

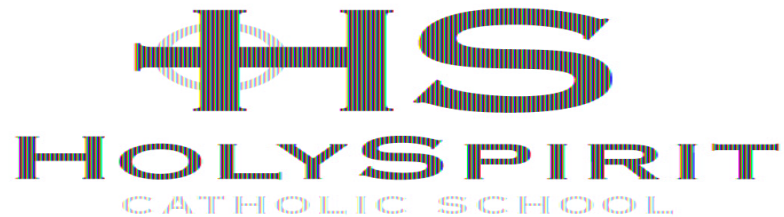
Implementing a Framework for Students with School Refusal in a Private School Setting

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Abstract

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, Indiana reports chronic absenteeism data annually. These absenteeism data are incorporated into an accountability system and used as an indicator of school quality and student success (IDOE). In 2017 Holy Spirit Catholic School embarked upon a program to review and update its attendance procedures. Administrators, social workers and office staff worked in collaboration with community partners to develop a comprehensive plan to address school refusal and truancy issues. Holy Spirit Staff reported a twenty percentile increase in daily attendance rates in the subsequent three years of implementation. Implementers note that small private schools are uniquely positioned to quickly address issues related to school refusal and to develop a collaborative approach to intervention.

Absenteeism and The Law

- **ESSA**
 - IN school quality measure -- K-8 chronic absenteeism
 - Chronic Absenteeism- 10% or more of school year

- **IDOE**
 - IC 20-33-2
Chapter 2. Compulsory School Attendance

Chronic Absenteeism Research

- Missed early school milestones
- Lower Graduation rates
- Negative Later-In-Life Outcomes

(Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools, U.S. Dept of Ed. 2019)

Holy Spirit Catholic School Profile

Preschool - 8th Grade



- 2021-2022
 - 63% Hispanic
 - 85% Catholic
 - 71% Receiving a state voucher
 - 58% Free lunch (2019-2020)
- 2019-2020
 - 1.9% chronic absenteeism (state avg:11.4%)

Holy Spirit School (HSS) : Approach to Absenteeism

❖ 2016-2017

- School messenger call made to family of absent student
- No systemic plan in place to improve attendance
- Data daily attendance rate estimated at 65%-70%

❖ 2017-2018

- Staff professional development on absenteeism
- Data assessment implemented (preliminary and inconsistent)
- Start of development of school-wide approach to reduce absenteeism

HSS: Approach to Absenteeism

❖ 2018-2019

- Outreach to area public school & community
- Monthly data summarized
- School refusal intervention consistently implemented
- Daily attendance rate 97.57%

❖ 2019-2020

- School admin, teachers involved in data review & intervention
- Proactive measures in place to address school absences
- Daily attendance rate 97.21%
- Adjustments made for absences during virtual learning

HSS: Absenteeism and COVID-19

❖ 2020-2021

- Attendance data review & intervention continued (Principal, teachers & social workers involved)
- Home visits, one-on-one meetings, google meet calls
- Outreach to community partners
- Provide family knowledge of Indiana Law on attendance
- Provide empathy and positive outreach
- Daily attendance rate 94.20%

HSS Attendance Guide

It is essential for children to attend school regularly in order to obtain maximum benefit from their school education...Any student who is absent from school is required to furnish a written excuse, signed by the parent or guardian, upon his/her return to school. The excuse should give the cause of the absence. Extended absences may also require a doctor's written excuse.

Attendance Procedures

- Stratified
 - Excused vs. Unexcused
 - Frequency driven
- Intervention
 - Teacher connection
 - Letters (nudge, educational)
 - Person-to-person meeting
 - Home Visits
- Community
 - Marion County Prosecutor's Office
 - Mental Health Services

HSS Absences Procedures

Internal

Every Unexcused Absence

- A call from the school office is made to the family of a student with an unexcused absence. Teachers to positively engage with students upon student's return to classroom and assist student in developing a plan to make up missing work.

2 Unexcused Absences

- The teacher will make contact with family and document communication. ([Phone contact #1](#))

3 and 5 Unexcused Absences

- Teacher will communicate with school secretary
- Social Worker/Principal will make contact with family and document communication (communication between social worker/Principal, student's teacher and secretary.) ([Phone contact #2](#))
- Social Worker/Principal will send out a Nudge Letter to the family (nudge letter may include details for setting up a Face to Face Meeting) ([Mail or send home with student mail contact #1](#))
- Social Worker/ Principal to determine the need to make a home visit. This is to be done on a case by case basis. ([Face to face meeting #1](#))

9 Unexcused Absences (Up to this point, a call from a parent can be considered excused. However, after 9 absences it should be communicated to the parent that any future absences will be considered unexcused unless accompanied by a doctor's note.)

- Principal will mail or send home or hand deliver the 9-day letter to the family. This letter should include that future absence **will require** a note from the child's doctor. A phone contact should be made as well. Included with the letter will be a report of the student's attendance. Principal will communicate with the student's teacher and secretary. ([Phone contact #3 and mail contact #2](#))

10-11 Unexcused Absences

- At 10 absences, even if a parent has called a student in, at this point in order to be considered excused, future absences will require a doctor's note. Social worker will set up a Face to Face Meeting if this has not been done. At the meeting, the Principal may hand deliver a Truancy Warning Letter to the family. ([Mail contact #3 and face to face contact #2](#))

12 Unexcused Absences (K-8 only)

If unexcused absences continue, the Principal reserves the right to refer the family to the prosecutor's office. The requirements from the state to refer a student or family for Failure to Ensure or truancy is the following:

1. Complete 2 phone contacts, 2 letter contacts, and 1 face-to-face contacts with student / family. Attempted contacts are acceptable.

Science of School Refusal

Mental health (avoidance of negative affectivity)

Escape (adverse school based social/evaluative situations)

Tangible rewards (parental role)

Pursue attention

Impediments

School refusal assessment scale

Student contract

Rewards

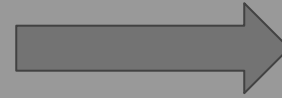
Engagement

Connection

Parenting session

Mental health services

Solutions



(Kerney et al 2004)



Home Visit

Teamwork

Staff ID visible

'Hurry up and wait'

Clear and concise explanation

Social emotional context

Transition student to school

Letter informing of visit / follow-up action

Advantages for Private School

Principal and Admin staff readily accessible

Less barriers for developing school-community relationships

Autonomy at the school level

Responsive and real time solutions

Timely teacher input and access

Prayer and Faith based approaches embraced

Additional Resources

IDOE <https://www.in.gov/doe/>

Attendance Matters

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/>

US Dept of Education -ESSA

<https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>

The International Association for
Truancy and Dropout Prevention
(IATDP) <http://iatdp.org/>

Bibliography

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ATTENDANCE MATTERS!

ALL DAY, EVERY DAY.



ATTENDANCE MATTERS!

Why?



Attending school regularly helps students feel better about school & themselves.



Start building a habit of daily school attendance in preschool so students learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important.



Good attendance will help students do well in high school, college, and at work.

What you can do?



Set a regular bed time and morning routine.



Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.



Don't let your child stay home unless truly sick.



If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk to teachers and your school counselor.

Postcard for Families

Appendix

School Refusal Assessment Scale

<https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780195308297.001.0001/med-9780195308297-interactive-pdf-003.pdf>

Holy Spirit School Empowerment Plan - SAMPLE

- Goal: Increase school attendance and achievement
- Objective 1: Increase school and parent consistency through joint meeting with parents, school personnel, and student
 - Objective 2: Develop and nurture a school environment of caring and support for student
 - Objective 3: develop contract for attendance to include and rewards for compliance and consequences for non-compliance
 - Objective 4: Develop a consistent and predictable strategy for assisting student from car to classroom

Contract:

In exchange for a resolution to the school problem, all family members and Holy Spirit school staff agree to try as hard as possible to honor the contract.

Student is to attend school each day from 7:30am -2:40pm

Holy Spirit School
Sample Empowerment Plan (continued)

Limit severe conflict between parent and child

- Set routines and behaviors for morning (waking, dressing, transportation, etc.).
- Holy Spirit Staff to pick up student in the mornings if needed.

Attendance at school for all 5 days will result in:

- \$ XBOX Card live
- \$ allowance

If student does not complete his responsibility of attendance during school day, he will have a home 'school' day with:

- no TV, internet, phone, or video games, snacks (during school hours)

I agree to the following Contract (Can be read and initialed daily)

Names and Date: X_____

Holy Spirit School - Sample Empowerment Plan
General Recommendations for Parents:
(note: recommendations may not all apply)

Believe that your child will get over the problem. Let him know that you believe he can handle it.

Listen to your child and encourage him to talk about his fears

Be understanding and use reflective listening -don't use shame,

Maintain positive contact with teacher and school personnel

Make sure your child knows you will return at dismissal

Leave quickly - no hovering or looking back

Don't reinforce the distress by rescuing him from separation

General Recommendations for Parents (continued)

Make school attendance mandatory unless your child is truly sick

We understand that anxiety will increase the more school is avoided

Create a home environment of structure and consistency.

Encourage your child to enroll in school extracurricular activities to help him feel more connected to school.

Provide positive feedback for the successes achieved at school.

If we note patterns of academic failure, we may assess for possible learning disabilities.

Contact school personnel if your child refuses to attend school

Provide consequences for unexcused absence.