside from having a good philosophic sort of alignment with what we are about, Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist can get down and dirty with kids. That can get their attention and he has creditably so the fact that kids know he is going to show up puts a little extra pressure that they show up at school. Just by that notion by him coming around. And we double team a lot, and he can come to me on tough cases. The other day, for example, a kid was about ready to run out of my school because he had a confrontation with a teacher. The teacher was sort of playing John Wayne and the kid didn't need John Wayne at that time, and he said to hell with it, I'm out of here. These people don't know what they are doing. And Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist came to me and said Principal of Alternative High School, you know, John Wayne is just about to drive one of these kids out of school and I had to get the kid and Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist in and we calmed the waters and worked through it. He understands, and has a *sixth sense*.

**Nick:** He is a boundary spanner; this is what we would call him in social science. He is a person that can be equally comfortable in the down and dirty, and in the discussion of sophisticated ideas about restorative justice. Is this another special person? Or is the concept of a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist the thing that can be replicated?

**Principal of Alternative High School:** I think they started with a concept and then they said given the range of probation officers available, who might have the best flare or feel for this kind of job? I don't know how he ended up being selected, but if it was an open bid and people had the opportunity to apply I don't know how that all happened, but I think it's concept and followed by somebody who could create more intentional relationships between the schools and the court system. It turns out that what this position would that look like is what Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has created in his work.

**Nick:** *From the school side, then, are you looking towards the courts and saying they should offer us something like this, a juvenile justice truancy officer, and you think Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is the role model to follow?*

**Principal of Alternative High School:** Yes, he has been the only one I've seen, and I don't know who else is out there, but he's certainly got my resounding endorsement.

**Nick:** *Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist uses something called **check and connect** in going back to the parents. Has that made the truancy board process better? How does all that fit together?*

**(Unknown):** I think he uses a little bit of it in the truancy board, but most of it is after the truancy board. But after he actually meets with the kids at the school and goes to the home and meets with them at home with the parent too. Yes, he definitely makes good use of the tool. I think that is a big part of it too with the parents. You wouldn't believe how they call him. All the time, the parents or even the kid, is calling him. So I mean he has made a very big effect on the kids in our district.

**Nick:** This is the part that we are doing today, but there is another part we are going to be looking at. Where we are going to be looking at the success at school reconnection of petition kids and school completion and we are going to try and compare kids who were petitioned but don't have the access to the community truancy board with kids that did to see what the outcomes are. I think a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is something that should show up as we trace the comparison over time. Our sense is there is a lot of connection going on. *Do you sense that anyone who is a probation officer with the court could learn to be as effective as the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is or is there a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist personality factor that is really powerful here?*

**(Unknown):** I don't know a lot of the probation officers personally. I know some of them. All of them that I know have the right kind of personalities because that is what they have done for a living, work with these kids. So, they know how to react with a kid and be on their level and yet step that up to a stricter level with the parents if need be. I think that is their training, I don't know.

**Prosecuting Attorney:** I think that it's interesting when I look at the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and who he is and the program he is in at West Valley, and then I look at Kathleen Law who is somewhat of a counterpart at District 81. There are some similarities between them in terms of -- I think juvenile probation officers—I think there is an affinity in helping them to

get through the struggles with what is going on in general. I think the concept is good that you put together at West Valley, District 81 is replicating that, but it looks somewhat different though. I mean the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is who he is and Kathleen is Kathleen. Even though they may do things differently, Kathleen comes to court and gives information to the court there. Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist doesn't want to do that, and I respect that, but what I think is happening is that we shouldn't think you can "cookie cut" these people; instead, I think you can put a road map together and a set of guide lines to move them and be able to do the job and be effective being who they are. The concepts are good. There are certain traits that I think the individuals in this role need to have, and based on that I think you are going to have success in the role with different types of people doing it in their own way. They are not going to look the same, Kathleen is not Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is not Kathleen, but I see that with the concept we have and with what we are doing here that the types of personalities of these juvenile probation officers have show that the concept is working well.

**Nick:** *How much do the schools permit Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist to know about the student from the school records and files? Does he have absolute access to whatever is in Skyward?*

**(Unknown):** He does.

**Nick:** *That was a decision by the schools to permit him to have that access?*

**(Unknown):** Yes, I think because our tech people are the ones who put it on for him. It came through the school district. They wouldn't have let him get on otherwise.

**Nick:** *Is that part of the GJJAC grant supporting some understanding of coordination between court and school?*

**Superintendent:** I know we signed off on some document about shared data, and what would be OK and what wouldn't. He is in our school around the kids, he's like us. So why wouldn't he be allowed?

**Prosecuting Attorney:** I have access to student's attendance records and those things, so I would imagine Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist would too. I know it is confidential information and I have to destroy it once it no longer of direct use in a case, but I still have that access to it.

**Nick:** *Do you have to have access on individual cases, or do you just have access to files?*

**Prosecuting Attorney:** They give them to me on individual cases.

<b>Two-hour session period comes to an end on time</b>
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**(Unknown)** Can we be excused?

**Nick:** Yes, you can be excused. I want to thank you very, very much. That concludes our session. This is remarkably useful. Would you like to have the transcript of the session to look over after we get it all done?

**(Unknown)** Yes, sure.

[Buzz of activity among participants upon group session termination]

**Focus Group B from 10:15 am-12:15 pm:** Traditional High School Principal, Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School, Principal of a Middle School, Principal of an Elementary School, Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court, Youth Director at a Local Church, Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School, Counselor in Elementary and High School and Attendance Secretary

**Paul:** My name is Paul Strand and I am an Associate Professor at Washington State University at the Tri Cities campus. I am a clinical child psychologist and I have been working on this project along with Dr. Nick Lovrich and this is our second year on the project on the Models for Change work with the MacArthur Foundation. What we are doing this year is evaluating the West Valley Community Truancy Board. It has been identified as a process that might be beneficial for other areas of the state to perhaps replicate. What we are trying to do is to learn a little bit about what it is about and why it has been successful, and what in particular makes it successful. That is what we are going to be talking about today. Along with Nick and I we have Nikki Skaggs and Maureen Erickson who are students working in the Criminal Justice program. Charles Johnson is a recent PhD graduate in Criminal Justice who will be moving at the end of the summer to the University of Maine at Presque Isle. He is going to be the recorder and I am going to be the facilitator. One of the things we really want to do is facilitate a discussion to try and learn more than we can with individual interviews. The folks in the room have each been interviewed by one of us. So, what we are hoping for is, in a group process, is to be able to learn a little bit more about the workings of the board.

[Late arrival of one participant]

Hi, are you Principal of an Elementary School?

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Yes.

**Paul:** Good; we've got a name tag down there for you.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** OK, great!

**Paul:** You can move up here if you would like to. There is a sign in sheet that is coming around. As WSU we are the research partners to help Spokane learn a little bit about the West Valley School District Community Truancy board. I have introduced the players on the research team, so let's go around the room and introduce ourselves.

My name is XXXX and I am the Youth Director at a Local Church and I run the Crossing Youth Center and I have been helping out on the truancy board for the last couple of years.

My name is XXXX, and I am a supervisor at the Juvenile Court... and one of the areas I supervise is the BECCA unit.

I am XXXX and I am a principal of an Elementary School.

I am XXXX, principal at West Valley High School.

My name XXXX and I am principal at Centennial Middle school.

My name is XXXX and I am a counselor at West Valley High school and an elementary school.

I'm XXXX and I am an attendance secretary at an alternative school and I work at the contract based school.

My name is XXXX and I am attendance secretary at West Valley High School.

I am XXXX and I am director of special services and principal of an alternative high school.

**Paul:** OK, great. Thank you for introducing yourselves. What we have is an agenda for our session and at the very bottom there are five basic questions we will be exploring today. They are not phrased as questions, but rather in terms of what is going to organize our discussion today. The questions come out of all the interviews that we have had with you folks and other folks. We have three of these meetings scheduled today, and this is the second one. We think these questions are going to allow us to get at the heart of what it might take to replicate this program, or at least determine whether or not it can be replicated in other schools, smaller or bigger in size to West Valley. But I'd like I say at the outset that it seems like there is something special going on here; that is a common theme of the interviews we conducted in preparation for this session. In addition to doing the work with West Valley, we have also looked at other truancy boards. For example, I mentioned I am from the Tri Cities and in Benton/Franklin County there are community truancy boards both in Pasco and Kennewick. But those processes run very differently because they are court-based rather than school-based. So, it's been fascinating to meet and interview you folks, to have the earlier discussion, and just to see how different these two approaches are even though they might carry the same name —CTB— Community Truancy Board. So, looking at the agenda one of the first things that jumps out at us that we have talked about with you before is *how the process from your points of view looks from the standpoint of: Is the Community Truancy Board really about accountability or is it more about problem solving -- or what we might consider it to be **restorative justice**? Maybe it's both, but if you were to come down on one side or the other what you say about the process? I am wondering if someone wants to kick it off with that?*

**Charles Johnson:** Before you start your discussion, if I might add one bit of process direction. Since I am the recorder it's my job and obligation to make sure that you are picked up by the transcriber. And so, when you speak if you would just tell us your name and try to remember that throughout the entire process it will greatly help the transcriber get the discussion rendered to a reviewable text. We are going to take the names off later, but we need to make it as easy as possible for the transcriber to hear the voices and separate out the questions and responses. Thank you in advance.

**Paul:** Thanks, Charles.

**Traditional High School Principal:** I don't think it has ever been meant or described to me as a restorative process that has been put into place, but more as an accountability piece and actually as kind of a holding cell so to speak between the school district — actually the schools—the school district and then the courts. So what it looks like, the way it has worked for our students is another opportunity for the student and the parent to come in and see the importance of attendance, but I have never seen any restorative slant to it in any capacity.

**Paul:** So you help them to be able to see the importance of school attendance and that is what the Community Truancy Board tries to instill, or get across?

**Attendance Secretary:** To add to that, once we get the accountability we do run across problems, and that is where we do some problem solving. "Can we refer you? Can you consider this change?" That type of situation is developed for the students.

**Paul:** So, a referral process that is part of the issue of accountability is part of the process, and you try and lead them in directions that might help their situation in terms of their attendance?

**Principal of an Elementary School:** I have learned from coming to the Truancy Board, because we all share a part of it throughout the year and I agree with the Traditional High School Principal — it is accountability. But once they are here we are able to give them ideas of what would be helpful. I don't know any parent that doesn't want their kid to go to school. So it's helping both the kid and parent to work together. Is the school placement correct? How does a kid at a secondary level recapture some credits, for example. In this regard there is a multitude of information that supports a student to get on the track we want them on rather than having them enter into the courts.

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** I think to add to that, when the kids in the family get here it gives us an opportunity to hear their story about why exactly, and what exactly is going on rather than just sending them to court. Other than that, what I like about this program is that there are so many community resources here that help them for counseling, or Job Corps, or job placement stuff in high school, skill center, different things that many of the kids in families don't have resources to but once they are here they get to know and we have that conversation to get them more aware of that.

**Principal of a Middle School:** I have two points on the accountability piece. When I think of the word accountability it is not just for the attendance. In regards to what the Youth Director at a Local Church is saying, the accountability for making good choices, safe choices with the community's resources. So, if there is a drug issue, it would be helping them being held accountable for that element too, not just the attendance piece. I think a lot of it falls under the age of the student — a seven year old compared to a seventeen year old with two credits. Again, a different piece of the accountability and how we structure that conversation comes with each student.

**Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court:** The board sessions I sat through that were the most impressive piece to me started out with accountability because, when they walk in the room, just the structure of the room imposes a sense of being held accountable in a formal setting. You have all these people lined up and you put them in the center of the room with no table in front of them, so it is very intimidating when they first walk in and sit down. So right off the bat they get the impression that this is an accountability thing. Then, as people start talking you will see that they are here to brainstorm about how we can help make this kid successful. Yes, you have to go to school, that is the law and we are here to make sure we follow the law. But, on the other hand, what can we do to help make you be successful. And having the different people from the community in there, like the Youth Director at a Local Church was talking about, makes a big difference because you bring in different range of expertise—not just the school personnel.

**Paul:** It really sounds like there is that idea to help people make choices that kind of jumps out at me. When you think about the accountability isn't just for attendance but it goes beyond that, and that the Community Truancy Board can serve as a resource. *I'm wondering what peoples' ideas are on that in terms of what kind of resources the Community Truancy Board provides to these kids. If it's a one size fits all thing, or if it gets tailored to individual children and if it does how that individualization happens?*

**Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School:** I will jump in on this one first. It depends on the individual story that we hear as the Youth Director at a Local Church mentioned. When they come in we ask them, “Why are you not attending?” It is not a one size fits all because all the kids are different. I don’t think in all the times we have sat on the Truancy Board did we ever not have a suggestion of a place to go or resources to follow up with—so it is very individualized based on what they identify as the obstacles as to why they are not attending. And because we have so many people representing different agencies and areas of support we are able to provide for those individual needs. It’s up to them to follow up, but we help in support and providing them the information.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** And we are able to keep track of it. Usually a meeting is set up at that point and time where the next day or in the next couple days they need to meet with a principal or a counselor at the high school or search out other alternatives they may need help in. And that is where the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist’s position comes in. Now we have someone from the juvenile courts who follows up, so it is not just this time and it’s over, but it’s this time and carried forward.

**Attendance Secretary:** I work a lot with Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and he comes and says “Let me see so and so’s attendance,” and if they are showing any attendance towards missing school again he gets them. I have seen him pull kids in and they have just really done a turn around. It’s like this is really serious. Some of them think Truancy Board is funny, but when the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist talks to them they realize — no, this is the truth and the courts is going to get me. So I think he has been a very valuable asset for us at the high school.

**Paul:** So he has a different level of letting them know this is serious because he is not from the school district?

**Attendance Secretary:** Right. Exactly, because he is with the courts and he can tell them and they will believe him as opposed to... you know...

**Paul:** Oh, OK. So they can recognize him as the next step as representing the court.

**Attendance Secretary:** Yes.

**Paul:** That must be the next step because...

**Principal of an Elementary School:** It might not be with the courts. It could be with social services. It could be because they need counseling. There is also that group following up.

**Traditional High School Principal:** I want to add something. I believe part of the purpose is talking about maybe replicating this system. The caution I would send out there to anybody who is thinking about doing this, is to make sure that everybody understands the roles when they sit down at a board. I say this because I have been at some of our truancy hearings when people are making suggestions and recommendations that they should not be making — primarily within the school district. When they start talking about placements of students, what we have done is always try to make sure there is a building administrator to put the brakes on those sorts of things. So I throw that out as a caution because there are a couple times I have had to intervene and say, “Well, wait a second. We need that building principal to be part of that conversation before you start making those types of recommendations.” So, I think it would be good for any group including ours to maybe have roles written down of what

your responsibility is as that community member and you stay within those guard rails and don't start crossing off into that; because it is real easy, speaking for myself, to start talking for Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, for example. Because I know just enough about his role to start pulling him in, so my caution for anyone getting ready to develop a program like this to be real crystal clear of what every person's role is, and maybe even review that every time we get ready to start the hearing.

**Paul:** So that people don't make some sort of promises or suggestions that might not be feasible?

**Traditional High School Principal:** Appropriate.

**Paul:** Or appropriate.

**Traditional High School Principal:** Because not necessarily everyone has a history of that student where the school, counselor, assistant principal or principal would have more information on that student. They already know and maybe there were contracts made with that particular student and you don't dig down into that level and peel that onion back enough with the people that are on the panel that is going on. It is not a superficial amount of information, but before they start making recommendations of what that student needs to do primarily within the district, the people that are in charge within those buildings probably need to be contacted a little bit more.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** That is a great statement. I want to follow up on that. Usually if I have a student that is coming here and I am not sitting on the board as part of the panels of the board, I will come also and fuse myself onto the board because of the knowledge I have about that kid and family. And I know Centennial does that, and I'm sure other schools do that too.

**Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School:** I want to say that a lot of our students that come here already have had intervention at our school level, so the information we have is pretty much black and white as far as what we want done with the student and what has already been done with the student. I agree with the Traditional High School Principal, sometimes it doesn't matter what information we are given and sometimes being overruled. And I agree each person does need to know what is going on with that school and the school should make the decision vs. someone who doesn't know the student or what is going on.

**Paul:** *In terms of what decision?*

**Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School:** If they are going to revoke their choice or what they are going to do as far as the level or where they are going to put the child or what they are going to have done like a drug assessment. Well, if this has already been handled at the school level I think the school should make the decision, not some of the community members that are making the decision.

**Paul:** Okay, so sometimes there can be information coming from the board that differs from what exists in the plan that is arising from the school and what is already in the works at the school level?

**Traditional High School Principal:** I guess I am not communicating that well enough, and I appreciate you trying to summarize my thoughts. My thought is more of — if I am there as a representative of the court, it should not be my role to say well what about transferring the

student to another building. They are definite boundaries. I am not saying they are not well intentioned, because they certainly are, even though I might not know everyone, the community feeling I get right away is very obvious. As nurturers I think we try to reach out and look further out than I think our authority allows us or should allow us to do.

**Paul:** And that can lead to problems?

**Traditional High School Principal:** Not only legal problems. Like the Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School pointed out, there are contracts that have already been made. Especially if it is a choice kid in particular, but if I go back and talk with one of my counselors and say “Oh, the recommendation of the board is that you start contacting the parent more often.” and they are pulling out their hair saying “I contact the parent once a month or once a week.” So feelings can get hurt.

**Paul:** OK.

**Traditional High School Principal:** It’s like we need to be aware of people’s roles. That’s probably the best way I can say it.

**Principal of a Middle School:** An example I can bring up that happened yesterday at the truancy board concerns these distinct roles idea. I was the administrator and the administrator kind of directs the conversation a little bit, kind of redirects it when it needs to get redirected and tries to summarize what the plan is. This was a choice student, out of district and I was kind of ready to say it sounds like being in West Valley is not a fit. You know, I think we probably need to revoke, but I needed to touch basis with the school and luckily the school was represented. I asked Coordinator of Community Truancy Board does the principal want the student revoked? So we kind of had a little side conversation. She wanted to keep the student for one more week for a probationary period. So again, very easily I could have said I think you’re revoked, you need to go back to your home school and so it’s important to have those roles and communication so we are getting clear communication to that family. I think sometimes that is where these other messages come from. We are just adding to the confusion to these poor folks who are already in chaos. Just another little piece of that...

**Paul:** So, it can lead to more chaos rather than less chaos, and that is really what you want to avoid. And then you have to backtrack because something has been said that doesn’t match what someone else has said. Well, this discussion does bring up other questions that are on down the list here a little bit. Two things come to my mind that I would like to hear your opinion on a little bit are: *Is the information that you’re provided with on the students as board members and training you receive to serve on the board sufficient?*

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** I remember that in my individual interview I brought up the background information shared and that it was so much more helpful. One thing I want to add first is, it is so great to have the school counselors, specific kids counselors from their school be at the truancy board. For one, they feel more supported, and for two, they usually have that information key to be able to give us members as well as being the link. Even if that kid hasn’t been connected with that counselor at the school, you can say this is your counselor from here on out you can connect with them more. It gives them another person along with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist to connect with and they have the resources that are really needed. But on top of that the times for me at least when it seems most successful in the Truancy Board is when we, just before the student comes in, we can get a little bit of a background if we know

it, about how many times the student has been on truancy board. Maybe this is the thing that has happened since 4<sup>th</sup> grade. It's a parent thing, if we know anything about their family or their living situations or if they have been in juvy or has different record type of things. Anything that helps us give, or understand who that kid is and where they are coming from seems to really help us in realizing and figuring out how to help them. And especially more resources with Spokane Valley Partners and Job Corps and Work Source and these different things that we can say, with this kid I can probably speak to them and be able to tell them what they have because we have that initial information that helps them help us know more about the student. And I know that isn't always the case. We don't always know the information, but when we do it seems to help.

**Paul:** Is that a plea for more information?

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** I mean both. I think if we can give more from time to time when we know it. Especially for people like me who are not in the school and don't know the students all the time. Even just a quick little thing—hey, this is what we know about this kid. It can give the board just a little bit more of an understanding of how to come at this student. More information could help us be more useful.

**Paul:** How about from an educator's standpoint... community standpoint?

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** From my experience on the truancy board I would say I don't know if there is training. There is on-the-job training and I would say, like the Traditional High School Principal mentioned, role definition and making sure we understand who is supposed to be approaching the truancy board meeting from what role is important. It took me a number of weeks as a counselor, and like the Youth Director at a Local Church said that is a role I finally kind of grasped regarding what I was supposed to be doing. But I was not informed of that prior to being on the truancy board meeting.

**Paul:** So, you had to figure it out by being there a few times and then you realized, this is how I can fit into this process.

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** Yes, and I don't know prior to that if there was any formal training. I have only been on the board for the past few years. My guess is that there wasn't. I think that could be a good thing for people who are doing what we are doing. Kind of have some clarification, kind of say this is what we see you doing on the truancy board?

**Nick:** Can I ask a question in observing? *Is the role definition something about representing different functions, or is the board diversity of perspectives what is important about the value of the plan. What is developed at the end? Or both? I mean, if you are going to replicate this in another school, who needs to be part of that group? And what roles are they playing? It sounds like the Traditional High School Principal thinks that is very important to be part of the replication. And there is very little documentation of the Community Truancy Board here. It all seems to evolve as people work with it. So the next people thinking about replicating it probably would like to know from you, from your experience, who needs to be there and what should they be saying when they are there and what shouldn't they be saying. Then, if that can be captured in the training that didn't exist for you it might be available for the next group.*

**Principal of an Elementary School:** And I can tell you when we very first started this we didn't disperse responsibility to all the administrators in the district. It was lead by one person and it

became overwhelming. And so that person couldn't always be at the board table every Wednesday. So that is how the other administrators even got involved.

**Nick:** Was it Dale McDaniel?

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Yes. I think it is good that all administrators are here, and anytime that we have one of your own kids here you should be there. Their counselor should be there.

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** That is what we do at the high school. If we can have both the administrator and the counselor that works with the student be there we can. But if one of us can't make it for whatever reason we talk to the administrator of that academy to make sure that one or the other is going to be there. And then that helps it to be successful. Then there is a more personal understanding.

**Paul:** So, those are two positions that need to be there, as a counselor and then a representative of the school administrator for that kid.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Yes. I think that is the best of all worlds to have that happen. You can't have a teacher there because they are teaching.

**Principal of a Middle School:** I kind of change that up a little bit for Centennial, though. I let our teachers know who is on truancy and if they have a stake in the student and prefer to come and sit with me. I have always let them come. Because maybe they have made those contacts that I don't even know about. But we haven't had any teacher's take us up on this. I think they are even a little intimidated about truancy board. But I've put that invitation out for the past couple of years. You might know more than I do, and if you want to be up there problem solving and holding them accountable I will take your class and you can go. And you mentioned what other roles are important; it's hard to say because I don't know the community or the culture in which you are trying to emulate this. You know, I think keeping it smaller there is a certain culture at West Valley and those of us that sit on the board know it. The Youth Director at a Local Church is a big piece at West Valley with our teenagers. If I was to look at Spokane public schools there is a whole different culture to the Lower South Hill then there is to the Moran Prairie or Indian Trail area. So I don't see it being as successful having just one board for these sorts of sub groups or areas' kids, cultures and families. So that would be my suggestion, I think it's a lot more beneficial being personalized. The accountability is still there, but the problems solving is a lot more genuine.

**Paul:** From the standpoint of community?

**Principal of a Middle School:** Yes.

**Traditional High School Principal:** What I would add to that group is having the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist there from the juvenile court. It has been just phenomenal because he starts going down avenues, especially when the parents and student start bringing up things that I am kind of like What? Where are you going with this? And he just narrows in like a quarter horse and gets right on it right away. Someone from the court system is very nice to have and I think someone who would represent a community homeless population. That has been a good resource that has been there. They start handing out cards right away. I would say in our case in the secondary system having someone there from Job Corps would be great because we have kids that just shoot right into the program. Those are the people that I have seen not just

taking an action as a community board member but actually touched that person in some capacity where they find a resource for them. I agree with the Principal of a Middle School. If it starts getting too big I think you lose some of that value within it, even though I'm speaking out the other side of my mouth. I will say that the Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court was bringing this to light, when they walk in — that is a long walk. They walk through the door, all the way up there, they sit down and its one of these sorts of things like what the hell is this? And after 30 years in education you can almost see the little light bulb go on like "oh crap, this is serious." And that is what we have to do. So that is another one of those oh crap its serious moments, sometimes it's not, and they are slouched down and they are like "whatever, throw the book at me and I am pretty hard, I know what's going on." But in most cases it's like "BLINK" (light bulb) and the impression they get when they are walking out of the room and they can't get out fast enough, and that's a good thing. So it's intentional the way things are set up. By the same token, it's large enough so that it is somewhat intimidating to that person because it certainly captivates most of their attention when you walk in this room as a parent and as a student.

**Paul:** They recognize it's a different level than what it has been. And then the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist adds to that is what you're saying. He adds that there is another level, there is a way in which these systems connect so that they can see what the next system is going to be even before they have to go to the courtroom.

**Traditional High School Principal:** A good example — the last time I was here with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist was when the student was kind of getting real distant with the answering and started talking about other kids doing this or that, and the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist started naming off names. And the person kind of said "oh yeah, it's Kevin." The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist starts writing stuff down, and you know now the kid is like wait a second he knows who I am talking about so now they have corralled me a little bit here and otherwise the kid is all over the place. The kids say something like; "well ya, I think I have a PO." And they know, but I am sitting there thinking I have no idea what they are talking about but the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist can get right to it. They get pinned down, and they have to verbalize their answers a little bit more. I think it's helpful as a student to have different accountability as well as the parents. Because sometimes they will give you only as much information as they think you have. So if the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist wasn't there, they pull a lot of cards. I have seen them start asking questions and they get right to it. So bare minimum those are the folks I would look at if I was going to replicate this system. Someone from the court, someone that can represent the homeless community, and then also Job Corps in the secondary, and if you had someone like the Youth Director at a Local Church from a faith-based capacity it makes a big difference and another resource for us. And as the Principal of a Middle School has outlined, our district isn't too large. We are small enough to make the connections, so when you say the Youth Director at a Local Church, the kids have a face to the name. I agree, if you are in Spokane public schools or in Tacoma it might get lost in the transition.

**Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School:** The other given person is obviously the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board, who does all the clerical and keeps us aware of what is happening... and also she holds those parents accountable. Yesterday a parent called our main office here — "I can't make it." Well, the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board is here and she made her come because those parents need to be

accountable. “Well I don’t feel well,” “well you will feel well enough to get here won’t you?” And the parent showed up. She is a critical piece to making sure everything is in order... all the documents and all that. She is a critical piece. She is a given to make sure this process works.

**Traditional High School Principal:** A district person oversees all of this and every time there is a truancy meeting. But that district representative is important.

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** Two things I wanted to add. I think one of the reasons why truancy board has such a high successful rate, such a high percentage don’t miss anymore school after they leave. I think one of the biggest reasons is the atmosphere. The reality of almost scaring it into them that the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board starts off. We all introduce ourselves, they introduce themselves and then the Coordinator of Community Truancy Board starts by explaining what the law is. Most of the teenagers have no idea what it is. Then when she says in Washington you have to go to school and this is what happens if you don’t, and if you miss one class from here on out you will go in front of the judge. Kind of like what you were saying, some of them are like, “I know the system so who cares.” But a large portion of them are like “I had no idea how serious this is.” So on top of being overwhelmed by all the adults present, that recognition of the importance of the hearing is the one thing that makes them change...not necessarily what we say. Another thing I wanted to say concerns the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. I think that he almost always sits over here so when everyone does it, he says “I am the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and I am from the juvenile courts” and you can just see some of the kids’ parents are like see this is serious. So just him being there and then on top of that, having a unique person like the present Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is, he is so good with the kids. He really knows how to connect, the words, the language to use, and he is so intentional about following up with these kids. That almost every single time — especially if they were a kid that was here last year — he follows them out and tells them about the next step. Hey, this is what is going on, what else we can talk about? And so, when they come back or even when we talk about if their friend comes. “Hey, I meet with your buddy every week. Ask him about the process.” I think having the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist’s position is extremely important as well as just the character of who the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is to really be able to relate with the kids really well.

**Paul:** Well, that brings us to the third item on the agenda. We are specifically going to talk about the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist at the end in terms of the position and the importance of it. And I am already getting a sense from a lot of people that they feel that it is an important role. But, if we think about the development of the board and how it has sustainability that is what we are interested in. *If we replicated this, can another group, another set of people get it done? It raises the question of “It is a personality thing?” “Is it Coordinator of Community Truancy Board?” or is there something special about the people involved in this board that make it work and this is a situation where “no you can’t ever do that again because you really need to have that personality”?* Or is it the idea, the concept that allows this process to be successful? What do you think?

**Attendance Secretary:** I served on the truancy board the first three years and then went off and in the first three years that we had the truancy board we kind of stumbled through a little bit. But I think just the nature of it and the way we have done it with the people coming on and off. We have had different people from the community and different people from the school district itself. And it is kind of a self-sustaining thing. Yes, the Coordinator of Community

Truancy Board has been there as the overseer. She has pretty much been there since the beginning. You would need someone from the district office to run all the stuff. But if you get people who want to do this, who volunteer because that is where we came from — we volunteered to be on the truancy board — then you are going to have people to sustain the motion. When people have to leave, *more will come on and sustain the whole momentum.*

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** I guess I can piggy back on that a little bit as someone who is maybe a newer member of the truancy board. Like I said, I didn't understand my role and didn't really understand exactly what the truancy board itself was doing or what I was supposed to be doing. I had no problem if there was conflicting meetings that I needed to be at. At this point for the past year and a half my preference would be to not miss the truancy board, and that is a priority to me because I know the kids feel like I can be valuable, or if it's a kid I don't know very well when they make it to truancy board, then I know I need to get to know this kid. There is something important going on. In a sense I am volunteering because I prefer to not miss any meetings.

**Nick:** Let me ask a question as an observer. Are you getting benefit from the board primarily from being more effective with the kids? Is that why you volunteer Attendance Secretary?

**Attendance Secretary:** More involved with the children because at the time I was running the Learning Opportunity Center at the high school and so a lot of the truancy children were a lot of the kids I was dealing with everyday at the high school. So it seemed like a good opportunity for me to get a little bit more background on the kids and have some say; you gotta be here, this is important.

**Nick:** This is one thing that we don't have any written documentation about, that focuses on the process the kids and families going through. *But there is another part to the board -- are the people volunteering to participate on the board benefiting from their participation in the other things that they do?*

**Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court:** Being a community member, and I just sat on the East Valley's Truancy Board that has replicated West Valley's, what it has done for me is that it has made our relationship with East Valley schools and the court rise tremendously. We have that connection now. Now, if it be a matter of kid-specific or program-specific or any other context now we have a connection back with us that we can call, even if it is not a truancy matter. If they can't get a straight answer from the parent or if the kid is involved with the law or not, they can now call and ask "what's going on with this kid?" We can then look them up and say they have this pending or whatever. So that communication going back and forth has made a big difference for us, and in the case of kid-specific issues this connection works in the same way. They send me a list of the kids before the truancy board, which is a great thing to have ahead of time because then I can look up and see if they are on probation or if they have an at risk youth tag or if they have any of that stuff. If they have been on probation in the past I can determine that as well. For example, who was their probation officer... I can go get background information from that officer. I can even invite them to come to the truancy board... so we have had that going back and forth now.

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** If I understand the question, the benefit I get out of it, one of the biggest benefits I get out of it is the parents. I call them and they won't return calls. I think I have only sat in on one truancy board where the parent was not there. So it is a bridge to meet the parent. So anytime the school and home can work together I think

whatever we are going to find success for that kid we are going to be more successful if we are working with the parent. Because sometimes it can get, I guess I walk out of the truancy meeting and feel like I have a positive relationship with the parents even though it is an accountability piece. Prior to that, if I haven't had contact with them or minimal contact with the parent the results are often poor. Sometimes it's more adversarial... the parents feel like the school is trying to get them. Walking out of there together they understand I have to get my stuff together because again this is a bigger deal than I understood it to be.

**Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School:** I agree with the Counselor in Elementary and High School because I do all the tracking of the students at our school and set up interventions. I try to make sure they are coming to school. I'm dealing with the parents all the time, and 98% of them I have never met... the board hearing gives them a little bit more insight as to who you're talking with because on the phone their voices can give you a real total wrong impression vs. meeting them in person... and you can see who you are dealing with.

**Paul:** *So face-to-face makes a difference?*

**Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School:** It does.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** I just want to reiterate that every administrator should have time on the board. It is vital because you learn. I'm not a secondary person; I was for a while, but avenues that you see and hear about come alive on the board. What can happen with one of my student's older brother or sisters is always good information for me to have. You can just take that information and pass it on. The other thing I want to say is that whenever I have had an intern for *principalship* I have asked them to sit on, and sometimes I am thinking I am getting out of it. And to be honest, I love coming to truancy. It is important to be there. I know most of the kids. They have either gone through my elementary school, or the middle school when I was the principal. We are small enough that we know families. I even brought a first grader there once.

**Paul:** *So you see this as a resource even as a first grader?*

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Absolutely.

**Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School:** I think the piece they are speaking about is the relationship building process. It's another opportunity to build a relationship with the student and the families in a supportive way. Again, we are there for accountability... but when they leave I think I can make the assumption that they feel like it was a supportive process.

**Paul:** So it's got that. That's a very interesting dynamic. They can come in and its set up as an accountability, but when they walk out the door they have a sense of connecting with the Counselor in Elementary and High School or feeling like this is worse or like what the Youth Director at a Local Church said, several of you have, "This is more serious than I thought. These folks are on board to keep me from going to the next step," which is what the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is pointing out. He's sitting here on the end and I have these people and hopefully someone will stop me before I get all the way to that side. OK, they wouldn't see that originally as they come in, but then they could feel supported even though they are happy to get out of here. *Well then, if we were to think about the sustainability issue—what is it that makes it possible for this process to continue as it has over the years? Maybe we have covered*

*it in some ways. Do folks have anything to add? I'm wondering also, Charles, do you have any questions? Feel free to step in and ask them. I haven't given you the opportunity.*

**Charles:** Well, there are a couple points I would kind of like to go back to. As we get to item number five as you're all probably anticipating, I would like to pose a question, specifically to the Youth Director at a Local Church and the Traditional High School Principal. *Traditional High School Principal, how do you see the Youth Director at a Local Church in his role with the board, and what successes do you think the board has seen as a result of having someone from the faith-based community involved in the process?*

**Traditional High School Principal:** The uniqueness of having the Youth Director at a Local Church is generally when they walk in here with something and it's not the first time they have seen his face. So he comes in West Valley High School and other schools and he is there during lunch. He comes to our activities. They see him, they have an understanding of who he is. So it's another adult, and a younger adult that can make another connection and encourage them in some capacity that we typically don't get with older adults. I would also add that the proximity, he is a mile away from us... our kids can walk over to his facility and I know they do. Those are advantages that are unique to us and so I don't know if that can be replicated, but in a smaller town probably that could be. But for us it really makes a big difference.

**Charles:** Thanks, and again this is Charles. (Addressing the Youth Director at a Local Church) I actually sat in on one of the community truancy boards at which you were present. *I'm just curious, how much interaction do you feel you have —and do you have enough interaction in your opinion? If not enough, how would you change that? This leads to another question with regards to the follow-up process after the students leave this room. How much do you actually participate in that post-hearing process?*

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** One thing I was going to add first is that I have been youth director here for the past two and a half years, and I see my role as being different than is typical at a church. I'm very community-focused. I don't see my role as getting the kids there to indoctrinate them into what I believe. I really believe in holistic ministry...helping them with their family situation, and helping teenagers get through being a teenager. I try to put support in place where it is needed. I'm an assistant golf coach and I'm involved in West Valley sports, and again those are not so I can get more kids to my program; that is not it at all. It is more about finding out resources, collaborating, and more community involvement to be able to, in the long run, help these kids. At first I was like the Counselor in Elementary and High School was saying, I didn't talk for a long time because I didn't know what the process was, I didn't know what my role was. This goes back to answering your sustainability thing. It's that the vision was cast on me very well that I have a heart for so many of these kids and just broken kids in general, that when they talked about what the truancy board is and what the avenues are and what we are able to bring to them and the resources, I was very excited to be there because I saw what these kids could have in life with a little help at the right time. An extra thing, more than just sending them to court and not providing any more structure in their life doesn't accomplish much. I don't speak a ton, but from time to time I think kind of what like the Traditional High School Principal was saying... that's because when I am younger and I am also more up to date with a lot of the trends and a lot of the things kids are into. I have quite a few "ins" with a lot of kids within the district. A lot of them tell me about different drugs and who's partying and whose dealing, and what house they go to when people skip. So I think I

bring a little unique perspective. Probably about 25-30% of the kids I know pretty personally, and once again to answer your questions it also gives me an opportunity to meet their parents if I haven't done that and connect with them even more. At the youth center we run, I run my weekly junior high and senior high programs there, but at the same time we also run drop-in for kids just twice a week during the school year and three times a year during the summer. So providing them and letting them know they have a safe place in their community is one thing we do. We urge them to come play video games, come play pool... you know, whatever things like that attract their attention. Those are a few things to add to the group. I am not here all the time, but I try to make it as much as possible. From one meeting here for the kids who come here they are able to see them at the schools, at lunch or sporting events. It can give them another person to talk to or connect with.

**Charles:** I have a particular interest in the information sharing aspect of the process, and that is the reason I opened this conversation up between the Traditional High School Principal and the Youth Director at a Local Church. *I'm curious from the administration standpoint of what you think about someone from the community having access to the information they have access to and involvement the process. Whether it's the Youth Director at a Local Church or someone like him, should they have more information? Is it possible he is not getting enough information, or is it possible he is getting too much information on students and their backgrounds? What is your perspective? I would like to start with the Traditional High School Principal, but I would like to have perspective from everyone on the board.*

**Traditional High School Principal:** Very insightful that you asked that question because there are limitations of what can be shared and we probably take that right to the edge. Because the student has rights and so on relating to privacy, for example, some stuff we can't share relate to behavioral situations which come up. That should not be shared at a board hearing session. But what would happen with savvy administrators is you will ask questions where the student brings that out, and now it's open game for people to start asking questions. So really, what I think we can do is provide attendance, and grades and transcripts and—depending on the experience of the board member—they can then discern what kinds of questions they have to ask to help with the student's attendance problem. But as building administrators and counselors we need to be really careful of what we say in front of that group because we always have to be careful and protective of that student's rights and the privacy of their records.

**Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School:** Being the director of special services we don't share their confidential special ed information. That is just not part of the conversation, so we do have those safeguards. It's not just something that is common knowledge and wouldn't be discussed in that type of setting. If you understand the transcript and who teaches what you can pick out some of those things, but we would never discuss their disability in the truancy board setting. We would not share that information.

**Principal of a Middle School:** Kind of what like the Traditional High School Principal is saying, a lot of it has to do with your questioning and what the family is willing to share. You know we won't discuss a student with an IEP, but maybe we will discuss why they are struggling in reading and part of the plan is going back to the building and looking at that further. Do we need to help accommodate that challenge the student is having? Most of it has to do with how you pose those questions. I just want to say one thing in regards to the Youth Director at a

Local Church being on the board. I think the power behind that too is he comes to the middle school quite a bit, lunches, dances, dresses up at Halloween, the kids see him in a very fun capacity, a very supportive role, but when they see him sitting up there even if he doesn't say a word they know he is holding them accountable. He has the same expectation that I have for them and their counselor has for them. And I think that is extremely powerful. So even though he interacts with them differently and sees them in a different capacity, they know he wants me to be at school too.

**Charles:** Does anyone else have any more comments on that? Do you think there is some information you feel you would really like to have that you are not getting, or do you think you are getting what you need?

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** I think for the most part I am getting what I need to and the statement I made at the beginning was more of the overall kind of general information we can know. I think it's so important that we know this kid has been here every single year for the past several years because there is this unique thing, it's a pattern. You know before if the parents been aware of things? Are they supportive? For the most part I think I get enough information for that, and I was going to add one thing which is this—there is sometimes the case where if I know a couple of the kids. I usually tell the board “hey, I know this next person coming in. I know this, this and this about them.” This information can usually give a better understanding for the board to realize if they were to share something, a lot of times I will go outside and talk to the parents and say “hey, I'm on this board, is it okay if I sit in here or I'm happy to sit outside” and so on. I realize there are boundaries around that stuff and I want to make it as comfortable for everyone in general. Especially being from a faith-based community, so many times there are those lines that depending on who you are, are tough to figure out where you yourself needs to be. The church and state rules, and you know different regulations like that and so once again I think that especially the people on the board realize that I am not there, I am never there to talk about God or the bible or anything like that. I don't see my role like that or anything. My own ministry is my own daily work, and being on the board is a unique part of that community outreach work. I don't know if every single director person could be like that or specific people who have more of a vision for community and helping the kids coming along side of them. You know, I'm not sure. I have met several youth directors in similar positions to mine who wouldn't do this and never go to the school because they are very focused on their own buildings, and that can be a negative stereotype about church workers. But I see myself in a completely different role and I don't see that changing.

**Charles:** As we move forward, one of our roles here is to help make a tool kit that it can be used to replicate the community truancy board process. One of the things we have heard prior to this group here is that at the beginning the folks from the community were invited in, it was kind of opened up and everyone was invited and now people are kind of “handpicked” to sit on the board. *Do you agree or disagree with that philosophy? What I am trying to get at more specifically is who is not at the table that should be with regards to having the needs of the students be met? Who is not being represented and who should be brought to the table, and how can we make those recommendations for someone replicating this?* I have a suggestion if you can't come up with something immediately. *It has been indicated that drug counselors could possibly be more included, what do you think of that?*

**Traditional High School Principal:** I would say that a large percent of the issues at the high school that we deal with are mental health issues...whether it's the student and/or the parent. So in that capacity we would love to have more support from the mental health folks, and if you're familiar with Washington State back in the mid 80's the state started pulling out of the mental health business and that function was actually picked up by public education. It was not appropriate, but no one else was doing those sorts of things. For an example, our counselors are guidance counselors. They're specially trained as guidance counselors, and if you ask the role of any one of our parents "what's the role of counselors" they will say they are there to help them with emotional and behavioral things. Well, their certifications are truly academic guidance, and in most cases their training is not in emotional/behavioral counseling. Public education took over that capacity because there was need for that, but that role is a difficult to carry out. So I would say it would be wonderful if we could have someone from mental health, because there is not a day that goes by in my capacity that I don't have to deal with someone who has some form of mental health issue.

**(Laughing—everyone took note that this could apply to the colleagues with whom they work in their respective schools or agencies)**

**Traditional High School Principal:** Truly, that would be invaluable for us. I would imagine that the court rooms are full of people with mental health issues.

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** I think for a while we had at least a one person from the high school who was on the board who does drug and alcohol assessments, and I think we cannot force them to do it but we can strongly advise them to set up a meeting with whoever it is that is available. To be able to say it's just going to be a conversation to have with her to figure out what that is... Someone who is specialized that can really get inside and especially having a one-on-one conversation is way easier instead of sorting out tough personal problems in front of a whole board, opening up about everything. But it did help having her on there to be able to talk about the different routines possible. I totally agree with the Traditional High School Principal and I think having a mental health person could really serve to improve things because so many cases come up, especially with parents. Yesterday, for example, there was one that could have really helped to have a better insight to that.

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** I guess there are a number of people on the board who can make referrals to mental health... the challenge is that two weeks ago I sat in and talked to parent after the meeting that she wanted. I talked with her about some resources I had, and she was really positive about them. I called her over and over and left messages, but she never returned my calls. It would be much better to have someone right there who can make the connection...someone who can refer right then and there.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Having mental health there would be great. I can think of a certain few agencies that I don't think would be very helpful.

**Charles:** Names would be helpful because we don't know. And at the end we take names out anyways.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** Secondly, I think it would be difficult to get a really hard mental health person here week after week.

**Paul:** So, do you think they could be distracting perhaps, or not helpful? That is a possibility.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** The formal person would come and in the end they wouldn't get any help.

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** If someone sat in I think it would be more beneficial if they had the power to connect the parent or child with services as opposed to leaving it up to the parent.

**Principal of a Middle School:** I totally agree with the Counselor in Elementary and High School about having that connection right there on the spot. Another person and maybe in the past this person has sat in, I'm not sure... but what about Children Homes Society? Have we ever had them sit in? That would be a great idea for us to have them sit in on the board because they could make that immediate connection and do the follow-up right in our school.

**Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School:** This may not be valid, but I think we have to be cautious so that we don't look like we are using the truancy board as a way to funnel services to a particular agency. So there would need to be some discussion about what type of person would sit on the board and what agency they represent—or give opportunities for other agencies. That may be an issue if it were perceived that we were funneling our resources to one particular mental health agency.

**Paul:** *The last question we have has to specifically do with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's role, and not the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist as a person, but rather as a representative of the court. Before we begin that discussion does anyone have anything to say about sustainability or that great thought you have in the back of your mind? Now is a good chance if we have missed anything, because that is what we are about — sustainability—what we can do to replicate it and what tools would be good for other places to know about.*

**Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School:** The obvious thing to me is that it is sustainable here because we believe it works. If it succeeds in keeping the kids out of the court system, if we believe it's working... then we sustain our commitment in that regard.

**Paul:** OK, well then... let's tackle the last question, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's position. Having a court person, and that is a recent addition (he said he has been here 1.5 years). Some of you have been here long enough to see what the board was like before and after the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. So I will open it up there—what noteworthy changes have resulted in your view?

**Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School:** I think having the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist on the board has made a huge impact because the kids know he has got information... he knows who their PO's are if they've been in trouble, he knows if they have a criminal record... he knows these things when they come to truancy board. For a lot of the kids that past is not their only issue. They often have other issues going on as well. They know the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist on another level, so when he says I am going to track you when you leave here once a week they know this tracking will take place. I think it holds them accountable for other issues also because he knows what they have done and what they are doing and they don't want to have him too much in their life. Often they are willing to deal with him once a week to keep on the straight and narrow, and I think it has made a lot of difference in a lot of the kids.

**Youth Director at a Local Church:** I spoke earlier about his role and one thing I would like to add is that there is great importance to the fact that there is someone who is willing to stick with it. It seems like it has been longer because of the number and range of relationships he has with the kids, but something I have seen this even compared to last year is that some of the same kids who have been on every year, they walk into the room, they see the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and are like “oh, hey the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist.” He has been to their house, seen where they live and gone and had deep conversations about life, their family and relationships and so having someone who can be sustainable themselves rather than having someone come in for a year and change out is really important. There is something about the power of having a middle school student going through high school and having that same person, even if he is not meeting every single week with them, but he is in all the different schools at different parts of the week. And being seen at different events and things like that...it is so important to have the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist role be a person who is willing to be sustained for a few years at least.

**Principal of a Middle School:** I agree the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist position is hugely important. I was pre- and post-Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. His presence on the board is huge and he does sit on the end there and talks the language of the kids and flips his computer open and they know he could be looking at anything or documenting anything. His presence in our building is powerful; he is doing the critical follow-up. The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist position—that is a critical component of the process. Even though we don’t want to talk about the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist specifically, personality is huge...whether it’s a teacher or an administrator the personality of that person is critical. Interacting with the kids and families effectively takes a certain kind of personality. Yesterday he shared he got stuck at the gas station with a parent for an hour and half. Because of that relationship with the family he takes that type of time and demonstrates that type of commitment. I just can’t say enough positive things about having that position. We have been blessed to have it in West Valley. Thank you, Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court. He is responsible for that.

**Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court:** Well our grant is, yes.

**Paul:** I think that is all that we have. Does anyone have questions?

**Becca Unit Supervisor for Juvenile Court:** Back on the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist’s position -- we all know it’s a grant. If there were additional funding to cover the costs of this position would there be an advantage to keeping a court person vs. a school person? So what I mean is, let’s say West Valley got extra money and they got the money to hire for a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist’s position. Would it be better if it was a court person or school person?

**Counselor in Elementary and High School:** Gut reaction would say court person.

**Principal of an Elementary School:** I think he brings a different set of skills.

**Traditional High School Principal:** I have a question I can ask of the WSU folks. So, I get the impression through conversation about the success of this program and trying to replicate that. How did you quantify that information?

**Paul:** You mean how do we know it works?

**Traditional High School Principal:** Yes.

**Charles:** I get to pause for a minute—long enough for everyone to look at me and then we get to defer to Dr. Lovrich.

**(Laughing.)**

**Traditional High School Principal:** I don't mean to put anyone on the spot, but certainly if you're talking about replicating systems at my school, if a teacher is saying I have success in a classroom I want to know what data did you use for that so I can replicate that with other teachers. So, I go into specifics of if its methodologies or pedagogy, so I'm curious.

**Nick:** We are going to do two parts to our assessment. This part is the qualitative part, documenting "how does it work"—that is, what are the dynamics when people say we are making a difference. Why do they say that? Then, we are having two independent sources of information. One is the interviews that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is conducting with parents and the kids that come and sit here, and I have to tell you preliminarily they have a very different impression on what is going on here than what we are recording here in the interviews and focus group session. That is going to be important feedback for anyone who is trying to replicate the system. You may have one set of eyes about how important it is to be officious and court-like in the hearing setting, but that choice of meeting format has consequences for those people after they leave and think about what happened to them here. So you need to understand that this feedback is being collected, and it can make your process better. So that is one set of eyes. A different set of eyes is the counter-factual. Kids that get petitioned, that have access to this process—are they having any different outcomes than kids that don't have access to this process? So, we have comparable groups of kids that Jennie Marshall at the Juvenile Court is going to help us identify, and we'll look at them with respect to two different types of outcomes. Going back archaically, we can look at **Did they finish school?** Was there school reengagement, and at what level? Also, did they have further involvement in the court system—juvenile and/or adult? If the process is successful, then it should lead to more engagement, more successful completion, and less communication with the courts, juvenile and adult. So we have the hard numbers and we have this softer process of how do people think this is working. Ideas like this, which are seen as good and promising and even put in the state legislation as a recommended thing you do if you are having a truancy issue in your school district, should undergo this type of strict scrutiny. There is no real documentation as to what has happened here, and this process has been going on since 1996 or 1997. The originator, your Superintendent, said in the previous session that this is "my thing and if I leave I don't know if it will keep going because it's expensive to do," but we don't have any documentation one way or another. We haven't seen anything on the previously available record where people said "This is what I get from this process." Is it the relationships that are important? If so, where is that written other than in experiences of people in this room? So task number one was to document that idea and catch it in your words, and have our analysis serve as the documentation of that belief. Then the other part is: Did it make a difference over time? Since you have been in operation since 1997 we have the advantage of being able to go back and look at school completion and school reengagement and subsequent court penetration for the kids that have been petitioned and have had and **not** had the benefit of the West Valley Community Truancy Board. Ideally we would like to get kids who are just short of being petitioned, that have chronic absenteeism but just short of getting into this process and see what their outcomes were. But that is a little harder.

**Paul:** One of the things that we do know is that even though we don't have hard numbers in terms of how your kids look compared to other kids—we're hoping to get that—is that this program has been around for a long time, and there have been other Community Truancy Boards that have risen and then died, and we also know that your overall enthusiasm for this is much greater than many community truancy boards around the state. I mentioned that we were looking at the Tri Cities and there are some reasons to think that that is an effective board, but there doesn't seem to be nearly the belief like what the Director of Special Services and Principal of an Alternative High School was saying that it works. So we don't right now have the hard numbers we can look at from a quantitative perspective, but we do know that there is something noteworthy that has kept this process going for a long time, and the first thing we can do is figure out why is it still going. So from that point it has shown success. That it has kept going and that there seems to be a degree of enthusiasm, and the fact that this school district continues to want to pour resources into it even though it's an expensive program is a sign of success.

**Nick:** There is one more thing. Two years ago there was a BECCA conference held in Spokane. There was a session in the afternoon, with various Spokane Valley people talking about this process. There were 300 people in that room. All the handout material was taken before I could get my hands on them. That is how enthusiastic people were, but very few can make the idea work back home. So, why is the idea seen as being so good but it's so hard to get enough buy in from enough people for it to get up-and-running? Once it got going here, it was sustained. So we want to find a way to short cut that initiation process. If it's good, if it is adaptable to certain circumstances if every district is a little different — one larger, one smaller, one more rural, one more urban, few resources, more resources, etc.—can the idea be tweaked enough for different circumstance that it is generally a good place to build relationships for kids that need that intervention? So that's what our job is, to help Courtney Meador address these questions with the help of the MacArthur Foundation funding and provide a replication tool kit to any school jurisdiction in Washington that wants to make use of this community truancy board process.

**Traditional High School Principal:** So, that is interesting. So I'll add qualitative outside of the feel good information we have. Quantitative, the jury is still out. The impression I have is you're here because we have a successful program; that is what we have been told. But that is not the case.

**Paul:** Well, it is successful compared to other school districts that have tried to do it and they can't keep it going. You have sustainability, and that is what we are identifying as success right now.

**Traditional High School Principal:** I would love to read your report.

**Charles:** You're going to enjoy what you are going to see at the end, having been through a process like this before at a significant level—namely, the office of the Attorney General in this state. I can tell you that you are going to be very excited to read and informed when you read that report. You know (addressing the Traditional High School Principal) I deferred to Dr. Lovrich because as you know, you and I both know and I heard this question before in your interview and I didn't respond to it because I realized a lot of what we do is based more on myth than hard evidence. We are going to produce a report that will determine rather clearly

whether the community truancy board is only mythical in its accomplishments or does in fact produce positive long term outcomes for kids. I think you are going to be very excited about it when it becomes available.

**Paul:** We are working on the sort of hard evidence the Traditional High School Principal wants at this time.

**Traditional High School Principal:** That is fair enough. I am not trying to put anyone one on the spot and I'm at district looking into this and I'm fairly anal. I would like to see some data that shows this is successful because then I could go to my community and say this is why this is successful for my school board or my teachers or my district officials. So I can say this is important enough to throw these resources at it.

**Nick:** I have to give credit to the MacArthur foundation when they picked the four states to work in on juvenile justice reform. They picked some states where not very much was being done, and they picked the state of Washington—and this location within the state—to say there are some exciting things going on here, and unlike most places they have very good data and unlike most places the data are being shared effectively across schools in a way that will allow us to get that hard information from the records. So we have the advantage of the Administrative Office of the Court (AOC) having a grant from the foundation to help us put this information together for the kids who have been through the petition process, and Jennie Marshall of the Juvenile Court and the Coordinator of the Community Truancy Board can help us with local information. We need some information from the state courts and linked data from OSPI, and agreements are in place allowing researchers at AOC to give us de-identified data for Spokane County. We don't need to know the kids, the families or anything like that. This is data we can look at for patterns and impact and comparisons across districts that have and don't have one or another process in place. So, we are way ahead in setting the example for other states. So, that is our job—that is, work with those people who have data we need, create an appropriate counterfactual comparison group to compare community truancy board kids against, and then offer the benefit of that analysis to others through broad dissemination via the tool kit and research reports. Now, it may be that there is no difference, and the feeling that we are making a difference is more myth than reality. It is a good myth, we have relationships and we love each other and we feel good, but it doesn't make much difference in the end for the kids either doing well in school or staying out of trouble. We don't know yet what the results will be, but we will certainly know the myth vs reality *dictum* when we get the numbers. It's a very good thing that everyone wants to know what these findings are. When other people are looking at you what you do and are wishing to replicate it, you would like to be able to finish the conversation and say here are some data that will show you that it's working. Similarly, if pre-Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and post-Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist outcome comparisons indicate the role he plays is a great asset, we will feature that observation in our report as well.

**Paul:** We will document that too.

**(Unknown):** And when will your report be done?

**Nick:** About 10 years from now.

**(Laughing)**

**Nick:** Our support for the grant ends October 31<sup>st</sup> and I don't know if we will have another year of funding after that. We would like to follow up with East Valley, which is currently in the first stages of replication; we would like to follow up with them as their system develops. Hopefully the learning curve that you had shortens the period of maximum benefit coming out of a replication elsewhere.

**Paul:** If it's myth we want to know.

**Nick:** If it's myth you know that is a hard pill to swallow, but you need to know that and we need to know that... everyone needs to know that.

**(Unknown):** Your comment about the perception of the students and parents who have been through this experience, I can't wait to read that.

**Nick:** It is one thing to share this good feeling about helping kids stay connected to school, but these people sitting here have a whole different set of experiences after they get out of here. And you really need to have that information, and we can do that. We can summarize that feedback and make certain that you have the benefit of that valuable information.

**Paul:** Thank you all for coming and sharing your time with us.

**Nick:** We couldn't do this without you—we invited 30 people and 30 people agreed to come. I have been doing this type of work for over 30 years and that kind of involvement has never happened.

**(Unknown):** Myth or not...we're excited about it.

<b>Two hour session period comes to an end</b>
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**Focus Group C from 1:00-3:00 pm:** Assistant Superintendant, Traditional High School Assistant Principal, Dean of Students of Alternative School, Principal of a Middle School, Staff Member of Local Community Center, Traditional High School Counselor, Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board, Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School, and Counselor at a Middle School

**Maureen:** The Models for Change project is a research project which is headed by Dr. Lovrich who is seated here. I would like to introduce him to you, and this is Dr. Strand and this is Nikki Staggs who also is a graduate student who just graduated from WSU with an M.A. degree in Criminal Justice. The purpose of this project is to study the West Valley Community Truancy board for possible replication, and all of you have been through the personal interview process leading up to these focus group sessions. We are trying to gather as much information from you as we can so that we can learn from your experience with the board. And we have very specific questions we wanted to ask you about which I believe you got in advance. You all have name tags which is very helpful. When we talk this will be transcribed later and please feel free to talk freely as your name will be redacted when it is transcribed. But it makes it easier for the transcriber if you say your name, like I'm Counselor at a Middle School or say Counselor at a Middle School speaking then go ahead with your comments. We are so interested in learning from all of you. So please, everyone, this is going to be an open forum—one in which you freely jump in whenever you would like. I wanted to defer to Dr. Lovrich because this is his project, I didn't know if you wanted to fill them in more on the background.

**Nick:** Actually I'm the second in command. Paul Strand is the Principal Investigator on this project; he is an associate professor of child clinical psychology at WSU in the Tri Cities and I am working with Paul as his support. I'm at WSU in Pullman and it's my 34<sup>th</sup> year there, serving as the Director of the Division of Governmental Studies and Services. The way the McArthur Foundation process works is the juvenile courts get to pick their research partner, and so we were chosen by the juvenile court in Benton/Franklin County for an earlier phase of this work and the Spokane Juvenile Court asked us to be their research partner for this assessment of the West Valley School District's community truancy board. So, as Maureen said, we are in about a year-long process to help Courtney Meador (former District Special Programs Manager and former Coordinator of the Models for Change Project) document the process and do some outcome assessments with the help of Jennie Marshall (Spokane Juvenile Court Data Manager and Models for Change Coordinator). The Spokane Juvenile Court and the Office of Court Administrator and OSPI are all sharing data, and we will have access to that data for the West Valley school district and some comparison districts as well. I think we should all do a little self introduction so that we all get for the record who all is here to take part in the discussion.

**Maureen:** Perfect, would you all like to do that in case anyone doesn't know you.

**Staff Member of Local Community Center:** I'm XXXX with Spokane Valley Partners which is the Valley's community center. I am a protective payee there, but I have been interested in education and I believe in the importance of education, so when the opportunity came I said yes I would love to be part of the community truancy board. The idea was that sometimes there are things that we can provide through the community center for resources.

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** I'm XXXX, the Dean of Students at CBE.

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** I am XXXX and I do the attendance at Spokane Valley High School.

**Traditional High School Counselor:** I am XXXX, a Counselor at West Valley High School.

**Assistant Superintendent:** I'm XXXX, and I am the Assistant Superintendent and was an Assistant Principal at Centennial.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** I am Principal at Spokane Valley High School.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** I am XXXX and I Assistant Principal at West Valley High School.

**Counselor at a Middle School:** I am XXXX, a counselor at Centennial Middle School.

**Nick:** Oh, I forgot I was supposed to tell the Traditional High School Counselor about my daughter who is a lawyer living in Montana. The Traditional High School Counselor was her volleyball coach at Pullman High School.

**Traditional High School Counselor:** She is one of my favorite little people. Tell her I said hello.

**(Laughing.)**

**Maureen:** *When we start our conversation feel free to jump in. Again, if you could say your name that would really help. The first question we want to ask you is how you feel about the board's purpose. Is it more of one of holding the student accountable, or one of problem solving with the student?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** So it's been like 11 or 12 years, so the people that are involved in it tend to stay involved in it year after year. Week after week administrators take turns coming. It's always a day I look forward to because it's productive. I feel like the work we are doing when we are at that meeting is making a difference, often helping a kid that is in a crisis. I always really feel like our work at that board is making a difference in that kid's life, so I am always excited to go and excited to be there.

**Maureen:** *When you look at your role, do you look at it as your role being holding the kid accountable or trying to solve the problems the student had or...*

**Assistant Superintendent:** Personally, I think it's holding the family accountable. It's not just the student, it's holding the whole family accountable, and then trying to find solutions... so more often than not there are some issues the families are having or the kids are having and there are some solutions that are very helpful. So that is the first step.

**Counselor at a Middle School:** It's nice because it brings it out in the open, you know, because when they are not there phone calls are made that often don't result in a conversation. Yes, and it's solution-based, so that is nice as well.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** I agree. I think it's **both**. I don't think it's an either or. I don't even look at it that way, because it depends on what the family has going on, what situation is happening. We try to look at all the variables that are involved... in some cases there may be a need to be an accountability piece of it. Other times it's problem solving issues as far as what sort of services can we provide for this family and support this child and its family. I think it's both, not just one or the other.

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** I would second that. I think the issue is the word accountability. Right? Because what we do in that problem solving approach is make a family accountable for solving the problem. We say to them “what is the issue, why is it that your student is truant?” But we also follow up with “What can we do to help?” If there is no engagement in the problem solving then it becomes more punitive, but it is not accountability strictly. I mean accountability is your kid has to be in school, and for the most part the families agree—my kid needs to be in school and they need to get their education and it’s really important. So what parents lack many times are the resources or the knowledge to solve the issues that are in front of them. The board can provide that, and then it becomes an accountability problem around following through. You said the problem was the school was too big and too hectic and the schedule was wrong, so we arranged for you to go to a different school where the school is small and the schedule was easy and you’re still not going to school. Now you’re accountable for the failure to solve the problem in a different way.

**Traditional High School Counselor:** Also, it makes a connection for the family which often hasn’t been to the school, and which doesn’t know the teachers. So sitting in front of the board may be the first time they have taken the opportunity to communicate with and had to come in contact with the school. And in the same instance it gives us an insight on something at the high school. If we have a wrong address for the student, that session gives us the opportunity to make a connection with the family that we probably have been trying to connect with earlier. But because we are human and flawed we have gaps here and there; we can fill in those gaps in information by phone to some degree, but relationships become possible to establish when you get to know people in a face-to-face setting. I think that makes a big difference.

**Maureen:** I’m sure the face-to-face is helpful.

**Assistant Superintendent:** My experience—if you’re that kid or family, if it’s a family—especially if you have two or three kids and two or three different schools and four or five counselors and three or four principals, and six secretaries—everybody gets different pieces of information and the puzzle never gets fully put together until that time. It seems a lot easier to solve problems kids have going to school when all the pieces are put together and everybody is there to help.

**Maureen:** *When you have a student at the board now, do you have the Coordinator of the Community Truancy Board try to have someone there from the student’s school, either the counselor or the principal? Is that your policy?*

**(Unknown):** Usually, the motto is for the administrator and the counselor to be there together. It doesn’t always work, but it’s pretty consistent that they are there. But there are also other pieces that need to be pulled into the loop and completed.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** Again it is crucial to have them there because in the past the information is passed on to teachers, administrators, and counselors and they do not have the detailed information needed. So a family might give you information that you don’t know is correct or incorrect. And a lot of time there is a lot of game playing that may go on in those sessions so that the accountability piece is on both sides for the building and the family. Because the family can say “You know you didn’t post those attendance records. You said you were posting them and that didn’t happen.” Or, vice-versa, and you can say “No we have the records right here.” So it

really is a nice accountability piece for both sides having everyone that is involved with them there.

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** For CBE, I don't think we are able to bring as much personnel there. There are only 16 full time staff there. So we don't do that, but we do have our attendance secretary at every meeting, for every student. So for us that is that connection, and sometimes I will try to go. Sometimes our advisors will go; the principal will go when we are dealing with CBE students. But I don't think we are 100% in getting everyone to be there.

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** As part of that, the Principal and I also talk to the teachers before we come to the meeting so that we have a pretty good idea of whether this kid is actually missing school. We need to make certain we don't have a glitch somewhere we don't know about. Sometimes it's a scheduling issue that popped up. The truancy board process is a problem solver for the kids and it keeps us accountable too.

**Maureen:** *That is interesting. I have had people say that before. Now I know the Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School because I interviewed you, but you do the phone call and how many of you use robo-dialing? And how many of you have people that actually make the phone calls?*

**(Unknown):** We do personal phone calls.

**(Unknown):** So does Centennial.

**(Unknown):** We tried to convince Centennial, but at this point...

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** I like having the personal phone call because you get all kinds of information you may not get by leaving a message. Sometimes you get more information than you want, but at least it gives you a place to start and you know the problems that are going on in the family. A lot of times the parents will tell you very useful things, but with an automated phone call you don't get the benefit of that type of information.

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** We do both live and automated calls at CBE. We have a robot call in the evening with the day's report, and in the morning different classified staff will make the phone calls as well depending on matching up kids with advisors. So the advisors don't make the phone calls but the staff does; it is exactly that. I came in today and one of the kids we were trying to track down who is in contempt of court right now has the father is saying "I don't care what the court does; besides, the kid doesn't even live in the state anymore." So we dropped them, and they are done. Clearly that isn't the type of information you get with a robot call.

**Nick:** I am going to violate my promise to the people with whom I work that I wouldn't say anything. What we are trying to document is really important lessons from practice for anyone choosing to replicate the community truancy board. If you have a strong view that the robot call isn't enough, and the benefit of spending the time and energy to do live calls is of sufficient value, we want to document that sentiment for the people reading the transcript thinking about doing replicating this process. We want to highlight the options that people will have to weigh and give them some examples of the costs and benefits they will have to consider as they think through how they own community truancy board might operate.

**Assistant Superintendent:** Even when you do the automated like West Valley High School, up to 1,000 periods are going to be missed in a week. Perhaps 980 of those are legit, easy to

excuse, and parents can call in. The ones that are problematic is where a person needs to get into situation.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** Let me explain the process at the high school, right here. What I do is I go through patterns and highlight patterns of kids I get in our model. We have two academies and I work with a counselor and she works with the Traditional High School Counselor, and so I have about 430 kids that I am in charge of. Between the two of us we have some pretty good narrative stories that just come out. So I pull kids on a weekly basis that have truancy issues. Our narratives come from that and that is how we cross over. So when we come to this point, we have a pretty good history with the kid. We're at about 850 kids right now, and so our administrative duties are split equally within that academy; that may not be a model for a school with many more students. I can't imagine trying to do this, on a weekly basis, in a big school setting. It's a big time commitment. If the school interested in this process for monitoring and reducing truancy had a model that was similar they could do what we do; however, if you're a really large high school that is a whole different thing. I don't know how they would do that, I haven't thought about it.

**(Unknown):** Your school is about as big as it can be, and it's hard.

**(Unknown):** Yes, if I tried to do 800 kids it just wouldn't happen.

**(Unknown):** You look at patterns, you talk to the attendance secretary and you find out that she talked to so and so's Mom and this or that situation was going on... so he was at the doctor's office instead of being in school. So, you can really find out a bunch of information like this and clean up a lot through telephone calls. In this regard, the district itself has networked pretty well. This applies even to communication between the high schools that are experiencing crossing over. Again, however, we're a pretty good size district for that.

**(Unknown):** I think the most important thing to note in the past year or two has been the follow-up to the truancy board. In watching the process it is clear that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has put, for lack of better terms, teeth to the truancy board. For many reasons—for one, connecting with kids and for two, having that follow up piece week-to-week with someone specific that they know is going to be there, I think has made a dramatic difference from what was done before when we had our truancy board. Because of those things kids go through depending on the percentages that you look at, what the follow-up rate was for the kids that missed school and kids didn't miss school. I would be interested in seeing this year and maybe even next year to see what that looks like because the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has been such a huge asset and a great addition to how this process is going. I don't know how you guys feel, but as far as seeing a drop—I think we will see a drop.

**Maureen:** So, it's not just the intervention, it's the follow up process... the consistency and the follow up that you think is important.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** So we have always tried to follow up between the Coordinator of the Community Truancy Board and the Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School, every year they are banging on schools to make sure they do follow-up monitoring. Before I would have given us a "B" for follow-up...maybe even a "C", but now that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is going it's been clear how much more you can do with it and how much more effective it is. The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is an "A" and I think the best grade to give us was a "C" before. If they

are doing automated or personal or whatever, one of the key pieces is the personalized piece. You want to know the information about the child and want to get to know the family and know all the details, but the other piece is when you get to that board one of the key components is the accuracy of your information. Whatever system you put in, the accuracy of that information is the key because if it is a mistake at the school's end, then that really is a problem. No matter what system you put in, the accuracy is the key. If it says they missed seven days they missed seven days; if it says they missed 20 periods then they missed 20 periods and there is a cross check balance as they go through the system to make sure these attendance records are accurate.

**(Unknown):** The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has been a critical piece because his work goes beyond truancy. I did my college term project on the truancy and it is unbelievable how he gets involved in all the areas necessary to make an impact. He understands every part of that problem area, even the academic part of it. He has a great impact with the kids than most because he can communicate with them at any level.

**Maureen:** That is really helpful. We have a whole section devoted to the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. I want everyone to give their input on that because that is turning out to be an interesting component and he has been here only a year and a half. Please keep your thoughts for that because we do want to get your input on that important piece of the process. *Now I have a question regarding when the students come in. I have only observed one board hearing, but I noticed that there is a little bit of time in between each kid's hearing. Do you all discuss the students somewhat before, or do you just look at the paperwork in front of you? How do you handle the information prior to the student if there is such information?*

**Traditional High School Counselor:** As counselors and administrators we can share a little bit of knowledge with the people on the board. A lot of times we have more information than just an attendance report and grades, and so I think it's important to know that "hey, this kid is not living at home, he's living next door to his parents." It really does go like that oftentimes. And so, I think it's important to have that little bit of time in between to update on the following one. For the most part we are sending an administrator and or a counselor or a representative of some sort with that the information to the board, and this gives the administrator on site at least a little bit of direction to go on. Although we have our basic questions, some additional direction helps.

**Assistant Superintendent:** There will be some recommendations like this kid really needs to be in a smaller setting, without a full day, every day schedule. Sometimes this will be that this is a really good kid, this is a wakeup call, so don't beat this kid up too badly. Sometimes this recommendation is like this kid and family need to get beat up pretty bad, he or she hasn't done anything constructive and needs to see a judge soon. So, all the prior experience and interactions with the kid come into play for the best decision to be made.

**Maureen:** *Do you think there is some potential for some bias to enter with that background information present, or do you think it's better for everyone to have access to this information?*

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** I would say most of it is a direction to reduce the amount of time expended by other people when it's not needed. You know if we have an issue with the family economically, then something might be appropriate to say "hey, I'm not sure about where this kid is living, we have determined he is homeless or maybe we have an issue economically." Something more specific like that is OK. I'm probably the worst at this, but I say

I'll handle this when I can bring in that sort of information. Clearly, we don't need 22 voices going at this; this type of sharing needs to be fast and not overly detailed.

**Maureen:** *Now, concerning when the kids come in and encounter the court-like format, do you think it's intimidating? Do you think that it is important to arrange the setting of the hearing in this way at this stage?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** I think it's intimidating. I don't think it's important that it is intimidating, but I don't think it hurts. Like I said earlier, it's about timing and giving the family a strong wakeup call. I think it's doing more for the parents than the kids. They are the ones who need to get their kids to school, especially little kids.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** I don't know if I would use the word intimidating or not, but they are used to always sitting in front of the VP or the counselor or whatever and having the same chat over and over... and all the sudden when you have the list of people go through and they list where they are from and what they are doing, it shows the importance of the board process. It shows that the whole community is involved with this and is working towards your child and your issues with this. I think it is probably a little bit intimidating, but I don't think it's necessary to the goal. The goal is to get across that this is important enough for all these people sitting up there are volunteering their time to provide an opportunity for constructive action.

**(Unknown):** I think it's their saving grace too because there is at least someone up there they know...someone they have spent time with....

**Nick:** *So they can't get away with a naive board? To replicate this, you wouldn't recommend this without having an administrator or counselor there?*

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** Especially schools like CBE... So when the Attendance Secretary at an Alternative School gets there she is an expert on that kid. She is talking to teachers, she is talking to administrators. Counselors or administrators, that doesn't matter... just someone who knows the kid. There is no hiding from someone like her. As long as that person has the facts, the right information it doesn't matter what their educational role is.

**Maureen:** *I'm interested in what you have to say about people having enough training when they are on the board and being pretty clear on what their role is or what it should be.*

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** I don't know. I think it's more a matter of awareness. The only time I feel that it crosses over a bit is when you know, one thing is said, it's clear and then it's repeated over and over. I think we do that too much; we don't need any more preaching or coaching. It isn't going to be more effective because five people say that. So I think we have to say be definite in our roles, that doesn't mean that...we want people to feel that it is open enough that they can bring up something new or ask a question that hasn't been asked. That is very helpful because there are different perspectives that different community members have. When they come they ask questions that we wouldn't ask. That just doesn't come to us, so that is really important, just as long as we don't repeat over again trying to do a speech session with the kid or something.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** I'm not sure if they need a formal training, but for sure you need to set up some norms in your group so you get permission to each person from an agency so if the dialog starts going towards

your expertise you need to speak up. They shouldn't think "Oh, it should just be the school people that need to talk." They really need to have that permission to speak up and share—or maybe I can offer this service as part of problem solving. I think if you don't set it up that way people might be intimidated and have one or two people overshadow it all the time instead of trying to get voice from the specific people that pertain to that child and that family. I would be interested in hearing the perspectives on this question of the community members.

**Staff Member of Local Community Center:** I guess I'm the only community member here today. I'm thinking we haven't had too many community members, but I myself never feel uncomfortable talking if we discuss things if a family comes in. Sometimes someone will say to me "We think this family is really struggling, Dad is in jail." Even if it is not something that may come up directly during our meeting I might, at the end as they are signing the paperwork, I might give my card and give information and take the parent aside and say "Are you having a tough time paying your utility bill? Maybe I can tell you if you can get set up with an energy appointment. Or if there is something you need for your child from our clothing bank, food bank, emergency assistance, please call me." I have had a fair number of calls from families. So yes, I try not to be too preachy, but you know sometimes it's hard when you see the parent maybe making the best efforts to get the child to school and they just are not able to do so. Because of the job I do, I see where these kids are going to be in five years, ten years; they are going to be my next generation of clients if I'm still working there, so I really see the importance of going to school.

**Maureen:** So, you wouldn't have had that knowledge to approach them. Then....

**Staff Member of Local Community Center:** Sometimes the parent may say something like "I have just been through a divorce and that's part of the problem." Or "My family life has been disrupted"; sometimes people will just give me a heads up signal ahead of time. I think they are really struggling and they have had a hard time and we know they are homeless and the Heart Program is helping somewhat, but I think they could also use the children in need of clothes assistance. We had someone who was in a fire, and so I was able to go to our clothing bank and food bank and get lots of resources. But you know it didn't need to take up a lot of time during the meeting... I just wanted the family to know. We also have school supplies.

**(Unknown):** I had a question about replication. On the one hand you have the function Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board referred to—namely, we want to give the impression that your success in school is in a community's best interest. So we look at the board of community members who are committed to helping youth succeed because we know our community is better off if you do. So that is one thing, but the other thing is how we connect if we are a problem solving board -- that is, how do we connect people with the community services that we need. So it makes more sense to me that we would have the Staff Member of Local Community Center there from Spokane Valley Partners than that we would have an executive from the window factory sitting there. But I think both of them are important roles, it's just the question for the community members "what are you getting out of it?" So I can't imagine who you pick up, having them there every week.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** It might be just that. It also might be that the person who owns the window factory isn't interested in the window factory itself but is interested in children overall in our community,

allowing you to put that mentoring piece in. Again, it comes back to what they may get out of it for themselves in terms of what they want to give to families for support.

**Maureen:** *So you do line up the resources when you can?*

**(Unknown):** Yes, and the counselors are great at that too.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** I would say that we have had quite a few situations where the student is really thinking “I really need to drop out and work.” We have had some community members that are business people that lay out some realities for these kids. Coming from me, they expect that, but when someone over at the roofing company comes and says I deal with kids like you all the time, this is what you have to do. This is the only way you’re going to get it is this pathway through school. We have had that happen several times where that was a pretty effective voice.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** As far as connecting to the community and the resources we have, that has also increased over time. We’ve talked a little bit about Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, and we are going to talk a little bit more about him, but we have also added another resource in the system—we have the juvenile court tying in with us. But we also now have ESD, and they wrote a grant for two staff members to be brought into this system. They are student advocates, and that is a social worker position. One is at the middle school and the other one that is working at all three of the high schools. The social worker position is one we just added into it. But we can see that as tying into some of the resources that are maybe missing right now, or the people that are not on the board this person can use their services to help the families. But that is a brand new system that we just started.

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** That also makes me think in terms of replication. I think that with the work I have done with ESD in other areas of the state that West Valley is really unique with the variety of options that we have to offer families. There are so many different ways that we are doing school here it seems like you can put this in another district, where you have one high school model or one middle school model. And it would be like trying to fix a clove with a crescent wrench. So in that case I would think that the community resources would be huge. One of the ways that we can help you get on track to succeed in our existing high school model here relates to the fact that we can do a lot of placement changes. They can say, okay if it’s not working here at full time high school how about one hour a week over here, or three hours a week over here or four hours a week over here. We can make those suggestions and facilitate those transfers right there. The types of families we are dealing with are not the ones that are going to walk out and go find someone they never met before and say I’m suppose to talk to you about something. But to have someone on the truancy board who is representing that school say “This is our range of services. Here is my card and I want you to call me tomorrow or I will meet with you this afternoon” or whatever. The handouts are so much smoother. It really facilitates making these connections. My memories from the truancy board were mostly the job corps representative. We used to have an admissions counselor who could say, for the kids who were looking at dropping out, you know “don’t drop out—here is a way to get your vocational training.”

**Nick:** *This is really important because how focus groups work is that some questions we didn’t explore in individual interviews then surface in the focus group. The first focus group raised the same issue—namely, this is a unique district because we have many ways of doing education*

*and so it may be this process isn't going to work in many other places. I'd like to have you give your best effort to exploring the utility of this way of addressing truancy in other places that may not be like the West Valley District. This may be a great process, but maybe it's great not because of the process but because the setting offers so many options to struggling kids. So what are your thoughts about that?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** We're talking about truancy, were talking about a state law that says you have to go to school. It just so happens that the school district provides several options of ways of doing that. But the truancy board itself having those different options, like Job Corps and having Goodwill Industries is important. You really find out if someone is coming in and telling you a story or telling you about the help you will need to connect them to. It is extremely effective when you have someone up there in Job Corps saying "I have a position opening in Republic. If you want to go it's yours." When we can help set up an appointment and/or transportation and you know if they jump on that, then they are serious and a success story is in the making.

Back to the idea of replication...because our district is so diverse a lot of the truancy issues in other districts migrate to our alternative schools. We probably see a larger and broader sampling of truancy issues than most school districts. I guess my point is that if we were a Freeman district up the road—smaller, traditional—I think it would be easier for them to deal with truancy than it is for us because it's a narrower band of issues they are dealing with. I guess my point is that if we can do it with our diverse population I think anyone can replicate it.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** I would agree with that 100%. I don't think our configuration is what makes our truancy board successful. I don't think it's the factor that should preclude another school district from using this process. You don't have to have five or six options for high school or middle school kids to go into to make good use of this process. I don't think that is the case at all.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** I really agree with that because Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and I met last week to talk about what we are going to do next year initially to make this process even more effective for truancy reduction. Our idea was, within our Eagle Academy actually do our own mini truancy board. And so we use a child study team that would be a very narrow process. We thought if we hit it early and often, we could have a committee with our counselor and teachers to hit this mini truancy board before you get here. The only way you can get this is to do the three and five days out. It's still quite a long time... and if replicating a board, in a mini way, then just me and the counselor going back and forth on the kids. We're going to see the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and so on...

**Traditional High School Counselor:** I also think it's important to point out that there is no magic wand in West Valley; rather, it's a matter of commitment from the administration to provide the resources in order to do this. Any district in the world can do it. It's just a matter of time and commitment and manpower. In the 8 or 9 years I have been here it has grown and it's changed, and it has gotten better. With additions of Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and additions of Nikki and a lot of other people the process has matured. It is a reflection of the commitment of the district and the staff.

**Maureen:** *That's all good information. Does anyone else have any more information to add? I know we talked about when the kids come in and you guys talk about private information, how*

*do you feel about the amount of information given? Do you think it's enough? Not enough? What would you recommend on a policy for potential replication of the board?*

**Traditional High School Counselor:** As a counselor we are coming with our kids. We hopefully, at that time, have more information that can be either enlightening or damning depending on which side the coin is on. I think the information brought here is relevant to why they are here. If they are using drugs or drinking, or doing whatever that is relevant information as to their truancy...and in a lot of cases, unfortunately, the parents are not aware of these actions by their kids. I don't think it's our job to torpedo a kid or a parent, but those are the things the parent are saying "He's never absent, he's never skipped" and the kid is sitting over here and he is stoned out of his mind. I mean one person who was the best I think at answering that question was Courtney. She would go (some facial expression, everyone laughing) "What are you using?" They are relevant questions to ask. So as for privacy concerns—the students are not in a private sector setting. They are in a public school, and if it is affecting their ability to get to school and it's because of their health or living situation... that is all relevant to what we are talking about. One for the first things I said was this is a fact finding board, not a punitive thing. There have been some eye-opening moments for some parents like "oh my goodness, are you kidding me?" So we don't come in to hamstring a kid, but we want to make sure the students and parents and everyone is aware we are here to help. But we can only help if these things are on the table.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** There is a resource officer that is working for the juvenile court. They also realize that the things that come up in the board hearing are not going to be used against them. What do we need to do in order to have an intervention vs. now you're going to get busted for that and now everyone is going to be watching you. As Traditional High School Counselor would say, Courtney might ask that point blank question about how many times are you using. The kid might say two or three times a week and the parent's head might just turn and say WHAT?. From that point on there is a more open conversation.

**Marueen:** *How do they know that information isn't going to be used against them in a legal system? How do they know they can speak freely?*

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** There isn't a specific weight placed on that idea, but I think just from over the 10, 12, 14 years this has been going on that it is just known. So I can't give you a specific answer for that, but it might be that the resource officer might be able to say... Their approach is to ask "How can we support you" rather than figuring out how can we get you arrested.

**Nick:** *The people interested in replicating the community truancy board process will want to know how to address that question. So, is one of the ground rules that facts which arise in the course of the hearing are not be used against the kids or parents?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** I don't think that is necessarily the case... in child neglect or child abuse issues, especially little kids, we would have an obligation to report suspected abuse to the authorities. But that is different; I think for the most part kids and parents understand that this is about truancy and not anything else, and what can we do to resolve that issue. The printed information we get is the attendance record, which Coordinator of the Community Truancy Board puts together in a way that is pretty visual. Especially with the high school kids we can see patterns. This period and this period, you are missing a lot of Fridays so we have

the attendance report and then we have credits, transcripts so one of my interests is if your attendance is getting in the way of your education it's a bigger deal than just not good attendance. So if your attendance isn't great but you're a "B" student, you're probably going to have a different conversation than if your attendance isn't great and you're behind in credits. That is pretty pertinent information. On the drug issue, for high school kids it's a majority... I would say about 70% of those kids have some drug-involved circumstances.

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** As part of that transcript with credits, where freshmen and sophomore year they did pretty well then all of a sudden it changed. What happened all of a sudden in 2009? What changed? And that will bring up issues.

**Maureen:** *How would you explain the success you have had with the community truancy board? Would you say that, would you attribute that success to the concept or to the outstanding people that you have?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** I think it's both. I think the concept in the beginning started at the leadership all the way up. Because that was so well done, the people that have stayed with us... very high quality and astute people.

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** Also, the kids know that we do truancy. They will come in and say "how close am I to truancy?"

**(Laughing.)**

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** They take it very seriously. They watch it very closely. Boy, if you make a mistake they let you know it.

**(Laughing.)**

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** They know as a district we take it very seriously. They also know that the Principal of Alternative High School and the Administrator of the Community Truancy Board is the head of the truancy board, so we are really going to take it seriously... so I think that has a huge impact.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** I think it's really important too, as administrators in our district we are all assigned another duty, and that was my duty assigned. I think the difference is that if it was just assigned to me and I didn't have a passion around it or want to do it you might see a different story. So as central office that's what they have looked at too. They pick out duties, as we are going around but they are also looking at what is our skill set and what's our passion around that specific area. The central office tries not to put someone in an area they might not have any inclination at all, that they just got hired and I don't want to have anything to do with this. Central office might need to be intuitive as to who has leadership and who they can assign that to who is going to take it to the next level.

**Maureen:** *How is everyone doing? Want to take a break, get some coffee or stretch? [group indicates desire to continue without a break] OK, how would you explain the sustainability of the program and how would you suggest that it be replicated elsewhere so that it is sustained?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** It is sustainable, and we have proven that. It is sustainable because it is effective... so effective that we sustain it. If you're just "showing up" you're not changing anyone's life.

**Maureen:** *Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School, you are one of the longest standing members of the board. What would you have to say about that?*

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** I think back to what the Assistant Superintendent was saying. It's sustainable because it is effective. I don't know what other way to put it. It works. We know it works. The kids know it works. The parents value it. They get a lot of information they didn't know ahead of time. I think that is what makes it function. Those that come to the truancy board do so because we believe in it.

**Maureen:** How long have you been on the board Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School?

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** Long time ago...

**Nick:** 1996 or 1997?

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** Yes, something like that. Actually it was a fluke. Our kids were going to truancy board and no one was going with them, so I went...and now I'm here.

**Nick:** If you look across the state at the Washington state policy, they tried to document truancy boards. Many have come and many have gone. They don't stay. They work for a while but then they poop out. They try them and they get too hard to maintain. Two years ago when the BECCA conference was in Spokane and the Principal of an Alternative School and the Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board were giving presentations on the West Valley School District truancy process 300 people filled a big room at the Davenport Hotel to hear about your program. All the handout materials were taken before I could even get a copy. But very few have been successful at getting something started. Why? Something is happening here that we have to put in a bottle...

**Traditional High School Counselor:** I have an idea... if you take a look at the administrators throughout the school districts they are fairly transient. Another district I have been in rotated administrators through constantly, while some have administrative central offices and key that have like 100 years or 120 years of collective experience...

**(Laughing.)**

**Traditional High School Counselor:** It seems to me here you have a quality program with a bunch of people running it and they are committed to it... there are very few districts that don't have highly transient administrative populations. There is one or two districts in the area that hold on to their people and they promote from within their own people and they talk about that. Not that everyone is in-grown, but it's that so many people are doing so many things that they are very passionate about, that they are committed to. I think it's a matter of there is not a huge transiency with the leadership.

**Assistant Superintendent:** I think part of that too is we didn't do it right the first time either. It's a huge commitment. You have to know what is going on and you have to know what is available for resources and you try that for a couple years and you realize that was not successful. We know how that is. We went from 70% attendance to 96% attendance, and I really think a lot of the kids buy into it. That is a great percentage for any high school. I think when I first started as an Assistant Principal at Centennial, I mean, the Counselor at a Middle

School was there as a counseling assistant way back then. I thought “Oh great! One more thing...”

**Nick:** This is honesty. This is good.

**Assistant Superintendent:** When I started I would hear that someone isn’t coming to school, and I’d think now I have to go and talk with him and his mother with all these people and talk about why they are not going to school... but our attendance secretary stood right outside my door and got me by the ear and said come on. She was like “No, you’re going.” And low and behold we started seeing in school that there were fewer discipline issues with these kids. So some of these kids were the ones causing trouble too, so once you make a connection with the kids and the family and you get them on the right track other things get worked out. I was a resultant participant the first few times I came. But I have now, 12 or 13 years later, been 100 times a year as a Principal or as District Office representative and I always look forward to coming. In my day sometimes it’s hard to look back and see what you did that was worthwhile, and I always feel like being on the truancy board gives me that feeling.

**Maureen:** Very Interesting reflection...

**Assistant Superintendent:** I wonder if part of the sustainability equation is how you measure success. Because what we are describing is a process in which you measure your success as “one kid at a time”. So we got one kid I didn’t know very well and I didn’t know what was going on and his life is improving, and that makes your day worthwhile. And I think in other situations people would tend to measure the effectiveness by the question “So your helping six kids on a Wednesday morning and we have 3,000 in the district. What are we doing wasting our time with those six kids?” I think that is a philosophy that really matters. You asked, “Is it the concept or the people. That is the concept that has to be in the people for it to work.”

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** It can’t be a standalone out there as a front program either. I mean, we’re not just creating the different alternatives for kids... It more like the Gates Foundations Small Kids project where everything is in that same direction and there is a **moral imperative**. And so even when it doesn’t work as well as it could there is a moral imperative to do that so when you walk away from the day you have done three or four things that have been instigated in West Valley School District. These kinds of programs, they are all moving the same directions. You feel like you give it your best effort and when that parent gets to another level you are sustained in your effort. Similar issues come up at these “child study team” meetings or even further down the road. Truancy is usually a part of it. It’s about linking that narrative, that story, giving an opportunity with that kid through a long process of things. It feels good as a district and to be a part of that.

**(Unknown):** Talking about commitment and sustainability, you know obviously there is central office commitment, and the Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board’s passion as the leader of the truancy board is clearly there... but every administrator in the district also has a stake in this. Regardless of how many kids they send in the course of a year they sit in on this, so they have an intimate working knowledge of what happens at the truancy board. Therefore, if the need arises they have the ability to access it. And it is not just something that is out there that is just part of the district over there.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** When you talk about replication, one of the bigger pieces is again that this process has been

going on for a lot of years. For someone looking at it you don't jump in and try to do what we are doing. You make it relevant for your community and you start small. And you make it small enough where you have successes, because if you want to jump in at the full blown way we are doing this, you probably will have failure because it will be overwhelming. You don't need to take on K-12 kids. You might take on a grade level. You might do some research around your data... figure out which population is your most average population and you want to start with them. And start having some successes vs. jumping in and trying to do your whole school district or all your high schools or something like that. I would recommend that they take the model on as far as looking at how you bring on your community members, and how you rotate your administration, but don't try and take everything on at one time.

**Maureen:** *Have you felt that you have benefited from being on the truancy board personally?*

**Principal of a Middle School:** Yes, our mission statement for the district is ***“Prepare each kid for college, career, and citizenship. Rigorous, relevant, education based in relationships.”*** The fact that we are looking at individual kids and trying to form a relationship with them... that's great! There is a model for me to take back to the building when I am sitting down individually with that kid that I am dealing with on a smaller kid or a larger scale.

**Nick:** *The three Rs and the three Cs. This truancy process is a component of that?*

**Principal of a Middle School:** Yes.

**Nick:** *So, does a school district that wants to replicate this process need to be doing three R's and three C's?*

**Principal of a Middle School:** I think anyone trying to replicate it needs to have something that is based on relationships. Definitely this needs to be part of it.

**Assistant Superintendent:** Each kid is as important as the three R's and the three C's.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** I would say I would throw out another R that is critical to relationships. That is **redemption**. This is a redemptive process. It's so funny—at the alternative school at CBE in the English department we were talking last year what they wanted to do with their kids and the idea of redemption came up. They brought that up... that is a powerful concept because if you take this as a legal procedural thing it is just another way to beat them up. But when the language around the process and the truancy board itself is redemptive you have plenty of hope here. And this is part of that we just need to get on track here. A lot of discussion around the board is where will you end up and how can you get there. It's if we move you here and do this, this, and this, this is where you can go and this is where you can move over to and get to this next point. You're out of the woods and you're ready to go. So I think that is a critical piece and that is just a culture, but any district can go to that culture if they are conscious about it.

**Assistant Superintendent:** Sometimes it helps the kid communicate with the parent. So we have had a kid show up and he's been truant at West Valley High School. The kid does not like a big traditional school, pep assemblies, doesn't ever want to see a cheer leader again, doesn't want to go to a basketball game, doesn't like bells, doesn't like to sit in a room with 30 kids, and the parent is resistant. The truancy board will say we have a different place for you, and we ask “where do you see yourself being successful”. A lot of times it's the first time where the

parents kind of perk up and you can tell they didn't know there was another option. And a lot of times that is when we can change things to help that kid have a better future.

**Counselor at a Middle School:** It's nice having that extra support. As a counselor, you know you have done everything you can to get them in school, and it's nice to have that safety net...another group of people to talk to the parent and to talk to the kid. Often they are done listening to you after you've everything you can. So it's nice to have that next step to get them going in the right direction.

**Maureen:** *I would imagine you help the parents get to the root of the problems and maybe open up the communications, and I'm sure that is rewarding. Do you feel that way?*

**Traditional High School Counselor:** A lot of times we can just see that, unfortunately, the parents are the root of the problem. So we can take that on as a board and say OK—we try to get the parents to see it a little bit more clearly, and although we don't do parentectomies...

**(Laughing.)**

**Traditional High School Counselor:** That is a real thing; often the parents are what we need to work with in order to be successful. That really is eye-opening for us, when the parents walk in and start talking to us we get it. We are like, OK, we understand.

**Staff Member of Local Community Center:** A couple years ago I would looked at the paperwork in front of me. Then I would look and see the total number of credits the child has earned. I would think, "Oh my God, this is hopeless. What we are going to do?" But by the end of the session, they are saying there is this credit retrieval program or you know the numerous options that were out there that there was some redemption and some hope. Because I would think to be in this situation, why would you care about coming back to school? It would seem hopeless. But there is always something offered to these kids. I think sometimes the parents think it is hopeless too. They don't realize there really is something out there, and if they follow through that they can make progress... and the kid may not get a diploma, it may be a GED or something else, but there is reason to hope. It may be through Work Source or whatever, but you know it's not the end of the road because they are at truancy board and because they only have 7.5 credits at the age of 17. There is something constructive that they can do.

**Assistant Superintendent:** I think part of that is that we don't wait until it's hopeless before we get them in here. We get elementary kids in here and we get middle school kids. The quicker we can get them in the quicker we can make a difference for them. The other thing that you see is even with the most dysfunctional parents, they are the best parents the kids have, so what are we doing as a system? What are we going to do to support that parent? Or what are we going to do to support that kid? It gives us information that we need to circle up around this kid and need to take on a big role of parenting for them.

**Maureen:** *Do you all have a way of following up for the kids that just tugged at your hearts? Do you hear from one another concerning what's going on with that kid or who graduates, or is that not always possible?*

**(Unknown):** I go to all the graduations, and I go down the list and think about all the kids I have worked with.

**Maureen:** *Well, this has been a splendid session and we have covered a lot of ground. Now the last section is the component about the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and how you feel*

*about someone in that position and how the person in that role brings some special gifts with his personality. We want to know how you feel about someone that is in the role in which the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has served. How important you think the role is, and how important the individual personality is? Also, do you think that person should be someone from the court system or someone from the school system? We are also interested in your perceptions of any differences you've seen in your success rate pre-Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and now that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is in place.*

**Principal of a Middle School:** The thing that sticks about the question is should it be a school person or a court person. I think it should be a court person. It just brings another angle into it that the school person can't necessarily provide.

**Staff Member of Local Community Center:** I was thinking that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist position has been a valuable addition. I have had a number of contacts with him and the kids he has been working with. He calls and says "Oh, I've got this kid and he needs shoes. His family doesn't have many resources and I don't know how many kids here, there excuse was I got head lice and my boyfriend got head lice and we keep passing it back and forth. And we don't have money for this." So I send out lice kits, he takes them out and delivers them to the homes. And the other thing is he is a great resource, he is able to tell people about things they don't know about. Not only do we tell them about the attendance law, but there is also the at risk youth, the child in need of services petition. There are kids who really, the parents need to know about the at risk youth petition and sometimes that is appropriate and he can help with that. So I think we have community members and we have plenty of school people I think having someone from the court as well is important...and I think the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's personality—he genuinely likes the kids and connects well with them—is important as well. You see someone who comes in and might know him because they have already been involved in the court system. So I think it has been great.

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** I concur. It's like the sustainability question we were just talking about. It would be absolutely possible to have the position, but screw it up with the wrong person. So we are lucky that we got the position and the right person for the job. One of the things I felt was the best resource that he brought when he first came in was the home visits. Because when you are dealing with 400 kids who live on campus, it's hard to justify going and tracking down one that is not there and who might be causing problems if they were. But to be able to say to someone else, who's got time and focus and experience, can you go and check on so and so because I don't know what's going on with her. That has been huge for me. And that was Nikki the social worker who is attached to us through the SV and that was our first effort with her was the dropout prevention and she has experience doing home visits because of her social work background. In the same vane how do you get feet on the ground with the families? The easiest thing in the world to do is stop looking for them, and what we gotta do if we care about them is to find them and bring them back to school and let them know we care and we miss them. Let them know they have something important to do and get them back in.

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** I absolutely agree with what the Dean of Students of Alternative School said. He does a fabulous job. One of the things I really like is our kids can end up in any of the schools, but when they do end up at another school they have that one connection—the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. I think that makes their transition a little bit easier.

**Nick:** Now you were here before the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist and after the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, so is this a qualitative enhancement of the process... adding the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist position?

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** I think so because, like the Dean of Students of Alternative School was saying, most schools don't have the facility or the manpower to go out and track these kids down. So they do disappear, they don't enroll in school or they just decide to quit coming and we don't have the manpower to find them. To have someone like the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist... he is out there, he will see them out on the street and stop them and ask "why didn't you go to school?"

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** I want to jump back in on that because the nature of the system is that most of us make assumptions that don't fit for this population. That is one of the reasons they become shunned because they don't fit into our middle class model. Our truant kids by-and-large are more impacted by poverty than non-truant kids but we rely on the phone model, we will just call them up when they are not here. Oftentimes their phones don't work, they change their numbers every two weeks, or they are living in a car. You can't just call them up. It's ridiculous to think you're even going to get these kids back in school by just calling them up. You can't send them registered mail, they don't pick up their mail, they live with Grandma. These things are really important factors that are not built into the system as it is, so how do you take the system and make it responsible? Well, you take someone like the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist who can go and knock on the door of the Grandma and say "do you know where your kid is living this week?" They say, "Yes, I know where." Every once and a while they will be hiding out in an apartment where he won't go without a deputy or two, but mostly we can find them. We see them especially at CV and Spokane Valley I assume to a degree. I have met kids from 12 different districts they are from all over the freaking county. How are you going to track them down? You're not just going to put out an all-call. So we make contact with our kids a lot of times through other kids. Hey, have you seen so and so, I heard he was in jail last week but now he's hanging out up north somewhere.

**Traditional High School Counselor:** I agree with the Principal of a Middle School, having someone from the court is an important component. Before the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, one of the things the truancy board lacked was a little bit more teeth to what they were saying. Although the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is not cuffing them and stuffing them right now, he knows the people that probably took them to jail last night. He knows their PO's and all these people and they know that. Because the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is open enough to say hey I know your PO, don't give me BS he is very good with the kids; he acts appropriately and works well with the people around him. I think the Dean of Students of Alternative School said it well—you can get the wrong person and mess that up in a hurry. I would agree with that, the fact that he is here and doesn't take them to jail but he knows the people that are going to if they don't do this or that related to school. I think it's been a wonderful addition to the truancy board to give a little bit more umph behind it. The truancy board person that is from the juvenile court makes an impact.

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** It has really opened up the communication for me any way between the school district and the court. And so whether or not that is a function of Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist or that particular position or whatever, I don't know...but I am thrilled to be able to communicate better with the courts about who is being supervised, who is

detained and who hasn't, and so forth. And I feel like Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is a part of that because I have someone walking through who is a PO, so I can say do you know what happened to...? That partnership is really huge.

**Nick:** *Is it the relationship or the information? What's the really critical part here, because the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist can provide information that you didn't have before, and can also have this relationship with kids. In either case, is this role of such value that you wouldn't recommend replication without a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist position using this model?*

**Dean of Students of Alternative School:** Personally, I would say you can't do a decent job with truancy without having a follow-up model; we have hit on one that seems to be doing pretty good. I would say you can't do a decent job with truancy without a close partnership with courts and the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is a bridge that facilitates that. So would there be another way to get a close partnership with the courts in a good follow-up model? Probably, but I have been trying to deal with that one without all of those things.

**Assistant Superintendent:** The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has been very successful in that job. I don't think it's because he has legal background. Maybe it's because it's his personality, and I'll come back to that. So personality is the key, but the expertise he brings to the table has been very helpful for us. He knows what the process is, once the kids leave our truancy board, it's been shocking to me to know how many of these kids are already engaged in the legal system. So the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist brings us a lot of information about what this kid has been up to and that kid has been up against. Moreover, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist can get real up-to-date information where a lot of the stuff we are dealing with is days, weeks and months old. In addition, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist can call the kids' PO and say "Is so and so in school today, and why not? What's going on, or where is this case?" So he brings a lot of information to us and a lot of expertise we don't have. He's been really helpful for us, for the child study team, for our district high school students, and for the valley. The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist has been very helpful with that.

**Nick:** *For the record, can you describe the "child team study team" concept?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** Yes, do you want the one minute version or the five minute version?

**Nick:** The five minute version because the people reading might think "oh, we want to work with that idea in our area.

**Assistant Superintendent:** So we started in West Valley a few years ago with our high school child study team. We were having trouble getting kids moved from one program to another smoothly and efficiently. So we decided we were going to meet a few times a month to talk about student placement, kids that weren't successful in the setting they were in try and find a better spot for them. At first we decided we were going to have a lot of conflict, we decided who got to be on the team and who got to vote on where the kids were going to go and how many votes each school got really thinking it was going to come down to three votes to two, you go to the Traditional High School Assistant Principal's school. We've always had some Principal or some counselor say I think that kid would be a good fit at my school. I'll give them a shot. We have always been able to get that kid to a place where we felt better about where they were going. It worked so well for us that we expanded it to include Central Valley and East Valley. We meet with them twice a month, and just West Valley twice a month. So we are

placing kids all across this part of the county. Everything in the valley is represented there. So we have a kid at West Valley High School who is pregnant and really doesn't want to be around West Valley High School. We don't have a program like that, but East Valley does...so we broker deals where we have sent West Valley kids to a different district with their state of portion and enrollment hours that come with them trying to get them in a place that is going to get them to be more successful. Same with Central Valley, so it has been a really good tool for us. A lot of those kids have legal issues, so when we are trying to decide what school the kid is going to have the best shot at part of the conversation is, is he going to be locked up here soon or is he going to be ready to come back to school here soon. Is it going to be a month or two months? Legally, what is he looking at at this point? The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is able to clue us in on that pretty thoughtfully so we are able to start them in a program with the Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board. It's a one hour a week thing, knowing that down the road when the legal stuff clears we will try to get...

**Nick:** So, Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is closely connected to that too?

**Assistant Superintendent:** Yes, indeed.

**Nick:** Not just the truancy board. OK!

**Assistant Superintendent:** He sits on all this stuff, and a lot of those kids that are at Child Study Team have also had truancy issues. So back to his personality, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is not judgmental, so you can tell when he is talking to a parent you can tell they feel like here is a guy that is trying to help me...not here is a guy who thinks I'm a bad parent. So they are willing to have those conversations with him. I'm not sure how one person can say the same thing and not be judgmental as someone else who says it and is considered judgmental, but the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is one of those people that does not come across as judging people. So for the people we are dealing with that is critical because they have been judged as lacking often in the past. People have been complaining to them about their kid's lousy attendance for years. They are tired of getting the bad news, and then along comes the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. They think this guy is going to help me get out of this. He is not here telling me that I'm a bad mother because I have been hearing that for years from these people, and that's important. He is also persistent. You will see him and he will be at the child study team and a kid will come up and go Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's here. He finds those kids, he follows them everywhere, he even shows up at the house. At some point they give up, and realize that the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist knows where I am going to be. Besides not being judgmental he is dedicated. When you're working with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, and I have seen him work with a lot of parents and kids, what comes across to the parents and kids is he is ever hopeful for the kids. This is very attractive to the parent...they get the sense that there is hope here for my kid.

**Nick:** Is this the redemption you are talking about earlier?

**Assistant Superintendent:** Yes. So we have had a lot of people here like Courtney Meador and the Counselor at a Middle School a little bit, but they have full time jobs and it's hard for the Counselor at a Middle School to drop everything she is doing and go to Traditional High School Assistant Principal's house. If the truant kid is not in school sometime today the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is tracking that student down. So it's his full time job, so while we have had other people that have approximated some of what he does, as a system we have never been

as effective as we are now with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. From a mercenary position I was more than happy to be here today because I would like to ask to continue to pay for the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist to work with us.

**Maureen:** *Thank you. This is directed toward the Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board—do you have a part to play on that?*

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** Yes, with the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist's position...he is not only hopeful with the families, but he can also be brutally honest with them, which is what they also need. He can bring a different perspective of that honesty as to the direction where that is going to happen and the "what's going to be happening"—the details. But for me, the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist really represents what it says on the top of the sheet here...it says Models for Change. Its systems reformed, that is what this is really about. This isn't necessarily about truancy, its system reform. And as the system is reformed what we are looking at is integrating different systems and different models and how does that integration work so in our community we are not duplicating services. The juvenile court offers so many services for kids that people are ignorant of. They have no idea what they are doing for these kids. They think they just take them down there and lock them up—this is not even close to true. They have all kinds of programs for the truant kids, and all the other kids down there. What he does blends so well with bringing the resources of the juvenile court, the resources of the school and other community agencies...blending them together so we truly have a system reform model and offer services, especially in this time with tight budgets. Everybody is cutting back, so how do we offer more with less? That's how you do it. With system reform and becoming integrated all together. And that is what he does so well...bringing the resources from the different agencies into one family and showing them what can happen and what can't happen as well. So to me it's the bigger piece, not just his personality which everything everyone has said is 100% true and it is about the person and it is not about the model. The model won't work without the right personality, but it's also bringing the systems together.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** As an administrator, you just really need a point person because we have so many different aspects to our job that he is a person that drives your attention to the critical parts. For example, I have three kids sitting in jail right now for an incident yesterday and it's going to be rather involved. Rightfully the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is a key component to translating legally back and forth in between myself, the kids, and the parents. We have all been a part of the truancy and putting together the package. His ability to get out and move around is critical. That is one part that schools miss on so many levels that we don't have the ability or resources to get out. But boy does that change the picture when you know he's at the home talking to the parent, having a whole different conversation than I might have over the phone with that person. In addition, the parent—I know this sounds crazy—feel supported by us in this situation and we're not seen as the adversary. We're already figuring out the educational piece, how can we finish up, how can we do it, it's that nonjudgmental part. They have been accused of this, they are sitting behind bars, but we're suddenly the good guys because the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is bringing the news from the school. We've got a plan and we are working on it. Let's just get through this process. It makes it a whole lot easier with him.

**Counselor at a Middle School:** I have some notes I've been taking on our conversation I'd like to share. Obviously, people have said a lot of things about how personality is important. The Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist likes to talk, and he can talk to anyone. It's nice knowing he is knocking on doors and visiting with families and I know they have all become friends, invite him in and ask watch him watch movies with them. You know what I mean. I have heard lots of stories from the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist. It's like, no, I just need the kids to come to school.

**Nick:** Do they ask him, "Would you like a drink?"

**(Laughing.)**

**Counselor at a Middle School:** Probably! I know he brings an extra set of clothes with him because he is not scared to sit on anyone's furniture, and sometimes he has stories about that. And I think a nice piece he is always checking in with us. He's checking with the kids. He makes our jobs easier, and he is so flexible...sometimes school environments you know can maybe not be easy for someone who hasn't worked in a school before. But the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist will just come in, find a spot to work, and not make a big deal about it. He might be working in a desk in the corner somewhere with these kids; he is just very easy to work with.

**Nick:** So, does each school provide a place for the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist or does he find a place? How does it work when he wants to be more in the school presence for any period of time?

**Counselor at a Middle School:** Where I am at Centennial he does not have a particular place, but we find him one. Like he shows up and I am going to be doing something else and I'm just like use my office or we find him whatever is available that day. Office space is quite tight.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** At West Valley High School you've got to be reluctant when you say this, because everyone looks at you and says "what do you mean you don't have an office for him?" We actually do have an office available this year. He shares it with a couple of resource people. But we have a place set for the outside folks coming in to our school so they have a sense of this being my office.

**Counselor at a Middle School:** With his personality, he's not afraid to go "Oh that's taken up, let's set up shop." And he's not above that if that makes sense.

**Nick:** What would you do to replace the things the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist does? How would you tackle that problem?

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** That is funny, literally if you were saying if this position went away what would you do? Well, it's like you do everything else. You try to parse out some aspects. There is just no way things would totally change. We would continue on with truancy board, we would still have a level of effectiveness, but I think really particularly with the most vulnerable—those kids at most risk which very often most districts say "hey, we got to cut out losses"—they are gone. But those are the kids...

**Counselor at a Middle School:** He is saving our chronic kids.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** Yes, those at-risk kids, wow, I don't know how we would reach them.

**Assistant Superintendent:** Funding is always an issue, right? But you know, I'll use Courtney Meador for example. I don't know how many years she was with us but she was part of several different grants. We kept finding a way to keep her in the system.

**Nick:** She is not very good by the way, we at WSU don't like her.

**(Laughing.)**

**Nick:** After twenty minutes with Courtney we all have to go for a rest.

**Assistant Superintendent:** So, she was one of those people that, when she left, we thought "Oh man, how are we ever going to replace Courtney?" If the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist were to be gone it would be a traumatic thing for us, but we would do the best we could to find some money somewhere to replicate as much of what he has been doing and try and find a person or come up with a combination of people that have a similar skill set that could do a lot of what he does.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** That is exactly it. It doesn't just have to be a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, it can be what we have identified is the resources, what needs to happen and know that we know that is a very successful piece of the model—then we would have to figure out how do we implement that missing part. As the Assistant Superintendent said, resources are tight everywhere, but that is what I go back to—the system is reformed, and how do we as systems figure out how can we share what we have most effectively. So it isn't just the education system saying "well, how do we support a \$60,000 person" or the court saying "how do keep funding a \$60,000 position that now we are shipping out to the educational system." Instead, it is "How can we start sharing that cost and making it work as wells as grants." There are a lot of different grants that are out there in the world. How do we share the work in terms of who writes them? We're working with ESD in this way...that is how that student advocate model came out; we share resources and get away from the side post.

**Nick:** If a replicator is doing this on grant funding and they only have so much funding, would you say start small without a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist, or would you say Start small **with** a Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist-type position?

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** Yes, if you can't afford to start with, then start without with the community truancy piece and build out.

**Nick:** With the community resources...

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** Yes, because you will make an impact on those kids. So if you're basing your whole model of replication or start up -- if we can't do it all we're not going to do any of it—then that is kind of ridiculous. That comes back to can we save two kids a year? ... then let's go for it, lets start that...and then we will build up from there.

**Maureen:** *One last question for all of you... we tried to frame everything in terms of these five questions, but you all have such broad expertise that we likely left out some issues you think should be discussed. Is there anything that we haven't touched on today that you could tell us about that you think would be useful in replication?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** So, one of the things that has been new to us is that we have been involved in, in a big way, through the Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board with the courts. While we have had some prior connection to the court system for quite a while to get better information to help us do a better job, this stronger connection really helps us do a better job with the at risk kids. So, through the grants that we have had that have helped support this project, like the things we are doing right now in this group, these help a great deal. We have time to reflect and be a little retrospective, and every time something like this happens we get a little bit more focused on our mission and get a little bit better at everything we do—including doing a better job at truancy next week because of this conversation today.

**Nick:** When Courtney Meador and our team were talking about our research design and we asked early on what is the training that people get to serve on the board...she kind of chuckled and said “have you ever heard of on the job learning?”—or something clever like that. And then she described how you have a core idea that translates into norms that people bring to their work, and then people ascribe to the norm and affiliate, and then they stay with it and improve on it over time. That was a really powerful statement about the value of this process for youth that you are discussing here today. A child-serving process. Now, try to reverse the perspective and tell us what do you think *kids and their parents* see when they come in here? We have had the chance to ask the Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist to collect data on questions we developed regarding their perceptions, and he has diligently done so in connection with his Check and Connect *modus operandi*. What do you think we are going to see when he gives us the data about what the kids and their parents perceive happens here?

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** I don’t know exactly what they see, but what I hope is that they see is that the time they had to take off from work had some value and we made good use of it. A lot of these parents have jobs that if they spend 20 minutes of truancy they don’t go to work that day because someone has to replace them; so, they have taken time off work and lost pay perhaps to sit in the truancy hearing. If it’s not going to do anything I don’t want them to walk out the door thinking that was a big waste of time. So I want to be able to provide resources to them to make them feel like they didn’t waste their time here.

**Nick:** Are you expecting them to be grateful?

**Attendance Secretary at Alternative High School:** I don’t know if I expect them to be grateful, but my husband ran a trucking company and his parents had to go to a school meeting. Somebody had to drive that truck and I just don’t want them coming here thinking it was a waste of their time. I want them to feel like it was helpful; if they go away with that feeling, I don’t know. I hope that they do.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** I hope what they are looking at is that they realize there are lots of potential answers and information and resources that they didn’t know about. Not that they are grateful that they came in, but that they experienced an “ah ha” moment. That they realize “I had no idea that there were five or six different high school models in this school alone.” They learn that the truancy board process could connect them to East Valley or Central Valley and help them, and that there is a child study team or a resource center that they can access. So, I hope they think that the process was really informational and that they come out with the sense “I had no idea

but now I have some hope.” If that happens, we can move forward and get past whatever this issue is.

**Assistant Superintendent:** I think some parents will express the view that they were thankful of the process because they have a kid that is in crisis and have done everything they can and wanting any help they can get. I think those parents are going to be grateful, and I think Juvenile Court Truancy Specialist is probably bright enough to pick a few of those for a survey. I think some parents are going to say, let’s face it my kid has missed eighty days a year for three or four or five years, my kid’s attendance is not a priority to me as a parent. And some of those parents are going to feel like they are over the top, I want them to stay out of my life, I know what I’m doing, who do they think they are trying to tell me how to raise my kid. So I hope you get some of those too, because I think we have made them feel pretty uncomfortable in this room and they should be. Because their kids and the opportunities they are going to have in their lives are being reduced every day they miss school, they need a wakeup call. So I think you’re going to get some of both.

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** Interesting piece, we have not mentioned teachers. They are the ones that are really going to count...when they are dealing with the kid, and that is really where they are going to get it. You have to go back and one thing I would say is you have to have a process that lets them know what you are doing here. The teachers have to see that process. It is very important that they understand what resources are there from the district. The board feels it’s really important to get the kids in front of that teacher in that classroom, and that sentiment is a tremendous form of support to them and when they need to know that and sense that. If that is in place you get more from the teacher.

**Assistant Superintendent:** Sometimes that information flows, so you’re sitting in here as an administrator or counselor and get something revealing about the kid and the family. I remember really clearly sitting in there as a principal with a girl, her first name was XXXX, who was struggling with attendance. Come to find out at truancy board the mother was a meth addict and was living in meth labs around the county, different place almost every night. Her only way to get to school was to figure out the closest bus from the meth lab she was at that night all the way out in Mead. She is twelve years old. To get all the way down town, out to Centennial by the time school started was her task. Her first period teacher in history, who was running a month-long project on what it means to be an American kind of thing, reported that Ashley was late getting to school two or three times. The teacher had had it, complaining that it she was still in her class. I said come here let me tell you what that kid had to do to get to school. The teacher changed her attitude really quick and told the girl come see her to work out a plan and tell her “we’re going to get through this—you’re passing my class.” So, it goes both ways from here.

**Nick:** *So is there a recommendation on how to get teachers more involved in this process if someone replicates it? Is there practical way to do that?*

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** Again, it goes back to how you have decided to go to your schools. Because we do a lot of collaborations there is a great opportunity to exchange information on students of concern. So you know a good part of every other week we are getting in that collaboration, and those are the sorts of stories that come out. Give me names of the kids long before they get to truancy board...who we are having issues with. So it’s a culture norm that you just don’t skip someone’s class without someone noticing; the teacher

gives you that. Then you cycle that by saying by-the- way, so and so who we talked about two weeks ago had a truancy board. Here is the story on that; that way they get the direct feedback.

**Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board:** We do the same for PLC's...bringing all the information about the child. What has happened, what hasn't happened?

**Maureen:** Did you have any more questions, Dr. Lovrich, you wanted to ask?

**Nick:** I do, but I am going to refrain because I promised I wouldn't ask too many questions.

**(Laughter.)**

**Maureen:** You have them all captive...

**Charles:** *Just a comment on the teachers, because it was mentioned by another Principal that she would actually sit in and allow the teacher to be at the truancy board. What do you think about that type of involvement?*

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** The person who is going to have the best chance of impacting that kid's life should be there.

**Charles:** But no teacher has taken her up on that offer yet.

**Nick:** Yes, she said she told her teachers that they could go instead of me, but not a single teacher has. But she also said, "you know they have to teach, they don't have the flexibility of an administrator to do it."

**Traditional High School Assistant Principal:** We can get very theoretical and get very warm about this but, hey, even as an administrator there are days... I'm like, oh my God, but I've got these five days.... I'm going to forget the Governor tomorrow and Assistant Superintendent's going to take over. So you know, it is a deal where if you can just get them in the conversation and you just give them the narratives and you can give me, and you have a process for feedback it's pretty good. I think all of us have advisories in our school, and so that teacher can be a critical piece at play. Because they will have 16-22 kids in their advisory, and they are with them for four years and they know those kid and their history so well, teacher involvement is a good way to help kids make it through.

**(Unknown):** I also think it might be important to give that opportunity to the teachers, but also we talked about privacy and information and those sorts of things. A lot of times unless the teacher has a personal relationship with that student that is just a unique of the situation, where there is a resource they know that they can be helpful. The kids have a right to feel that their teachers don't need to know their Mom is a meth addict.

**(Unknown):** One of the common factors with kids with truancy issues, of course it's not all the time but it's a preponderance of the time, is those are kids don't have a close personal relationship or connection with someone in the school. Kids that have a close personal connection with someone in the school, such as a teacher they like, enjoy coming to school, but so often they don't reach out in times of need.

**Nick:** *We're going to be doing one more component beyond the interviews and the focus groups. We are going to be looking at archival records and we'll find kids in Spokane Co. that are similar to the petitioned kids in the West Valley School District who did not have the benefit*

*of the community truancy board. We'll compare the rates at which they reengage in school and finish their studies. We will also compare the rates at which they penetrated the juvenile justice system and adult offending later. We want to warn you ahead of time—we may find out that there is really no demonstrable impact on school completion and offending from the community truancy board in West Valley. Would you still maintain the commitment to purpose and the imperative to do it because it's the right thing? We're talking about is this being a possible myth... the myth around this state that this process is very effective. We don't have any real data on long term outcomes yet, but we are going to get it thanks to the MacArthur Foundation funding. Would you rethink the commitment to the community truancy board if the results are not favorable?*

**Assistant Superintendent:** So what we hope is that what you find is every kid that has gone through here has gone on to Harvard, is a lawyer or successful. We know that is not true, so we know that the kids we're dealing with are the toughest kids we are going to deal with, so any success there is a big improvement. I think anecdotally the reason this has been sustained is because we have that feedback already in our hearts. We know that some of the work we have done here has saved lives, and we know that for a fact. It's the old starfish, if you don't know the story... the guy is walking down the beach and its low tide, millions of them for miles...

**Nick:** This isn't an off-colored joke is it?

**(Laughing.)**

**Assistant Superintendent:** Way down the beach he sees someone running and he sees the young man throwing starfish back in, picking them up one at a time running back and forth throwing them as far out into the ocean as he can. The old man said to the kid, "what are you doing, you can't possibly make a difference." So the kid picked one up, threw it in the water, and came back and said "I made a difference for that one." So, like the Principal of Alternative High School and Administrator of the Community Truancy Board said, if we can change one or two lives a year I think everyone in this room would show up for the board.

**(Unknown):** The other piece you need to look at is what is your variable, as data collection people what are you going to use as your variable as success? That's a bigger question I would have for you, because do they have to graduate, do they have to graduate on time, do they have to earn credits, do they have to be 100% on their attendance... One of the pieces we are looking at is that we do have the data already to show you about 80% of our kids that go through our truancy board do not go to the court; that is part of one of the pieces we were looking at is how do we reduce the status offender from connection with the court system. This is because we know as soon as they connect with the court system they become part of the system, so we can already prove to you data-wise that our success is keeping status offenders from going into the court and being part of that system. We know that for a fact. Now what we don't know, how many of those kids graduate, graduate on time, succeed, go on to college and do all that. So from your question would we continue? **Absolutely**, because we can already prove that we are keeping a lot of the kids out of the court system.

**Nick:** Well we have been doing this kind of work for a long time. I'm 100 years older than Paul so he has to listen to me, but for 30 years or so I have done this kind of work, this kind of research. I have never had this proportion of people volunteer their time to be interviewed, to come and talk than this group. There is obvious commitment here; no one is being forced to do that. That is from in there (pointing at his heart), and it must be the rewarding experience had

and shared that keeps the process going. So, we don't have any dog in this race; if it's an appealing myth we're going to expose the myth because outcomes can't be documented in a comparative study of sound research design. Whatever we find we want you to have the benefit of our research so that you can think about it. If there are findings that come back from the interviews with parents and student that you wish were different, we are going to report them just as we see them. We **have** to do that, people looking at this need to know the whole story...and you need to know the whole story. I think lack of training for your board process is compensated for by the communication and norms that you folks have developed over time and sustained over time. The chance to talk about it like this is very valuable for you. I would think about doing this periodically with someone that comes in from outside and makes you answer questions you prefer not to, or looks at the report and has you respond to the report as a group and think about it as a group.

**Assistant Superintendent:** I'm looking forward to the report and I hope there are some things in there that we can take a look at and say we can do better with this, we can do better with that. We are under no illusion that we are perfect. If we can get better, then we want to do that. So we're hopeful that we will get some good feedback.

**Nick:** Maureen, do you want to thank everyone on behalf of our crew?

**Maureen:** I want to thank you all so much for being so generous with your time and for all of your wonderful information... thank you all. Have a good afternoon.

<b>Two-hour session period comes to an end</b>
--

## **APPENDIX B**

### **2010 BECCA Conference PowerPoint Presentation**

#### **Preliminary Results of Case Study**

## Appendix B

### 2010 BECCA Conference PowerPoint Presentation

  
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
*World Class. Face to Face.*

**MODELS for CHANGE**  
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

**2010 BECCA CONFERENCE PRESENTATION**  
**Tri-Cities, October 14-15**

**Breakout Session #3**  
**Drop Out Prevention & Warning Signs**

**Title: Results of Case Study Evaluation of the West Valley School District (Spokane) Community Truancy Board**

*Paul Strand, PI and Nicholas Lovrich, Co-PI*  
Division of Governmental Studies & Services  
Washington State University

**DGSS Research Team**

- Paul Strand, PI, WSU Tri-Cities
- Nicholas Lovrich, Co-PI, WSU Pullman
- **JUVENILE JUSTICE FIELD RESEARCHERS: Qualitative and Quantitative**
- Charles Johnson, Ph.D., Field Research Coordinator, Univ. of Maine
- Kevin Wright, Ph.D., Quantitative Research Specialist, ASU
- Maureen Erickson, Graduate Research Assistant, WSU Spokane
- Nikki Skaggs, M.A., Graduate Research Assistant, WSU Spokane
- Nichole Lovrich, J.D., Legal Research, Gonzaga Univ. School of Law
- Starcia Ague, Undergraduate Research Assistant

**NOTE: Johnson, Wright, Erickson and Skaggs all recruited from graduate seminars in Evaluation Research highlighting direct experience with on-going evaluation research projects.**

  
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
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2

## QUALITATIVE FIELD RESEARCH:

### Documentation of Formation, Evolution & Achievement of Sustainability for Replication

**50 interviews** with Community Truancy Board (CTB) participants

**3 focus group sessions** involving 28 CTB participants to follow up on themes identified in interviews ([Skaggs MA Thesis](#))

**68 student interviews** and **32 parent interviews** carried out as an enhancement of the [Check and Connect](#) process

**Observations and Document-Based Research** on Community Truancy Boards in Washington in Addition to the West Valley Community Truancy Board ([Dale McDaniel dissertation](#))

## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: Assistance from the Administrative Office of the Courts

### THANKS DUE TO DR. TOM GEORGE

Carried out analysis on *linked* (court and school ) data for 2004, 2005 & 2006 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohorts for truant and non-truant students

### TWO TYPES OF COUNTERFACTUAL COMPARISONS

- I. Aggregate Comparison between the West Valley School District and three “similar” school districts not using a CTB process (3,000+ students)
- II. Individual, student-level comparisons of 172 “matched pairs” of students from the WVSD and the comparison districts

**FOCUS UPON SCHOOL COMPLETION (Graduation/GED) OUTCOMES**

## Preliminary Summary Results:

*Evidence of Effective Dropout Prevention Process Capable of Successful Replication*

### Principal Findings of Evaluation Research

- Strong district buy-in to, and belief in, the CTB process
- Progressive enhancement of the process has occurred with broader collaboration with community-based resources, and increasing sophistication of insight into truancy phenomena is in evidence as a consequence of closer court/school collaboration (“Martin position”)
- CTB process re-enforces a “culture of caring” and renews faith in redemption within the school setting among school personnel
- Favorable outcomes in school completion documented in both aggregate, cross-school district comparisons and comparison of maximally similar kiddos in the WVSD and 3 comparison districts
- Neighboring districts are replicating the CTB process
- *Sobering feedback* provided to WVSD CTB by students and parents

## CONTACT INFORMATION: Spokane County Juvenile Court **Models for Change**

- Jennie Marshall, Project Leader (Spokane Juvenile Court)  
[jmarshall@spokanecounty.org](mailto:jmarshall@spokanecounty.org)
- Paul Strand, PI of WSU Research Team  
[pstrand@wsu.edu](mailto:pstrand@wsu.edu)
- Nicholas Lovrich, Co-PI of WSU Research Team  
[faclovri@wsu.edu](mailto:faclovri@wsu.edu)
- Martin Kolodrub, Truancy Specialist  
[mkolodrub@spokanecounty.org](mailto:mkolodrub@spokanecounty.org)
- Larry Bush, WVSD Community Truancy Board  
[larry.bush@wvsd.com](mailto:larry.bush@wvsd.com)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Dale McDaniel Dissertation Information**

**A CASE STUDY OF THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS' RESPONSES TO WASHINGTON  
STATE'S COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE LAW (BECCA BILL)**

## Appendix C

### A CASE STUDY OF THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS' RESPONSES TO WASHINGTON STATE'S COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE LAW (BECCA BILL)

By

DALE ALAN MCDANIEL

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Washington State University-Vancouver

Department of Education

November 2006

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A CASE STUDY OF THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS' RESPONSES TO WASHINGTON STATE'S  
COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE LAW (BECCA BILL)

Abstract

by Dale Alan McDaniel, Ed.D.  
Washington State University  
November 2006

Chair: Paul Goldman

This dissertation summarizes and characterizes the current state of prosecution of truancy violations in juvenile court as a part of the Washington State Compulsory Attendance Law which was enacted in 1995, ten years before this research was conducted. Specifically, it interprets, analyzes and describes the efficacy of the law with respect to its original goals in three school districts and their corresponding counties in Washington State.

Findings support the general implementation of the law especially in those school districts and court programs that provide flexibility in meeting the individual needs of students and their families.

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**A copy of this dissertation is available in the Washington State University Library or at the following link: <http://washingtonstate.worldcat.org/oclc/123767481>**

## **APPENDIX D**

**Catherine Nichole Skaggs**

**M.A. Essay, WSU**

**Graduate Program in Criminal Justice**

**Preliminary Assessment of the MacArthur Foundation Truancy Reduction Project  
in Spokane County: A Grounded Theory Approach to Logic Model Specification  
for the Effective Replication of a Community Truancy Board**

## **Appendix D**

Preliminary Assessment of the MacArthur Foundation Truancy Reduction Project  
in Spokane County: A Grounded Theory Approach to Logic Model Specification  
for the Effective Replication of a Community Truancy Board

**Catherine Nichole Skaggs**

MA Candidate, Washington State University, Spokane

Non-Thesis Master's Essay

Graduate Program in Criminal Justice

MA Committee:

Nicholas Lovrich, Chair

Bryan Vila

David Brody

April 2010

## **Abstract**

This analysis seeks to document the key operational aspects of effective community truancy boards in Washington state so that replication in additional settings can be facilitated. A literature review will lay the foundation for theories and ideas that support truancy boards as a countermeasure to truancy. The 1995 Becca Bill legislation occasioning statewide concern for truancy and school avoidance issues is summarized, and the several forms of truancy reform implemented in the state is discussed. The work of the MacArthur Foundation's Spokane County *Models for Change* project is discussed, with particular attention being focused on the qualitative research being done to document the core processes on the West Valley School District's Community Truancy Board. A preliminary assessment of research findings to date is presented reflecting a grounded theory approach to understanding based upon semi-structured interviews with key actors and a substantial number of persons with experience serving on the Community Truancy Board. This essay indicates how these findings will serve as the foundation for further research in 2010 that will be conducted by the Washington State University research team working in partnership with the *Models for Change* project in Spokane.

## **Preface**

One goal of this Master’s Essay is to contribute to the MacArthur Foundation *Models for Change* Spokane County Project on Truancy a preliminary overview of the insights derived from the use of a grounded theory project to document the underlying logic model for the *Community Truancy Board* as it has developed over time; this process represents a statutorily recommended method of reducing truancy and promoting school attendance in Washington State and is seen as a process worthy of replication. A second related goal is to present a description of the qualitative data collection and analysis process used to develop these insights into this under logic model—and document how that logic model was adapted over time. A third goal of this essay is to report preliminary findings from interviews conducted with persons who have had extensive experience with the process. Lastly, this MA essay will attempt to draw conclusions which can contribute to the planning of focus group sessions with key actors and interviews with parents and students to be undertaken in the next phase of the project.

The major elements of this essay are the literature review, comparison of West Valley School District Community Truancy Board process with other Truancy Boards in the State, data collection process used in this grounded theory qualitative process, preliminary findings from interviews, and conclusions drawn which can contribute to the next stages of analysis—focus group sessions with key actors, systematic, multiple coder coding of interviews for thematic frequency determination, and interviews with parents and students.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review examines issues youth encounter that lead to future delinquency and theories of behavior and adolescent decision making related to involvement in juvenile deviance, especially as these theories relate to the process of formal education. Factors such as

the life course, risk factors and change, family factors and influences, violent behavior and social control (school), I.Q. and deviance, social production and crime, and policing juveniles will be covered to introduce the importance of educational experience in early adolescent development to avoid criminal involvement in adulthood.

### Success Orientation and Education

Robert S. Agnew (1980) commented in “A Study of the Effect of Goals on Anomie,” that *success orientation* has a significant suppressive effect on anomie and that, next to education, success orientation is perhaps the best predictor of avoidance of anomie. Anomie is derived from Durkheim’s study on suicides, and is synthesized into Merton’s theory of Anomie and offered as a precursor to juvenile delinquency and adult crime. Success in conventional society is defined largely in terms of money, power, and prestige, and it is argued that anomie arises when either none of these conventional forms of social status and success in life are felt to be important—or they are seen as utterly unattainable (Agnew, 1980, 53).

Money, power, and prestige are all measures of success that can be most easily attained by achieving higher levels of **education**. When a person goes through life without a set of reasonable goals for achieving success given their circumstances, the end result can be anomie and disengagement from opportunities for self-improvement such as school attendance. Agnew notes correctly that every individual does not have the same set of goals. If unattainable goals are emphasized as preferred measures of success, then goals are not achieved and anomie could occur among those who have unrealistic goals (Agnew, 1980, 63). Agnew set forth the concept of success orientation (how important it is to an individual to attain a certain goal in life) as a critical element, and it likely plays a big part in truancy and school avoidance behavior. People with high success orientation, according to the author, would be predicted to be white or well-educated and have a better chance of reaching their goals compared to blacks or poorly educated persons; a review of the research literature on truancy done for the MacArthur Foundation

“Models for Change” project in Benton/Franklin Counties shows that truancy is indeed far more common among youth who are disadvantaged, of minority background, come from criminally involved families, and are being raised in single-parent or foster care households (Jones, 2009).

The consensus in the research literature is that the better one’s education, the better one’s chances are that they will achieve their personal goals and be successful in life. Education has long been considered an important factor in successful futures, providing paths and opportunities for children to follow. If power, money, and prestige are considered commonplace conventional signs of success, and education is a means to achieve that success, then to avoid anomie (alienation from prevailing social standards) it is assumed that education is necessary for successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. This set of assumptions about the importance of schooling lies behind the virtually universal practice of legislated requirements for school attendance and prescribed penalties for truancy and school avoidance (“ditching”).

#### Life Course Considerations

Albert K. Cohen (1965) studied how deviant behavior develops in the life course; he postulates an interaction process which integrates anomie theory with role theory, and his work has direct connection to truancy as well. Cohen argues that the way personal goals are adopted and opportunities are realized within the limits of cultural and institutional norms should be conceptualized through an individual’s *life course* (1965). Each individual must be seen as a product of both their own inherent nature and the outside experiences they have had as they go through the process of living out their lives. For example, the sense of proportionality one sees between effort and reward is not determined by the objective returns of effort alone or the consequence of personal character alone, but by these also by the reactions to those efforts by the many others who one comes into contact with in the course of one’s life (Cohen, 1965, 6).

The combination of the results of one’s actions and the external strains and supports present for one in the broader society or environment together influence the development of

anomie and social deviance such as truancy. Cohen notes that such things as another person's morals, if they are important in one's life, can be a significant source of strain (Cohen, 1965). He argues that deviance is very often a reflection of an effort to reduce the disjunction (the motive behind action) and re-establish a balance between goals and means, and then he moves into the role of "the self" derived from the work of George Herbert Mead. As with Mead, Cohen suggests that the self is linked to dynamic roles that are a part of the categorical system of society (Cohen, 1965, 12). He notes that sometimes deviant behavior is a reaction to the disjunction between goals and means can be expressive of the role or part of the self. Sexual seduction, for example, may be thought of as an illicit means to the achievement of a goal, but the seduction need not be an adaptation to the insufficiency of other means, or a response to disjunction, but rather one may cultivate the art of seduction because this sort of expertise is directly related to the accomplishment of a coveted role (Cohen, 1965, 13). Cohen concludes that there is a need to investigate the possible ways in which the two kinds or sources of deviance interact or become synthesized (Cohen, 1965, 14).

### Family Factors

Henry Amatu (1980) studied the phenomenon of family-motivated truancy and found that when compared to a group of non-truant pupils in a Nigerian primary school, the degree of domestic responsibilities of the truant group is a major determinant of whether the children in that group attend school. For example, there was a need for assistance in trading activities, getting goods to and from the market, if the parents were traders. Amatu also noted that there were school-related correlates of truancy as well. Unsatisfactory school progress was also reported as a reason for both the truant and non-truant children avoiding school (1980, 113).

The author's three hypotheses regarding family factors and school performance factors were supported, showing that in the truant group the pupils were an important factor in helping

run the home and/or business. Secondly, parents were less actively and less frequently participating in the home studies of the truant pupils. Lastly, the truant pupils showed that they didn't do as well in school as the non-truant group. Amatu concluded that truancy and academic success are mutually exclusive (1980, 116). These results indicate that some families rely on their children in ways that can reduce the amount of time and effort left for schooling. Family-related issues might be an area that requires some problem solving techniques or assistance so that the family does not hinder educational attainment. Community truancy boards, the principal subject of this study, are a resource intended to identify such problems and deal with them in an informal setting so that the family and student can get the help they need to insure that the student's schooling is occurring and progress toward school completion is being made.

#### School Factors

Jean A. Baker et al. (2001) studied school-level contributions to dropout and school completion looking at school environment and school structure as possible important factors in school completion for students. Moving away from person-centered correlates of dropout like demographic correlates such as poverty, ethnicity, and gender, as well as child-centered variables, such as students' academic competence, motivation, or mental health—factors which tend to dominate the discourse on school dropout—Baker and her colleagues focused on the environmental factor of school structure as a contributing factor to dropout and school completion (2001, 406). School structure was referred to as the permanent features physically and organizationally that structures the school system. The Baker et al. team suggested *ecological systems theory* as a framework to explain the observation that developmental outcomes in education are influenced by progressively complex, reciprocal interactions between individuals and their environments (2001, 409).

Baker et al. noted that schools which actively adapt their organizational structures to promote student engagement should be less likely to witness truancy and school avoidance

behavior than those that fail to take these environmental aspects into consideration. Organizational structures such as size of classes and provision for casual meeting areas influence motivation to participate and be engaged in school. It is clear that schools and school policies play a major part in the dropout rate. Community Truancy Boards that are aimed at problem solving before the truant student goes to court or drops out can come up with solutions for the student to be engaged in school long enough to complete the requirements if retention and structural complexities are hindering their focus.

The concept of Community Truancy Board is specified in statute in the State of Washington, and is defined as follows in the Revised Code of Washington: “Community truancy board means a board composed of members of the local community in which the child attends school. Juvenile courts may establish and operate community truancy boards. If the juvenile court and the school district agree, a school district may establish and operate a community truancy board under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. ...Duties of a community truancy board shall include, but not be limited to, recommending methods for improving school attendance such as assisting the parent or the child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the causes for the absences or suggesting to the school district that the child enroll in another school, an alternative education program, an education center, a skill center, a dropout prevention program, or another public or private educational program. The legislature finds that utilization of community truancy boards, or other diversion units that fulfill a similar function, is the preferred means of intervention when preliminary methods of notice and parent conferences and taking appropriate steps to eliminate or reduce unexcused absences have not been effective in securing the child’s attendance at school. The legislature intends to encourage and support the development and expansion of community truancy boards and other diversion programs which are effective in promoting school attendance and preventing the need for more intrusive intervention by the court. [RCW 28A.225.030 and 1999 c 319 s] Given the

primacy of the concept of community truancy boards in Washington, this analysis of the community truancy board in the West Valley School District, and the derivation of the lessons to be learned from its operation since 1997, should serve as a major contribution to its successful replication elsewhere in the state.

#### Community Oriented Policing Connections to At Risk Youth

Gordon Bazemore and Scott Senjo (1997) focused on community policing (COP) and police encounters with juveniles as a major factor in reducing truancy. Although Bazemore and Senjo expected to find a great deal of role conflict between enforcement and prevention/service roles among officers who were youth-oriented, their research findings indicated that the two goals were more often mutually reinforcing than in conflict. Youth-oriented community oriented police officers frequently cited improved enforcement as an end result of increased intimacy and involvement in the community (Bazemore and Senjo, 1997, 67).

The researchers found that most COP officers developed close personal relationships with people in the neighborhood and the youth living there, and these relationships assisted them in finding resources and support for the at-risk youth with whom they came into contact. Their research documented the value of community oriented policing programs directed toward youth. Programs such as police athletic leagues, school resource officers, and DARE are secondary prevention strategies officers got involved in to help engage young people in activities other than inappropriate or illegal ones. Community oriented policing programs such as these expand the discretion needed for creative problem solving to address problems such as truancy among criminally-involved youth in particular. COP officers often show at-risk youth that they can be trusted, looked up to, and represent someone who is there to provide help when they encounter difficulties in life which affect their progress toward school completion.

Jon Gunnar Bernberg (1999) studied violent behavior as a frequently noted subculture of delinquency, and argue that social controls such as school-based norms and cognitive

development are significantly related to the tendency to resort to violence in delinquency. Bernberg noted that his research suggests that violent behavior and delinquency have similar social predictors that tend to derive from hanging out with deviant peer groups, a strong influence in adolescent lives universally. Socializing without stable adult authority figures or in structured activities such as school and school-related activities is shown to lead to delinquent lifestyles for youths; socializing with violent-prone peers in the absence of school engagement is shown to be particularly detrimental to youth.

Peer pressure is a strong social influence during middle and high school stages in the lives of youth; according to social learning theory, norms, habitual behaviors, and life style routines are instilled principally through the primary social groups of family and peers (Cherlin, 2008). Viewed in the context of social learning theory, Bernberg suggests that violent behavior is learned as a consequence of the placement of high attention on toughness, risk taking, and excitement by one's primary social groups (1999, 447). Bernberg also points out that some studies have shown that violent behavior has been related to other forms of non-violent delinquency such as poor school performance and attendance, and weak attachment to conventional social norms associated with civility and common courtesy. Weak social controls arising from ties to conventional institutions and conventional beliefs have similar bivariate and multivariate effects on violent offending (Bernberg, 1999, 456). When the social controls associated with schooling and the school setting break down, adolescents tend to become vulnerable to risk factors in the primary social construction of their lives. At-risk youth lacking conventional role models or norm-inducing activities such as schooling are much more likely to engage in delinquent activities with their peers. Bernberg argues that violent behavior is often a way for at-risk youth to defend the values (however dysfunctional vis-à-vis conventional society) of the social identities of delinquency and to gain status or power among their peers.

Donald J. Black and Albert J. Reiss (1970) studied the effects of detection and sanctioning differentials in the policing of juveniles. Black and Reiss noted that most encounters that juveniles have with the police related to minor infractions such as disturbing the peace and under-aged drinking, but they remind us that most cases of juvenile misconduct are undetected by the police (1970). They also reported that the police very rarely arrest juveniles, and even when the police have very persuasive situational evidence they generally release juveniles in the field (Black and Reiss, 1970, 74). Truancy would be considered a minor infraction in the hierarchy of police work in the field. Officers often come in contact with truant adolescents who are not rowdy or are not disturbing the peace, but they do not tend to view arrest for truancy as part of their normal job of law enforcement. Even if investigating truant students on the streets, police officers often choose to “leave them be” if no evidence of a serious infraction is present at that time. While the state’s BECCA Bill [Engrossed 2<sup>nd</sup> Substitute Senate Bill 5439, Chapter 312, Laws of 1995] gives strong powers of arrest to police officers, the findings of Black and Reiss documented more than 40 years ago continue to hold—namely, police seldom view truancy enforcement as a normal part of their work.

#### Chronic Truancy and Offending Connections

Alfred Blumstein et al. (1985) studied delinquent careers, reports of discrimination of more and less serious offenders, and their recidivism rates. They explored the idea that a small portion of chronic offenders were committing a large portion of crime. They looked at three groups—namely, *innocents* (no arrests), *desisters* (one or two arrests), and then all the others termed *persisters* (Blumstein et al., 1985). They also examined data from the Cambridge study of Delinquent Development to assess factors related to early onset among chronic offenders. Their study suggested that age 10 was often the first clear sign of trouble for those who were later found to be chronic offenders, and that if preventative actions were to be formulated the

opportunity for successful intervention would be at the time of first conviction (Blumstein et al., 1985).

The study examined the observations of teachers and peers at the ages of eight and ten for these chronic offenders, and their commentaries indicated that problematic behaviors (disorderly conduct and intimidation) and “poor school attainment” were strong predictors distinguishing chronic offenders from the non-chronic offenders (Blumstein et al.). The study indicated the importance of childhood development, especially as revealed in the school setting. Students who are not engaged in their primary and secondary school education will find something else to become engaged in, putting them at risk for delinquency and possible future chronic offending.

The findings reported in the Blumstein et al. study suggest that community truancy boards might be a helpful tool to assess problem areas or barriers for students who are not going to school or who are not doing well in school because of their inappropriate conduct. If the at-risk child’s situation can be addressed effectively to make them more successful in the school setting they may be diverted from chronic offending later in life (Blumstein et al., 1985, 217-218).

#### Parent-Child Relationships Connections

Eve Brank et al. (2008) studied an intensive probation program which had, among other goals, improving parent–child relationships and helping youth choose better peers. The school-based component of this probation program was an essential aspect of the effort to promote crime-involvement prevention. The program made use of the restorative/community justice philosophy of focusing on healing everyone (not simply in terms of clinical healing) rather than just focusing on the offender. In some families involved in the program the parents were struggling with their own issues, and program staff often helped those families with their problems so that the youth might succeed in their schooling and succeed in staying away from problematic situations and crime-involved peers (Brank et al., 2008, 196). The program

produced some evidence of improvement in child-parent relationships, and on peer associations. When asked about their friends one year after the intervention, responses indicated that some friends looked up to them as a leader, most agreed with their ideas, and some of their friends made fun of them while some were indicated as troublesome or did things that were against the law (Brank et al., 2008). The West Valley School District's community truancy board is also premised on the restorative justice concept, and family dynamics, family unit problem-solving, and peer group network expansion are all matters that receive frequent attention in the deliberations of the community truancy board.

Graham Bryce and David Baird (1986) studied family therapy in a problem-centered approach regarding student refusal to attend school. Family therapists were engaged to identify barriers to school attendance and their interviews with children and parents revealed a wide range of problems that fit the categorization of family dysfunction. The researchers explained that careful attention to the families' concerns on the part of school officials often allowed for more effective collaboration on the school refusal problem (Bryce and Baird, 1986, 210). A longitudinal follow-up evaluation showed that the major differences between the group of children who returned to school and those who did not concerned the development of better relationships within the family; the resolution of family conflicts played a crucial role in overcoming school refusal (Bryce and Baird, 1986, 212). The community truancy board experience in the West Valley School District's community truancy board would confirm this finding; in many cases of chronic truancy the underlying problem of dysfunctional families underlies the school avoidance issues coming before that board.

#### Life Course and Life-Long Learning in an Information-Based Economy

John S. Clousen (1991) investigated how the life course is shaped by social and cultural features that reflect the physical and psychological attributes of the individual in adolescence and by commitments and purposeful efforts made by the individual during this formative period in

their lives. In late adolescence one's goals, abilities, and values are influenced strongly by social experiences that interact with one another and affect the opportunities or obstacles that are encountered in early adulthood. How the adolescent reacts to these opportunities and obstacles to a considerable degree shapes their decision making in future life course decisions such as marriage or career choices.

When referring to the life course, Clousen pictures a reflexive set of potentially available roles that are interlinked and to which persons commit in varying degrees in different periods of their life (Clousen, 1991, 806). In regard to preparing for a career, it has become increasingly difficult to complete one's education then go into a job and work one's way up from an entry-level position. Clousen argues that the advent of the "information society" has both placed a high premium on formal education and made it even more important to be able to engage in "life-long learning" for success in professional or bureaucratic careers. These societal changes make it even more important to address the problems of truancy and school avoidance in the current generation of school-aged youth. Many adolescents are not in the frame of mind to anticipate the kind of strategic planning of future success that is required to success in the decades ahead. Without the solid foundation of formal schooling the cognitive abilities required to navigate the information society's workplace promises a troubled life course. Clousen concluded that *planful competence*, if attained early in life through dutiful school attendance and active engagement in learning before transitioning into adulthood, will benefit youth once they reach adulthood and are making larger and more serious life choices. The planful competence trait can be seen as a sign of maturity and the attribute is mostly likely attained (or is not attained) in adolescence (Clousen, 1991, 834).

Colvin and Pauly (1983) postulate that there is active societal production of serious patterned delinquent behavior as a consequence of our social structure under capitalism. They argue that the focus of the social control structures of our society lie primarily in the workplace,

the family, the schools, and in our peer groups. In this system of external control, the workplace typically structures the consciousness and behaviors of parents who produce and reproduce these controls within their children. The children, at the early stages of their development, are influenced by this type of authoritative control structure when they enter school. The schools are structured and designed to prepare children for the demands of the labor force needs of a capitalist economy (Colvin and Pauly, 1983). Just as students are rewarded for following orders and responding to the dictates of their teachers, so are employees rewarded for following orders and responding to the dictates of their employers.

Colvin and Pauly argue that these social controls interact with adolescent exposure to peer groups in the school and society. These peer groups, in turn, can reinforce either conventional or delinquent behavior. The more coercive the control relations encountered in these various socialization contexts are, the more negative or alienated the individual's ideological bond will be and the more likely the individual is to engage in serious, patterned juvenile delinquency (Colvin and Pauly, 1983, 515). More specifically, these researchers argue that education entails the molding of human raw material into a product that can be consumed in the capitalist labor process (Colvin and Pauly, 1983, 537). The school provides multiple experiences that prepare the child for future interactions with authority, such as in the workplace. One set of experiences requires discipline, regimentation, and conformity to external authority while other school experiences encourage creativity, initiative, and self-direction. Both types of experiences prepare them for future placement into the workplace instead of making it attractive to resort to illegitimate opportunities for gain to “make it” in life. Clearly, if schooling is curtailed by truancy or dropping out entirely, the benefits of these important formative experiences are lost.

In their research, Jane Corville-Smith et al. (1998) focus on the relationship between student school attendance and three types of factors thought to be correlated with attendance—

namely, the personal characteristics of the student, the state of family relations within their household, and school characteristics. The traits of social competence, relationships with peers, self-esteem, academic self-concept, proclivity toward anti-social behaviors, and neurotic disturbances were identified as personal characteristics of the student. With respect to family dynamics, less acceptance, less consistency with the use of discipline, and unhealthy (stressful vs. supportive) family relationships were used to characterize family relations (Corville-Smith et al., 1998). Teacher to pupil relationships, non-stimulating curriculum, and perceptions of no future benefits were considered school-related factors.

The Corville-Smith et al. study reported that most of these variables distinguished between students who were regular attendees and those who were often truant. Those students who were regularly absent from high school showed lower self-esteem, lower academic self-concepts, were less competent in social relationships, perceived their families to be less cohesive as a unit, received less acceptance from their parents, had less/inconsistent/ineffective discipline from their parents, achieved lower scores in school, and derived less satisfaction from school and their relationships with their teachers (Corville-Smith et al., 1998, 636-637). The study explains how diverse problems with school attendance can be, and in many situations there is more than one problem at hand.

### Truancy and Adult Offending

Focusing on the positive side, Bill Henry et al. (1999) studied whether school attendance throughout adolescence acted as a protective factor for individuals at risk for criminal behavior in early adulthood. The study documented student attendance, in months, between the ages of 15 and 21 and predicted that the more time the students spent in school in early adolescence, the lower the levels of antisocial behaviors they would experience (Henry et al., 1999). The results

of the study indicated that the months spent in school did indeed serve as a protective factor against antisocial behavior for the males in the group, but this was not the case for the females.

Whether the outcome variable was self-reported offending or conviction records, their results were similar—namely, after controlling for the effects of social class, intelligence, family disruption and adolescent delinquency, a significant Lack of Self Control and Months of Education interaction emerged and suggested that the combination of poor childhood self-regulation and early school leaving marks a small subgroup of offenders who are responsible for a disproportionately large percentage of all crimes committed (Henry et al., 1998, 1066-1067). However, the case is not the same for girls. The same level of poor self regulation in childhood that would place a male child at risk for later antisocial behavior wouldn't constitute the same degree of risk for a female child. Henry and his colleagues speculated that the lack of ability to predict delinquent behavior in the females could have been due to social and developmental influences that channeled girls' early under-controlled behavior away from externalizing behavior problems and toward internalizing problems such as anxiety or depression (Henry et al., 1999, 1069).

Bill Henry et al. (1996) also conducted research on relations between family characteristics, childhood temperament, and convictions for violent and nonviolent offenses at age 18 in a representative birth cohort of men who are part of a large longitudinal study and showed that family factors were associated with both types of conviction outcomes, whereas childhood temperament was associated primarily with convictions for violent offenses. During the assessment at three years of age, the mother-child interaction was observed during a one-hour testing session and rated by a pediatrician across eight distinct dimensions. A point was assigned for each dimension on which the interaction appeared negative or inappropriate. Evaluations continued at ages seven and nine for the traits of cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict with mothers at seven, and assessed how often the child had changed residences up until nine years

old. Parental figure changes were also reported (changes in significant other, death, sent to other relatives, or foster care) along with marital status of the primary caregiver (Henry et al., 1996).

Computerized court convictions were looked up by name in the police database for the sample of males in the study. Records included convictions in children's and young person's court from ages 13 to 16, inclusive, and convictions in adult criminal court from age 17 until the 18th birthday. Informed consent for the search was obtained during the interviews at age 18 (Henry et al., 1996, 617).

Henry and his colleagues concluded that childhood family factors (particularly number of parent changes, number of residence changes, and single parent status) conferred on participants a "generalized" risk for criminal conviction (the variables were associated with increased risk for violent and nonviolent convictions), and, in contrast, measures of early childhood temperament appeared to be specifically associated with having at least one violent conviction by the age of 18, and only the temperament variable discriminated between those participants who had been convicted of a violent offense and those who had been convicted only for nonviolent offenses (Henry et al., 1996, 620).

#### IQ Dynamics in Truancy

Travis Hirschi and Michael J. Hindelang (1977) studied how IQ has an effect on delinquency, independent of class and race, and is mediated through a host of school variables. The argument is that IQ, through facilitation of school performance, does have a suppressive effect on delinquent behavior, and delinquents are broadly known to have lower IQ's than non-delinquents. Some arguments against the concept that IQ has an effect on delinquency stated that the differences in IQ are due to the differences in class and culture and suggested the possibility that cultural factors are at work: the children of professionals differ from those of unskilled manual workers by about 20 IQ points; average IQ scores are low in areas with high delinquency rates; children in large families have lower IQ scores and are more likely to be

delinquent, and overcrowding is related both to low IQ and to delinquency (Hirschi and Hindelang, 1977, 581). The researchers conclude from their studies that available data confirm that IQ, acting through school performance, does have a suppressing effect on delinquency despite sociological textbook claims that there is a “no-IQ-difference” (Hirschi and Hindelang, 1977, 584).

#### Restorative Justice Connections to Truancy Reduction

David R. Karp and Beau Breslin (2001) looked at the concept of restorative justice in school communities, assessing how this approach to drug and alcohol problems might offer an alternative to the zero-tolerance policy. With arguments derived from social disorganization theory, which holds that youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods are at more risk to be in the subculture of delinquency, the study argued that institutionally strong communities can better prevent crime as well as respond to crime when it occurs in their neighborhoods than communities lacking this trait (Karp and Breslin, 2001).

As far as the concept of restorative justice goes, when children go to school they are immersed in forms of social control that are more personal, less bureaucratic, and less punitive than the formal institutions of the criminal justice system (Karp and Breslin, 2001). Restorative practices don't just aim at sanctioning inappropriate behavior, but rather seek to strengthen relationships and ties to the community that alter the offender's environment in positive ways, showing that the community, the justice system, and the school are all participating in active problem-solving for the family and the youth involved. Relationships between school-based actors such as teachers, students, and staff members are not just instrumental to student learning, but have moral implications as well (Karp and Breslin, 2001, 252).

There is a dramatic shift from the zero-tolerance idea of rule breaking in the school atmosphere to one that is more caring and less authoritative, giving the offender a participating role in the sanctioning or problem solving process. This is a common clash that is also seen with

the shifting philosophies of policing going from law and order focused traditional policing to community oriented policing. Traditional school administrators are authoritative when rules are broken, much like the police tend to be in traditional policing settings. Restorative justice brings in the concept of addressing more than the infraction noted, and looking instead at the environment surrounding the event in question.

In research done quite long ago, Rudolf Moos and Bernie Moos (1978) found that social environments in classrooms were related to absentee rates and final grades given by teachers. It is clear that students need to be in the classroom to take advantage of their learning opportunities and keep pace with the course content. Not attending school has been linked to self-reported delinquency, according to Moos and Moos (1978). High school classrooms that had college preparatory curriculum were sampled for this study with subject matter in math, foreign language, biology, English, art and business bookkeeping (Moos and Moos, 1978). Only one high school was sampled because the focus was on classroom climate, and since absentee rates vary from school to school, more than one school sample might have confused classroom and school effects (Moos and Moos, 1978). This study enhanced our understanding of the importance of the classroom environment for the student, indicating that it must provide opportunity for achievement and active engagement. Students may learn more if the classroom provides a level of difficulty for competition between peers, however these researchers report that students are frequently absent from such competitive classroom environments (Moos and Moos, 1978, 267).

Terence P. Thornberry and R.L. Christenson (1984) examined theoretical and empirical consequences associated with unidirectional explanations of criminal involvement using a linear panel model approach. They report that unemployment and crime seem to mutually influence one another over one's life span. Thornberry and Christenson argue that crime is properly viewed in most instances as a product of social disorganization, but once manifested in

delinquent subcultures criminal behavior feeds back upon and becomes a causal factor in the perpetuation of disorganization (Thornberry and Christenson, 1984, 399).

Data for this study were derived from juvenile and adult arrest histories that were collected from the files of the Philadelphia police (sample of members of the Philadelphia birth cohort of 1945) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Data were available for all subjects to age 30, and interview data were collected at age 25 (Thornberry and Christenson, 1984, 401). The results of their study showed strong support for the idea of a *reciprocal model* of crime and unemployment showing that unemployment exerts a rather immediate effect on criminal involvement and criminal involvement exerts a more long-term effect on unemployment (Thornberry and Christenson, 1984, 405). To the extent that formal education and the completion of high school insulate one to the dangers of unemployment to some extent, to that extent the effort to reduce truancy represents a kind of “job retention” influence in the economy.

#### Community-Based Truancy Countermeasures

In their article Richard Dembo and Laura M. Gullledge (2008) address issues relating to innovation and the challenges facing truancy reduction programs across the country. They present a detailed discussion based on their evaluation of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (2007) program on truancy, noting aspects of that program that are effective. In this regard they highlight: parent or guardian involvement; a continuum of services to include meaningful incentives, consequences, and support; collaboration with community resources, including law enforcement, mental health services, mentoring, and social services; school administrative support and commitment to keeping youth in the educational mainstream; and ongoing evaluation (Dembo and Gullledge, 2008, 439).

The researchers noted that there are school-based programs, court-based programs, and community-based programs implemented across the country. School-based program focused more on providing mentoring and improving teacher-student relationships while encouraging

attendance and performance through check-ins and one-on-one interactions for the students (Dembo and Gullledge, 2008). Another aspect of the school-based programs is more access to the health care component, providing both medical and mental health services for students.

The community-based programs, like the community truancy board concept being investigated here, featured collaboration with community members and community-based organizations and agencies to reduce truancy. These collaborations typically involve human services, family court, the school district, and other community organizations to assist in reaching out to the families and students wherein school avoidance are a problem (Dembo and Gullledge, 2008). The court-based programs tend to focus on the development of diversion programs designed to keep truant kids for further involvement in the court. The research for that program showed significant drops in absentee rates after the first court hearing for many students, but little positive effect for chronic truants (Dembo and Gullledge, 2008, 444).

The researchers concluded their study with the observation that interventions which do not get to the root cause of truancy fail to address the problems leading to more serious involvement in the juvenile justice system. Having come to this conclusion, more and more truancy programs across the nation are shifting from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional strategies that involve more collaborative and holistic approaches to the truancy issue (Dembo and Gullledge, 2008). The community truancy board is a mechanism for putting into action such a collaborative and holistic approach.

### **BECCA Bill Legislation and the Importance of Addressing the Truancy Problem**

In 1995, the Washington state legislation passed a law broadly known as the “Becca Bill”. This statute addressed issues in public policy on at-risk youth, runaways, and truancy (Aos, 2002). The Becca Bill was passed after a young girl in middle school, Rebecca Hedman, had run away from her foster home in Tacoma and was murdered by a “John” while she was

turning tricks, doing drugs and living on the street in Spokane. The law requires schools to notify parents and guardians of the unexcused absences of their youth and to meet with the family if the unexcused absences continue to build up (Aos, 2002). If truancy continues, the court can take action and order the student to juvenile detention and fine the parents monetarily or with community services.

Washington's truancy petition process is as follows: 1) The school determines if the absence is unexcused; 2) If the student has one unexcused absence in a month, the school informs the parents of potential consequences of additional unexcused absences; 3) If the student has two unexcused absences in a month, the school shall schedule a conference with the parents and the student and take additional steps described in the law; 4) If the student has five unexcused absences in one month, the school shall enter into an agreement with the student and the parents, or refer the student to a community truancy board that shall enter into the agreement, or *may* file a truancy petition with the juvenile court. The parent *may* file a petition with the court if the school district fails to do so; 5) If the student has seven unexcused absences in one month or ten in one year, the school district *shall* file a truancy petition with the juvenile court; 6) The juvenile court shall schedule a hearing, unless other action can be taken. If the truancy petition is granted, the court shall assume jurisdiction to intervene for a period of time determined by the court. The court has several options at this stage: 7) If the child fails to comply with the court order, the court may order the child to report to a county detention facility, or may impose alternatives to detention such as community service. The court may fine the parents or impose community service in lieu of a fine (Aos, 2002).

The threat of court involvement is one of the consequences the school discusses at the beginning stages of the discussion of the truancy problem, and this is intended to serve as a deterrent for the family in continuing unexcused absences (Aos, 2002). Some studies have been

conducted since the implementation of the Becca Bill in 1995 to evaluate the effectiveness of the truancy petition.

In 1998, three years after the Becca Bill was passed into law in Washington state, a study found that a) many schools had **strengthened their attendance monitoring** and enhanced their enforcement policies in response to new expectations created with the truancy petition requirements with juvenile courts and school districts partnering together to develop programs for truant and at-risk youth; b) truant students had a significantly **higher mobility rate** than non-truant students, and in a case study it was found that 48% of truant students either transferred, withdrew, or dropped out compared with 17 percent of the entire student population; c) the number of petitions filed in the 1996-97 school year **increased by 29 percent** over the 1995-96 school year, suggesting that schools have **insufficient resources** to meet court petition requirements (Harding and Burley, 1998).

Comparisons of truant kids to the rest of the population were made in terms of school suspensions and in-tact family at home; only 36 percent of truant students lived with both their parents while 56 percent of all students in the case study lived with their parents. It was also noted that 42 percent of the truant students were in either the eighth or ninth grade in school (Harding and Burley, 2002).

In 2000, the Seattle School District was evaluated to assess the outcome of the new truancy law because they had historical data on truancy that preceded the 1995 truancy law implementation. This study reported that unexcused absences went down between 1993 and 1999, but the study indicated that the total number of absences remained constant. This result could have been due to more accurate reporting on absences and unexcused absences rather than any change in student behavior (Burley, 2000). Truant students represented 18 percent of the student population in the 1994-95 school year, and 14 percent of students in the 1996-97 school year. Additionally, among truant students in the post-Becca group, 730 (45 percent) had been

subject to a truancy petition (Burley, 2000). The findings also suggested that while the *act* of filing a court petition didn't deter the student, the *threat of court involvement* might have deterred some students from accumulating unexcused absences. The author of the evaluation study noted that while better accuracy of reported attendance is considered a positive outcome of the truancy law, it was difficult to accurately measure pre- and post-requirement data in the Seattle School District (Burley, 2000).

### **Other Forms of Truancy Boards in Washington State**

While the Becca Bill is a state law, it is administered locally in differing ways in Washington's 39 counties, and even within school districts within the same county. Dale McDaniel's dissertation on three school districts' response on the truancy law (2006) analyzed the truancy board in the Kelso School District in Cowlitz County, in the Vancouver School District in Clark County, and in the North Thurston School District in Thurston County.

Cowlitz County has five school districts other than Kelso. Each school has a single truancy officer who is in charge of students who cross the 5-7-10 days of absence in a month/year (McDaniel, 2006, 71). Legal documents are prepared by these truancy officers, then they are forwarded to the County Prosecutor's office (who acts as the schools' attorney), and the Prosecutor's office keeps petitions active for the school year. The school files contempt motions if necessary—that is, if school attendance does not improve (McDaniel, 2006, 72). There is a transition school in the Cowlitz County that is available for those students that are unable to attend regular school, and that is where probation services are administered to chronically truant youth. The transition school became so popular that it housed around 80 students in one day and had to hire a Special Education teacher and mental health therapist (McDaniel, 2006, 73).

There is one single commissioner that is responsible for all the petitions and contempts of court, so that person knows each of the truant youths individually and is familiar with their cases.

However, because of the large caseload for which the one commissioner is responsible, a school administrator assists regularly so that the team of the commissioner, the prosecutor, and the school administrator make the court proceedings quite efficient (McDaniel, 2006). According to McDaniel, there is a concern in Cowlitz County that some school principals do not file Becca petitions at all. Funding is also an issue with the Cowlitz County government, especially with respect to the intervention programs they want to implement for at-risk youths but for which there are no state funds provided.

Like many other systems, Kelso School District has one person representing all of the district's schools. School administrators assist the district's Becca Bill coordinator with petitions that are being brought to court, and attendance secretaries and school nurses at the middle and elementary school level help out as well with truant students. Actual data collection is the responsibility of the district coordinator alone, a fact which led to the development of the concept of *single point of contact system* for the district (McDaniel, 2006). The Kelso School District doesn't have a board because it couldn't keep consistent volunteers, and instead makes use of a Truancy Workshop that is implemented as a group intervention program (McDaniel, 2006, 77). The Kelso School District has an on-time graduation rate of 59%, and extended graduation of 60.2%, compared to state averages of 70.1% and 74.4% (McDaniel, 2006, 78).

Clark County—because of its robust economy, high population density, proactive court and progressive school community, has an active filing philosophy and organized prosecution team that creates unique intervention programs for parents and students with a large Becca staff that administers a complex array of programs (McDaniel, 2006, 79). Each school district participates actively in this process, and there is training that is necessary between court officials and school officials. The training occurs a few times a year to accommodate the large number of filings from each of the nine school districts in the county (McDaniel, 2006, 79).

Clark County also has a large school-based truancy board that students are required to attend for re-evaluation after their first court appearance. The truancy board has the authority to alter school programs, change placement, order assessments, and assign interventionists to meet with the family if the initial interventions do not work (McDaniel, 2006, 79). If progress isn't made, they have the authority to bring the student and the family back to the court for sentencing. The County also has a General Equivalency Program (GED) at the juvenile detention facility that is a part of the "intensive intervention stage" where they meet with the family regularly (McDaniel, 2006, 80).

Resources from the court are used for psychological evaluations, drug and alcohol interventions, and many other services that aren't available to the schools (McDaniel, 2006). McDaniel refers to three levels of interventions with the student and family and states that Clark County Juvenile is at the second level. The first level is where the student is impacted by being served a subpoena and goes in front of a judge; the second level is the student and family needs are assessed and options and opportunities to change their attendance are offered; and the third level is the student is so impacted by life circumstances that the school's programs are deemed inappropriate placement/solutions (McDaniel, 2006, 80-81).

The Vancouver School District Truancy Board works with students to alter schedules, arrange medical evaluations, acquire counseling, and seeks to avoid contempt hearings. Clark County also has a single commissioner that has chaired nearly every truancy board, every panel, and every budget committee involving Becca since the inception of the law (McDaniel, 2006, 82). The school district's on-time graduation rate is 68.9% and extended graduation rate at 75.7%, as compared to the previously mentioned state rates of 70.1% and 74.4% (McDaniel, 2006, 84).

The North Thurston School District and Thurston County is different from the others in that it does its "Truancy Class" at the court for students who have petitions filed. There is an

introduction for the students and families, then the Becca class is presented as a mandatory class which concentrates on the economic advantages to attending school and the costs of dropping out (McDaniel, 2006, 84). There is a court officer that does truancy, at-risk youth petitions and Children In Need of Supervision (C.H.I.N.S.) petitions.

There are concerns with a three-week delay from filing and hearing the cases, and there is a concern for a couple districts that don't typically file petitions (McDaniel, 2006). The Thurston County Juvenile Prosecutor's Office does not participate in Becca hearings. The focus in that county is to counsel and document the results to reinforce the district's decision to provide earlier interventions and give administrators information about the truant students they never had before. They try to offset the number of contempts of court actions early in the potentially lengthy Becca process. North Thurston's on-time graduation rate is 73.8% with extended graduation rate of 76.5% (McDaniel, 2006, 88).

Benton and Franklin Counties were observed in February 23, 2010, by Maureen Erickson and Dr. Paul Strand to observe their process of truancy boards with their school districts. In Franklin County was held in a library of a middle school in the district where the physical set up is more informal. Students and families sat around small tables together. There was a power point presentation that was given by a counselor to all of the students/family members that day. Simple suggestions to change or improve attendance. were made during the presentation. The Becca Bill was also explained in the presentation and the importance of school in regard to future ramifications upon failure to complete their high school education.

Once the presentation was completed, there was an attorney (contracted by the school district) who was introduced and continued the meeting, explaining two choices the students/families had. They could either voluntarily sign the petitions that would go to court and then be signed by a judge, or they could go to court in person to fight the petition (and potentially

win if there was a legitimate reason for the absences). He explained that he would meet with each of the families and provide them with legal counsel before their decision is made.

The students were asked to complete their paperwork before the meeting with the attorney including questionnaires for the student and the family, a truancy intervention plan, and the petition. Truancy counselors were available for guidance or assistance on completing the forms. The attorney conveyed to Dr. Strand that 90 percent of students will sign the petition at the meetings. Students who signed the petitions were given appointments to return two weeks later to meet with the board to discuss their progress or continuing obstacles with school attendance. When a contempt is to be filed, it is recommended by a truancy counselor if necessary after the petition process or to intervene on a contempt filing that might be charged against the student.

In the contempt hearing, the judge may choose to dismiss, sentence the youth to work crew, or sentence them to detention. They also may choose to impose financial sanctions on the parents or sentence them to work crew. The students and parents are represented by counsel in the court hearing process.

In Benton County, the truancy board meeting was held at the juvenile court facility. The truancy counselor is often present on the trips to bring students in for detention, and she explained that she has a large case load which can range from 80-300 at a time. The truancy counselor lead the meeting which (was actually informal for being held in the courtroom). The process was similar to the process that was followed through in Franklin County. The same attorney was present to represent the legal counseling for the students and families. The Washington State University observers of the truancy boards in both Benton and Franklin Counties voiced their opinion that the power point presentation that was given at the meetings in each county was a very effective tool for the students and families to understand the law and the

process they are involved in with the truancy issue (M.M. Erickson, personal communication, March 7, 2010).

### **Creation of West Valley School District's Community Truancy Board**

Since 1996, the West Valley School District in Spokane County has had a community truancy board that is based on the principles of restorative justice and community-based problem solving before the student has to appear before a judge (Court Commissioner) in court. The Spokane Juvenile Court works in partnership with the several schools within the West Valley School District. When a child comes before the board, the truancy petition has a stay put on it so that the board can collaborate on a solution to the truancy issue with the student, family, school, and community acting in partnership. An agreement is signed between the board and the student/family that they will, to their best efforts, work to change what is needed so the child can attend school. If there is a failure to meet the standards and goals set in the agreement, the board will lift the stay and the child/family will have to go to juvenile court.

Recently, through grant funding from the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (GJJAC), the Spokane County Juvenile Court contracted a Probation Officer Truancy Specialist to work with truant youth in the district. In using the *Check and Connect* model, which utilizes the four components of mentoring, systematic monitoring, timely individualized intervention, and enhancing home-school support, the Truancy Specialist can work with the kids in the school district on a more dedicated and individualized/personal level, meeting with the student and family on a periodic basis. This officer has an office in each of the schools in the district so he can be available on site if needed.

The community truancy board is held in a conference room in one of the schools in the district. There is a horseshoe table set up at the far end of the room, and there is a row of chairs positioned in front of the table for the student and family to sit down in front of the board. Each

board member introduces themselves to the student/family and indicates how they are connected to the school district or community. Each member also has a packet of school-related attendance and academic performance information on each student coming into the meeting, including what school they are attending, school attendance patterns for the present year, current and past grades, and a summary of completed credits on record. The administrator of the meeting will then briefly go through the Becca Bill and possible future court consequences if the problem of non-attendance is not resolved in line with the community truancy board's findings and conditions of compliance. A question and answer session will go on for roughly 10-20 minutes to determine what obstacles or barriers might stand in the way of the student attending school on a regular basis. These obstacles range from school-based problems (e.g., alleged harassment) to family-based problems (e.g., obligations to care for younger siblings). A contract containing specific steps that are to be taken to attend school will be made up at that meeting, and the student/family signs it along with the meeting administrator. The board meetings are held in the mornings for about three to four hours each week once truancy petitions begin to be filed with the Spokane Juvenile Court.

### **Restorative Justice Roots of the Community Truancy Board**

The theory of restorative justice came from studies of victims and consideration of their rightful place in the criminal justice process. Surveys conducted of crime victims revealed that many of them would like to, or are willing to, participate in direct mediation or receive compensation from their respective offenders (for a good review of these studies see: Maguire, Morgan, and Reiner, 2007). The restorative justice concept shares the aim of repairing a wide range of harms, including material and psychological damage and damage to relationships and the general social order, caused by anti-social behavior generally, and criminal behavior in particular. The concept incorporates components of mutual respect, accountability for one's

actions, consensual participation and decision making, and the inclusion and empowerment of all relevant parties (Maguire, Morgan, and Reiner, 2007, 482).

Specifically referring to those components important to restorative justice, West Valley School District completed a district-wide Strategic Plan that became the guidance system for the district, emphasizing accountability in their mission statement, belief statements, visionary goals, and target objectives. The term “accountability” was defined as the responsibility of the students, parents, community members, and educators at all levels to make a commitment to quality education (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1996). The students demonstrate accountability by displaying consistent attendance and ongoing progress toward academic achievement. Community members show their accountability by demonstrating a commitment to be involved to assist in mentoring and providing support for students who need some assistance in school attendance. Local businesses partnered with school educators to determine skills needed for school-to-career pathways, and they highlighted good attendance as being strongly correlated to those skills (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1996). According to the district’s Strategic Plan, it is a process that allows for input from representatives of all stakeholders using strategies other than suspension for truancy. It was imperative to develop other, more relevant and effective interventions for solving truancy problems, especially for those youth who have resisted previous efforts at finding solutions for truancy issues (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1996).

### **MacArthur Foundation and *Models for Change Project* and the West Valley School District’s Community Truancy Board**

Washington State University, with grant support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, has entered into a collaborative partnership with the Spokane County Juvenile Court to do utilization-focused evaluation research on the West Valley School District’s

Community Truancy Board. This research is intended to document the district's efforts (initiated in 1996) at developing an effective alternative to the court processing of truancy petitions filed in court. The WSU team is working with the Spokane Juvenile Court to determine how the successful process developed in the West Valley School District can be replicated in other districts that are interested in setting up comparable processes to address their truancy and drop out problems. This information will contribute to a *replication toolkit* that will be useful for the implementation of the Community Truancy Board (CTB) process in other schools in the Spokane area—and possibly other school districts across the state..

The goals of the project are outlined in the written agreement with the MacArthur Foundation submitted by the principal investigators on the Washington State University research team. State-wide evaluation efforts and collection of data will be conducted by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP). In the second phase of the program, the goals are to conduct interviews of current and past board members and extract themes from these interviews regarding how the process works, why it is effective in many cases, what changes might make it more effective, and what veterans of the CTB process think about the ability of this process working effectively in other school districts concerned about truancy and school drop out issues. Specifically, the Washington State University *Models for Change* team collected interview-based qualitative data reflecting a grounded theory orientation to discern the underlying logic model of the process from over 50 veteran members of the Community Truancy Board process. Upon a preliminary assessment of major themes drawn from those interviews a protocol targeting replication issues was developed to be used in a set of three focus groups of 6-10 individuals who had been interviewed. It is important to note that all interviewees were asked whether they would be willing to take part in a focus group session, and ALL agreed to do so.

The WSU team interviews revealed some differing views among interviewees on a number of matters, including what types of contract elements are most likely to cause students and parents to truly commit to school re-engagement. Systematic observations of the board process also were conducted so that the interviewers had a good sense of the context from which the interviewees were responding to their questions (see interview protocol in the Appendix). The relationship between the court and the school district with respect to truant youth was an area of particular interest; was CTB a place where the conflicting interests of the courts and schools come into play, or is it a place where there is clear collaboration occurring to the benefit of students at risk of being disaffected from school. As the literature review noted, the causes of truancy are typically multiple, and involve multiple parties which neither the courts nor the schools ACTING ALONE can bring together to help the child regain momentum toward successful school completion.

In this regard, the school district has recently put into place a case manager who serves on the board *ex officio* and is in charge of improving school retention of truant youth, and the court has created the Truancy Specialist position discussed above. This synergistic combination of school-based and court-based resources is hoped to lead to noteworthy improvements in the re-engagement of truant students. Finally, data will be obtained from the AOC and WSIPP relating to existing community truancy boards state-wide. The Washington State University team will integrate the data gathered from these multiple sources into a form that is useful for the Models for Change project and provide the Spokane Juvenile Court with assistance in drafting the replication toolkit.

## **Methodology and Data**

Grounded theory is a systematic methodology that uses qualitative research to generate theory from data in the process of conducting research. This is a method that works in reverse

from traditional research approaches employed in scientific research. Instead of beginning with the formulation of a hypothesis, the first step is to collect data from a variety of methods. The next step is to code the key points and group them into workable concepts to form categories. From there, there is a base to create or generate a theory or a 'reversed-engineered hypothesis'. This is the basic theory behind the work of the *Models for Change Project* in Spokane.

Qualitative interviews were conducted in the fall of 2009 to provide documented information on the process of the West Valley School District community truancy board and on the opinions and perceptions of the process of expressed by current members, former members, and court staff working in conjunction with the board. A set of more than 50 interviewees was composed and contacted by the Spokane County *Models for Change Project* Coordinator Courtney Meador, inviting them to participate in an interview to help the project's research team document the board's logic model. The statement of the importance of the task of documenting the WVCTB process was e-mailed to all the persons involved, and they were given the interview questions and confidentiality agreement contract in advance to look over before the interviewer contacted them for scheduling. They were told that they will need to set aside roughly an hour for the interview. The 55 potential interviewees contacted were made up of superintendents, principals, school secretaries, school counselors and psychologists, teachers, truancy coordinators, attendance staff, community members, public defenders, juvenile court staff, and former board members.

Questions were formulated based on the ideas of the purpose of the board, background information given to board members on each student, the board hearing process, the post-hearing follow-up process, the solicitation of perceptions of successful outcomes, suggested improvements which could enhance the CTB's effectiveness, benefits gained by board members from their own personal involvement in the process, recommendations for the successful replication of the board process in other jurisdictions, and opinions regarding the management of

the board process. Interviews lasted between, 30 minutes and two hours, depending on the person being interviewed. Interviewees were asked, following the interview, if they could be contacted for corrections or clarification. They were asked if they would like a copy of the written transcript of the interview. Finally, they were asked if they would be willing to participate in a future focus group in the spring of 2010 that will be based on the information gathered from the interviews being conducted.

The interviews were transcribed into a text format and were read over to begin the thought process for coding. Preliminary theme extraction is currently being done using a tentative variable scoring sheet with the main concepts observed in the interviews being extracted by the interviewers. Along with the major questions asked in the interviews, many follow-up questions were asked related to the replication process and these themes are being identified and labeled for future systematic coding.

The five interviewers, including myself, who conducted the interviews last fall have been using the variable scoring sheet to extract the information present in each interview. Categorizing answers in the scoring sheet to begin comparing answers for later inter-rater reliability determination has been a complex process. With five interviewers having five slightly different follow-up questions in their interviews, inter-rater reliability assessment will take a significant amount of time before the actual coding process can be accomplished. Inter-rater reliability is important because an accurate tally of major and subsidiary themes requires consistent interpretation of transcripts by multiple coders.

Since there will be two coders working independently for each interview in the final coding process, a high degree of inter-coder reliability is essential to accomplish through a process of multiple replication of test interview transcript scoring until a scoring template is shown to be an effective guide to transcript scoring (Portney and Watkins, 2009). The interview transcripts have been sorted into separate sets of interviews for each question included in the

interview protocol (see Appendix), and a separate inter-rater agreement statistic will be calculated for each of these questions once the trial scoring process is completed. The 55 interview transcripts were first segregated into two types of interviews—*process documentation interviews* (semi-structured interviews following the interview protocol fairly closely) and *documentary interviews* (slightly structured interviews with key actors who were encouraged to range broadly in their remarks for the record). The first set of interviews will be used for the systematic scoring of themes and subthemes by two raters coding independently, and the second set of interviews will be used for broader context and report preparation to document how the logic model of the WVCTB evolved over time since its formation in 1996. The second type of interviews contain valuable information on “lessons learned” over time which will enrich the replication toolkit.

Interviews for students and parents have also been put into place for the next steps of the project, and these are ongoing in the Spring of 2010. Interview questions have been developed by the Project Coordinator, in collaboration with the WSU research team, to be administered by the Probation Officer/Truancy Specialist who meets with all of the students and their families involved in the CTB process. These questions will be added to those observations he already records as part of the *Check and Connect* process, and all of that information will be made available (de-identified) for analysis by the WSY research team.

### **Preliminary Assessment of Themes Derived from Community Truancy Board Member Interviews**

For the twelve interview questions posed in the interview protocol, what follows here is a **preliminary assessment** of the major themes that have been identified for structuring the follow-on multi-rater coding research that will be taking place in the late spring and early summer of 2010.

The first question addressed whether the interviewee had a clear idea of the purpose of the board, and what their concept of that purpose was. Almost all interviewees felt they had a clear idea of the purpose of West Valley School District's Community Truancy Board. The CTB was seen as an intervention process that is set up as a step before the student has to appear before the court or a judge to respond to a truancy petition filed with the court. It was viewed as a *problem-solving* process involving a formal meeting between the student and family and concerned community members that can provide resources for them where they are needed. Typical comments made during the interviews were as follows: "It's an opportunity for them, like I said, to have a second chance. They still have to abide by the same rules." Another interviewee commented, "The community comes together; different members from the community come to be part of that truancy board... maybe along with the principal and a counselor or a service provider from the school the child attends... then as a group we try to come to an understanding what the next step will be to get that student re-engaged in school or to address any problems that might arise."

The second question referred to the member's role as, either holding the juvenile client accountable or as a provider of help (punitive versus restorative). Roughly 2 out of 3 interviewees felt that the role was a **combination** of both the accountability and provider of help roles. Roughly a quarter of the interviewees felt that the role was principally a provider of help, and only one in ten or so felt that the role was principally one of accountability enforcement. Some typical comments recorded were as follows: "Sometimes we are just giving them a wakeup call; hey, you can't continue to do this... or these are the consequences if you don't straighten up. Sometimes we do see other things, issues where maybe something is going on at home, a living situation, maybe there has been a separation, and maybe they don't know about the homeless education resource team, maybe they have had to move and transportation has become an issue." Another interviewee observed the following: "So we say, well maybe we

need to concentrate as soon as you get X amount of credits then we can see about getting you into the skills center where you can actually take classes... there are lots of different options for kids. So we try and make sure they know about what options are out there, because we want them to be successful.”

The third question posed in the interview protocol addressed the training the board member received for their service on the board. About 4 in 10 interviewees stated that no formal training was received relating to their involvement with the board. Roughly 1 in 5 had no formal board training, but felt their job or occupation prepared them well for their involvement with the board. About 1 in 3 could not recall, and one person felt they had received enough background information to be considered training for their involvement. One key actor interview reveals the rather informal approach that has been taken to the preparation of board leaders and members alike: “When I took over the truancy board, I sat down with this person (name omitted), we talked for a few hours one morning, like around this table and showed me how things were put together. (He showed me) some paperwork that he had looked at, indicating that he had gone to some training somewhere for that information. We had really good professional connectivity too. He was just a phone call away when I took things over.... He always made himself available and that was really a good thing for me to be able to have that connectivity with him.”

The next question on the interview protocol asked about the background information that is given to members on the truant youth before the board meeting, and how it is conveyed to the members of the board. Almost all the interviewees stated they are given a uniform packet of materials relating to attendance, grades, and credits toward graduation on the student prior to the youth and parents/guardians entering the meeting. Some commented on the fact that they knew a little more because that student attends their school, and they know a little of their background. For example, one interviewee noted the following: “I’m a school psychologist, but I do counseling with a few students. ...so, if I work closely with a particular student and if that student

is on the addenda then I go to the board meeting.” Another interviewee described the usual situation in the following terms: “Well, on some of the kids we’re told prior to them coming in— (that is) if there’s a school person from their school there. Some of the schools, um, sometimes aren’t represented, but most of the time they are and they’ll give us a quick background of the students. But other than that, we don’t, you know, if they are not kids from our school we don’t know a whole lot about them other than what they tell us right before they come in.” Another interviewee indicated that some information in addition to the uniform packet material is shared with the board members. This interviewee stated the following in response to the information available question: “We know some of their personalities ahead of time. Before the students are (present) there usually is a person in charge that day (name omitted) who gives a briefing on the student before they show up. That’s valuable, you know we are in a small enough district that a lot of the students who had issues earlier will also have issues at the high school, and sometimes we see a lot of the same kids and families.”

A follow on question was then asked in reference to the follow-up process occurring after the student and parents/guardians leave the board meeting. About 4 in 10 of the interviewees assumed that the Truancy Specialist and/or the community truancy board coordinator were conducting the follow-up process. Another 3 in 10 interviews either didn’t know who was responsible for follow-up or assumed the signed agreement from the meeting (with instructions as to what to do next for the student) was being upheld by school authorities. Another 2 in 10 interviewees made no comment on this question, and around 1 in 10 interviewees felt their school followed up only on the school attendance issue at the individual teacher/classroom level. It was clear from these interviews that the follow-up question is an important one, and one which is rather tenuously performed.

Interview comments regarding the “definition of a success”—i.e., preferred outcomes with respect to the board—reflected various viewpoints. Most interviewees initially stated that

better attendance was the indicator of success with for a truant student. Attending school is the basic requirement for the Becca law, but the thinking of the board members interviewed did not stop there. Many of them believe that attendance is only the first element of success; a fuller measure of success is developing a connection to school or other school-based people (school friends or teachers, coaches, counselors), being productive and getting the grades, and making progress toward graduation. Some brought up the concept of solving whatever the problem (i.e., barrier to attendance) is with that particular youth, and one interviewee expressed the view that success means a student does not come back to the community truancy board. In this regard, one interviewee expressed the views of many others in noting the following: “That the student felt listened to and heard and that there was good communication between the board and the student and his parent... so that the student and the parent felt involved in the process, and that they had some control or power in the decision (i.e., the compliance contract).” Another interview suggested that there is no uniform definition of success because the students’ situations varied so greatly. They noted the following in this regard: “You have to look at each individual and family... (there are) different reason for different kids to not go to school.”

The interview protocol question asking for suggested improvements produced answers which ranged from a member not being able to think of any because they felt the process was working well, to simple recommendations relating to the physical set up of the board to the suggestion that name tags be worn by all participants. Overall, no recommendations were made for drastic changes because a member didn’t think the board was working well enough. On the positive side, there were numerous forms of praise uttered for the CTB process. For example, one interviewee commented after praising the CTB process as follows: “I think helping to make sure that there is a diverse panel so that there are a lot of different services being offered when the students come to the truancy board, just making sure it’s diverse.” Another noted: “I would like to see them last longer, or have someone and somewhere to go right afterwards if they still

need to talk.” Yet another noted: “Make sure the truancy records are correct, that’s number one I would say.” One interviewee did touch on an important improvement that could be made relating to scheduling and downtime. They noted that “We spend a lot of time waiting and sitting around for kids and parents that don’t show up. So it’s very difficult to give up an entire four hours of your morning and when you could have or might have the opportunity to see 10 kids and you only end up seeing 2 or 3.”

On the matter of the interview protocol question dealing with their own personal benefits derived through their involvement, this was a topic included as potentially important for the recruitment of board members by future CTB process adopters. Recruiting people into a process many have found to be personally rewarding would help implement a new CTB—and would make the adoption of the new process much easier than having to argue that adoption is the result of legislative mandate or saying “it’s just a new part of your job.” On this question virtually all interviewees had something of interest to share. One interviewee observed that following: “It’s just a good experience to be with those school people for one thing, and to find out how the school is run and how everyone operates... I was glad to be in on it.” Another interviewee observed: “It’s not a black and white world... I went from, why in the world you don’t just go to school, to the realization that for some kids the fact that they get to school is *remarkable*... Some of the lives they live!” Another interviewee commented:- “Don’t judge children until you know their whole story and what their life is really about. I think that we’ve helped turn, turn lives around for kids, you know, by bringing them there... it’s gotten them back on the right path.” Yet another interviewee commented on the value of the network of relationships that grows out of service on board. They noted in this regard: “Like I said before with the networking, that’s been really great for so many dimensions of my work.” In a similar vein, another interviewee noted the following: “Well I think I am aware of who our community partners and resources are, which is always good to know.” Perhaps the most common comment registered on this question

was the following sentiment: “I’ve got greater appreciation for the school districts and the work that they do.” It is clear that service on the truancy board builds regard for community schools and the administrators working on school attendance and school completion problems. All but one interviewee recommended this process as a likely effective countermeasure to truancy in other school districts.

### **Findings and Contributions Made to the Goal of Replication**

Focus group questions have been drafted and are in the final stages of review for use in a set of three focus groups to be conducted on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Based on the information provided in the past interviews, the questions will focus on five *major* thematic subtexts that are directly related to the replication potential of West Valley School District’s community truancy board. Ideas to elaborate on during the focus group sessions will be on: (1) the accountability versus problem-solving emphasis of board sessions; (2) the scope of information shared about the youth with board members; (3) the reasons believed to account for the successful track record of the board; (4) factors underlying the sustainability of the volunteer board since 1996; and (5) the value of the probation officer/truancy specialist that has been contracted full time for the board in the last year.

The purpose of conducting focus groups is to produce concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest (Morgan, 1997, 13); in this case the topic of interest is the question of likely principal replication concerns raised by a school district deciding to implement a community truancy board. This process of facilitated discussion among a group of similarly experienced persons can generate a rich dialog on the differing reasons why people might prefer greater attention to accountability or a fuller sharing of background information on the youth before the board, for example. Having group interaction opens up the range of perspectives on the phenomena discussed and most often leads to mutual stimulation of thoughtful reflection

among the focus group participants. Inchoate thoughts are often given greater coherence upon hearing the thoughts of others expressed and discussed (sometimes debated), and as a consequence focus group sessions are frequently more insightful than individual interviews for the study of complex social phenomena.

According to Morgan (1997), conducting two eight-person focus groups can produce as many ideas as 10 individual interviews, and considering the time it would take to conduct 10 individual interviews and analyze them, the two focus groups would be more efficient in many circumstances (1997, 14). Information gathered from individual interviews can be used to elaborate ideas expressed in the interviews and bring out various opinions not originally addressed at the individual level because of a desire to avoid the use of “leading” questions in the original interview setting. This is particularly the case in grounded theory research processes such as the one used here. Every attempt was made in those interviews to avoid the expression of a pre-conceived view and to allow the underlying logic model of the WVCTB to emerge from the collection of interviews conducted.

In the designing phase of the focus groups it is important to address certain ethical concerns and be conscious of time constraints. Confidential information that will be shared between the participant and the researcher is now going to be shared with an entire group. There is also the issue of tape recording. Tape recorders were used in the individual interviews and were not a problem, so for this phase it is assumed to be accepted again. It will be necessary to recheck with the focus group participants that they are comfortable with the use of recording equipment and are reassured of the confidentiality of the information to be captured during the group discussions (Morgan, 1997, 32).

Scheduling the focus groups for the board members is also complex. Many are school staff and have their own work schedules that might conflict. Focus groups usually take a couple of hours, particularly if a goal of the process is to solicit participation by each member of the

focus group. In this case all three focus groups conducted will be done over the course of a single day after the WASL testing period. This will be more convenient than having multiple dates to juggle with different work schedules. The transcription process will also require a lengthy period because multiple participants require great attention on the part of the transcriber to allocate commentary to the correct participant. The transcription work will likely require a month of rough transcription, careful annotation of source of commentary, and editing for analysis. The analysis needed for the focus groups transcripts could take a month or more, and will require the development of a commentary coding scheme that permits the determination of *degree of consensus* attained on key issues (Morgan, 1999, 33). The transcription process for the individual interviews took approximately three to four months to complete, so having three groups of eight people (on average) in one session will require a considerable amount of careful preparation time for focus group transcription

## **Conclusions and Further Research**

For the next phases of the Washington State University team the project will be documenting the CTB process and deriving lessons for replication, assuming the community truancy board process in question is effective (admittedly an untested assumption). With respect to outcomes over time, since the WVCTB has been in operation since 1996 it is possible IN THEORY to make comparisons between the truancy filing outcomes of the West Valley School District and those of other Spokane County school districts. Some of the relevant information is available in the Spokane County Juvenile Court records and other information is available from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Dr. Tom George of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is responsible for attaining the OSPI data for our project and provide us with a “linked file”—i.e., a dataset with cases containing both court-based and school-based data for each record. This area of work will be the responsibility of Kevin

Wright, and this work will take place as soon as possible after the receipt of the relevant data. Since the Spokane County *Models for Change Project* must produce a replication toolkit as a major deliverable, a great deal of time and resources are being devoted to the task of documenting **process refinements** and the **specification of tradeoffs and options** available for new adopters in the future rather than on documenting outcomes attributable to the process. While this outcome comparison to a reasonable counterfactual is important work, the replication toolkit is nonetheless of primary concern.

As noted above, in the project's current phase the interviews are being categorized into two groups: *documentary interviews*, which have long open-ended commentary with frequent probes from the key interviewees, and *documentation of process interviews* that have short and structured answers to the sequenced questions asked on the interview protocol. The multiple coder coding process will begin once the interviews are categorized, edited, grouped by question, and put into a uniform format. Coding will be conducted by me and one other person. We will take three interviews from each question subfile and code them independently. Then we will compare answers for the identification of discrepancies to resolve. We will repeat the process a second time with the next three interviews of each subfile. We will then do the next 10 interviews independently and give them to the Co-Principal Investigators Prof. Paul Strand and Nicholas Lovrich for the calculation of inter-rater reliability scores for each interview protocol question. Finally, both coders will code half of all the interview protocol questions for ultimate use in tallying frequency of theme reiteration.

For later work, it would be desirable and important to use archival data from court and school sources. Using the student and parent/guardian perceptions in tandem with those of the board members and associated actors will allow a complete documentation of the Community Truancy Board process from the perspective of school administrators, juvenile court officials, voluntary members of truancy boards, and the youth and parents/guardians who have had direct

experience with the community truancy board process. The archival data from court and school records prior to- and after the appointment of a Probation Officer/Truant Specialist will allow another important insight to be determined—namely, what is the impact of having added this significant new role to the community truancy board process? This analysis, and that of the overall analysis of outcomes to be done with the AOC dataset for Spokane County, will be undertaken **much later**, perhaps towards the end of the current grant period. Doing interviews with kids and parents who are not in the Truant Specialist’s current caseload at this time is not feasible in this round of funding, but could (and should) be done in a subsequent round of studies if there is funding made available for that work. The ultimate goal for this project is to assist the *Models for Change* Project Coordinator in the preparation of a replication toolkit based on the information gathered. The toolkit is not intended to be a “this way works and this way doesn’t” document, but rather it is to serve as an informative, well-researched information guideline to be used by school districts to determine if a community truancy board is appropriate for their area -- and if so, to learn from the experience of the West Valley School District Community Truancy Board the lessons of successful adoption, long-term sustainability, and wise adaptation of program logic model over time.

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