

## REDUCING DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY CONTACT BY REDUCING TRUANCY

Truancy, the unexcused absence from school, is more than just an issue for schools, as it can be a very costly short- and long-term issue for a community. Research clearly shows that truancy is an early warning sign for future delinquency, substance use, and school drop out<sup>1</sup>. As part of San Diego County's continued effort to reduce Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC)<sup>2</sup> in the juvenile justice system, the San Diego County Probation Department applied for and received Title V funds to reduce truancy among Hispanic youth. Hispanic youth were selected because of the results from a SANDAG report that found truancy to be significantly related to detention in Juvenile Hall, with a larger proportion of Hispanic youth engaging in truancy<sup>3</sup>. In an effort to divert truant youth and intervene early in a youth's life, SANDAG worked with The Children's Initiative and San Diego Unified School District to identify risk factors contributing to truancy at high-risk middle schools (i.e., 50 percent or more truants and a disproportionate amount of juveniles on probation living in the area), identify possible solutions, and evaluate the outcomes of truancy reduction services. The results from this effort were consistent with research in the field that shows that poor academic performance, lack of school engagement, overburdened families, youth with special needs, and school behavior problems contribute to truancy. In particular, analysis of over 3,000 youth attending three at-risk middle schools found that those youth who were in special education, English Language Learners, suspended at least once during the school year, or in a higher grade were more than one to almost three times more likely to be truant than those who did not have these background characteristics (Table 1).

**Table 1**

### FACTORS RELATED TO BEING TRUANT

Factors That Increased a Youth's Likelihood of Being Truant	Odds of Being Truant
Suspended at least one time	2.82
Being in special education	1.70
Being an English Language Learner	1.31
Being in 8 <sup>th</sup> grade compared to 6 <sup>th</sup>	1.19

\*Significant at the  $p < .05$  level

SOURCE: San Diego Unified School District, 2009

Title V funds were also utilized to provide truancy intervention services to 103 middle school youth who had a history of truancy. The outcomes showed positive changes in participants' attendance, truancy, and grade point average (not shown). This was the first step in a three-phase process to impact truancy, with the second step to begin early 2011. These data will be used to direct the truancy intervention services in the future. To learn more about this project, as well as San Diego County's efforts to reduce DMC, visit SANDAG's Web site at [www.sandag.org/cj](http://www.sandag.org/cj).

<sup>1</sup> Yeide, M. & Kobrin, M. (2009). **Truancy Literature Review**. Washington D.C. OJJDP USDOJ. Available online at <http://www2.dsgonline.com/dso/Truancy%20Literature%20Review.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> DMC is the overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile just system.

<sup>3</sup> Keaton, S., Burke, C., Rohanna, K., Sievers, S., & Schafer, E. (2008). San Diego County's Juvenile Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC): Identification and Assessment. San Diego CA: San Diego Association of Governments