Research Brief

Strategies for dealing with tardiness

Question: What works to reduce tardiness?

Summary of Findings: Principals and teachers have long thought that student tardiness was a serious problem. In one study from the 1990's, 8-12% of students were absent each day, and more than 40% of teachers found tardiness to be a significant problem. In fact, it is considered so serious that a school's response can go to extremes: a student in Mount Pleasant, MI, was suspended for writing and reading a parody of the school's tardiness policy, and students in one California high school are fined $165 if they are tardy more than twice. A Google search on "tardiness" will yield a lot of high school online handbooks and policies about tardiness. The question, of course, is not "what are high schools doing?", but "what are high schools doing that's working?" Many approaches seem to work, but they tend to break into two categories: the behavior modification approach and the needs-based approach.

Behavior modification approaches include the following: being locked out of class; detentions; parent conferences; additional assignments; reductions in grades; work details during lunch, after school, or free periods; Saturday classes; token systems for being on time; time cards; time management workshops; contingency contracts; and tardy rooms. Many of these strategies proved effective, but detentions, reduced grades, tardy rooms, and additional assignments proved ineffective at changing behavior.

Other schools, however, look at the reasons that students are tardy and try to address the underlying problems. This approach is based on the idea that before a school can change the behavior of at-risk students, they must understand what is going on in those students' lives. When asked through interviews or surveys, students indicated that they were tardy for the following reasons: transportation problems; overcrowded conditions; lack of positive history about people of color; lack of a culturally sensitive curriculum; dirty and limited access to bathrooms;; health-related causes; sleeping habits; and family-related excuses. Such studies often found that tardy students felt a disconnect with the school, the teachers, or the curriculum. From one study: "Students complained about the inconsistency of school rules, especially those related to tardiness and eating in school, and they noted the double standard that allowed teachers to do many things students were not allowed to do. They voiced concerns that they were never given a say about anything in the school, expressing the belief that all the rules originated with teachers and staff, and that student input was not solicited. When they did express opinions about school, they thought that their comments were not taken seriously."

Successful needs-based strategies included the following: identifying chronic offenders, assessing them individually, and referring them to appropriate services, including support groups; working with parents to find solutions; instituting free breakfast programs; working with teachers to improve the quality of the instructional program; switching to Block scheduling; interdisciplinary & integrated curriculum; and providing opportunities for students to express their opinions and contribute to the operation of the school.

Needs-based approaches had the added benefit of not only improving punctuality, but often academic achievement and attitude toward school, as well.

As one study says, "… even the best attendance policy must be accompanied by an understanding of student motivation. Schools must look at whether alienation is playing a part in absences. Other factors, such as cultural values, socialization, social responsibility, academic rigor, and school climate, must also be considered when examining attendance patterns."

Online Resources:

GENERAL RESOURCES

Student Absenteeism and Tardiness. Indicator of the Month.
An important aspect of students' access to education is the amount of time actually spent in the classroom. This brief highlights data on the student absentee rate for 1990-91. The data were extracted from "The Condition of Education, 1995," U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. ERIC #: ED396461
http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80144fb8

School Suspends Student Over Tardiness Parody
September 6, 2001
MOUNT PLEASANT, Michigan (AP) -- A lawsuit was filed on behalf of a student who was suspended after reading a parody of his school's tardiness policy to a group of friends in the cafeteria. Smith's commentary, written at home, criticized the school's new tardiness policy, the process leading to its adoption, and several teachers and administrators responsible for enforcing it. He was suspended because he allegedly assaulted "the dignity of a person," the ACLU said.
http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2001/fyi/teachers.ednews/09/06/tardiness.lawsuit.ap/

Fine with Tardiness
For the Sake of Argument (A blog for discussing issues of important to the "heartland of America.")
December 02, 2003
A Whittier (CA) high school is cracking down on tardy students. Students at Whittier High School who arrive on campus after the 8 a.m. bell more than twice will be fined $165 by the Whittier Police Department, Principal Loring Davies said.
http://www.thesakeofargument.com/archives/000334.html

How Do You Handle Chronic Tardiness?
Teachers at different levels explain their solutions to tardiness. From NEA Today September 2001,

page 27
http://kcsos.kern.org/schcom/stories/storyReader$82

NEEDS-BASED APPROACH

Building Successful Students: Creating Disciplinary Policies That Promote College
A Plan for Improving Roosevelt High School
In the spring of 2002 United Students began a student-led research process to identify the main problems at Roosevelt and develop solutions. United Students distributed a survey to the RHS student body in classrooms, and collected surveys from 754 students. The student leaders analyzed US survey findings, RHS graduation and college eligibility rates, and two *L.A. Times* news articles which highlighted the impacts of the tardy room and the B-track policy within LAUSD. The survey administered by US asked RHS students their view of the effectiveness of the tardy room, the need for a culturally relevant curriculum, and access and support to information that fulfills college course requirements. US student leaders analyzed all the data to design an effective alternative policy to the tardy room.
http://www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/tardyroomreport.PDF

Working with Students and Parents To Solve the Problem of Tardiness.
Kerrins, Judith A.; Hayes, Denver;
Middle School Journal v27 n4 p46-51 Mar 1996
Concerned about student learning, believing tardiness to be at an all-time high, and not happy with their current policy for dealing with student tardiness, the faculty of a junior high school in the Rocky Mountain area asked themselves: "What can be done about students who are tardy?" This article describes that process and their findings.
ERIC #: EJ600001
http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b8001d656

Absentee Prevention--A Model for Intervention.
Hegner, Martha**;**
NASSP Bulletin v71 n496 p125-26 Feb 1987
Describes a program at Rochester School District (Pennsylvania) that determines the needs of students with chronic attendance and tardiness problems and works with students, families, social service agencies, and alternative educational programs to resolve conflicts. Chronic offenders are identified, assessed individually, and referred to appropriate services, including support groups.

ERIC #: EJ349137

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b8005b614

Listen to the Children: Children at Risk for Failure Speak Out.
Britt, Patricia M.**;**
Before educators can assess the problems associated with being at risk of academic failure, they must understand what is occurring in the lives of at-risk students. The focus of this study was the school lives of 15 high school students. Students complained about the inconsistency of school rules, especially those related to tardiness and eating in school, and they noted the double standard that allowed teachers to do many things students were not allowed to do. They voiced concerns that they were never given a say about anything in the school, expressing the belief that all the rules originated with teachers and staff, and that student input was not solicited. When they did express opinions about school, they thought that their comments were not taken seriously. Suggestions for improving the educational environment for at-risk students begin with providing opportunities for students to express their opinions and contribute to the operation of the school.
ERIC #: ED425254

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=51&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80094c6a

Attending to Attendance. Fastback 450.
Dougherty, John W.**;**
This fastback document examines student absenteeism and offers advice on what schools can do to improve attendance. It looks at truancy, absenteeism, and tardiness and how, since the first days of compulsory education, educators have had to deal with these obstacles to education. But even the best attendance policy must be accompanied by an understanding of student motivation. Schools must look at whether alienation is playing a part in absences. Other factors, such as cultural values, socialization, social responsibility, academic rigor, and school climate, must also be considered when examining attendance patterns. To improve attendance, schools should develop a clear, fair attendance policy, should support the attendance policy by placing a premium on uninterrupted instructional time, and should review and renew the attendance policy regularly.
ERIC #: ED454571

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=51&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80140edd

Research Brief

School Breakfast Program and School Performance.
Meyers, Alan; And Others;
Children who participate in the School Breakfast Program show significant improvement in academic performance and tardiness rates, and a trend toward improvement in absenteeism. Results were the following: (1) participants and non-participants did not differ with respect to sex, ethnicity, or number of children per family; (2) participants improved their CBTS score; (3) absenteeism of both participants and non-participants increased, but there was less increase for participants; and (4) tardiness decreased for participants and increased for non-participants.
ERIC #: ED297084
http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b800440c1

A Four-Year Contrast between High School Students in Interdisciplinary and Discipline-Based Curriculum Programs: Behavioral and Academic Implications.
Cordogan, Steve**;**
A suburban Chicago, Illinois, high school administrator and several of her family members initiated an interdisciplinary curriculum in the mid-1990s. Data were gathered for 161 discipline-based and 247 interdisciplinary students. Students in the interdisciplinary program demonstrated more positive behaviors than the discipline-based students, as indicated by consistently lower absence rates and generally lower suspension rates. Academic performance indicators also favored the interdisciplinary students, and there was no indication of a "dumbing-down" of interdisciplinary content. Freshman year scores on the Iowa Test of Educational Development were equal or higher, and interdisciplinary students consistently had higher grade point averages. ACT college admissions test scores were also higher for interdisciplinary students. The attrition rate was lower for the interdisciplinary program, and students and teachers expressed positive feelings about the program.
ERIC #: ED461672
http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=51&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b8006f91f

Block Scheduling: Does It Make a Difference? A High School Case Study.
McCoy, Mary Helen S.**;**
To offer insights into scheduling strategies, this paper presents the effects of block scheduling in one rural public secondary school. Results revealed several themes: block scheduling helped students feel more empowered about learning, and teachers reported more empowerment in their instructional role. More assigned homework was being completed, and teachers indicated satisfaction about the demands on their time. Findings indicate that block scheduling basically benefited all students equally, regardless of ability level, attitude toward school, and degree of school success. Students'

tardiness decreased and their management of books, materials, and schoolwork improved. The report suggests that supports--materials and supplies--must be provided for the ongoing success of block scheduling.
ERIC #: ED420106
http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=51&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b8013cb8f

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION APPROACH

Maui School Fights Tardiness
At Baldwin High School of Maui, if you're late, you get locked out of class and have to stand in line in front of the auditorium to get a tardy pass. 3 late passes land you a spot in Saturday school. Perfect on time attendance gets you a chance to win a prize.
http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Dec/09/ln/ln01p.html

A Behavior Modification Program To Reduce Tardiness in Middle School Dropout Prevention Students.
Johnson, Blanche**;**
A behavior modification program was developed and implemented to decrease the tardy behavior of 20 students (ages 13 to 15) in a self-contained dropout prevention class. The intervention program included the following components: (1) daily time card sign-in; (2) points for prompt attendance, exchangeable for rewards; and (3) a time-management workshop to teach new strategies to save and manage time. Students also designed their own time-management plans. The program's success was demonstrated by: a change from an average of 15 tardies per week to zero tardies for the last 3 weeks of the program; all students were able to identify time-management strategies 4 weeks following the workshop; and all 20 students received rewards for timely attendance during weeks 5-7.
ERIC #: ED387985
http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80127781

Effects of Contingency Contracting on Decreasing Student Tardiness.
Din, Feng S.; Isack, Lori R.; Rietveld, Jill;
A contingency contract program was implemented in this study to determine the effects of contingency contracting on decreasing student tardiness in high school classrooms. The participants were 32 high school students. A contingency contract was signed individually with the students in the experimental group. Results from data analysis indicate that participants in the experimental group

showed significantly fewer tardiness counts than those in the control group, which suggests that this behavior modification technique can be effectively applied to decrease student tardiness by high school teachers.

ERIC #: ED474642

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Tardiness&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=50&eric_displayNtriever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b8017a1cb

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