

SSW RESEARCH BRIEF

Discipline Reform for Truancy in the State of Arkansas

Anderson, K., Egalite, A., & Mills, J. (2019). Discipline reform: The impact of a statewide ban on suspensions for truancy. *Journal Of Education For Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)*, 24(1), 68-91. doi: 10.1080/10824669.2018.1537794

What is the study about?

This article assesses the effectiveness of policy reform meant to curb truancy (Arkansas Act 1329 of 2013).

Truancy:

Defined as unexcused and unlawful absences from school, typically without parental knowledge or consent.

Methods and Results

Purpose: To estimate the impact of Arkansas' policy change on the attendance of truant students. Attendance is an important measure of instructional time for students and a common proxy measure of student engagement with school.

Two research questions:

- (1) How did the ban on out-of-school suspensions for truancy impact the overall attendance of students identified as truant?
- (2) Did these impacts differ depending on a school's compliance with the policy?

Results:

- Compliance with the law was poor with OSS use (for truancy) only decreasing by 1/3. Compliance was least likely in schools with the highest rates of truancy, OSS, and racial/ethnic minorities.
- Results showed no improvement in attendance for truant students after the policy change. In fact, some non-compliant schools experienced negative effects.
- The authors report that the lack of compliance with the law likely contributed to the lack of change in attendance for truant students.

<u>Why is it important?</u>	<u>What can social workers do?</u>	<u>How was the study done?</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal mandates do not guarantee the intended outcome. • Policies enacted at the state-level without buy-in at the school-level are unlikely to see compliance. • Highlights the importance of fidelity for any school-wide reform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Act as a liaison between policy makers and your school/district by advocating at the state-level for any resources or supports needed to implement policy changes. ✓ Communicate with your principals about the impact that compliance with the law had on the lack of changes in truancy. 	<p>The authors used Arkansas as a case study to evaluate the impact of a state-level policy banning the use of OSS for truancy. Eight years of student data from all Arkansas public k-12 schools were used to compare rates of absenteeism between truant & non-truant students before the policy went into effect and after.</p>