

ATTENDANCE MEDIATION

Supporting Schools. Listening to Families. Finding Solutions.

The Center for Dispute Resolution at the University of Maryland (C-DRUM) champions innovative approaches to conflict resolution in Maryland's public sphere. In 2007 C-DRUM implemented an evidence-based approach to resolve school attendance issues in Baltimore City public schools. In 2012-2013 attendance mediation services are planned for four counties and Baltimore City.

THE PROBLEM

Truancy crushes opportunity. In schools, poor attendance diminishes the overall quality of classroom instruction, drives down standardized test scores, and drives up drop-out rates. Within communities, student that miss school are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system, become victims of crime, and require social services intervention. Patterns of truancy begin early, often in kindergarten, and have long-lasting effects. Attendance problems are complex, and no single remedy will eliminate the problem within a school community. Instead, targeted multi-level interventions are required.

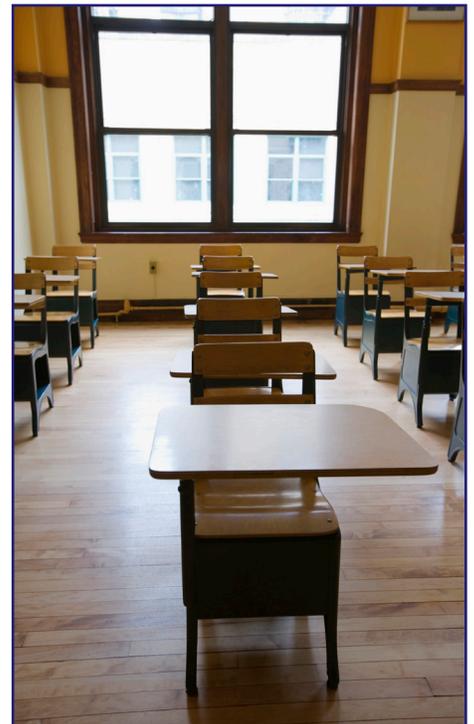
THE SOLUTION

Mediation provides the involvement of a trained neutral during a difficult conversation, and the setting reconnects the family with the school community and offers ready access to identified resources. In mediation the participants—the parent and teacher, typically—propose their own solutions to the issues raised. Although there are common reasons students miss school—illness, transportation, safety, etc.—for each family these are unique struggles. Because the mediations are normally confidential, they offer a safe setting in which to discuss these issues. Without mediation, these conversations don't typically happen, and parents are rarely afforded the opportunity to talk about their child's needs with a teacher in an uninterrupted setting.

THE MODEL

C-DRUM supports programs implementing attendance mediation through training and technical assistance, and the provision of mediation services. Under C-DRUM's model, mediators are trained specifically in attendance mediation and the mediations take place in the schools. Program orientations are held in the schools to explain the mediation process to parents and school personnel and the mediation program works within the existing structure of the school's attendance protocol. The program connects families with resources in the community through school-based referrals, and a list of resources is available to families during mediations. Issues affecting school attendance are addressed as early as possible (ideally within 6-10 absences), and mediators try to get to the source of the problem and promote ongoing communication between the family and school.

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THE IMPACT

Sam stopped coming to school after his brother's murder. His parents were supportive but unsure of how to help, and his teachers were uncertain of how to reach him. In the mediation Sam barely spoke but he heard two important things from his teacher: he was in danger of failing and might repeat 8th grade, and he was an important member of the class. After two additional mediations, Sam's attendance turned around, his grades improved, and he was looking forward to high school.

* * *

When Shawna's grandmother came to a mediation she heard how her poor attendance was affecting her academically, but she also shared her concerns about her speech. Shawna received a referral to a speech pathologist and the school social worker, and her teacher provided Shawna with make-up work. Her absence rate improved by 50%.

* * *

Terence was a reluctant, tardy first grader whose single mother also had an infant and toddler at home. During mediation his teacher explained the impact of missing first period every day, offered strategies to help the morning routine run smoothly, and suggested how she could reinforce the mother's efforts with incentives at school.

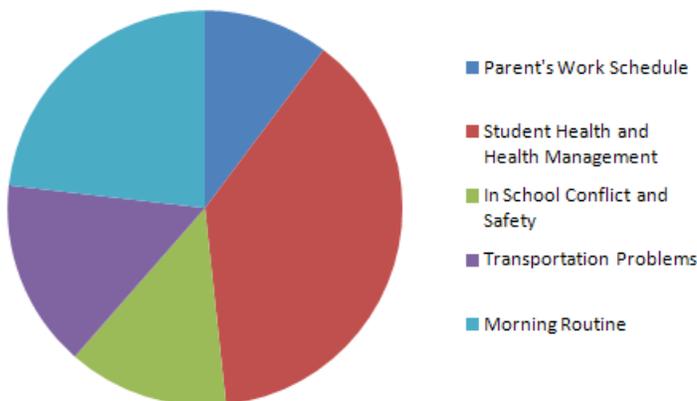
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Post-mediation surveys over the last five years demonstrate that 95% of parents and 98% of teachers found the attendance mediation process to be satisfactory or very satisfactory.



More than one-third of the families that engage in mediation report that it is the first time that they have met their child's teacher.

Top Five Sources of Truancy
2007-2012



Percentage of Students Whose Attendance Improved 2011-2012

After referral to mediation	62%
After early (6-10 absences) referral to mediation	68%
After early referral to mediation and mediation occurs	69%