

School Attendance: Using Mediation to Strengthen School-Family Relationships

Dr. Adonis Bolden, Assistant Principal Delaware Hayes High
School

April Nelson, JD, Court Mediator, Delaware County Juvenile
Court

Objectives

- Review House Bill 410 and a school district's obligation to address attendance issues.
- Examine the myths and the reality of school attendance and look at the real issues a school district in 2020 faces when dealing with attendance.
- Learn about a court-school district partnership in Delaware County, how it changed after the implementation of HB 410, and how mediation can be used to help school districts connect families to needed resources.

House Bill 410

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House Bill 410 Overview

Signed into law March 2017

Truly took effect 2017-2018 school year

GOALS OF HB 410

- Decriminalize truancy at juvenile level
- Place an affirmative duty on schools to reach out to families to address attendance
- Require schools to formulate a plan to improve attendance (SAIP)

Habitual Truant

- 30 consecutive **unexcused** hours
- 42 or more **unexcused** hours in a month
- 72 or more **unexcused** hours in one school year

Decriminalizing Truancy

- Districts must remove “excessive truancy” from any zero tolerance policies for violent, disruptive, or inappropriate behavior
- Students may not be expelled or suspended for being truant
- School districts must take procedural steps to engage the student and family before filing a complaint in court

Mandated Steps

- Parent notification: within 7 days of triggering event, school must make three meaningful attempts to reach family
- Absence intervention team must develop student absence intervention plan (SAIP) within 14 days
- School must wait 61 calendar days after SAIP to file complaint against juvenile

School Attendance: Myths and Reality

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Myths of Poor Attendance

- “These parents don’t care.” “These are bad parents.”
- “These kids don’t care.” “These kids are lazy.”
- “It doesn’t matter if you show up if you’re not ready to learn.”

Myths of Poor Attendance

- “Absences in early grades are no big deal. It’s just first grade.”
- “Students don’t really start missing school until they are older.”
- “There’s nothing schools can do to improve attendance—it’s up to the parents.”

Myths of Poor Attendance

- “These kids also have disciplinary issues in school.”
- “These kids are from lower socio-economic backgrounds.”

Challenges Facing School Districts in 2020 and Beyond

Moving Forward: The Delaware Approach

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Setting the Scene

- Delaware City Schools: 6,135 students, 5 elementary schools, 1 middle school (grades 6 - 8), 1 high school (2 alternative education programs)
- Delaware County Juvenile Court: 1 judge, 3 magistrates (1 assigned to attendance docket), 65 employees

Community Demographics

- Population: 39,000
- Racial profile: White, 89% (non-Latino: 87.1%), African-American: 5.2%; Asian: 2.4% Latino: 2.6% ; multi-racial: 2.7%
- Median annual income: \$62,000
- Poverty rate: 9.8%

School District Demographics

- Population: 6135
- Staff: 365 educators; 12 principals
- Racial profile: White/NH: 80.9%; Latino: 7.5%; African-American/NH: 4.1%; Multi-racial: 6.9%; Asian: .7%; English learners: 2.6%; Economically disadvantaged: 32.9%

Court-School Partnership

- Assigned School Liaison (Court Staff)
- Court Mediation Staff
- District Commitment
- Mediate K through 12

Process

- Schools send out letters on accruing absences
- School liaison contacts families by telephone; will meet with students at the school building grades 6-12
- When Habitual Truant hours met, Liaison will involve mediation staff to schedule family/school mediation

Process

- Mediation is held primarily at school
- Will mediate with student only at high school level (sometimes at middle school level)
- Mediator is neutral facilitator
- Goal is signed Student Absence Intervention Plan

Questions?
Observations?
Reflections?

Contact Information

Dr. Adonis Bolden

Assistant Principal

Hayes High School
289 Euclid Avenue
Delaware, Ohio 43015

Phone: 740-833-1013

Email: boldenad@delawarecityschools.net

Contact Information

April Nelson

Court Mediator

Delaware County Juvenile Court
145 N. Union Street
Delaware, Ohio 43015

Phone: 740-833-2610

Email: anelson@co.Delaware.oh.us

Thank you!

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Agreement to Mediate School Attendance

Student: _____ **School:** _____ **Grade:** _____

About mediation:

- Mediation is a chance to find ways to improve school attendance. The goal is to look for ways to have the student in school regularly.
- The mediator will help you come up with a workable attendance plan. The mediator will not take sides.
- Anything said during mediation is confidential except:
 - Threats of harm
 - Criminal activity
 - Someone hurting the student in any way.
- The goal is to come up with a plan to make school attendance better. The plan is written up in a Student Attendance Improvement Plan and signed by everybody. Everyone will get a copy of the signed plan and the school will keep the original. Once the Plan is signed, the terms may be shared with school staff and Court staff as needed.
- By signing below, you are agreeing to talk about school attendance.

Signature:

Role (Who you are):

Date:

Date Student Becomes Habitually Truant: _____

Date Parent Notified of Excessive Absences: _____

Date of Absence Intervention Plan: _____

Unexcused Hours Missed: _____ Total Hours Missed: _____

OUTCOME

Attendance Plan signed
 Attendance Plan not signed; discussion held
 Family/student declined to mediate
 Family/student did not appear for scheduled mediation
 Other: _____

Date prepared: _____

Mediator: _____

April Nelson

**DELAWARE CITY SCHOOLS/DELAWARE COUNTY JUVENILE COURT
Student Absence Intervention Plan**

Student: _____ **Grade:** _____

School: _____ **Mediator:** _____

Date Student Becomes Habitually Truant: _____

Date Parent Notified of Excessive Absences: _____

Date of Absence Intervention Plan: _____

Unexcused Hours Missed: _____ **Total Hours Missed:** _____

Our goal is to create an attendance plan that will help the school, the student, and the family work together to improve attendance. Working together as a team, we have identified the following barriers to regular attendance and strategies to improve attendance:

Barriers: _____

Strategies: _____

Participants:

Role:

Date:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Ohio law requires that schools must create an attendance plan for students who are "habitually truant." Under the law, if the student has refused to participate in or failed to make satisfactory progress on the intervention plan, the school will file a complaint in Juvenile Court not later than sixty-one days after the date the plan was implemented.