TRUANCY INTERVENTION PROGRAM (TIP)

PROGRAM INTRODUCTION & HISTORY
The Truancy Intervention Program (TIP) is a partnership between the Dade State Attorney's Office (DSAO) and Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), aimed at reducing juvenile crime in Miami-Dade County and encouraging students to attend school on a regular basis. TIP combines early intervention with prosecutorial enforcement of Florida’s Compulsory Education Laws. The program was conceived as a result of studies conducted in 1991 and 1993 by the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury’s findings revealed that between 75-85 percent of serious juvenile offenders had been truant or chronically absent from school. These studies further revealed that this student population failed to read at grade level. These findings correlate to the fact that 75 percent of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate and display a negative pattern of erratic attendance which had begun in the third grade or at age nine. In response to the grand jury’s findings, the program was piloted in four M-DCPS elementary schools during the 1993-1994 school year.

Due to TIP’s success in lowering absenteeism in schools, the program has undergone gradual expansions. During the 1998-1999 school year, the program underwent its most challenging expansion. It expanded to 207 elementary schools and 16 secondary schools. Due to a lack of funds during the 2003 school year, secondary schools were removed from the program, leaving TIP in all Miami-Dade County Elementary Schools.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES
The premises of the TIP expansion are based on the following:

I. TIP provides effective methods of delinquency reduction by focusing on truancy in the early adolescent stage coupled with enforcing parental responsibility.
II. Students will not acquire basic academic competencies unless they attend school regularly.
III. As an initial step, TIP intervention can have a positive effect on students to prevent academic failure or to prevent criminal ideologies sometimes caused by repetitious contact with the juvenile justice system.
IV. By preventing delinquent behavior and improving academic success through a reduction in truancy, M-DCPS can save its children’s futures and reduce the potential for crime.
V. Enforcement of school attendance laws requires the coordinated effort of various agencies.
VI. TIP has been an effective truancy program, proven by the significant reduction in truancy for selected schools and the positive interaction between M-DCPS and DSAO.

With a target population in excess of 300,000 students, TIP is the largest cooperative effort ever undertaken by the DSAO and M-DCPS.
ENROLLMENT CRITERIA
The program uses the M-DCPS computer database to identify truant students in elementary schools. Students trigger TIP when they reach ten unexcused absences at any time during the school year. Once identified, the student parent(s)/guardian(s) are required to attend a mandatory meeting at the student’s school. The notice for this meeting is sent from DSAO. There are four Truancy Child Study Team (TCST) level meetings at which parental/guardian consequences escalate and additional district and law enforcement representatives are in attendance to provide escalating services. At each of the four levels of meetings on the continuum, intervention strategies involve additional participants and demand more from the student and the family while increasing the support given to them.

If the parents/guardians of a student fail to attend a TCST meeting, a DSAO investigator is sent to the student’s home to establish the reason for their absence. Upon locating the parents/guardians, they are advised of another opportunity to have a meeting, which will be scheduled on the next available meeting date.

TIP MEETINGS
At the meetings, the importance of parental responsibility to ensure regular school attendance and compliance with state attendance laws is stressed. The meetings are also utilized to evaluate the student’s domestic situation to determine and reduce the causes of the truancy. TIP envisions regular school attendance as the first step necessary to provide meaningful and effective interventions to prevent future delinquency. As a result, various strategies, including remedial tutoring, social services, and, if necessary, court assistance through Florida’s dependency system or through appropriate criminal prosecution, are utilized to develop and implement solutions. To determine meeting success, the student’s school attendance is monitored and follow-up meetings are conducted if the attendance problem continues.

The first level meeting and the second level meeting are both scheduled at the student’s home school. The third level meeting is held at the District School Board Administration Building and the fourth level meeting is held at the DSAO.

Attendees at the first and second level meetings include: a school site administrator, a school counselor, a social worker (if needed), the student and his/her parents/guardians. In addition to those in attendance at the first and second level meetings, TIP district representatives and a School Resource Officer (SRO) will be in attendance at the third level meetings. Respectively, attendees from the third level meetings will also attend the fourth level meetings held at the DSAO in conjunction with DSAO TIP program administrator, an Assistant State Attorney (ASA), and additional law enforcement personnel.

During and following each meeting, the student’s respective school assumes the responsibility of collecting and documenting information provided by school and district representatives, parents and the student. Copies of all completed TIP forms are included in a specific TIP file created for the student. Note: Thorough maintenance and proper documentation of all processed TIP information is critical if the student’s attendance problem continues and requires a fourth level meeting at the DSAO or prosecution.
**TIP OPERATIONS MANUAL**

Miami Dade County Public School personnel are provided with a comprehensive training on *TIP*. Copies of the *Truancy Intervention Program Elementary Schools Operations Manual* are distributed to attendees at this training. If necessary, additional training on the program is offered at individual school sites, which can be requested throughout the course of the school year.

The roles and responsibilities for each school employee assigned to monitor the TIP program are outlined in the manual. The following information is also included in the manual: procedures for each level meeting, *TIP* technical operation procedures, meeting schedules, and all program forms required for each meeting.

**PROGRAM RESULTS**

During the 1997-1998 school year:

- 78% of schools participating in *TIP* for the first time during the 1997-1998 school year showed improvement in student daily attendance while only 66% of elementary schools that did not participate in *TIP* showed attendance improvement.
- 46% of the students referred to TIP required DSAO to personally contact their parent/guardian for meeting notification. Of these, 81% of parents/guardians attended a meeting after one contact from DSAO.
- Overall, students who attended a first level meeting experienced a reduction in their average unexcused absences and did not increase their excused absences.
- *TIP* students performed the same or higher in academics (61%), effort (62%), and conduct (56%) grades after the first level meeting.

Since its implementation in M-DCPS, the program has also enjoyed remarkable support and praise from the community, teachers, school administrators, parents/guardians and the Florida Legislature. This anti-truancy program envisions school attendance as the beginning, not the end, of the processes necessary to provide meaningful and effective intervention to prevent future delinquency. Effective early intervention for elementary and secondary school students, of the type offered in the Miami-Dade County State Attorney’s Office Truancy Intervention Program, can reduce truancy, reduce the potential for crime, and promote a better future for our students.

If you require additional information regarding *TIP*, feel free to contact Mr. Mark E. Zaher, Director, School Operations/Special Programs, at 305-995-2710. You may also write to us: Miami-Dade County Public Schools, School Operations/Special Programs, Dade State Attorney’s Office Truancy Intervention Program at 1500 Biscayne Boulevard, SBAB Annex Room 315, Miami, FL 33132.