

Chapter Three: Promoting School Engagement

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NCSE | National Center for School Engagement

School Policies that Engage Students and Families

National Center for School Engagement

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An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

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School Policies that Engage Students and Families

School policies tend to either to engage students and families in the learning process or push students out of schools. Often, there is much variability across schools as to how these policies are implemented. In general, the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) has identified the following policies that are more conducive to recapturing students in school.

☑ *Attendance Policies that Distribute Responsibility Broadly*

Many school and school district attendance policies place the responsibility for student attendance solely on the shoulders of parents/guardians and the student, themselves, without recognizing that teachers and school staff also have some accountability for attendance. Beyond accurate attendance monitoring, school personnel should consider what motivates students to attend classes and school functions. Additionally, schools must consider their response to chronic truancy. Schools should have a clear and consistent process in place for the first unexcused absence and for subsequent unexcused absences. This process must be communicated to students and parents at the outset of the school year. Staff must be available to track down truant students to find out what is the underlying cause of excessive absences. If supports and resources are needed, these should be provided through school social workers or psychologists. Teachers should be encouraged to make the necessary interventions including parent contacts or conferences. All parties must take responsibility for improving attendance. This includes students, parents, extended family, teachers, other school personnel and the community.

☑ *Grading Based on Attendance*

Grading based on attendance is becoming a more common practice in schools. It clearly communicates the importance of attendance and consequence of non-attendance. A student should be rewarded for participating in class discussions. At the same time, failing a student due to a pre-determined number of absences, without any appeals process, can be very detrimental to the students' success. Consider this example. If a student has already failed a class, what is the motivation to continue to attend this class? A student may choose to just leave school. Although some may start again the following semester or school year, often students find it easier to never re-enroll. Providing partial credit for completed coursework is a worthy alternative. Consequences for non-attendance are important, however when students are attaining passing grades, despite non-attendance, does it make sense to fail the student? Additionally, appeals should include a jury of impartial school and community members. Appeals processes for class credit must involve more than just the classroom teacher.

☑ *Withdrawals Due to Excessive Absences*

A common school district's local school policy is to withdraw students who are over the mandatory school age, due to excessive unexcused absences. Although many policies also indicate that substantial effort must be made to contact the pupil and/or parent to identify the reasons for non-attendance, in practice this is not always the case. Schools typically do not have the staff or resources to track down every chronic truant. Unfortunately, without this kind of effort, the dropout rate will only increase. Schools

need to explicitly describe the steps necessary before withdrawing disenrolling students. These steps should include a face to face visit with both the student and his/her parent/guardian. The school should develop a school re-engagement plan or offer other creative options such as a GED or alternative school. All efforts should be made to track down missing students.

☑ ***Establishing a Statewide Common Student Identification Number***

In order to truly understand graduation and dropout rates, a statewide student identification number should be established. This ID should be assigned to students when they are first enrolled in elementary school and should follow them through to high school graduation. All alternative, charter and GED programs should use this same student numbering system. In this way, more accurate statewide dropout and graduation rates can be developed. More accurate data will help schools and communities understand the true extent of the problem and intervene accordingly.

☑ ***Use Alternatives to Out of School Suspension and Expulsion***

Many schools suspend or expel students for excessive unexcused absences and most recognize that this consequence does not typically re-engage the youth in school, or prevent further trancies. Often students are pleased that they are allowed 3 days off school, which was the point of skipping class in the first place. In-school suspensions and detention are a viable alternative. Meaningful community service for excessive absences such as tutoring younger students or organizing a school event are good alternatives. Withholding privileges can be effective, such as no school athletics or field trips, however, we recommend that these are used as incentives as opposed to punishments. Sometimes extra curricular activities are the only thing that motivates students to attend and long term banning from these activities can motivate students to dropout. Additionally, catch-up classrooms are recommended for students to re-engage in learning while not holding back their other classmates.

☑ ***Creative and Effective Communication to Notify Parents of Absence***

Although it is critical that parents are notified of their child's unauthorized absence from school, often students erase the voice mail message or toss the school letter before mom or dad know about the problem. Additionally, some chronic truants are homeless, do not have phones or are from families that do not speak English. Finding effective ways to communicate absence is critical. Given enough school personnel, home visits are ideal. Many truancy officers and school resource officers are beginning to do home visits with truants and their families. Often truants become delinquent (Gavin, 1997) so establishing rapport with the family early on is critical.

☑ ***Coaching Students to Alternative Schools, GED programs or the Work Place***

Adults and children all have different ways of learning. Mainstream schools do not work for all students. However, schools cannot be too quick to coach students to alternative options. With high stakes testing, it is often tempting to encourage low achieving, chronically truant students to leave their home school for another alternative. Often it is these students that are "pulling down" the school average. A recent report from ETS (Barton, 2005) indicates that nationally one-third of our students are failing to graduate

from high school. This begs the question, if mainstream high schools are not working for one-third of our students, isn't it time for schools to change. Many feel that school reform is so difficult that it would be easier to establish a separate system of alternative and charter schools. However, others feel that these schools draw valuable and needed funding from our mainstream public schools. This debate will continue and probably not be resolved in this decade. In the meantime, schools must be cautious about coaching students out of school or pushing students out, too quickly

☑ ***School Finance Based on Average Daily Attendance***

School funding is often based on a fixed per pupil cost. However, how those pupils are counted varies widely between states. Some schools receive the funds based on the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the school year. Other states have one or several "school count" days. Often schools will hold large celebrations and pizza parties to get as many students as possible to school on count day. If a student has an unexcused absence on count day, schools often have the option of filing a truancy petition within a certain time period in order to recoup costs for that student. Unfortunately, after count day has passed, there is very little motivation for schools to keep students in the classroom. Overcrowding, limited school supplies, and high teacher-student ratios often encourage schools to let go of absent students. It is recommended that all states use an average daily attendance to calculate school finance. In this way schools have incentives to keep students in school to the end of the school year. Additionally, school finance will more closely approximate actual students served.

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NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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Quantifying School Engagement: Research Report

National Center for School Engagement

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303 E. 17th Avenue, Suite 400 Denver, CO 80203**

Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Quantifying School Engagement: Research Report

Introduction

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) received funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to evaluate their Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program. As part of this evaluation, CFFC created the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE). One function of NCSE was to develop an instrument to measure students' school engagement in order to assess whether interventions in three intensive demonstration sites had an effect on student engagement. This article explains the process by which NCSE created the student school engagement survey and summarizes the preliminary data about the reliability and validity of the instrument¹.

Background of School Engagement

For decades, educators and educational researchers have been interested in the effects of students' attitudes about school and their experiences in school on achievement and attendance. Researchers have conceptualized these attitudes and experiences in a variety of ways, with little consistency in methods and theory.² Researchers have used a multitude of terms to describe what they think is important to study when it comes to attitudes and experiences.

Klem and Connell (2004) discuss different concepts that have been used. For instance, Marks (2000) conceptualized engagement as “a psychological process, specifically, the attention, interest, and investment and effort students expend in the work of learning.” Connell and colleagues defined and measured two forms of engagement: ongoing engagement, which includes student behavior, emotions, and thought processes during the school day, and reaction

¹ The actual pre-post test evaluation results using the survey can be found in the Houston and Jacksonville evaluation reports.

² Although theory does not necessarily seem to guide the research, many researchers in the area cite B. F. Skinner and Albert Bandura in their literature reviews.

to challenge, which refers to a student's coping strategy for dealing with perceived failure in school (Connell & Wellborn, 1994; Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1996). Using the Rochester Assessment Package for Schools (RAPS) instruments, Klem and Connell (2004) found that students who were at optimal levels on their engagement measures were "44% more likely to do well and 23% less likely to do poorly on the performance and attendance" indices. In addition, students who were considered below average in engagement were 30% more likely to do poorly on student outcomes.

Fredricks and colleagues also published a comprehensive article that synthesizes the research in school engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) and put this body of research into a theoretical framework consisting of three types of engagement: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement. And while there are arguably overlaps in these concepts³, it appears to be a good way to conceptualize the work and add to the field. The following is a description of each:

1) Behavioral Engagement: Broadly defined as doing school work and following rules.

Examples:

- Positive Conduct: Consists of behaviors that illustrate effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions, contributing to class discussion, following rules, studying, completing homework, and participating in school-related activities.
- Absence of Disruptive Conduct: Not skipping school and not getting in trouble.

³ For instance, a scale item designated as cognitive engagement because it refers to the effort put forth in doing school work might also be considered a behavioral engagement because it reflects behavior rather than thought.

2) Cognitive Engagement: Essentially defined as motivation, effort and strategy use. This includes a psychological investment in learning, a desire to go beyond the requirements and a preference for challenge.

Examples:

- Flexibility in problem solving, preference for hard work, investment in learning beyond just behavioral engagement, mental effort, and desire to master a task.

3) Emotional Engagement: In general, this includes interests, values and emotions.

Examples:

- Affective reactions in the classroom, attitudes towards school and teachers, identification with school, feelings of belonging, appreciation of success in school.
- The antithesis of positive feelings are also emotional engagement items.

The division of engagement is not intended to imply a definitive separation, because as Fredricks et.al. (2004) state, “these factors are dynamically interrelated ... they are not isolated processes” (pg. 61). Instead, the division merely aids in understanding that “engagement” as a whole is a multi-dimensional construct. In fact, the authors discuss numerous overlaps in past research, and the potential for overlaps is evident in the concepts as they define it. Consequently, we would expect these components to be highly correlated with each other, but relate differently to student outcomes such as achievement and attendance.

Fredricks et al. (2004) also discuss the past research in terms of what associations have been found between the types of engagement and achievement. The authors conclude that there is a body of evidence showing the relationship between behavioral engagement and achievement exists but that there may be mediating factors that influence this relationship. In addition, it is

unclear if behavioral engagement is predictive of deep understanding of material. Little convincing evidence has been found concerning a link between emotional engagement and achievement. This, however, may be due in part to inconsistent ways in which researchers have measured what Fredricks et al. conceptualize as emotional engagement. However, evidence of a relationship between cognitive engagement and achievement is much stronger, including data from scores on achievement tests designed to measure in-depth understanding. The work in this field, however, does not eliminate the possibility of a bi-directional influence between outcomes and engagement: it is most likely that they influence each other.

The relationship between engagement and dropping out has been studied somewhat. Not surprisingly, behavioral engagement, which includes measures of skipping class is related to dropping out than the other two engagement types (Connell, Spencer, and Aber, 1994, Rumberger, 1987). There is little empirical evidence that emotional or cognitive engagement is related to dropping out. However, it seems plausible that cognitive engagement is related to achievement. If it is true that students whose academic performance is poor are less engaged, then it is possible they are also more likely to drop out. In addition, students who feel emotionally disengaged may also be less likely to continue their school careers. In general, there simply have not been enough studies using these types of clear engagement distinctions to draw conclusions about the nature of engagement and student outcomes.

Methodology in the Survey Design

We examined multiple survey instruments that concerned attitudes and experiences with school to design the student engagement questionnaire for the OJJDP intensive sites. All potential engagement or similar concept items and scales were identified through various sources, including national surveys, surveys from schools, journal articles, and the Core

Measures book produced by CSAP. The research and evaluation team at CFFC worked collaboratively to select the questions that appeared to be most promising in terms of validity and reliability, and that covered a breadth of content. However, in order to cover the breadth of content, but also keep the instrument at a reasonable length, the original scales were not used in their entirety, which had the potential of reducing their validity. The survey items came from the following data sources:

- ADD Health Survey – The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
- Core Measures - CSAP
- School Integration Index, based on ADD Health
- Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris (2002)
- Pellerin (2000)
- Pemi-Baker School District (2002)
- School Climate Survey – From Data Analysis for Comprehensive Schoolwide Improvement by V. Bernhardt (1998)
- Jenkins (1997) – Based on Hirschi’s social bonding theory

Although these are the primary sources we chose, many of the questions were modified somewhat in wording. These changes were made in order to make the survey consistent in terms of the response scales we chose and/or to make the items more clear to the students. In addition, CFFC added unique questions that seemed pertinent to the project but were not considered school engagement questions. For instance, we added questions about exposure to school drop out, expulsion, and suspension, thoughts of dropping out, experience with school failure, students’ experience as parents, activities while skipping school, victimization experience, attitudes toward their neighborhoods, future aspirations, and parental involvement.

After identifying the items we felt would be most useful, we examined each one for “fit” into one of the three types of engagement: emotional, cognitive, or behavioral, based on the descriptions above. Each team member labeled each item by engagement category. The feedback from each member was analyzed and items with general consensus (with all but potentially one member agreeing that there was a fit) were assigned to be part of one of the three scales.

This process led us to create the following scales:

Emotional Engagement

Sixteen items fit this category.

- 19a When I first walked into my school I thought it was Good....Bad.
- 19c When I first walked into my school I thought it was Friendly....Unfriendly.
- 19d When I first walked into my school I thought it was Clean....Dirty.
- 22c I am happy to be at my school.
- 22d The teachers at my school treat students fairly.
- 22f I like most of my teachers at school.
- 22m The discipline at my school is fair.
- 22o Most of my teachers care about how I’m doing.
- 22p Most of my teachers know the subject matter well.
- 22r There is an adult at school that I can talk to about my problems.
- 22s I respect most of my teachers.
- 22v Most of my teachers understand me.
- 23d I feel excited by the work in school.
- 23f My classroom is a fun place to be.
- 23u I enjoy the work I do in class
- 23w I feel I can go to my teachers with the things that I need to talk about.

Cognitive Engagement

Twenty-two items fit this category.

- 21a How important do you think an education is?
- 21b How important do you think it is to get good grades?
- 21c How important do you think the things you are learning in school are going to be to you later in life?
- 21f How important do you think it is to have a good job or career after finishing school?
- 22h I am getting a good education at my school.
- 22j I will graduate from high school.
- 22k I want to go to college
- 22n Most of my classes are boring.
- 22p Most of my teachers know the subject matter well.

- 22q I learn a lot from my classes.
- 23e I am interested in the work I get to do in my classes.
- 23g When I read a book, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand what it is about.
- 23h I study at home even when I don't have a test.
- 23j I talk with people outside of school about what I am learning in class.
- 23k I check my schoolwork for mistakes.
- 23l If I don't know what a word means when I am reading, I do something to figure it out, like look it up in the dictionary or ask someone.
- 23n If I don't understand what I read, I go back and read it over again.
- 23p I try my best at school.
- 23r I get good grades in school.

Behavioral Engagement

Seven items fit this category

- 14 How often have you thought of dropping out?
- 23a When I am in class, I just pretend I am working.
- 23b I follow the rules at school.
- 23c I get in trouble at school.
- 23q I skip (cut) classes during school.
- 23s I skip (cut) the entire school day.
- 23t I try to stay home from school.

We received achievement and attendance information from the Gulfton neighborhood in Houston, TX, Kent County in Seattle, Washington, and Jacksonville, Florida. These data were correlated with the engagement scales to examine validity. We expect that if school engagement is related to achievement and attendance, the scales should be correlated to these indicators. In addition, we would expect that cognitive engagement would be more highly correlated with achievement than attendance, whereas behavioral and emotional engagement might be more highly correlated with attendance than achievement. However, since we believe that engagement is a single concept with multi-dimensions, we expect that each type of engagement would be related to student outcomes as well as to each other. In addition, we ran Cronbach Alphas on each scale in each site to examine scale reliability⁴.

⁴ Cronbach's Alpha is an index of reliability for a set of items that indicates the extent to which items measure the same characteristic. Also known as the indicator for scale internal consistency and as scale reliability coefficient.

Results

Reliability

A “reliable” instrument is one that produces the same measurement if used repeatedly with the same population. Each of the scales is clearly reliable. The typical acceptable Cronbach Alpha in social sciences is .70. Each of the scales, with the exception of behavioral engagement in Jacksonville, Florida exceeds this, and does so consistently. It is true that by adding items to a scale one can expect Cronbach Alphas to be higher (assuming the items are at least somewhat related to the construct of measure). Thus, the lower Cronbach Alphas in the behavioral scale may be due in part to the relatively few items (7) in this scale compared to the other two (16 in the emotional and 22 in the cognitive scales). See the tables below for details.

Emotional Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Cronbach’s alpha
Houston	57	.884
Jacksonville	39	.895
Seattle	39	.902

*Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Cognitive Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Cronbach's alpha
Houston	66	.904
Jacksonville	41	.922
Seattle	43	.867

*Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure. Note: If the item “Most of my teachers know the subject matter well.” were deleted in Houston, the alpha be .901.

Behavioral Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Chronbach's alpha
Houston	72	.797
Jacksonville	46	.489
Seattle	47	.793

*Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Validity

An instrument is considered valid when it measures what it is supposed to measure. There are a number of ways to assess validity. We chose convergent validity, in which constructs that are similar to the instrument are identified, valid data sources for those constructs are gathered and the relationship between the instrument and the already established valid data is assessed. We attempted to examine whether the scales were related to other school outcomes (such as GPA and attendance) in order to assess the validity of the engagement scales. These results are broken out by site.

Houston

In Houston, the emotional engagement scale was not significantly correlated with GPA, but the cognitive scale correlated with GPA. The coefficient was .369, which is significant at the $p < .005$ level ($N = 62$). This means the cognitive engagement scale accounts for approximately 14% of the variance in GPA. The behavioral scale also correlated with GPA .345, which is significant at the $p < .005$ level ($N = 68$). This means the behavioral engagement scale accounts for approximately 12% of the variance in GPA. There were no significant correlations between attendance and cognitive or emotional engagement, however, the correlation between behavioral engagement and days missed was .20 ($p = .15$, ns). Finally, the emotional scale correlated with the behavioral scale .22 (ns) and correlated with the cognitive scale .68, $p < .001$. The behavioral scale is correlated with cognitive scale .52, $p < .001$.

Seattle

In Seattle, none of the engagement scales correlated with GPA or absences. Behavioral engagement correlated with cognitive engagement, $r(51) = .64$, $p < .001$ and with emotional engagement, $r(51) = .35$, $p < .05$. Emotional engagement correlated with cognitive engagement, $r(51) = .72$, $p < .001$.

Jacksonville

Since the students served in Jacksonville are primarily in elementary schools, we received Math and English grades rather than GPA. We also received attendance information broken down for excused and unexcused absences.

The behavioral scale did not correlate significantly with grades, but was correlated with unexcused absences, $r(40) = .352, p < .05$. The emotional scale was significantly correlated with Math grades, $r(32) = .48, p < .01$, English grades, $r(32) = .43, p < .05$, and unexcused absences, $r(33) = .61, p < .001$. The cognitive scale was also significantly correlated with Math grades, $r(34) = .40, p < .05$, English grades, $r(34) = .37, p < .05$, and unexcused absences, $r(35) = .46, p < .01$. None of engagement scales correlated with excused absences.

The emotional and cognitive scales were significantly and highly correlated; $r(37) = .928, p < .001$, where as the behavioral scale was not significantly correlated with the cognitive scale and was only marginally correlated with the emotional scale; $r(30) = .31, p = .05$.

Conclusions

The school engagement survey was designed to measure school engagement as a whole. In this project it was tested with small samples of truant students. Consequently, the participants in this study are likely to be less engaged than students as a whole, and to have a restricted range of achievement and attendance indicators than that which would be found in an entire student body. This complicates testing for validity and reliability. Nevertheless, we found support for the reliability of the engagement scales and some support for the validity.

The scales met and exceeded the desired criterion for reliability; in all but one case, the Cronbach Alphas ranged from .79 to .92. Cronbach Alphas can range from 0 to 1. The higher the number, the more likely the items in the scale are measuring a similar concept. These numbers indicate that the items “fit” in these scales.

The scales also appear to be valid as evidenced in two of the three sites. In Houston, cognitive and behavioral engagement was significantly related to GPA. Behavioral engagement was correlated with attendance, but not significantly so. In Jacksonville, all the scales were

significantly related to unexcused but not excused absences. In addition, emotional and cognitive engagement were also related to Math and English grades. Although similar findings were not found in Seattle, these findings do suggest that engagement is likely to predict and/or be predicted by attendance and achievement.

Behavioral engagement is more closely related to attendance than grades, which is not surprising given that some of the items are self-reports on missing classes. Jacksonville's data included excused absences, which were not related to any of the engagement indices. If we believe that excused absences are legitimate (e.g., illnesses) and therefore not related to student engagement, we would expect no relationship to exist. Consequently, this is perhaps a good illustration of "discriminant validity" in which a construct unrelated to engagement, like excused absences, would not be expected to be related to engagement. Nevertheless, the lower reliability indices for this scale indicates that the next steps should be to add items to improve reliability and perhaps broaden the construct in terms of other school related behaviors.

In addition, the cognitive engagement scale was more consistently correlated with achievement than the other two types of engagement. This makes conceptual sense. One would expect that students who report putting more effort into school work would achieve higher grades.

All of the scales are correlated with each other. This too, makes conceptual sense because as stated earlier, engagement is conceived to be a multi-dimensional, but unified, construct. The fact that these correlations ranged from not significant to .93 show that although they are related, they are not measuring identical concepts within engagement.

These results indicate that a school engagement questionnaire can be a useful tool in assessing cognitive, behavioral and emotional engagement as well as providing some indication of how students may be doing in terms of attending school and achievement. However, there is much more research to be done before the school engagement instrument designed for this study can be definitively said to be the best tool to use. Additional work, some of which has already been done, includes qualitative research with students (focus groups about engagement and one-on-one cognitive interviews about the survey items), and gathering schoolwide and hopefully districtwide engagement and student outcome data in multiple states.

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Developing an Effective Media Campaign Strategy

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When the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sent out requests for proposals to sites interested in becoming demonstration programs for truancy reduction, they required five main strategies to be developed. One of these key strategies was a public awareness campaign. The National Center for School Engagement has worked with each demonstration site as they developed these public awareness activities. Summarized in this report are some of the best media campaign strategies.

Everyone at one time or another has been exposed to or affected by a public awareness campaign/communication campaign. A campaign can be defined as a coordinated communication effort that is conducted through the mass media, interpersonal communication or some combination. Whether one takes notice or not or makes behavior changes is directly related to the effectiveness in which the message is delivered. For example, simply reading a brochure with the message “Buckle Up” is unlikely to bring about any noticeable individual or social change. However, campaigns that include a diverse mix of other media vehicles are more likely to influence people to make choices in line with the campaign information. Formulating an effective media campaign is essential to the success of the message.

Below are the basic questions that need to be answered to develop a plan for an effective media campaign. The following questions can be a useful first step:

- ***What goals do you want to accomplish?***
Pinpoint very specifically the action and/or awareness that you want your target audience to adopt.
- ***Who is the target audience?***
The target audience is a segment of a population that will receive the media message. Carefully dissect the population into the target category by profiling the audience to better understand their attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Knowing what the target audience thinks about the issue at hand and where they obtain information will play an important part in determining appropriate media channels used in delivering your message.
- ***What messages will bring about the desired change or outcome?***
Message development is of utmost importance. The root message should come from quality discussion and brainstorming. The root message also should position your goal in a unique and appealing way to the target audience. Choose more than one message (but no more than three) to prevent staleness and to encourage a view from different angles. Suggestions for message development include: interviews, surveys, focus groups, and piloting materials with the target audience.
- ***What media channels will be the most efficient and cost-effective?***
There are several categories of mass media: News media includes television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. Advertising and public service announcements may involve print, radio, television and billboards/bus boards.

Public affairs events may include rallies, conferences, and speeches. To help inform the decision of which type or types of media to use, be aware of where the target population gets its information, which channels are most/least believable, what your budget will support, and what will provide adequate “dosage” of the messages on a regular basis. Building and maintaining relationships with local media will aid in better results during a campaign.

- ***How will progress be monitored?***

There are two common evaluation techniques to consider for evaluating a public awareness campaign: process and outcome. A process evaluation will ask questions such as “how is the implementation going?” or “are we meeting benchmarks”? An outcome evaluation will focus more on the number of people reached or how behavior has changed. Through ongoing evaluation measures, you will know

- whether your messages and supporting materials are being seen,
- whether your messages are perceived to be credible and plausible, and
- whether your messages are affecting behaviors.

It is recommended that you document comments and anecdotes about what people are saying regarding the campaign. Be aware of influences that may alter the meaning of the messages or that may cast suspicion on the campaign or campaign sponsors.

An example of an extraordinary public awareness campaign currently being demonstrated is Jacksonville United Against Truancy (JUAT) in Jacksonville, Florida. JUAT’s main goal is public awareness and the reduction of truancy. The National Center for School Engagement interviewed Shelley Grant, Director of Youth Offender Programs for the State Attorneys Office, and invited her to share thoughts about their public awareness campaign.

What was the goal of JUAT’s public awareness campaign?

- Public awareness, first and foremost.
- Dispell misperceptions that truancy is “skipping school for a day at the beach” or that it is inconsequential or harmless.
- Truancy is not just a student problem; it is parents who keep their children home, preventing them from getting an education.
- Relate what truancy really is today and then help people understand that there are serious consequences to it. A lot of parents don’t know the laws regarding truancy. Specifically, if parents keep their kids out of school they could be prosecuted.

What worked? What are some of the successes that the campaign has enjoyed?

- The first day of school campaign has been successful through the years. When school first began earlier in August there were 10,000 children missing the first day of school. In the last couple

of years it has been in the hundreds - thousands and thousands less than it used to be. The campaign has certainly proven effective just by looking at first day of school attendance.

- JUAT is responsible for establishing Truancy Awareness Month in October.

What were some of the types of media and products used?

- A successful campaign needs something to draw students to the table. The use of lanyards, stickers, and pencils has worked in the past. Now with the new theme of Count Me In For Learning, we have Frisbees, calculators, and pencil pouches.
- A brochure puts something in their hands that they can hold onto and read later.
- Outlets and events are things like Back-to-School rallies and fairs, places where there are going to be children and parents who need information about school. These are places we focus our attention on always providing information at event tables.
- PSA's were produced that were of fair quality. Unfortunately, they are very expensive to do and we couldn't afford to buy airtime so the PSA's were running at 2 am and 4 am. [Editor's Note: Public Service Announcements are announcements that inform the public about a community service. These announcements are sent to the media (radio, television and print) at no charge. Typically, one cannot designate times that the messages are aired. However, if the media is approached as a sponsor of the message better air time is often awarded.]
- One year, a couple weeks prior to school starting, we had information flashing on the screen at local movie theatres about school starting and the importance of being in school on a regular basis.
- During the 2nd year of the campaign, an art class at one of the local colleges was given a class project to develop a sign for the sides of buses in Jacksonville about truancy. One young woman designed a picture of a bus passing by very quickly and it said "don't miss the bus to your future". This ran on buses for several months and seemed to be very effective.

What are some of the challenges and barriers of a media campaign?

- As a state agency, not having the expertise in the marketing field has been difficult in terms of graphics, press conferences, timing, and having the connections.
- Also, as a state agency, not always having the funds to do what you want to do. [Buying ad time on] Television is cost prohibitive when you operate on a grant.
- Trying to focus on the positive side of truancy. “Gloom and doom” is the nature of the business in a state attorney’s office. Creating a message that doesn’t focus on the negative can be challenging.

Talk more about the collaboration efforts that go into this campaign. Who is involved?

- The Chamber of Commerce has been very involved in the last few years in the back to school efforts.
- The school system appears to be fully on board with the new Count Me In For Learning campaign.
- In the past, Burger King has provided coupons for free Whoppers for students.
- Burger King and BellSouth have provided funding for the campaign.
- Winn Dixie, a local grocery store, has supported back to school efforts by placing event fliers in grocery bags.

Were media efforts evaluated? What was found?

- Parent surveys were administered and questions were asked regarding knowledge of truancy laws and motivation for getting kids to school. The responses indicated that a large portion of parents are knowledgeable about the laws and that those laws are quite motivating to get their children to school. Based on those findings, the Public Awareness campaign does seem to be getting the word out.
- Media attention around parental arrest is two fold. On the one hand, it is negative attention for the parent; but on the other hand it delivers a powerful message to other parents. It is reported that the state attorney feels this is the only offense that media attention is worthwhile because it lets other parents know this can happen to you if you don’t send your children to school.
- The number of children who miss the first day of school has been reduced by thousands as seen by looking at day one attendance records.

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National Center for School Engagement

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The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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Special Thanks to:

Shelley Grant, Program Manager

The State Attorney's Office, Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida

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Count Me In For Learning!

National Center for School Engagement

July 28, 2006

**An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
303 E. 17th Avenue, Suite 400 Denver, CO 80203
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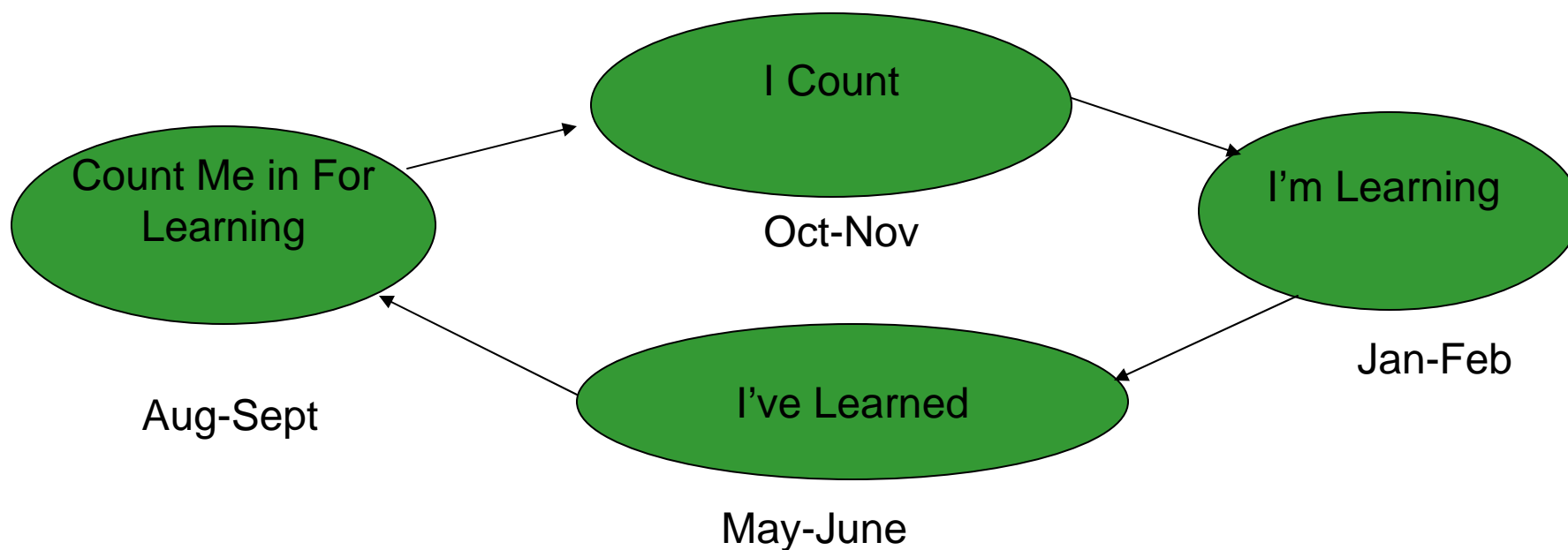
Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement



Count Me In For Learning!

Public Education Campaign for School Engagement

School Year Activity Cycle





Why a Public Engagement Campaign?

- Schools incorrectly assume that the public will automatically show up to enroll their children. Estimates in Seattle and Philadelphia are at about 20,000+ children daily in each city who are not enrolled in any school
- Parents and children need to understand the importance of regular school attendance
- Attendance needs to be valued and celebrated year round to assure school funding, but mostly for student learning
- Parents and students engaged in school is the best indicator of achievement
- Count Me In for Learning is a brief set of ideas for local planning to take adopt change adapt to local needs



Count Me in For Learning

August Prior to School Opening

Example Activities

- Mobile School Enrollment at parks, rec centers, shopping malls, businesses
- Line up business partners for dissemination of Count me In message on shopping bags, fast food bags, posters
- Create give-aways like buttons, book bags, back to school lists, book marks, posters, T-Shirts, etc
- Media events about school enrollment, TV interviews, hotline for where to enroll an school info
- Family potluck dinners and fund nights at schools just before opening



National Center for School Engagement



I Count

October-November

Example Activities

- School Count day activities (also state test day activities)
 - Welcome snacks
 - Parent socials and info sharing sessions
 - “I Count” stickers or buttons for all
 - Student led DJ music at lunch
- “I Count” poster & essay contests
- On Learning & staying in school
- “Improve the School” student focus groups
- Teacher- student role swaps
- School climate surveys and discussions





I'm Learning

January-February



Example Activities

- Attendance & achievement awards
- Mid-Year Completion celebrations
- “Improve the school” parent focus groups
- Learning is Cool poster contest
- Student letters & phone calls to excessively absent students
- Teacher home visits
- Parent- teacher- student evening ice cream socials about learning
- Hands-on learning days





I've Learned

May-June



Example Activities

- HS Graduations make front page and TV news
- School & Business awards and incentives for graduates and continuants (elem-MS; MS-HS)
- What I've Learned essay contests
- What I wanted to learn student focus groups
- School celebrations and awards for attendance, achievement, academic lettering, service learning
- Student speeches, art, music science and math presentations of learning to service clubs, churches, civic groups
- Presentations of Learning a requirement for graduation and continuations





Public Awareness Pays

- Communities with high levels of school attendance have fewer day time crimes and lower first time drug use
- Communities who set an expectation of regular school attendance see better outcomes for their children and youth
- Public awareness campaigns can help achieve high levels of school engagement, academic achievement and parent involvement
- Count Me In is just good public relations!

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Effective Marketing Through Truancy Posters

National Center for School Engagement

December, 2006

**An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
303 E. 17th Avenue, Suite 400 Denver, CO 80203**



Effective Marketing Through Truancy Reduction Posters

Public awareness is an important way to promote positive behavioral change in the general public or for a targeted group. Tools to raise public awareness include disseminating information, creating knowledge, and building understanding. For a comprehensive campaign, multiple avenues should be used, such as:

- Newspapers
- Newsletters
- Press releases/conferences
- Annual reports
- Magazines
- Television
- Radio
- Brochures
- Posters
- Billboards
- Audiovisual presentations
- Photography/Art
- Websites
- Events
- Exhibitions
- Theatre
- Community meetings

In addition to spreading the message far and wide, keep in mind that a campaign can range in cost from minimal to expensive depending on resources. Examples can be seen in the following text that represents this range.

In April 2006, The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) hosted a national truancy prevention poster contest to find out what materials communities are using to support truancy prevention and to promote the importance of school attendance. While the contest called for posters, the materials submitted were also used as brochures, newsletters, t-shirts, and advertising on buses.

A voluntary panel of judges was composed of representatives from juvenile courts and community programs, as well as high school students, truancy officers, social workers, and psychologists. In addition to the criteria used for rating creativity, originality, and marketing, judges were asked to provide comments about what they thought and how they felt regarding the posters.

The judges found the following elements to be fundamental in whether or not a poster was “good”, effective, or had impact.

Audience:	Who was the target audience? Are there multiple audiences? Was the audience too broad or too specific? Would the audience experience an impact or be driven to action?
Appeal:	Eye catching Attention getting Too wordy Use of color Use of visuals/graphics
Message:	Clarity of message Wordiness Relevance Positive/Negative Appealing tag line/catch phrase Language
Facts:	Use of facts/statistics Accuracy of information

Sixteen entries were received and judged based on originality, creativity, and marketing appeal. Awards were given in three categories:

- 1) Community campaign
- 2) School district/area-wide campaigns
- 3) Individual school/Community campaigns

In addition, two Judge’s Awards were acknowledged based on other unique qualities.

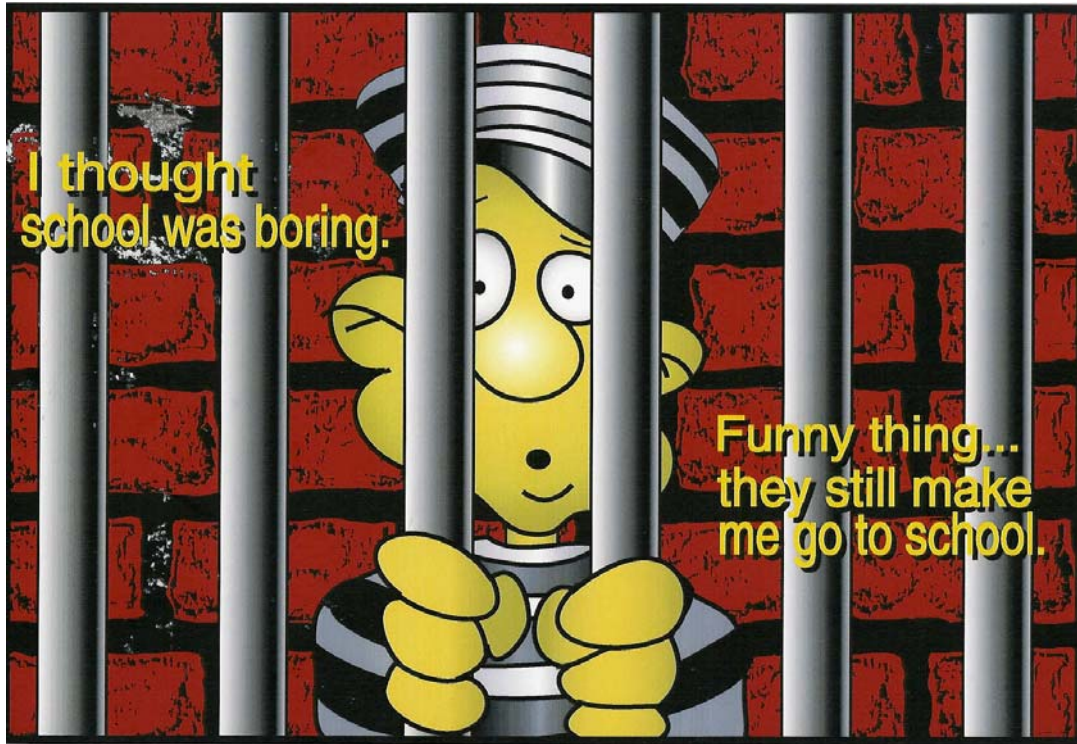
Each entrant was asked to describe how the entry was developed and give an example of its effectiveness. Below is a description of the award winners, photos or samples of the materials, and narrative about the campaign development.

The award for “**Community**” campaign went to Richard Williamson, LMSW-AP from Watauga, TX. His entry included hallway posters that could also be featured on websites.

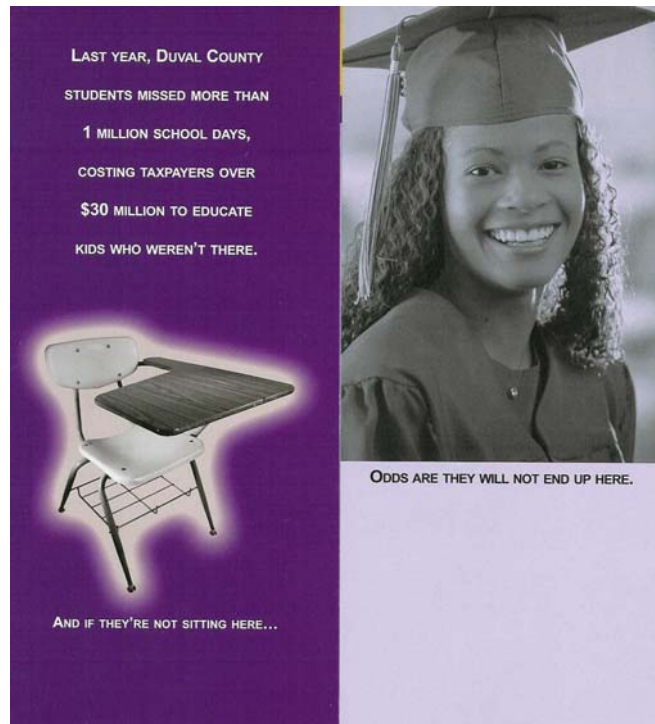
He writes, “A couple of years after leaving foster care, one of my former foster youth (a former truant) made drug-related choices resulting in incarceration. At my request, he drew the truancy-related artwork while incarcerated (he received about \$3,000 for the artwork). When he was released, we went to a printer and used grant funding to print the series which is now in use in over 100 schools and other youth serving agencies in the Dallas area. While in the foster care system,

he graduated from high school and an art school. The artwork was also used for brochures, display stands, four styles of book covers, posters, and websites”.

By visiting www.truants.org, you can view the posters developed by this former truant.



The award for the “**School district/School area**” campaign went to the State Attorney’s Office, 4th Judicial Circuit of Florida in Jacksonville. This entry included brochures entitled, “Count Me In For Learning”. They are part of a public awareness campaign to stress the importance of attending school regularly. There are two versions of the brochure: one is for elementary school children, the other is for secondary school children. The latter is shown below. They were distributed to every student in Duval Public Schools.

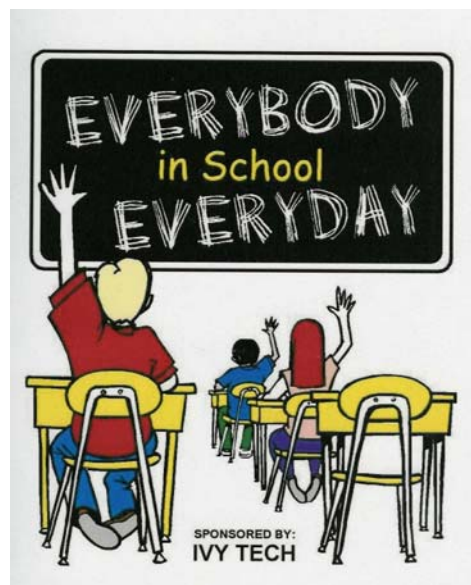
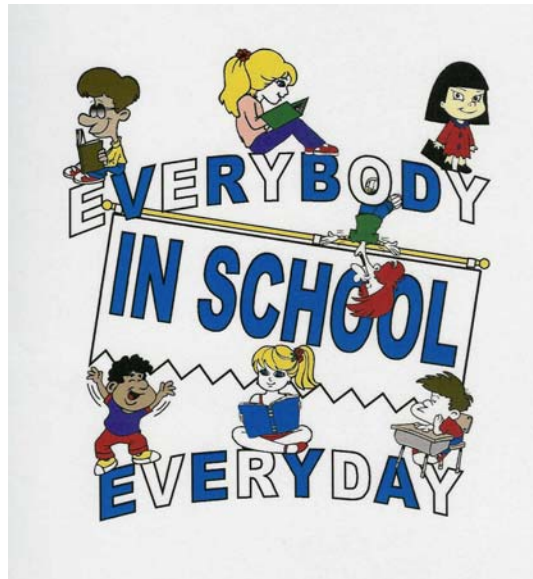


The Teen Court Program Coordinator in Jacksonville submitted the above entry along with a description of development.

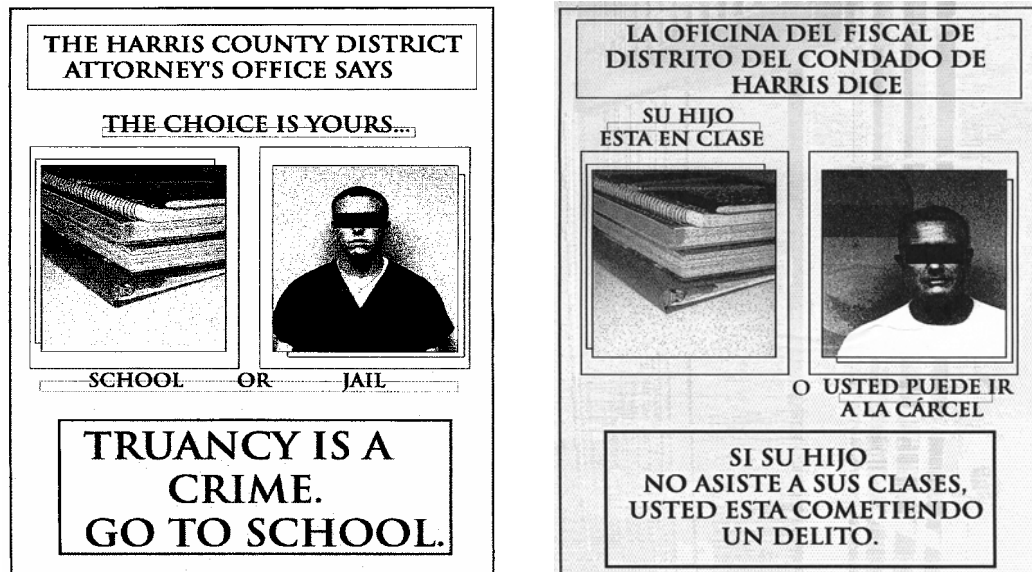
"We have two brochures, one aimed at elementary children, the other at secondary children. The elementary brochure opens up to a picture of a smiling girl graduating, to reinforce the positive aspects of staying in school so the younger children have something to look forward to. The secondary brochure opens up to a picture of a jail cell, to reinforce where they could end up if they do not attend school regularly. This brochure serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of truancy. These brochures were developed by the State Attorney's Office and were widely distributed with the help of JUAT (Jacksonville United Against Truancy). JUAT is a collaboration of community partners dedicated to the reduction of truancy and public awareness of truancy in Jacksonville. These brochures were recently distributed to all Duval County students during the 2005-2006 school year. We have not had enough time to determine effectiveness, but the wide distribution is success in itself."

The award for "**Individual school and community**" campaign went to Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation in Indiana. The entry represented a local "Attendance Awareness Month" event. It included hallway posters and T-shirts with the message, "Everybody in School Everyday." The Coordinator of Student Services submitted the entry and reported a description of development.

“Posters were made and t-shirts were printed with the attached logo. The posters were displayed throughout the school buildings as well as in various public buildings such as the court house, the Office of Family and Children’s Services, and local grocery stores. T-shirts displaying this logo were given to the winners of the elementary poster contest. One of the posters, completed by a 4th grade student, actually inspired the poster that will be used for Attendance Awareness Month in September 2006.”



One of two Judges Awards aptly named the “***Straight-Up Award***” was given to Harris County, Juvenile Division for their entry, "Harris County Stay-in-School Program Posters." This entry generated much discussion among the judges and was very controversial. It was recognized by youth as "straight-up" because it sends a clear message that truancy is serious. However, it is important that accurate messages be sent. Not all truants go to jail and not all parents of truants go to jail. Youth detention can be a consequence for a violation of a court order that mandates school attendance. These messages were published in both English and Spanish.



The second Judges Award, called the “***Eye-Catching Award***”, went to the State Attorney's Office, 4th Judicial Circuit of Florida in Jacksonville for a bus poster that was done in collaboration with Florida Community College. The poster was created as part of a class project. The student's favorite artwork was selected to be made into a bus poster. Part of its appeal is that it reaches multiple audiences.



A public awareness campaign is a great way to spread an important message to targeted audiences in a geographic area. NCSE encourages other communities to produce their own public awareness campaigns to reduce truancy and increase school attendance.

For more information, please visit our website: www.schoolengagement.org

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