



NCSE | National Center for School Engagement

Washington State's Models for Change Truancy Interventions: A Cost-Benefit Analysis

National Center for School Engagement

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**An initiative of The Partnership for Families & Children
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In Washington State, several judicial and school district collaborations have developed innovative programs to respond to unexcused absences in more effective and less costly ways. These programs, which operate in four judicial districts covering five counties, are part of the Models for Change Initiative funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.¹ The districts are Benton-Franklin Counties combined, Clark County, King County and Spokane County. The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), an initiative of the Partnership for Families & Children, was contracted by the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ), supported by a grant from the Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice, to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of these initiatives as compared to the more traditional court practices they supplement. This report presents the results of that analysis.

NCSE is grateful for the assistance of many individuals in various offices and for their assistance in collecting the data used in this report. Of particular mention are Darryl Banks, Juvenile Administrator (Interim) of Benton-Franklin Counties' Juvenile Justice Center, Justice Bobbe Bridge, ret., Founding President and CEO of The Center for Children and Youth Justice; Bonnie Bush, Juvenile Court Administrator of Spokane County; Leila Curtis, Deputy Prosecuting Attorney of the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office; Sue Furth, Data Quality Training Coordinator of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Hannah Gold, Project Coordinator of The Center for Children and Youth Justice; Leesa Manion, Chief of Staff of King County Prosecuting Attorney Office; Jodi Martin, Project Coordinator of Clark County Juvenile Court; Sharon Paradis, Administrator of Benton-Franklin Counties' Juvenile Justice Center (retired); Jan Solomon, At-Risk Youth Programs Manager of King County Department of Youth Services; and others who assisted behind the scenes.

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the economic impact of the truancy interventions being used among court-referred students in four Washington State sites. The four judicial districts that serve these areas received funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change Initiative (MfC). In general, the funded programs were designed to provide alternatives to traditionally punitive court approaches. The model programs include needs assessments, informational workshops, mentoring, academic support, and parent engagement efforts.¹ Each of these judicial districts has developed a unique program, and the goal of this study was not to compare those programs to each other, but to document the economic impact of the tremendous costs associated with school failure as indicated by high school dropout. The most recent data possible were solicited from each district, generally from the 2009/10 and 2010/11 school years.

Major Findings from the Study

The Models for Change truancy interventions take a supportive, problem-solving approach to truancy reduction – an approach that has been shown to be more effective in improving attendance than traditional court practices. This study has shown that given the enormous costs to society of high school dropout, investing in these interventions will pay off many times over.

Preliminary data from Clark, King and Spokane suggest that these interventions are likely to be much more effective in achieving high school graduation than the traditional court truancy practices typically used in the state. Statewide, ninth grade students who received court filings for truancy graduated at a rate of only 15%. This study has assumed that successful program participants from the model programs will graduate at a rate of 57%, which is the rate at which the related research study described later in this report, found that 9th graders who receive special interventions will graduate. The table below shows the differences in anticipated graduation rates in the four sites as compared to what we might have expected in the absence of the model program interventions.

¹ Court sanctions, including juvenile detention or ankle monitoring, remain a possibility for non-compliant youth and families. RCW 28A.225.090(2)

| Graduation Rate Differentials Given the Presence of the Model Programs (MfC) Compared to Expected Rates with No Model Interventions | | | | |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Site | % Graduation Anticipated in a Traditional Court Approach | % Graduation Anticipated Given MfC Programming | Difference | |
| | | | % Increased Graduation | Additional Graduations Expected |
| Benton-Franklin | ----- | ----- | 14.9% | 111 |
| Clark | 15% | 29.5% | 14.5% | 81 |
| King | 15% | 24% | 9% | 147 |
| Spokane | 15% | 69.7% | 21.2% | 71 |

Estimates of the present value in 2005 and 2007 respectively estimate that the cost of each high school dropout ranges from \$209,100 (Levin et al, 2007) to \$292,575 (Sum, et.al, 2009). Based on these low and high estimates, the next table summarizes the expected costs averted and returns on dollars spent in each of the four sites. Given the proportions of students whose attendance improved enough to be counted successful by program staff, the increased graduation rates that are likely to result from those successes, and the costs that will be averted by each of those graduations, these programs are all calculated to be highly cost-effective. Costs averted sum to tens of millions of dollars, even using the lower estimate of the cost of high school dropout. Projected returns to the dollar range from a low of \$34 in King County to a high of \$130 in Spokane.

| Low and High Estimates of Costs Averted and Returns to the Dollar by Site | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Site | Low Estimate of the Cost of Dropout (\$209,100) | | High Estimate of the Cost of Dropout (\$292,575) | |
| | Costs Averted (Millions) | Return on the Dollar | Costs Averted (Million) | Return on the Dollar |
| Benton-Franklin | \$22.6 | \$45 | \$31.9 | \$64 |
| Clark | \$16.7 | \$60 | \$23.4 | \$84 |
| King | \$29.9 | \$34 | \$42.1 | \$47 |
| Spokane | \$74.7 | \$130 | \$104.8 | \$183 |

Preliminary outcome studies suggest that these interventions are likely to be much more effective in encouraging high school graduation than the court practices typically used in the rest of the state.

Report of the Cost Benefit Study

Context of the Innovations

In 1993 the parents of a 13-year-old girl named Rebecca Hedman sought assistance from the court for their daughter, whom they claimed was beyond their control. They were told the court could not intervene unless the girl had committed a crime. Shortly thereafter, Becca was murdered while a runaway and truant from school. In the aftermath of the tragedy, her parents mobilized statewide attention on the issue of school attendance and prompted passage of a new state truancy law, commonly called the Becca Bill, in 1996.² The bill requires that schools and courts take the following actions in response to unexcused absences from school:³

School/District Requirements

- *After one unexcused absence in a month, the school is required to inform the parent in writing or by phone.*
- *After two unexcused absences, the school is required to initiate a parent conference to improve the student's attendance.*
- *After five unexcused absences in a month, the parent and school must enter a contract to improve the student's attendance. Or, the case can be referred to a Community Truancy Board.*
- *After seven unexcused absences in a month, or ten unexcused absences in an academic year, the school district [must] file truancy petitions with the juvenile court.*
- *If the student is not in compliance with a court order resulting from a tuition petition, the school is required to file a contempt motion.*

School districts, through their elected school boards, typically adopt policies and procedures relative to these requirements that are coordinated with local juvenile courts. Guidelines for school board policies are developed through the Washington State School Director's Association, wherein each board makes adjustments to these guidelines based on local priorities and resources.

Each of Washington's school districts addresses the definition of unexcused absences and interventions in a manner consistent with school board policies [and OSPI's definition]. Similarly, local juvenile courts address the petition process in a manner consistent with local county juvenile justice priorities and resources. As a result of these local variations, there are significant differences in how each community approaches and resolves the issue of truancy in Washington State.

As indicated by the underlined sentence in the box above, the law allows local courts and school districts to develop their own methods of responding to truancy at each of the indicated levels. The interventions studied here were developed under this provision.

² Murakami, Kery. (6/23/1995). "Would 'Becca Bill' Have Saved Becca? -- Named For Runaway Girl Who Was Murdered, New Law Gives Parents More Control Over Kids," Seattle Times. <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19950623&slug=2127830>, accessed 2/5/2013.

³ <http://www.k12.wa.us/SafetyCenter/Truancy/default.aspx>, State of Washington, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, accessed 2/5/2013.

Context of Costs and Benefits

In order to assess the net benefit of these programs, the study has taken the following steps.

1. Collect and sum costs of court and program interventions in the four sites.
2. Review the literature to select low and high estimates of the cost of high school dropout.
3. Assess various sources of outcome data to estimate probabilities of high school graduation.
4. Calculate estimated differentials in graduation rates among MfC program involved youth and other court involved youth, savings based on low and high estimates of dropout costs, and estimated returns on the dollar given the cost savings.

Table A shows results of the programmatic cost analysis. In all but Spokane County, judicial system participants were unable to separate costs of regular truancy court operation from the costs of their significant involvement in the MfC initiative. Therefore, in Benton-Franklin, Clark and King Counties the costs shown below include the costs of serving all truant students referred to court regardless of whether those students participated in the MfC initiative. Summed costs per student ranged from \$337 in Spokane, which also sent the smallest percentage of court-referred students to the MfC intervention, to \$674 in Benton-Franklin, which sent the largest percentage of students to the pilot intervention. It is important to keep in mind that the introduction of the MfC initiatives changed the way the court conducts its traditional practices. Juvenile Probation Counselors funded by the juvenile court are going about their jobs differently, and the added success of the program means that fewer cases are progressing to more serious – and more expensive – court interventions, juvenile detention included.

| A: Number of Students Served, and Total and Average Program Costs by Site | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Site | Number of Students Served | | Total Program Costs | Program Cost per Student Served |
| | Total | By the MfC Intervention | | |
| Benton-Franklin | 742 | 640 | \$500,320 | \$674 |
| Clark | 559 | 415 | \$277,267 | \$496 |
| King | 1,601 | 743 | \$887,209 | \$554 |
| Spokane | 1,699 | 337 | \$573,208 | \$337 |
| Court only | 1,699 | | \$374,413 | \$220 |
| CTB Only | 337 | | \$198,795 | \$590 |

The Cost of a High School Dropout

The cost of a high school dropout can be thought of in one of two basic ways: public or taxpayer costs alone, or total societal costs. Public costs include 1) the lifetime loss of income, sales and property tax revenue as a result of lower earnings; 2) increased use of social services such as TANF and WIC; 3) increased public health care use; and 4) increased criminal justice expenditures. Societal costs include all of those and add a 5th category: the total lifetime income lost by the individual dropout. Societal costs are therefore much greater than public costs.⁴ For purposes of this study, we consider only the cost of high school dropout that is passed on to the public, although the resulting lower personal income should be of great concern to the dropout. Therefore, this study compares the public cost of high school dropout to the costs of the four model truancy reduction programs.

A child who drops out of high school in 2013 will contribute less and cost more not just in 2013, but in every subsequent year of his or her life. In effect, society will pay in installments. So how can we think about the true cost of a dropout if so much of our payment will be made later? We might reasonably question the wisdom of paying for a dropout prevention program *now* when we can postpone paying the bulk of dropout costs for many years. Economists routinely apply ‘discount rates’ to future costs in order to calculate their current value. The resulting figure lets us know how much the costs that will be accrued in the decades to come would mean to us right now, if we needed to pay them all today.⁵ From here on, when we refer to the cost of a high school dropout, we mean the *current value* of a dropout; if we summed the projected cost in every future year, the figure would be several times larger.

Several recent studies have calculated the average cost of a high school dropout. Belfield, Levin and Rosen calculate the cost of “opportunity youth,” meaning young people who have already dropped out of school *and* are unemployed.⁶ They estimate the public cost of each 16-year-old opportunity youth to be \$258,240. However, the young people participating in the Models for Change truancy reduction programs do not meet the definition of opportunity youth. They are still enrolled in school, and even those who would drop out in the absence of any effective intervention might find a spot in the labor force. Therefore, the “opportunity youth” estimate would be too high. Using

⁴ A related study of potential interest to readers of this report concluded that a typical day of learning achieved as part of a K-12 education yields an additional \$319 in income to the student, some of which would revert to the government in taxes paid. See Washington State Institute for Public Policy, “The Economic Value of Learning Time in K–12 Schools: A Summary of Research Evidence and an Economic Analysis” (April 2011). That study did not analyze welfare, criminal justice or health care costs averted as a result of the average day of education.

⁵ For those unaccustomed to the terms ‘current dollars’ and ‘discount rates,’ one way to understand the concept is to think about buying a home. Mortgage interest is the conceptual inverse of a discount rate. When purchasing a home, one can either pay a smaller amount but pay it now, or end up paying a much larger amount over the next 30 years. The interest rate that both the bank and the homebuyer are willing to agree upon is equal to the time value of the money. In fact, home interest rates closely align with the discount rates chosen by economists.

⁶ Belfield, Clive R., Henry M. Levin, and Rachel Rosen. “The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth.” Corporation for National and Community Service. Washington D.C. (January 2012).

a different methodology, Levin et al arrive at a more conservative figure.⁷ They estimate the average lifetime tax cost to be \$139,100; the health care cost to be \$40,500; the criminal justice cost to be \$26,600; and the social welfare cost to be \$3,000. The total estimated cost of each high school dropout sums to \$209,100. In a third study, Sum, Khatiwada and McLaughlin calculated the net contribution of adults aged 18 to 64 in 2007 by educational level.⁸ They started with annual federal, state and local taxes paid, and subtracted cash and in-kind transfers and incarceration costs. According to their calculations, each high school dropout costs more than he/she contributes for a net lifetime fiscal impact of -\$5,191, meaning they cost society \$5,191. Each high school graduate or GED earner contributes a net of \$287,384. The difference between the two is the total foregone societal benefit of a high school graduate: \$287,384 – (-\$5,191) = \$292,575. This study uses the latter figures - \$209,100 and \$292,575 - as low and high estimates of the cost of high school dropout as shown in Table 1.

| Table 1: Cost of a High School Dropout Estimates Used in this Study | | |
|---|-----------|-------------------|
| Estimate | Amount | Citation |
| Low | \$209,100 | Levin et al, 2007 |
| High | \$292,575 | McLaughlin, 2009 |

Both of these measures underestimate the cumulative cost of high school dropout in ways that are important to acknowledge, though difficult to quantify. Neither measure takes into consideration the intergenerational costs of dropping out, meaning the additional cost to society that will

eventually be incurred by the children of today’s dropouts – children who will be more likely to be raised in poverty than those of high school and college graduates, including a higher risk that they too will drop out. Nor does either measure include the additional taxes that would be paid by third parties who would benefit economically from the additional spending of which high school graduates would be capable. Given the high marginal propensity to consume among lower-income individuals, the multiplied effect of their spending would be substantial.

Although the additional income that would be earned by each additional graduate is not included as a basis for this analysis, a quick look at the total figure makes a compelling case for dropout prevention. The Alliance for Excellent Education estimated the total additional income that would be earned if every student who entered high school in the fall of 2007 had graduated on time in the spring of 2011, by state and for the nation as a whole.⁹ Washington State graduated 65.6% of its 2007/08 9th grade class in 2011, while 30,592 members of that cohort failed to graduate. Those 30,592 dropouts would have earned additional lifetime income of more than \$4.8 *billion* dollars. In the absence of interstate mobility, the bulk of that money would have been spent (and re-spent) in Washington State.

⁷ Levin, Henry, et al. “The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America’s Children.” Teachers College, Columbia University. New York. (January 2007).

⁸ Sum, Andrew, Ishwar Khatiwada, and Joseph McLaughlin. "The Consequences of Dropping out of High School: Joblessness and Jailing for High School Dropouts and the High Cost for Taxpayers." Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University. Boston. (October 2009). This article is also interesting for its analysis of teen parenting by educational attainment.

⁹ Alliance for Excellent Education Issue Brief. “The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools. Washington, D. C. (November 2011).

Program Descriptions

Washington State Models for Change has produced a concise program description guide that has been reproduced with permission in Appendix A. In general, the programs are designed to provide alternatives to traditionally punitive court approaches. They include needs assessments, informational workshops, mentoring, academic support, and parent engagement efforts. Court sanctions, including juvenile detention and ankle monitoring, remain a possibility under the statute for non-compliant youth and families.

Program Costs and Outcomes by District

Each of the districts in question has developed a unique program, and the goal of this study is not to compare those programs to each other, but to the tremendous costs associated with school failure as indicated by high school dropout. The most recent data possible were solicited from each district, generally from the 2009/10 and 2010/11 school years. Ideally, this study would have disaggregated the costs and benefits of traditional court interventions and compared them to the costs and benefits of the MfC interventions. This was not possible for two reasons. First, there are fixed costs associated with providing an intervention, whether traditional court or MfC. To leverage resources, agencies share these costs across all truancy interventions, making it difficult to accurately separate costs. Second, it would not actually make sense to compare the cost of the MfC interventions to the cost of the court practices used alongside them. That is because the introduction of the MfC interventions has changed the way the court conducts its traditional practices. Juvenile Probation Counselors funded by the juvenile court are going about their jobs differently, doing most of their work under the auspices of the MfC interventions, and the added success of the program means that fewer cases are progressing to more serious – and more expensive – court interventions, juvenile detention included.

Benton-Franklin Counties Costs

| Table 2: Number of Truancy Cases in Benton-Franklin Counties During the 2009/10 School Year | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Total new truancy cases | | 742 |
| | Signed agreed orders to attend school | 501 |
| | Had initial court hearings | 241 |

Benton and Franklin Counties are combined in a single judicial district, so the truancy reduction program serves students in both counties. Table 2 shows that in the 2009/10 school year, schools filed 742 new truancy cases. Students and families are given the choice of signing what is called an agreed order to attend school or having a court hearing, generally to dispute the charge. The agreed order means they agree the student's attendance has been

problematic and also agree the student will attend school regularly thereafter. Of the 742 students, 501 signed the agreed order and 241 chose a court hearing.

Table 3 lists the interventions taken on behalf of Benton-Franklin students in 2009/10. Students are most frequently referred to the MfC Community Truancy Boards (640) and much less often required to serve on a work crew¹⁰ (113). These 113 youths served a total of 272 days on a work crew, or an average of 2.4 days each. Only nine students were eventually sentenced to juvenile detention following a contempt hearing, for a total of 12 days.¹¹ Note that the number of new truancy cases (742) and the number of contempt hearings (621) are not directly comparable. Successful cases are closed at the end of the school year, while only the unsuccessful cases are carried over.¹² This means that a portion of the 621 contempt cases held during the 2009/10 school year originated during the 2008/09 school year or even earlier. This fact is important for this analysis because it means we cannot calculate the proportion of successful versus unsuccessful cases using these numbers.

Table 3 also lists the costs associated with each of the interventions. The cost of the truancy boards and the court hearings cannot be disaggregated because funds come from a single pot. Community Truancy Boards (CTBs) are staffed in part by volunteers, so costs that might be incurred by entities other than the court and Prosecuting Attorney's Office are mitigated. The total cost of court interventions, staffing, supplies and utilities amounts to \$477,520, the bulk of which is the staffing cost. The \$275,400 intervention staffing includes one full-time support person, one full-time and four half-time juvenile probation officers, and a counselor on contract. The probation officers provide support to the school districts, talk with youth and families before truancy petitions are filed, problem solve with the school and families, screen petitions from the school, facilitate truancy boards and attend court with the student and school. The figure also includes the cost of a Truancy Clinic that is held for two hours after each court date for students that receive a first contempt order, and a four-hour Truancy Assessment Skills Class that is held after each court date for students that receive a second or subsequent contempt order. Juvenile detention costs \$200 a day, compared to work crew that costs just over one-third as much at \$75 a day. Summing all costs yields a total amount of \$500,320 for the year.

The rightmost column in Table 3, Average Cost Per Truant Student, indicates the amount per student spent on that intervention given the particular mix of interventions used among all 742 students. In other words, given the rates at which students were referred to truancy boards, work crew, and detention, and the rate at which they recidivated and required contempt hearings, Benton and Franklin Counties spent an average of \$674 for each of the 742 students.

¹⁰ Work crew is "a program of partial confinement consisting of civic improvement tasks for the benefit of the community." RCW 9.94A.030

¹¹ Contempt hearings are held when students do not obey a court order or an agreed order to attend school.

¹² The practice of carrying unsuccessful cases over to the new school year is a change that was initiated as part of the reform. Previously, all cases, successful or not, had been closed at the end of the school year leaving students to accumulate more unexcused absences in the fall before triggering the court process and starting from the beginning. Carrying cases over leaves students and families who may be inclined to miss school less opportunity for school failure.

Table 3: Truancy Interventions and Costs in Benton and Franklin Counties During the 2009-2010 School Year

| | | Students Served | Amount of Service | Cost per unit of service | Total Cost | Average Cost Per Student |
|---------------------|--|------------------------|--------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Intervention | | | | | | |
| | Referred to Truancy Boards | 640 | | Total costs: Staffing interventions \$275,400 | | \$644 (N=742) |
| | Initial Hearings | 241 | | Court staff \$77,100 | | |
| | Contempt Hearings (some carried over from past years) | 621 | | PAO Staff \$75,020 | | |
| | | | | Supplies & utilities, etc. \$50,000 | | |
| | | | | Grand total | \$477,520 | |
| | Work Crew | 113 | 272 days | \$75 | \$20,400 | \$180 |
| | Detention | 9 | 12 days | \$200 | \$2,400 | \$266 |
| Total | | 742 | | | \$500,320 | \$674 |

Benton-Franklin Counties spent an average of \$674 on interventions for each of 742 students.

Outcomes

Benton-Franklin did not collect outcome data for 2009-2010 school year. Recognizing the importance of tracking their students' education outcomes, Benton Franklin now collects data on all participants.

Clark County

Costs

Tables 4 and 5 outline truancy practices and costs in Clark County. The truancy process begins when the district files a truancy petition. During the 2011/12 school year 559 truancy petitions were filed. The majority of youth and their parents are invited to attend a Truancy Workshop in lieu of requiring a court appearance. The majority of invitees choose to do so. In 2011/12, 415 students were invited to a Workshop, and 263 (63%) attended (Table 3). Whether the student attends the Workshop or not, the truancy petition is stayed for up to 12 months. If the youth has unexcused absences after the stay is signed, he/she is referred to the Truancy Project for case management services provided by Truancy Specialists. Youth who continue to have absences while working with the Specialists are then referred to the Truancy Board. Of the original 415 invited to the Workshop, 21 students were referred to the Truancy Board. If youth make no progress within the 12-month period, they are referred back to the school district with

a negative exit from the program. The school district and court then move forward with the truancy petition.

Table 4 shows that during the 2011/12 school year, the MfC interventions cost a total of \$178,357. We know that 415 students were referred to the Workshop and that 153 students – 37% – improved their attendance to such an extent that they were *not* referred to the Clark County Truancy Project (415-262=153), but we do not know if every improved student attended the Workshop or not. Some students may have made the effort to improve simply because the Workshop invitation made them, or their parents, realize they were heading for legal difficulties. If we consider that every student invited to the Workshop was in some way served by the MfC intervention, regardless of whether they attended the Workshop or not, the average expenditure per student is \$430 (178,357 / 415 = 430).

| Table 4: Models for Change Truancy Interventions and Costs in Clark County During the 2011-12 School Year | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| | Students Served | Amount of Service | Cost of Service | Average Cost per Student |
| Intervention | | | | |
| Truancy Workshop | 415 invited 263 attended | 35 @ 1.5 hours each | MfC \$144,031 8 School Districts \$32,200 | \$430 (N=415) |
| Referrals to CC Truancy Project | 262 | | School District Truancy Specialists \$2,126 | |
| Truancy Board | 21 | 11 hours total* | Total = \$178,357 | |
| Total | 415 | | \$178,357 | \$430 |

* Length of CTB meetings was unavailable but was estimated to be equal to the length of the Spokane CTB meetings at just over 30 minutes per student.

Table 5 shows the traditional juvenile justice interventions and costs used in Clark County where 559 new truancy petitions were filed during the 2011/12 school year. Note that 144 of the students who received a truancy petition were not referred to the Truancy Workshop to begin the MfC process (559 - 415 = 144). Clark County spent only \$98,910 on their traditional practices, for an average expenditure of just \$177 on each of the 559 students. Only two cases proceeded to contempt hearings during the school year. Remember, though, that court expenditures on these practices would likely have been much greater in the absence of the MfC interventions.¹³

¹³ Note: Twenty-six students received a mentor through the court, but those mentors were volunteers who accepted no pay. Since one purpose of this study is to assess whether these interventions are worth expanding to other Washington State counties, it is important to consider the possibility that in other locations mentors might need to be paid.

Table 5: Traditional Court-Related Truancy Interventions and Costs in Clark County During the 2011-12 School Year

| | Students Served | Amount of Service | Cost of Service | Average Cost per Student |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Intervention | | | | |
| Court | | | | |
| Petitions | 559 | | Probation Counselor \$94,800 Legal secretary \$300 Clerk's Office \$3,500 Total = \$98,600 | \$176 (N=559) |
| Stays of Proceedings | 363 | | | |
| Orders of Intervention | 52 | | | |
| Contempt Hearings | 2 | | | |
| Orders of Contempt | 1 | | | |
| Truancy Workshop | 263 | | | |
| Truancy Court Supervision (Mentoring) | 26 | | \$0 (volunteer mentors) | \$0 |
| Detention | 1 | 2 days | \$310 | \$310 |
| Total | 559 | | \$98,910 | \$177 |

If we sum the amounts spent on all truancy interventions in Clark County, we arrive at a total of \$277,267 (\$178,357 + \$98,910 = \$277,267). The average spent on each of the 559 students who initially received a truancy petition is \$496.¹⁴

Clark County spent an average of \$496 on interventions for each of 559 students.

¹⁴ The Models for Change program has substantially changed the way in which the Clark County court operates. Specifically, the cost of the probation officers who used to be part of the pre-MfC court process have been shifted away from the court and into the MfC intervention; they are now working as Check and Connect coaches. That makes MfC look relatively expensive and the traditional court process look relatively inexpensive, but that conclusion is misleading. To make a valid comparison between court costs and MfC intervention costs one would have to compare the cost of the current court intervention plus the MfC intervention to the old cost of the court intervention, and analyze them in terms of outcome data from both time periods. Both interventions are currently part of a cost package that cannot be separated.

Outcomes

When students exit the CCTP, Truancy Specialists assess whether the outcome for each student was positive, negative or neutral. These numbers are shown in Table 6. Of the 262 referrals made in 2011/12, 175 exited the program. (The other 87 were still involved at the time of this writing.) The largest number of students had a neutral exit, or one in which it is unclear what the ultimate outcome is likely to be. One third of the students (59) had a negative outcome, and just over one quarter (48) improved their attendance, graduated, earned a GED or enrolled in Job Corp.

| Table 6: Exit Status of 175 Students from the Clark County Truancy Project During the 2011/12 School Year | | | |
|--|---|---------------|-------------------|
| Status | Definition | Number | % of Total |
| Positive | The student significantly improved his/her attendance, graduated from high school, enrolled in Job Corps, or completed a GED. | 48 | 27.4% |
| Neutral | Emancipation Moved out of jurisdiction Home School Unable to locate Parent non-compliant Juvenile Probation or JRA Involvement | 68 | 38.9% |
| Negative | The student neither improved his/her attendance nor followed through with board agreements or recommended resources or services. Formal court is recommended. | 59 | 33.7% |
| Total | | 175 | 100% |

Table 7 shows the various outcomes for truant students in Clark County, as a percentage of the 559 students who received truancy petitions, and as a percentage of the 415 who were invited to participate in the Truancy Workshop. Cases coded as successful, either because they were never referred to the CCTP following the Truancy Workshop invitation or because they successfully exited the CCTP sum to 201. Since we do not have any information on the outcomes of the 144 students who were not referred to the Workshop, it might seem more reasonable to calculate a success rate for the MfC interventions alone of 48% ($201 / 415 = 48\%$). However, since we are using the summed costs of all truancy services in Clark County, and since this analysis chooses to err on the side of underestimating the financial benefits of MfC, we will use the lower-bound success rate of 36% ($201 / 559 = 36\%$).

Table 7: Total Number of Students with Improved Attendance, Clark County, 2011/12.

| Status | Definition | Number | % of Legal Truants | % of MfC Participants |
|-------------------------|---|------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Legally truant youth | Initial truancy petition filed by school district | 559 | 100% | ---N/A--- |
| MfC Participant | Invited to Truancy Workshop, launching the MfC intervention | 415 | 74% | 100% |
| Non-MfC participant | Never invited to Truancy Workshop, no outcome information available | 144 | 26% | ---N/A--- |
| Successful: | Total | 201 | 36% | 48% |
| Not referred to CCTP | Inferred improvement following Workshop invitation as indicated by lack of referral to CCTP | 153 | 27% | 37% |
| Positive Exit from CCTP | The student significantly improved his/her attendance, graduated from high school, enrolled in Job Corps, or completed a GED. | 48 | 9% | 12% |
| Indeterminate | Total | 155 | 28% | 37% |
| Neutral Exit | As defined in Table 5 | 68 | 12% | 16% |
| Continuing | Continued CCTP involvement, ultimate outcome uncertain | 87 | 16% | 21% |
| Unsuccessful | As defined in Table 5 | 59 | 11% | 14% |

King County

Costs

Two school districts among the 19 in King County participated in the MfC pilot program in 2009/10: Bellevue and Highline. The program, called Youth R.E.A.C.H., uses a three-tiered approach to diverting truant students from traditional court procedures. Once a school has filed a truancy petition on a student, a 90-day stay is issued and the youth is referred either to a Tier 1 Truancy Workshop, a Tier 2 Community Truancy Board, or Tier 3 individualized case management. Table 7 shows that schools filed on 1,601 students during the 2009/10 school year. Of those students, 743 were referred to the Truancy Workshop and 50 to a Truancy Board, but no data were provided on the number who received case management.

Table 8 shows that the court costs incurred in the filings amounted to an average of \$554 per student. The most common intervention other than court is a Truancy

Workshop, to which 743 students and families were sent. The costs of the Workshop are included in the aforementioned court costs.

| Table 8: Truancy Interventions and Costs in King County During the 2009/10 School Year | | | | |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Students Served | Amount of Service | Total Cost | Average Cost Per Student |
| Intervention | | | | |
| Court | | | Court staff \$165,540 | \$545 (N=1,601) |
| Filings | 1,601 | | DJA (clerk) \$134,151 | |
| Preliminary Hearings | 201 | | Judicial officer \$86,070 | |
| Contempt Hearings | 12 | 20 | Interpreter \$23,450 | |
| Truancy Workshops | 743 | | PAO \$207,000 | |
| | | | Attorneys \$256,713 | |
| | | | Total \$872,924 | |
| Truancy Boards | 50 | | \$8,793* | \$176* |
| Detention | 8 | 12 days | \$4,179 | \$522 |
| Electronic Monitoring | 3 | 15 days | \$1,313 | \$438 |
| Total | 1601 | | \$887,209 | \$554 |

* These figures were estimated using the average cost per student from the Spokane truancy boards of \$175.86.

King County spent an average of \$554 on interventions for each of 1,601 students.

Outcomes

The Vera Institute of Justice completed evaluations of Youth R.E.A.C.H. after both years of the program. The Year 1 study by the Vera Institute of Justice found that unexcused absences decreased by 15% among program participants over all, and 61% of students improved their attendance enough that their truancy cases were dismissed before the end of the school year.¹⁵ During Year 2, the evaluators noted that both pilot

¹⁵ Vera Institute of Justice, (No Date), *A Descriptive Analysis of King County, Washington's Youth REACH Pilot Program 2009-2010*. All students are subject to a mandatory case dismissal by August 31st but these dismissals came earlier, indicating they resulted from improvement.

sites struggled to maintain fidelity to the model. While data was analyzed for Year 2, the outcomes should not be considered representative of the model.¹⁶

Spokane County

Costs

Spokane County provided the most detailed data, breaking down costs for each step in the traditional court process (Table 9). During the 2010 calendar year, schools filed on 1,699 students. In addition to the MfC interventions, the court sentenced 102 students to 182 days in a detention alternative program, which means weekend detention; 20 students to 41.5 days of detention; and an undisclosed number of students to 166.5 days of electronic monitoring. Of these three interventions, electronic monitoring is the least expensive at \$94 a day. Detention costs \$235 a day, and weekend detention costs \$216 a day. Given the mix of interventions used in 2010, Spokane County spent a total of \$374,413, for an average cost of \$220 per referred student.

Table 9: Traditional Truancy Interventions and Costs* in Spokane County During the 2010 Calendar Year

| | Students Served | Amount of Service | Cost per unit of service | Total Cost | Average Cost Per Student |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Intervention | | | | | |
| Court | | | | | |
| Information and filings | 1,699 | 1,699 | \$70 | \$118,475 | \$70 |
| Fact Finding Hearings | 286 | 286 | \$63 | \$18,021 | \$63 |
| Contempt Hearings | 109 | 177 | \$103 | \$18,339 | \$168 |
| Court Total | 1,699 | | | \$154,834 | \$91 |
| Detention | 20 | 41.5 days | \$235 | \$9,734 | \$487 |
| Electronic Monitoring | Not Provided | 166.5 days | \$94 | \$15,698 | N/A |
| Detention Alternative | 102 | 182 days | \$216 | \$39,312 | \$385 |
| Total | 1,699 | | | \$374,413 | \$220 |

* All costs include a 14.98% indirect cost rate.

Spokane County truancy court spent an average of \$220 on interventions for each of 1,699 students.

Truancy Boards constitute the bulk of the Spokane County MfC intervention. Truancy Boards operated in two sites in 2010: Shadle Park, which served 52 students, and West

¹⁶ Vera Institute of Justice, (No Date), *A Year 2 Analysis of King County, Washington's Youth REACH Pilot Program*.

Valley, which served 285. The numbers of students served and the costs of running those Boards are presented in Table 10. The total cost of these services amounted to \$198,795 for staffing at an average per student cost of \$590 for these 337 students.

| Table 10: Models for Change Community Truancy Board Costs in Spokane County During the 2010 Calendar Year | | | | |
|--|------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Models for Change Intervention | Students Served | Amount of Service | Total Cost | Average Cost Per Student |
| Community Truancy Boards | | | | |
| Shadle Park HS Community Reps * | 52 | 13 2-hour meetings | \$7,031 | \$135 |
| West Valley Community Reps * | 285 | 29 4-hour meetings | \$52,235 | \$183 |
| Court reps (provided to both sites) | 337 | Court Reps at both Boards + a full time Check & Connect Coach | \$139,529** | \$414 |
| Total | 337 | | \$198,795 | \$590 |

*Reps were from a variety of educational and community based agencies

** Includes a 14.98% indirect cost rate to cover general operating and administrative costs.

If we sum the costs of both the traditional court practices (\$374,413) and the MfC Community Truancy Boards (\$198,795), Spokane County spent \$573,208, for an average expenditure of \$337.38 on each of its 1,699 students.

Spokane County spent an average of \$590 on Community Truancy Board Services for each of 337 students.

Outcomes

We have no outcome data for the 1,362 court-referred students who did not have access to a Community Truancy Board. However, we do have outcome data on the 337 students referred to the MfC Community Truancy Board (CTB). Preliminary results of a Truancy Board outcome study were made available by Dr. Thomas George, a Senior Research Consultant for the Washington State Center for Court Research.¹⁷ In the study, 66 truant students in 9th or 10th grade in the district’s primary traditional high school during the 2008-09 school year were matched with 66 students from traditional high schools in three local school districts. The students were matched on grade level, sex, total absences, unexcused absences, number of times he or she received detention or an in-school suspension, number of out-of-school suspensions, number of

¹⁷ Strand, P., George, T., & Lovrich, N. (2013). Graduation Outcomes for Truant Students: An Evaluation of a School-based Community Truancy Board with Case Management. Manuscript submitted for publication. Washington State Center for Court Research: Seattle, WA.

expulsions, total number of disciplinary events, number of credits attempted and number of credits earned.

Differences between these two groups were significant. While 46 of the Community truancy board targeted students graduated, only 32 of the matched students did so. Conversely, only ten CTB students dropped out, while 18 matched students dropped out. In both groups two students continued and one earned a GED. The remaining seven CTB students and thirteen matched students transferred out of the school. When the sample is taken as a whole, only 15% of the CTB students dropped out of high school, compared to 27% of the matched students. By removing the transfer students who complicate the samples with incomplete data, the relative difference becomes even larger; 17% of the Community Truancy Board targeted students compared to 34% of the matched students dropped out. Therefore, truant students who did not have the advantage of the Community Truancy Board intervention were twice as likely to drop out of school.

High School Dropouts Prevented and Costs Averted

The return to dollars spent on each program depends on how many high school dropouts it prevents. Even if we had a crystal ball to look into the future and see exactly how many program participants will eventually graduate, we would still need to subtract from that total the number who would likely have managed to graduate even without the program supports. In other words, we need to compare the expected number of graduates from among program participants with the number of graduates we would have expected in the absence of program participation. In Spokane we have an outcome study based on actual graduation rates among a subset of program participants and a matched control group of non-participants. In Clark and King Counties we have data on the number of cases deemed successful, but not on those students' eventual graduation outcomes. We have no outcome data for Benton-Franklin students. Therefore, in the Clark and King County analyses we rely on results of a statewide, post-BECCA Bill study of high school graduation rates among students with various numbers of unexcused absences in 9th grade.¹⁸ Students with no unexcused absences in 9th grade had an 81% probability of graduating from high school on time. The probability of on-time graduation dropped to 57% for students with five to nine unexcused absences and to 39% for those with ten or more unexcused absences. The group of students who received a truancy petition graduated at a rate of only 15%. Since all the students who were referred to the Models for Change truancy reduction programs had truancy petitions, our best estimate of their graduation rate without program intervention is 15%. Since court-referred students often have many more unexcused absences than the ten that make them legally truant, and have often lost enough credits to have fallen seriously behind in high school, we assume that in the absence of a court referral none of those students would have graduated. In other words, we assume that traditional court practices result in graduation for 15% of the students they serve. In Benton-Franklin we make additional assumptions about program success based on the experiences of the other counties.

¹⁸ George, Thomas. "Truancy in Washington State: Trends, Student Characteristics, and the Impact of Receiving a Truancy Petition." Washington State Center for court Research (2011).

Clark County

Since there were 559 truancy filings in 2011/12, without the MfC intervention we would expect 15% of these students, or 84 to graduate.

The estimated number of graduates given the presence of MfC is more complicated to calculate. Of the 559 students who received truancy filings, we estimated that there were 201 program successes, 144 never referred to MfC, 68 neutral exits, 59 negative exits and 87 still involved. Let us assume that among successful program participants the intervention is able to increase the graduation rate from 15% to the 57% anticipated among students with five to nine unexcused absences. Using the graduation rate among students in this category makes sense because their attendance is not poor enough to require a mandatory truancy filing, but neither is it perfect. We assume that neutral exits will still graduate at the 15% rate, and that none of the unsuccessful students will graduate. We estimate that students still involved in the program will ultimately exit the program and graduate at the same rates as those already exited. Table 11 shows how all these expectations play out numerically. The bottom line indicates that our best estimate of the number of eventual graduates in Clark County among the 559 with truancy filings in 2011/12 is 165. This number compares quite positively with our estimated 84 graduates in the absence of the intervention, resulting in an additional 81 graduates. The average expected graduation rates are 15% in the absence of the intervention compared to 29.5% with the intervention – a differential of 14.5%.

Table 11: Expected Number of Graduates in Clark County Given the MfC Truancy Intervention

| Category | Total Number | Expected Graduation Rate | Expected Number of Graduates |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Not referred | 144 | 15% | 21.60 |
| Successes | 201 | 57% | 114.57 |
| Neutral exits | 68 | 15% | 10.20 |
| Negative exits | 59 | 0% | 0.00 |
| Still involved | 87 | ----- | ----- |
| 27.4% successful | 23.84 | 57% | 13.59 |
| 38.9% neutral | 33.84 | 15% | 5.08 |
| 33.7% negative | 29.32 | 0% | 0.00 |
| Total | 559 | 29.5% average | 165.04 |

What does this mean monetarily? If we multiply the additional 81 high school graduates by our low (\$209,100) and high (\$292,575) estimated costs of high school failure, we find that the project averted between \$16,937,100 and \$23,698,575. From these figures we must subtract the \$277,267 cost of program operation for a net savings of between \$16,659,833 and \$23,421,308. If our assumptions concerning program effectiveness are accurate, the CCTP will yield a rate of return of between \$60 and \$84 for every dollar invested. ($\$16,659,833 / \$277,267 = \$60.09$ and $\$23,421,308 / \$277,267 = \$84.47$.)

Clark County truancy interventions saved between \$16.7 and \$23.4 million in costs averted due to high school dropout. The return to each dollar spent was between \$60 and \$84.

King County

Since there were 1,601 truancy filings in King County, the estimated number of graduates in the absence of the MfC intervention is 15% of 1,601, or 240.

The Vera study found that 61% of program participants improved their attendance enough for their truancy cases to be dismissed before the end of the year. Given the operation of the MfC intervention, the outcomes among the 1,601 petitioned students are estimated as follows. The number of students who were not referred to the program is 858; we assume 15% of those students will graduate. The number of successful program participants is 61% of 743, or 453, and we will assume they graduate at the rate of 57%. That leaves 290 unsuccessful participants whom we assume will not graduate. Table 12 shows how these figures add up to 387 expected graduates, for an overall graduation rate of 24%. That yields an additional 147 graduates and a rate differential of 9% between MfC involved and traditional court involved youth.

Table 12: Expected Number of Graduates in King County Given the MfC Truancy Intervention

| Category | Total Number | Expected Graduation Rate | Expected Number of Graduates |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Not referred | 858 | 15% | 129 |
| Successful cases | 453 | 57% | 258 |
| Unsuccessful cases | 290 | 0% | 0 |
| Total | 1,601 | 24% | 387 |

If we multiply these numbers by our low and high estimated costs of high school graduation we find that the 147 additional graduates encouraged by the program will avert costs of between \$30,737,700 and \$43,008,525 ($\$209,100 * 147 = \$30,737,700$ and $\$292,575 * 147 = \$43,008,525$). Once we subtract the \$887,209 in program costs the net benefit is between \$29,850,491 and \$42,121,316. The resulting return on the dollar is between \$34 and \$47 ($\$29,850,491 / \$887,209 = \$33.65$ and $\$42,121,316 / \$887,209 = \$47.48$).

King County truancy interventions saved between \$29.9 and \$42.1 million in costs averted due to high school dropout. The return to each dollar spent was between \$34 and \$47.

Spokane County

Spokane County is the only site where we can disaggregate costs of traditional court from the costs of the Community Truancy Board. Let us compare the costs and benefits of traditional court practices first. Since we have no outcome data for the 1,362 students who received court filings but did not have access to the Community Truancy Board, we will use the statewide study estimate of a 15% graduation rate as we have in other sites. If 15% of 1,362 students graduate, that means 204.3 graduates. Multiplying 204.3 by our low (\$209,100) and high (\$292,575) estimated costs of high

school failure, we find that the Spokane court averted costs of between \$42,719,130 and \$59,773,072. We subtract the \$374,413 program cost for a net savings of between \$42,344,717 and \$59,398,659. The estimated rate of return on the Spokane intervention is between \$113 and \$159 ($\$42,344,717 / \$374,413 = \$113.10$ and $\$59,398,659 / \$374,413 = \$158.64$).

In Spokane 337 of the 1,699 students who received a truancy filing were served by the MfC Truancy Boards. As discussed above, in the Strand, George and Lovrich outcome study 46 of the 66 students who were referred to the West Valley Truancy Board graduated, for a rate of 69.6%. If we apply the 69.6% graduation rate to all 337 students served by Spokane Truancy Boards in 2010/11, we get an expected number of graduates of 234.6. Multiplying 234.6 graduates by our low (\$209,100) and high (\$292,575) estimated costs of high school failure, suggests that Truancy Boards averted costs of between \$49,054,860 and \$68,638,095. We subtract the \$198,795 program cost for a net savings of between \$48,856,065 and \$68,439,300. The estimated rate of return on the Spokane intervention is between \$246 and \$344 ($\$48,856,065 / \$198,795 = \$245.76$ and $\$68,439,300 / \$198,795 = \$344.27$).

The Spokane County truancy court saved between \$42.3 and \$59.4 million in costs averted due to high school dropout. The return to each dollar spent was between \$113 and \$159.

The Spokane County Community Truancy Boards saved between \$48.9 and \$68.4 million in costs averted due to high school dropout. The return to each dollar spent was between \$246 and \$344.

Benton-Franklin Counties

In the absence of outcome data from Benton-Franklin, we have two options. At a minimum, we can calculate the break-even point, meaning the number of high school graduates the program would have to generate in order to pay for itself. Then we can make an educated guess as to whether it is likely to generate more or fewer graduates than those required to break even. Alternatively, we can apply the average success rate from Clark, King and Spokane Counties to Benton-Franklin students to calculate returns on the dollar assuming the program is equally successful. We will use both methods.

The Benton-Franklin Break-Even Point

The break-even point is calculated by dividing the entire cost of the program by the cost of a high school dropout. For Benton-Franklin that means dividing \$500,320 by our low-cost estimate of \$209,100 and our high-cost estimate of \$292,575. The results are 2.39 and 1.71. Even using the lower assessment of the cost of dropout, if the Benton-Franklin MfC program prevents three or more of the 742 referred students from dropping out it will generate a positive return. If we expect 15% of the 742 students – or 111 – to graduate in the absence of program supports, and add a mere three more for a

total number of 114 and an average graduation rate of 15.36%, the program will generate a small but positive return.

Applying Average Estimated Graduation Rates from Other MfC Programs

The estimated differentials in average graduation rates from Clark, King and Spokane Counties are 14.5%, 9% and 21.2% respectively. The average of those figures is 14.9%. (There is no need to adjust for size of program because we have no reason to believe that program size in and of itself would affect program success.) If an additional 14.9% of Benton-Franklin's 742 participating students graduate as a result of the intervention, the additional number of graduates would be 110.6. Multiplying this number by our low and high estimated costs of high school dropout yields averted costs of between ($\$209,100 * 110.6 = \$23,126,460$ and $\$292,575 * 110.6 = \$32,358,795$). After subtracting the \$500,320 program cost, the net benefit is between \$22,626,140 and \$31,858,475. The return to each dollar invested is between \$45 and \$64 ($\$22,701,160 / \$500,320 = \$45.22$ and $\$31,858,475 / \$500,320 = \$63.68$).

If we assume that Benton-Franklin Counties' truancy interventions were equally effective as those of the other counties, their interventions saved between \$22.6 and \$31.9 million in costs averted due to high school dropout. The return to each dollar spent was between \$45 and \$64.

Conclusions from the Study

The Models for Change truancy interventions take a supportive, problem-solving approach to truancy reduction – an approach that has been shown to be more effective in improving attendance than traditional court practices. This study has shown that given the enormous costs to society of high school dropout, investing in these interventions will pay off many times over.

Preliminary data from Clark, King and Spokane suggest that these interventions are likely to be much more effective in encouraging high school graduation than the court practices typically used in the state. Our best guess as to what graduation outcomes among these court-referred students would have been in the absence of the MfC interventions comes from state-wide calculations of graduation rates for 9th graders with differing numbers of unexcused absences (George, 2011). Ninth grade students who received court filings for truancy graduated at a rate of only 15%. This study has assumed that successful program participants will graduate at a rate of 57%, which is the rate at which the George study found that 9th graders with five to nine unexcused absences graduated. Table 13 shows the differences in anticipated graduation rates in the four sites as compared to what we might have expected in the absence of the MfC interventions. They range from 9% in King County to 21.2% as calculated by Strand, George and Lovrich in Spokane.

Table 13: Graduation Rate Differentials Given the Presence of the MfC Programs Compared to Expected Rates in their Absence

| Site | % Graduation Anticipated in a Traditional Court Approach | % Graduation Anticipated Given MfC Programming | Difference | |
|-----------------|--|--|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | | % Increased Graduation | Additional Graduations Expected |
| Benton-Franklin | ----- | ----- | 14.9%* | 111 |
| Clark | 15% | 29.5% | 14.5% | 81 |
| King | 15% | 24% | 9% | 147 |
| Spokane | 15% | 69.7%** | 21.2** | 71 |

* The arithmetic average of differentials from the other three sites was used in the absence of outcome data from Benton-Franklin.

** Taken from Strand, George and Lovrich, forthcoming.

Estimates of the present value cost of each high school dropout range from \$209,100 (Levin et al, 2007) to \$292,575 (McLaughlin, 2009). Based on these low and high estimates, Table 14 summarizes the expected costs averted and returns on dollars spent in each of the four sites. Given the proportions of students whose attendance improved enough to be counted successful by program staff, the increased graduation rates that are likely to result from those successes, and the costs that will be averted by each of those graduations, these programs are all calculated to be highly cost-effective. Costs averted sum to tens of millions of dollars, even using the lower estimate of the cost of high school dropout. Projected returns to the dollar range from a low of \$34 in King County to a high of \$344 in Spokane.

Spokane was the only site in which costs were broken out between court and the Community Truancy Boards, allowing us to compare estimated returns to the dollar between the two. Given the 15% assumed graduation rate among court-referred students, both interventions are highly cost effective, but the Community Truancy Boards are more so.

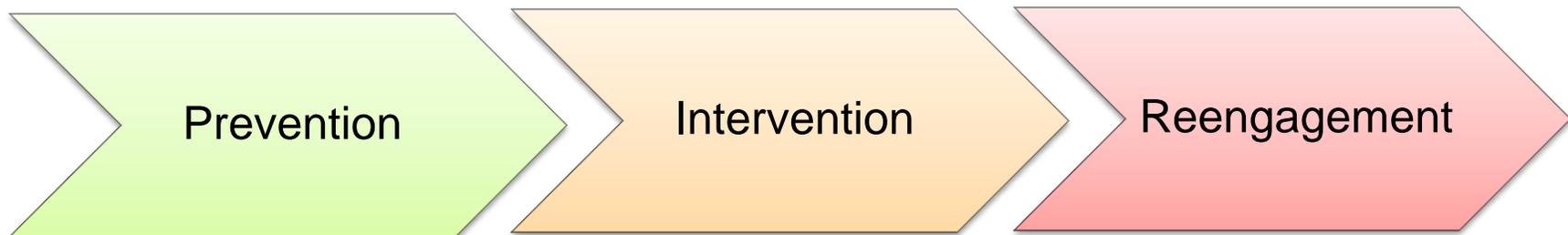
Table 14: Low and High Estimates of Costs Averted and Returns to the Dollar by Site

| Site | Low Estimate of the Cost of Dropout (\$209,100) | | High Estimate of the Cost of Dropout (\$292,575) | |
|-----------------|---|----------------------|--|----------------------|
| | Costs Averted (Millions) | Return on the Dollar | Costs Averted (Million) | Return on the Dollar |
| Benton-Franklin | \$22.6 | \$45 | \$31.4 | \$64 |
| Clark | \$16.7 | \$60 | \$23.4 | \$84 |
| King | \$29.9 | \$34 | \$42.1 | \$47 |
| Spokane Court | \$42.3 | \$113 | \$59.4 | \$159 |
| Spokane CTBs | \$48.9 | \$246 | \$68.4 | \$344 |

It is important to recognize that these estimates are based on a number of assumptions. If those assumptions are incorrect, these values could be over or underestimated. First, to the extent that any program costs have been overlooked, program costs would be higher. Higher program costs would likely have a small effect on total costs averted, but might reduce the return to the dollar noticeably. Assumptions made about graduation rates have a larger effect. If unsuccessful program participants, or students who were never referred to the programs but went through traditional court proceedings, end up graduating at a rate *higher* than 15%, both the costs averted and the returns on the dollar would *increase* in Benton-Franklin, Clark and King Counties, because costs and benefits are summed across both the traditional court approaches and the Models for Change interventions. Costs averted and returns on the dollar would increase in the Spokane court program, but would not change in the Community Truancy Board Program, reducing the relative advantage of the CTBs. On the other hand, if program participants deemed successful graduate at a rate *lower* than 57% in any of the counties, both total costs averted and returns to the dollar would be smaller, possibly to a significant extent. It is highly unlikely, though, given the enormous cost to society of high school failure, that having actual graduation outcome data would prove any of these interventions to be financially imprudent.

It is also important to acknowledge once again that schools engage in significant efforts to work with students who accrue unexcused absences before they reach the point of entering a truancy court filing. This study does not attempt to assign a dollar value to those efforts, nor estimate their payoff because the study deals only with students whose attendance is poor enough to be sent to court. These unmeasured school building efforts likely reengage many students who might otherwise be headed for court and potential dropout, and are likely to be highly cost effective as well. Therefore, we can recommend that follow-up data on the students who went through the MfC intervention be collected so that actual outcomes can be measured. Given such data, we wouldn't have to choose proxies for their graduation rates and that would likely strengthen the efficacy of the MfC interventions as a worthy investment even further.

Appendix A: Washington State Models for Change Model Program Guide, (Reproduced)



- AOC - WSCCR Washington Assessment of the Risk and Needs of Students (WARNS)
- Kennewick High School Education Advocates Project (Benton-Franklin)
- West Valley School District Community Truancy Board (Spokane)
- Clark County Truancy Project (Clark)
- Clark County Parent Project (Clark)
- Clark County Truancy Workshop Program (Clark)
- Youth R.E.A.C.H. (King)
- KCPAO Truancy Workshop Program (King)
- KCPAO "If Project" Workshop Program (King)
- Destination Graduation (Benton-Franklin)
- Fast Forward (Benton-Franklin)
- PathNet Pilot Program (King)

Benton-Franklin

New Horizons High School (NHHS) -- an alternative school program located in Pasco, Washington and serving students who are credit deficient, pregnant/parenting teens, in need of an alternative school setting/schedule, and/or re-entering the high school system -- manages a school retrieval program, known as “**Destination Graduation,**” for chronically truant and drop-out youth. With support through WA-MfC, a district-wide expansion of Destination Graduation was piloted in Pasco School District. The expansion includes operation of an extended day school reengagement and dropout retrieval program from 2pm to 7pm during the school year and offers a variety of services to dropout and juvenile justice youth.

The **Kennewick High School Education Advocates Project** is an intervention program, supported by WA-MfC, which targets ninth and tenth grade students with a truancy petition at Kennewick High School. The program aims to help these youth identify barriers to successful school navigation and completion, to increase communication between the student, their parents and school, provide social skill training to address attitudinal and motivational issues and provide opportunities for academic success by pairing chronically truant youth with a part-time Certificated Teacher, an educational assistant, a Juvenile Court truancy counselor, and education advocate to serve on the youth’s “Educational Advocate Team.”

Fast Forward is a free dropout retrieval and school reengagement program, open to Tri-Cities area youth, ages 16-21, who have dropped out of school, to support out-of-school youth in returning and reengaging in high school. Identified by WA-MfC research as a community need, Fast Forward partners with traditional and alternative high schools, technical schools, community colleges, and other Tri-City area alternative education programs to provide an open pathway back to school and a diploma.

Spokane County

West Valley School District Community Truancy Board (WVSD-CTB) is a post-filing truancy intervention operated by West Valley School District in collaboration with Spokane County Juvenile Court. With support through WA-MfC, Spokane County Juvenile Court enhanced the WVSD-CTB by placing a truancy specialist, trained in *Check and Connect*, in the District to provide follow-up and assist students and parents with compliance of the WVSD-CTB recommendations. With the enhancement, it was determined that the WVSD-CTB was a promising intervention for truancy.

Clark County

Clark County Truancy Project (CCTP) is a post-filing truancy intervention, consisting of community truancy boards operated by Educational Service District 112 in collaboration with Clark County Juvenile Court and Clark County school districts. CCTP also serves Cowlitz County.

The **Parent Project** is a nationally-recognized and proven parent training program for parents of at-risk youth. With support through WA-MfC, the Parent Project is offered to families currently receiving services through the CCTP.

The **Truancy Workshop Program** is a post-filing truancy intervention, developed with support from WA-MfC, to divert all petitioned students and their families from the formal court process to a court-operated workshop. Workshops involve Clark County Juvenile

Court staff, school districts, parents, and students and aim to provide information about the State’s truancy laws, the importance of education, community resources and services, and facilitate development of a school reengagement plan.

King County

Youth Re-engaging in Education through Action and Coordinated Help (R.E.A.C.H.) Truancy Reduction Program is a post-filing, three-tiered, graduated truancy diversion program, consisting of graduated school-based interventions, including School Engagement Workshops, Community Truancy Boards, and Case Management. With support through WA-MfC, Youth R.E.A.C.H. is operated by the KCPAO in collaboration with King County Juvenile Court, Bellevue and Highline School Districts, and other juvenile justice and community partners.

The **KCPAO Truancy Workshop Program** is a post-filing truancy intervention, developed in collaboration with King County Juvenile Court and adapted from the WA-MfC Youth R.E.A.C.H. program workshops, to divert all petitioned students and their families from the formal court process to a community-based, regional workshop. Workshops involve KCPAO staff, school districts, parents, and students, and aim to provide information about the State’s truancy laws, the importance of education, community resources and services, and facilitate development of a school reengagement plan.

The KCPAO **“If Project” Truancy Workshop** is a post-filing truancy intervention and/ or truancy contempt alternative, developed in collaboration with King County Juvenile Court and the “If Project,” and targeting deep-end, unresponsive, and non-compliant truant youth and their parents. If Project workshops are community-based, regional workshops held on Saturdays during the school year for four hours. Workshops involve KCPAO staff, If Project staff, parents, and students, and providing information about the State’s truancy laws, the importance of education, and community resources and services.

PathNet is a systematic coordinated Pathway of Networked community-based programs and services that re-engage youth toward an end goal of a living wage job and career. The PSESD **PathNet Pilot Project** is a school reengagement and dropout retrieval program offered through the King County Work Training program to youth on probation who have dropped out of school or have too few credits to graduate from high school. With support by the King County Superior Court through Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA), WA-MfC, and partnering youth-serving organizations, PathNet connects disengaged youth with educational advocates, who provide case management, help coordinate school reentry and skills development, and facilitate a youth’s achievement of a high school diploma, GED or vocational certificate; and engagement in career planning.

AOC/ WSCCR

The **Washington Assessment of the Risk and Needs of Students (WARNS)** is a screening tool designed to identify the service needs and emergent risks of students demonstrating patterns of excessive school absenteeism. The WARNS measures both past and current experiences and functioning in several domains critical to healthy educational, social, and psychological development. It is designed to predict risk for future problematic outcomes such as truancy, delinquency and dropping out.

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) strives to build networks of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attachment and attendance promotes academic achievement and school success.



NCSE was established in 2003 by The Partnership for Families & Children (The Partnership) following more than a decade of research concerning youth out of the educational mainstream. NCSE is one of five centers within The Partnership. The impact of our work has been significant investments of state and federal funds to promote high school graduation and reduce suspensions, expulsions, truancy and dropout.

Our program experience and research have identified school attendance and engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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