

# 42nd Annual InterCourt Conference



Session 1D: Using Mediation  
to Address Chronic  
Absenteeism and Promote  
School Attendance

March 12, 2026  
Hilton Columbus at  
Easton Town Center  
Columbus, OH

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## FACULTY BIOGRAPHIES

**LISA HICKMAN, Ph.D.**, is the Executive Director for the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD) as of August 19, 2019. She holds a Bachelor's, Masters and Ph.D. in Sociology.

For over 11 years Lisa was faculty in the Department of Sociology at Grand Valley State University (in Michigan), and additionally served as chair for the department for two years. She taught courses and conducted research in the areas of education, children and families.

Lisa moved back to Ohio for family reasons and began her work as the Research Specialist at the Ohio Criminal Sentencing, conducting research to help inform criminal justice policy in Ohio.

The transition to working as Executive Director for the Ohio Coalition is an honor and feels like coming back to her roots, what she is trained in and what she does well. She looks forward to providing support to the staff and parents so that the Coalition can continue to move forward in its mission.

**MARYA KOLMAN** is the Manager of the Dispute Resolution Section of the Supreme Court of Ohio. She was previously the Supervisor of Mediation Services for the Franklin County Domestic Relations and Juvenile Court. Prior to working for the court, she was an attorney and mediator in private practice. Marya is also an adjunct instructor in mediation and dispute resolution at both the Moritz College of Law and Capital University Law School. She frequently provides training programs for mediators, court personnel, attorneys and social workers on mediation and other alternative dispute resolution topics.

Marya is currently the president of the Board of Directors of the Association for Conflict Resolution. She is also a member of the Association for Family and Conciliation Courts, the American Bar Association and the Columbus Bar Association. Marya holds a law degree from Yale Law School and an undergraduate degree from the Pennsylvania State University.

**LORI L. REISINGER** has been a Judge with the Champaign County Court of Common Pleas, Domestic Relations-Juvenile-Probate Division (Family Court) since February 9, 2009. Champaign County's Family Court is only one of four of its kind in the State of Ohio. The Family Court Model was strongly promoted and supported by the late Chief Justice Thomas Moyer.

She graduated summa cum laude from Capital University Law School in 2000. She began her law career with Havens Willis LLC concentrating on civil litigation primarily in the area of real estate. In 2003 she switched her focus and became an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney in Champaign County where she was responsible for

all of Champaign County's juvenile matters as well as prosecuting adult felonies that involved domestic violence and/or child abuse both physical and sexual.

Prior to beginning her legal career, Judge Reisinger worked as a financial analyst for GE at their aircraft engine, medical systems, and superabrasives divisions. She is a 1986 summa cum laude graduate of Miami University.

She is a member of the Champaign County Bar Association, the Ohio State Bar Association, the Ohio Association of Juvenile Judges, the Ohio Association of Domestic Relations Judges (Trustee), the Ohio Association of Probate Judges, the Ohio Judicial Conference, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the American Judges Association, the Subcommittee on Family Law Reform Initiative, the Supreme Court of Ohio's Commission on Dispute Resolution (Chair – Ohio Supports Attendance), and the Miami Valley Juvenile Rehabilitation Center Board.

**MINDY YOCUM** is a staff attorney with the JusticeTech program at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, where she leads interdisciplinary student teams in developing technology-driven solutions to expand access to justice. She brings years of experience as a practicing attorney and founder of JusticeMobile, a nonprofit mobile legal clinic that serves underrepresented communities throughout Ohio. At JusticeTech, Mindy focuses on transforming legal processes, especially around eviction and truancy, by integrating user-centered design and innovative tech tools into real-world legal systems.

# Using Mediation to Address Chronic Absenteeism and Promote School Attendance

**Patrick Hickman**

*Ohio's Attendance Advisor  
Office of Whole Child Supports  
Department of Education and Workforce*

**Marya Kolman, Esq.**

*Manager, Dispute Resolution Section  
Supreme Court of Ohio*

**Hon. Lori Reisinger**

*Champaign County Family Court*

**Mindy Yocum, Esq.**

*Yocum Law Office*



# School Attendance Issues



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## Faculty:

Judge Lori Reisinger, Champaign County Family Court

Patrick Hickman, Associate Administrator and Ohio's Attendance Advisor, Office of Family Engagement and School Partnerships, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce

Marya Kolman, Manager, Dispute Resolution Section, Supreme Court of Ohio

Mindy Yocum, JusticeTech Program Attorney, Moritz College of Law



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# **School Attendance Issues Challenges for Juvenile Courts**



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# **Understanding Chronic Absenteeism**



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# What is Chronic Absence?

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or more of school for **any** reason.



Chronic absence is **different** from truancy (unexcused absences only) or average daily attendance (how many students show up to school each day).



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# Impact On Learning

Students who were never chronically absent were 3x more likely to be proficient in English Language Arts

Students who were never chronically absent were 3.9x more likely to be proficient in Math.



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# Absences Add Up!



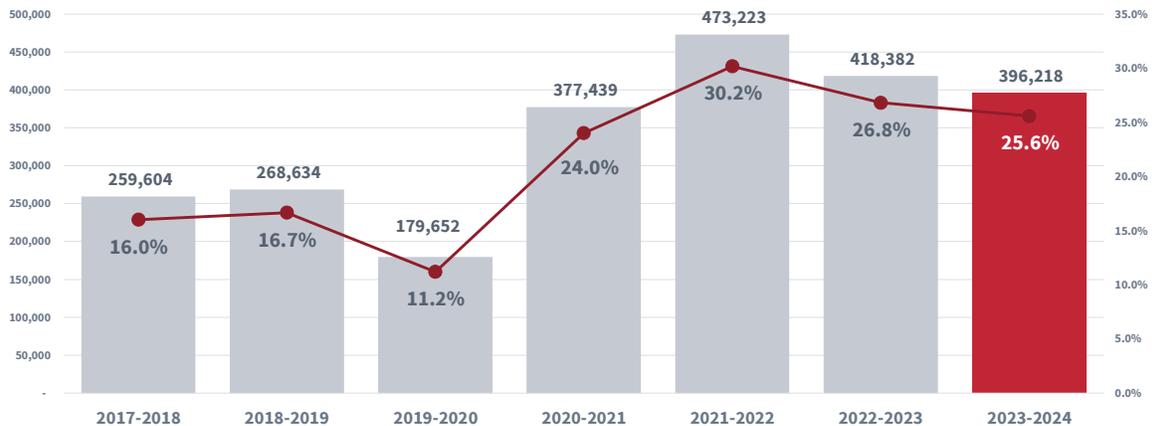
Missing just 2 or 3 days a month can lead to chronic absence.

10% of the school year = 18 days of absence

This translates to almost one month of missed learning



# Chronic Absence Statewide

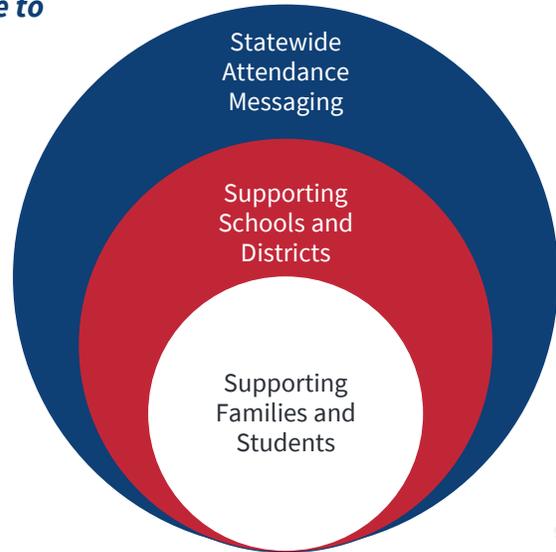


# Ohio's Response to the Problem

***Our Goal: Reduce statewide chronic absence to 12.8% by 2029***

## Supports Available:

- [Attendance Support Webpage](#)
- [Stay in the Game! Attendance Network](#)
- [Monthly Attendance Webinars](#)



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# Changing Our Mindset



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## What Is New In Ohio Law?

### September 28, 2025

- Notification requirements
- Complaint filing
  - [ORC 3321.16](#), [3321.19](#)

### August, 2026

- Board policy
- Absence intervention teams
  - [ORC 3321.191](#)



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# Reasons Students Are Absent

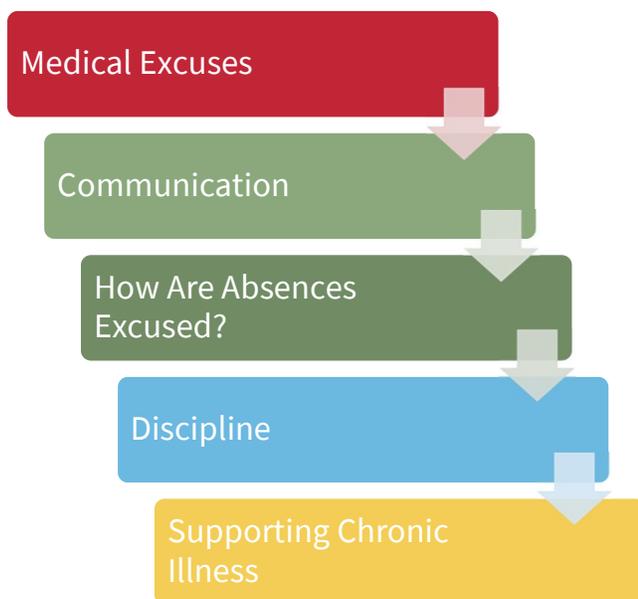
Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement	Misconceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chronic and acute illness</li> <li>• Family responsibilities or home situation</li> <li>• Trauma</li> <li>• Poor transportation</li> <li>• Housing and food insecurity</li> <li>• Lack of access to needed services</li> <li>• System involvement</li> <li>• Unpredictable schedules for learning</li> <li>• Lack of access to technology</li> <li>• Community violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggling academically and/or behaviorally</li> <li>• Unwelcoming school climate</li> <li>• Social and peer challenges</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Unfair disciplinary and suspension practices</li> <li>• Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations</li> <li>• Caregivers had negative educational experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of challenging, engaging instruction</li> <li>• Bored</li> <li>• No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)</li> <li>• Lack of enrichment opportunities</li> <li>• Lack of academic and behavioral support</li> <li>• Failure to earn credits</li> <li>• Need to work conflicts with being in high school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused</li> <li>• Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning</li> <li>• Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences</li> <li>• Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness</li> <li>• Attendance only matters in the older grades</li> <li>• Suspensions don't count as absence</li> </ul>



www.attendanceworks.org April 29, 2025



## Local Policies Influencing Attendance



# Next Steps and Resources



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## Professional Development

Ohio Department of Education & Workforce

**Teaching Attendance  
Curriculum  
for School Leaders**

Developed in partnership with Attendance Works



# Conversation Guides

## Conversation Guide: Talking with Students about Attendance, Grades 6-8

### Using this Guide

Attendance conversations provide a supportive space to explore student perspectives, identify barriers, and collaboratively develop practical solutions. Schools, districts, or any trusted adult can use the questions below to guide meetings with **students in grades 6-8** about attendance. The facilitator should use open-ended questions, allow time for reflection, and keep the conversation strengths-based and focused on actionable strategies.

**Example:** What are your thoughts about how important school is?

**Non-example:** Did you know you are required by law to go to school?

### STUDENT BACKGROUND

- Tell me about your favorite teacher/staff member. What do they do that makes them your favorite?
- Tell me about the school subjects and activities you enjoy most and what you enjoy about them.
- What skills or talents do you have?
- What are your hobbies?
- How do you typically spend your time when you're not at school?
- What are your goals for \_\_\_\_\_?
  - Facilitators can personalize this question by filling in the blank with a topic that is meaningful/appropriate for the student (e.g., "this school year," "your future career," or "after graduation").

### STUDENT SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- How much do your friends or classmates help you get through the school day or encourage you to come to school?
- What do the adults at home do to help you get to school every day?
- How do you feel about your teachers?
- If you could change one thing about school, what would it be? How would this make your time at school better?
- What is one word you would use to describe your feelings about our school?
- What times of the school day or classes feel more difficult for you?

### ATTENDANCE CHALLENGES

- When you think about the days you've missed school, what is usually going on?



# Attendance Calendar

## Fall/Winter (November-February)

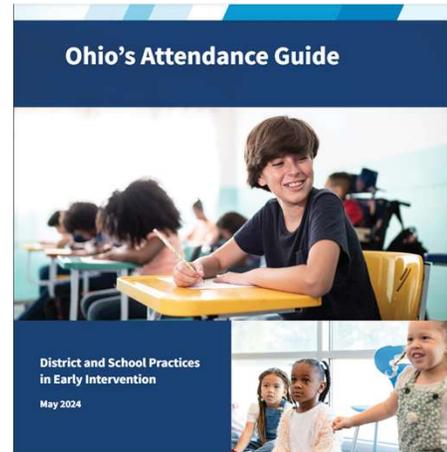
- Analyze attendance trends to identify days with high absenteeism (e.g. days before or after holidays)
- Conduct outreach through positive letters or calls to families, emphasizing partnership to address attendance concerns
- Communicate with families about the importance of attendance around holidays, vacations, winter break, hunting season, tournaments, etc.
- Identify students who are moderately chronically absent (missing 10-19% or 12-24 hours) and not connected to a caring adult
- Use data to prioritize connections for student groups with high levels of absenteeism and assign mentors
- Share positive messaging with families when students return from vacation
- Connect students with chronic absence to expanded learning opportunities



# Ohio's Attendance Guide

## Areas for District Team Inquiry

- Has our team mapped community-based resources that promote attendance and engagement by school?
- Do our community partners align their work with multi-tiered attendance and engagement strategies?
- Does our team have mechanisms to identify needs from school leaders that require the assistance of community partners?
- Is there a clear process for school teams to connect to external partners?



# QUESTIONS?

EDUCATION.OHIO.GOV

Patrick Hickman

Ohio's Attendance Advisor

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## School Attendance Mediation

- Opens communication in a safe and confidential environment
- Neutral third-party (mediator) facilitates conversation
- Models respectful, non-judgmental and honest communication
- Concerns and interests can be explained and addressed efficiently and productively

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## School Attendance Mediation

Purpose – Address the student's absences in a supportive, non-judgmental, and non-punitive way.



**MEDIATOR:**  
Neutral third party who conducts the process.



**OTHER PARTICIPANTS:**  
School Personnel: Teacher, counselor, administrator, or other  
Student parent or custodian  
Student (middle/high school students)  
Others by agreement

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## School Attendance Mediation Goals

- Improve attendance
- Establish importance and necessity of attendance
- Minimize harmful effects of absenteeism
- Increase likelihood of student's educational success
- Identify and address root causes of absenteeism and barriers to school attendance
- Build family – school partnership and communication

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## School Attendance Mediation

Program determines timing – wide variety of options

- Anytime when school is concerned about student's absences or tardiness or poor communication between school and family
- When a student meets a threshold number of hours set by school
- May be based on chronic absence hours even if some absences are excused
- When school has worked with family and absences continue
- After court complaint filed as diversion process prior to hearing
- After student is adjudicated truant or parents found guilty of educational neglect

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# School Attendance Mediation

## Earlier is Especially Effective

- Mediation is especially effective when pattern of absences is just beginning – before or when chronic absence threshold hours are met, even if some absences are medically excused.
- Elementary school mediations are often successful because they address issues before students develop habit of regular absences.

## Later Can Still be Effective

- Attendance often improves anytime barriers are uncovered and removed.
- Middle school and high school students frequently improve attendance when their concerns are addressed.

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# School Attendance Mediation Process

-  Mediator welcomes participants and explains the process.
-  Mediator invites school representative to provide information on the absences.
-  Mediator invites parents and student (middle/high school) to discuss absences and challenges they are having with school attendance.
-  Participants discuss possible ways to assist family and student to help improve attendance.
-  Mediator writes a short agreement for all to sign.
-  If mediation is the absence intervention meeting (AIP), agreement is written as AIP.

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## Confidentiality and Privilege

The Uniform Mediation Act (R.C. Chapter 2710) applies to school attendance mediations.

- Mediation Communications are privileged and cannot be disclosed in court proceedings unless an exception applies.
- Mediator must also maintain general confidentiality.

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## Confidentiality and Privilege

Exceptions to privilege and confidentiality

- Written agreement signed by the participants
- A signed written agreement reached in school attendance mediation can be provided to court if truancy charges are filed
- Threats of harm to self or others
- Child and elder abuse allegations
- Information about felony crimes
- Mandatory reporting obligations

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## Pilot Project

Collaboration between Ohio Supreme Court Commission on Dispute Resolution, OSU Moritz Law School JusticeTech program, Champaign County Family Court, and Urbana School District.

Goal - to develop a program to help reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy in rural counties that have limited financial resources and no mediation programs or mediators.

One of Ohio Supreme Court's initiatives to promote access to justice in rural counties.

Champaign County agreed to be pilot project site.



- INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM BRIDGING LAW AND COMPUTER SCIENCE.

- FOCUS ON ETHICAL AI AND EXPANDING ACCESS TO JUSTICE.

- BUILDING PRACTICAL, COMMUNITY DRIVEN JUSTICE SOLUTIONS AT OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.



## Solution

Executable document that helps to streamline attendance/contact data of truant students.

Yearly Absence Summary 40 or More Hours						
URBANA ELEMENTARY						2024-2025
John Doe #11924		Daily	Consecutive	Monthly	Thresholds	
Age: 8		Calendar: Elementary A				Grade: 02
MR Teacher: JACOBS, MRS. M.		S - Resolved Absending Full Time				ACTIVE RES: Active % FS - 100
School Year	Encused	Unexcused	Medical Exc.	Suspension	Total Hours	Total Abs.
2024-2025	42.00	0.00	31.17	0.00	628.00	154.83
Jane Smith #11937						
Age: 12		Calendar: Elementary B				Grade: 05
MR Teacher: HOULTON, MR. R.		S - Resolved Absending Full Time				ACTIVE RES: Active % FS - 100
School Year	Encused	Unexcused	Medical Exc.	Suspension	Total Hours	Total Abs.
2024-2025	0.00	40.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	40.00

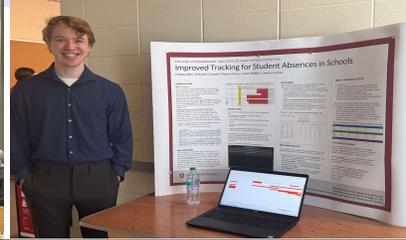
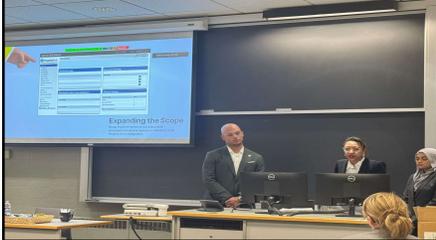
ProgressBook PDF

Truancy 1 Tool											
Truancy	Page	Truancy	Age	Grade	Encused	Unexcused	Medical	Suspension	Total	Hours	Abs.
1	John	Smith	7	02	42.00	0.00	31.17	0.00	628.00	154.83	42.00
2	Jane	Smith	12	05	0.00	40.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	40.00	0.00
3	Michael	Johnson	10	03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
4	Emily	Davis	7	01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
5	David	Brown	9	01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
6	Sarah	Wilson	11	04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
7	James	Taylor	10	05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
8	Olivia	Martinez	8	02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
9	Christopher	Lee	7	01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
10	Emilia	Gonzalez	13	05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
11	Benjamin	Harris	10	03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
12	Sophia	Rodriguez	9	02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00

Truancy 1 Tool

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
ID	Last Name	First Name	Age	Grade	Custodian Address	Successes	Encused 4 Week	Unexcused 4 Week	Total Abs 4 Week	Successes	Total Abs 11W
119390	Doe	John	8	02		0.00	42.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
110157	Smith	Jane	12	05		0.00	0.00	40.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
117031	Johnson	Michael	10	03		0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
118245	Davis	Emily	7	01		0.00	0.00	0.00	634.00	0.00	0.00
118079	Brown	David	9	01		0.00	0.00	0.00	600.00	0.00	0.00
119796	Wilson	Sarah	11	04		0.00	0.00	0.00	628.00	0.00	0.00
120451	Taylor	James	10	05		0.00	0.00	0.00	630.00	0.00	0.00
121874	Martinez	Olivia	8	02		0.00	0.00	0.00	635.00	0.00	0.00
122963	Lee	Christopher	7	01		0.00	0.00	0.00	610.00	0.00	0.00
123378	Gonzalez	Emilia	13	05		0.00	0.00	0.00	625.00	0.00	0.00
124309	Harris	Benjamin	10	03		0.00	0.00	0.00	640.00	0.00	0.00
125074	Rodriguez	Sophia	9	02		0.00	0.00	0.00	645.00	0.00	0.00

Streamlined Excel Sheet



## Virtual Resource Guide

FAQ Welcome Page Resources Chat

## Welcome to the Virtual Resource Guide for Urbana!

This website serves as a Virtual Resource Guide for children facing truancy, offering tailored support for challenges. Users navigate through a decision tree to find relevant resources quickly based on their specific needs.



## Attendance Matters

## Demo of Second Bell

## Demo of Urbana Resource Guide



# Pilot Project

**School and court collaboration**

**Mediators provided by pilot project**

**Mediations on Zoom facilitate parent attendance**

**Addressed causes of absences**

**Attendance improved for many students whose parents participated in mediation**



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# Pilot Project

**First year one school – Urbana Elementary**

**Second year added Urbana Junior High**

**Also added second court and school district – Marion Family Court and Grant Middle School in Marion Ohio**



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## School and Court Collaboration

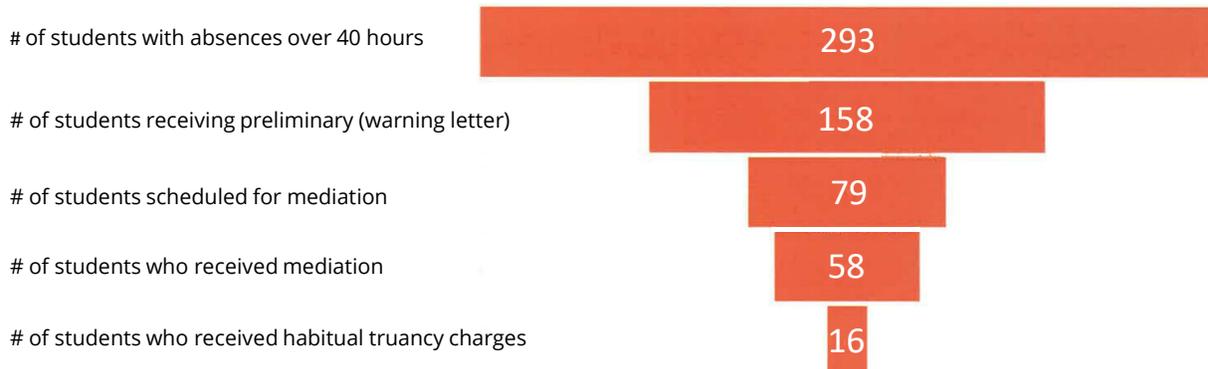
Effective programs are usually court and school collaborations.

- Court provides mediators and program administration.
- School selects cases to be mediated.
- Notices often sent on court letterhead.
- Mediations held at school or virtually. Parent participation is much higher when mediations are held virtually.

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## Snapshot Data Year One



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## Benefits from Pilot Project

- School learned about reasons for absences such as:
  - Child or parent illness
  - Child afraid of becoming ill in school
  - Death in the family
  - Parent work schedule conflicts
  - No transportation
  - Homelessness / temporary housing

## Benefits from Pilot Project

- Parent learned about resources
  - Daycare programs
  - Emergency transportation
- Parent and school made plans to improve child's attendance
  - In school counseling or support
  - School nurse support

## Benefits

- Establishes a collaborative approach to school attendance. Not school vs. student or family.
- Not judgmental or punitive.
- Opens lines of communication - school and family.
- Opportunity for all to express concerns and interests.
- All work together to develop plan to improve student's school attendance.

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## After Mediation

- School monitors attendance.
- Second mediation sessions are possible.
- Legal process proceeds if absences continue.
- Mediation does not delay process or expand statutory timelines.

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## What If Mediation is Not an Option for your Court?

- How can you make your Court's Diversion Program More Effective?
  - Reach out to community resource partners
  - Use Dept. Education and Workplace Conversation Guides
  - Develop your own conversation guides of questions that encourage helpful discussion
  - Other?

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## Small Group Discussions

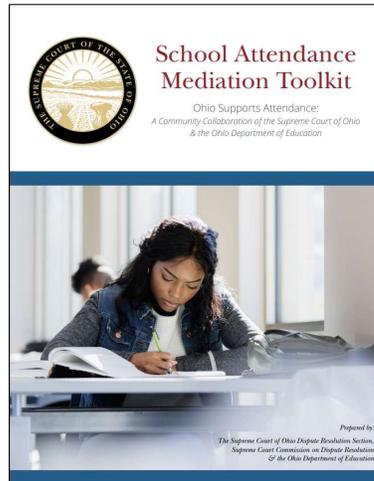
- What ideas do you have to improve school attendance programs in your county?
- What would make your diversion programs more effective?
- What would you like to try?

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# Resources



# Contact Information

Judge Lori Reisinger  
Champaign County Family Court  
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