

PROJECT THRIVE
(TRUANCY HABITS REDUCED, INTERVENTIONS VIA EDUCATION)

EVALUATION REPORT



SCHOOL YEAR 2004-2005

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(2 SP12094-05)

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Executive Summary

Since Ohio passed *Senate Bill 181* making it mandatory that school children meet the minimum attendance requirements of the state, parents/guardians of school-age children have been educated about the legal consequences of SB 181 largely through the coordinated efforts of the Summit County Juvenile Court Truancy Task Force. In conjunction with **Project THRIVE** - Truancy Habits Reduced, Interventions Via Education - the Summit County Juvenile Court Truancy Task Force collaborates with Project THRIVE, Summit County Juvenile Court, and school systems to offer a myriad of services to students and their families living in Summit County. Project THRIVE is a comprehensive truancy and substance abuse prevention program designed to provide school districts with sound strategies for addressing truancy among at-risk youth in Summit County. The program has prevented chronic and habitual truancy and substance abuse in students identified as “at-risk.” THRIVE’s program modalities include truancy awareness, early intervention, treatment, intervention and prevention, mediation, and case management for at-risk students and their families.

The external evaluation of Project THRIVE revealed that the program has achieved all of its stated goals and objectives and has made a significant impact in preventing truancy among at-risk youth living in Summit County. During the 2004-05 school year, Project THRIVE served four school districts (i.e., Akron, Barberton, Cuyahoga Falls, and Woodridge) and continued to offer numerous intervention and prevention activities throughout eleven schools. This year, 658 at-risk students were served by THRIVE and the program was expanded to include four additional schools. When compared to last school year, Project THRIVE increased the number of students served by 48%. Program activities show that 566 early intervention letters were sent to parents/guardians informing them of their child’s absences and warning them of the risks to their family; 360 student mediation sessions were scheduled with students, parents/guardians, school personnel and case managers – with completed agreements among 220 families (a completion rate of 61%). By the end of the school year, Project THRIVE terminated 162 students – those who were on active caseload and received case management and mediation services. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the 162 families who fully participated in Project THRIVE improved their attendance rates during the school year. Drug, alcohol, and tobacco use continues to remain significantly low for students participating in the program. Survey data show that parents are educated about the state law regarding truancy and are increasingly aware of the correlation between truant behavior and substance use. Criminal activity and school suspensions related to substance abuse remains low for program participants. As a result of Project THRIVE, attendance rates for participating schools have increased over the past several years. The support that families received from Project THRIVE has been proven to prevent substance abuse among at-risk students, to increase attendance rates for children participating in the program, and to increase parental awareness of the correlation between truancy and substance abuse. Above all, Project THRIVE and the efforts of the Summit County Truancy Task Force have continued to improve the quality of life for children and families living in Summit County.

I. Overview

Project THRIVE (Truancy Habits Reduced, Interventions Via Education) is a comprehensive truancy and substance abuse intervention and prevention program designed to provide school districts with sound strategies for addressing these issues among at-risk youth in Summit County. The program is designed to prevent chronic and habitual truancy and substance abuse in students identified as “at-risk.” THRIVE’s program modalities include truancy awareness, early intervention, treatment, intervention and prevention, mediation, and case management for at-risk students and their families.

Project THRIVE is a partnership of the Summit County Truancy Task Force, the Community Health Center, school systems and other members of the coalition who are interested in improving the lives of students and their families living in Summit County. The Truancy Task Force consists of a diverse group of individuals who represent different community sectors in Summit County. Coalition members consist of youth, parents, business leaders, media personnel, school personnel, staff from youth-serving organizations, law enforcement agents, and representatives from the Community Health Center who have an expertise in the field of substance abuse. Through the coordinated efforts of the Summit County Truancy Task Force, members of the coalition have been working diligently to educate parents/guardians about the correlation between truancy and substance abuse and about the legal consequences of Ohio *Senate Bill 181* - making it mandatory that school children meet the minimum attendance requirements of the state.

Evaluation of Project THRIVE¹. The evaluation report for the Project THRIVE initiative assesses the effectiveness of the program and examines the services aimed at preventing truancy and alcohol, tobacco and drug use among school-age children. Consequently, it focuses on the progress of at-risk students who participated in the program during the school year (SY) 2004-05 and reports on the myriad of program activities and services provided to the greater Akron community. Data collected as part of this evaluation provide an opportunity to assess program performance in relation to the measurable goals and objectives for the program.

The goals and objectives of Project THRIVE include the following:

1. *Prevent substance abuse among “at-risk” students achieved by the following objectives: Decrease the number of absences (and tardies) among the “at-risk” population by 40%; increase understanding of substance abuse by 60%; and increase participation in extracurricular activities by 30%.*

¹ RaJade M. Berry, Ph.D. served as the evaluator of Project THRIVE during the SY 2004-05. The evaluator attended monthly meetings with the Summit County Juvenile Truancy Task Force, interviewed Project THRIVE staff and members of the Truancy Task Force, and solicited information from court and school personnel to report the qualitative and quantitative measures contained in this report. Additional measures collected for this evaluation were obtained from the THRIVE database maintained by the Community Health Center.

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2. *Prevent substance abuse achieved by the following objectives: Decrease the number of absences/tardies among the targeted population as compared to last school year by 40%; and increase family's knowledge between the correlation of truancy and substance abuse by 50%.*
3. *Decrease substance abuse among targeted population achieved by the following objectives: Reduce the number of suspensions for drug-related offenses among youth that have a history of truancy in pilot schools comparing years 2001-02 to 2002-03 by 40%; and reduce substance related criminal activity by program participants by 40%.*
4. *Reduce truancy by adhering to State mandate of 93% school attendance achieved by the following objectives: Increase attendance rates of youth in selected schools to meet 93% attendance rate; decrease recidivism of juvenile complaints of both youth and families by 50%.*

Program Targets. In SY 2004-05, THRIVE served four school districts in Summit County - Akron, Barberton, Cuyahoga Falls, and Woodridge. Among the eleven schools that participated in Project THRIVE, program staff offered numerous intervention and prevention activities and served 658 students. The following schools participated in the program:

- In Akron Public Schools, the program served 431 students from Bettes Elementary, Leggett Elementary, Perkins Middle, Portage Path, and Rankin Elementary schools.
- In Barberton Schools, the program served 88 students from Memorial Elementary School.
- In Cuyahoga Falls Schools, the program served 25 students from Price Elementary and Sill Middle schools.
- In Woodridge Schools, the program served 114 students from Woodridge Primary, Woodridge Intermediate and Woodridge Middle schools.

As shown in Table 1, **Frequency Distribution of At-Risk Students by School District**, this year Project THRIVE increased the number of students served by 48%, when compared to SY 2003-04. As in previous years, most of the students served in SY 2004-05 were from Akron Public Schools (66%), with Woodridge second (17%), and Barberton third (13%).

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Table 1						
Frequency Distribution of Project THRIVE School Districts by School Year						
	SY 2002-03		SY 2003-04		SY 2004-05	
School Districts	#	%	#	%	#	%
Akron	86	37.2	219	49.3	431	65.5
Barberton	38	16.5	49	11.0	88	13.4
Cuyahoga Falls	46	19.9	58	13.1	25	3.8
Woodridge	61	26.4	115	25.9	114	17.3
Unknown			3	0.7		
Total	231	100.0	444	100.0	658	100.0
Source: CHC Project THRIVE Client Database						

Community Outreach: Project THRIVE continues to provide support for parents and children at-risk for truancy and substance use. Between July 2004 and June 2005, project staff dedicated 3,252 service hours to families (and schools) supported by the program. Specifically, 334 of those hours were direct service hours that included face-to-face or phone contacts with students and their family; 1,776 hours were consultation that included staffing for school- and court-related services and direct referrals on behalf of the student/family, case coordination, and referral services; and 869 hours account for prevention service activities.

Project THRIVE co-sponsors numerous prevention service activities for participating schools and offers summer programming for children living in districts served by the program. Between July 2004 and June 2005, Project THRIVE served 12,218 children, 3,154 parents, 958 school staff, and 1,297 community members.

During this evaluation period, program staff attended the following training programs: "24/7 Math programs", "7 Habits for Learning", "A Close-Up on Substance Abuse in Adolescence", "A Framework for Understanding Poverty", "Addressing Domestic Violence Issues in Chemical Dependency Treatment", "Alternative Education and Community Partnership", "Attachment and Bonding", "De-escalation of Clients", "Ethics", "Gangs", "Multicultural Diversity", "Positive Behavior Support", "Prevention of Tobacco Use", and "Strategies, Programs and Resources To Prevent Truancy."

To increase parent participation in prevention activities and to broaden community understanding of substance use among youth, program staff and coalition members expanded the number of family- and community-oriented activities. Some of the activities include: Open house programs, family night activities, book fairs, award ceremonies, parent/teacher conferences, and recognition activities. Additionally, members of the coalition conducted two radio interviews. In the first interview with WCUE, the director of Project THRIVE and a school representative discussed factors that increase a child's chance of being at-risk for truancy and substance abuse. In the second interview with WKDD, the project director and the Juvenile Court Judge discussed factors that increase a child's chance of being involved with the criminal justice system through truancy and substance abuse. In addition, court magistrates

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conducted public awareness presentations highlighting the correlation between truancy and substance abuse in a variety of community venues.

Prevention programming includes classroom lessons on drugs and their effects, helpful versus harmful medicines, tobacco prevention, underage drinking and bullying; field trips to Hale Farm, Summit Mall; support for other prevention activities like DARE graduation, SADD, PANDA (Prevent And Neutralize Drug Abuse) activities, Say No to Drugs, Red Ribbon Week, Say Yes to School; and numerous academic, behavior and attendance awards.

In July and August 2004 and June 2005, case managers collaborated with area service providers to conduct Summer Enrichment Programs that address truancy and prevent substance use among school-age children. Summer Enrichment activities consisted of the following intervention and prevention programming: Akron After School Summer Program, Honey-Locust Summer Enrichment Program, Honey Locust Family Learning Night, National Youth Sports Program, Summit County Juvenile Truancy Court, Sill Middle School Leadership & Mentoring Camp, Perkins Middle School “Activities Central,” Van Buren Summer Group, and the Summit County Juvenile Detention Center Friday Education/Process groups, First Tee of Akron, Girl Scouts of the Western Reserve and AMHA Norton Homes Teen Group.

II. Assessment of Program Goals and Objectives

The following data are used to provide an evaluative summary for Project THRIVE - to assess which aspects of the program are most effective and to identify areas for program improvement.

Goal 1: Prevent substance abuse among “at-risk” students achieved by the following objectives: Decrease the number of absences (and tardies) among the “at-risk” population by 40%; increase understanding of substance abuse by 60%; and increase participation in extracurricular activities by 30%.

Objective 1: Decreased Number of Absences/Truancy

During the school year 2004-2005, school administrators identified more than six hundred students as being at-risk for truancy in Summit County. Specifically, school administrators identified 658 at-risk students - those who have had three or more unexcused absences since the beginning of the school year. In addition, school administrators refer children/families to Project THRIVE when they have determined that a child’s excessive excused absences or tardies place the student at-risk for abusing alcohol and other drugs.

During this evaluation period, program activities designed to work with the student, family, school personnel, and case manager demonstrate that 566 early intervention letters were sent to parents/guardians informing them of their child’s absences and warning them of the risks to their family (e.g., academic and legal consequences); 360 student mediations sessions were scheduled with students, parents/guardians, school personnel and case managers - with completed agreements among 220 families (a completion rate of 61%).

In Table 2, **Attendance Outcome Data for Program THRIVE**, attendance outcomes for families who were on the active case load of Project THRIVE - those who received case management and also participated in mediation – are calculated as follows:

- **Successful Attendance** means that the student successfully completed Program THRIVE and/or had fewer than 3 unexcused or excused absences from the time of last contact with the program;
- **No Change** means that the student missed three or more additional days of school since participating in the Program;
- **No Service** means that the family of the at-risk student transferred from the school district or refused case management or otherwise disengaged from the program; and
- **Court Referral** means that the family of the at-risk student was referred to the Summit County Juvenile Court due to unchanged truant behavior.

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The number of absences among the “at-risk” population continues to decrease considerably for families who were on active caseloads and received mediation and case management services from Project THRIVE. Of the 162 families terminated at the end of the school year - almost 60% decreased their number of absences and improved their attendance rate during the school year. These students had fewer than three unexcused or excused absences from the time of last contact with the program. Less than 4% of these families were referred to juvenile court for violation of S.B. 181; 17% transferred from their referring school district and/or refused case management services; and 21% missed three or more additional school days. Compared to previous school years, more families successfully completed the program and less than 5% of THRIVE cases were referred to juvenile court. These comparative data clearly demonstrate that students/families who received mediation and/or case management services through Project THRIVE improve their attendance rates overall.

Table 2
Project THRIVE Attendance Outcome Data by School Year

	SY 2002-03		SY 2003-04		SY 2004-05	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Outcomes						
Successful Attendance	89	56.3	81	59.1	95	58.6
No Change	28	17.8	36	26.3	34	21.0
No Service	37	24.4	14	10.2	27	16.7
Court Referral	4	2.5	6	4.4	6	3.7
Total	158	100.1	137	100.0	162	100.0
* Percentage due to rounding.						
Source: Project THRIVE Client/Termination Database						

Objective 2: Increase Understanding of Substance Abuse

In an effort to increase student understanding of substance abuse, Project THRIVE and coalition members provided anti-drug education to 566 students who attended school in participating districts. The anti-drug presentations expose students to information that increases their awareness and understanding of substance abuse, focus on the harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, highlight the correlation between truancy and substance abuse and promote age-appropriate messages for youth.

In the past four years since the implementation of Project THRIVE, survey data reveal that students in schools served by Project THRIVE understand that the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) can negatively affect their relationship with their parents and friends and that ATOD use can prevent them from achieving their dreams. As shown in Table 3, **Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use**, an increased number of students clearly understand the psychological, social and physical hazards of substance abuse. The pre- and post-test results show that almost all of the students believe their parents would disapprove of any substance use (i.e., alcohol, cigarette, or drugs); almost all of the students regard the use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco as “bad”; and almost all of the students indicate that people who drink, smoke or use drugs hurt themselves. Student perceptions regarding risk and disapproval of

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substance use among their parents, friends and peer group are appropriate for this age group. The difference in percentage points between pre- and post-test results reflect modest changes given the students' pre-test knowledge and awareness of substance abuse. Less than 2% of the students surveyed report drug, tobacco, and alcohol use in the past 30 days. These survey results suggest that that presence of Project THRIVE in participating schools has led to an increase in student understanding of substance abuse far greater than 60%.

Table 3			
Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use (Pre- & Post-test Results)*			
Survey Questions	Pre-test Results	Post-test Results	Percent Difference
Would your parents be mad if you drank alcohol?	98.9	99.1	0.2
Would your parents be mad if you smoked cigarettes?	99.5	99.3	-0.2
Would your parents be mad if you used marijuana?	99.1	99.3	0.2
Do your friends think it is bad if you drink alcohol?	97.7	97.9	0.2
Do your friends think it is bad if you smoke cigarettes?	98.2	98.2	-
Do your friends think it is bad if you use marijuana?	98.1	98.4	0.3
Do you think people hurt themselves by drinking alcohol?	98.9	99.3	0.4
Do you think people hurt themselves by drinking cigarettes?	98.8	99.8	1.0
Do you think people hurt themselves by drinking marijuana?	98.9	98.2	-0.7
Have you drunk alcohol in the past 30 days?	1.9	1.4	-0.5
Have you smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days?	0.5	0.5	-
Have you smoked marijuana in the past 30 days?	1.1	0.5	-0.6
* Pre & Post-test Results reported for "yes" responses only; Missing responses excluded from analysis.			
Survey results for SY 2004-05; Pretest N= 566 ; Posttest N= 444			
Source: CHC Project THRIVE Database, Student Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use			

Objective 3: Increase Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities

Project THRIVE staff continues to significantly increase participation in extra-curricula activities that focus on truancy and substance abuse awareness. During SY 2004-05, project staff conducted 310 prevention programs in schools and in communities and prevention programming reached 15,372 children and their families. Some of the extra-curricular activities organized and/or assisted by project staff included: attending parent/child activity night, facilitating intervention and awareness programs for after-school programs, attending monthly meetings on promoting youth and alcohol awareness, presenting drug, alcohol and tobacco prevention activities at THRIVE schools, assisting with field trips and leadership activities, and providing information about the dangers of tobacco to youth as well as a host of other prevention activities. Project staff is dedicated to ensuring that at-risk students participate in extra-curricular activities throughout the school year and during the summer months. This statement is supported by the fact that prevention programming and the number of families reached increased by more than 100% this year.

Goal 2: *Prevent substance abuse achieved by the following objectives: Decrease the number of absences/tardies among the targeted population as compared to last school year by 40%; and increase family's knowledge between the correlation of truancy and substance abuse by 50%.*

Objective 1: Decrease number of absences/tardies

As was mentioned in the evaluation of Goal 1, the number of absences among the “at-risk” population decreased considerably. Of the 162 students terminated at the end of the school year - those who were on active caseload and who received mediation and case management services – almost 60% decreased their number of absences and improved their attendance rate during the school year. On average, these students had 5.48 unexcused absences “before” they were referred to Project THRIVE for case management and mediation. Once these students were terminated from the program – when case management and mediation agreements were completed – the average unexcused absences “after” THRIVE were 2.92. This finding suggests that the students who received case management and mediation services significantly reduced their unexcused absences after engaging in the THRIVE program.²

For the 162 students who were referred to Project THRIVE for case management and mediation, students who reported to school late increased. Before they were referred to the program, this group accumulated an average of 6.88 tardies. After they were terminated from the program, on average this group of students accumulated 7.09 additional tardies. While the relationship between the number of tardies accumulated before and after participation is not significant, previous experience suggests that students who participate in the THRIVE program reduce their number of unexcused absences and increase their school attendance overall - even if they arrive to school late.

Objective 2: Increase Family Knowledge of Truancy and Substance Abuse

Project THRIVE’s case managers continue to conduct workshops and presentations aimed at involving families in its program modalities. Program staff focused each of these workshops/presentations on educating parents about the positive correlation between truancy and substance abuse. Staff involve parents in THRIVE’s public campaign to prevent truancy and substance abuse among in Summit County. Since July 2004, case managers educated 3,154 parents at various school functions and community events that included: School Open Houses, Parent/Child Night, and Parent-Teacher meetings. In addition, case managers spent approximately 500 hours educating parents about truancy and substance abuse through prevention and intervention programming.

Tobacco is the number one violation of school policy within districts served by Project THRIVE. When students violate the school code of behavior, school administrators communicate directly with the parent regarding the violation. School newsletters,

² T-value (-2.56) statistically significant at .00 level.

bulletin boards, and school nights all promote prevention messages aimed at educating parents and students about truancy and substance abuse.

Based on the survey data collected from parents when they completed mediation, Project THRIVE has been successful in increasing family knowledge of truancy and substance abuse. As indicated in Table 4, **Frequency Distribution of Truancy Knowledge Survey Results for Parents**, 133 parents completed the Truancy Knowledge Survey after completing mediation services provided by the program. Ninety-four percent of the parents surveyed are aware of the legal consequences regarding truancy under Senate Bill 181, i.e., parents of truant children can be sent to court or may be imprisoned. More than 80% of the parents survey reported that they knew kids who miss school are more likely to use illegal drugs and are more likely to commit crimes. Conversely, more parents understand the positive correlation between school attendance and academic success, between school attendance and drug-free living, between school attendance and employment possibilities.

	% True	% False	% Unknown
Students who attend school regularly are less likely to use illegal drugs.	83.5	13.5	3.0
Being absent from school doesn't affect a student's grades.	96.2	3.0	0.8
When a student misses too much school, their parents may have to go to court.	94.0	3.8	2.3
Students who graduate from high school are more likely to be employed.	88.7	10.5	0.8
Students who attend school regularly feel good about themselves.	96.2	3.0	0.8
A State law can send parents to jail when their children don't go to school.	94.0	3.8	2.3
Students who skip school are more likely to commit crimes.	88.7	9.0	2.3
Source: CHC THRIVE 2005 Database Parent Survey			

In addition to the information collected as parents completed mediation, parents were surveyed at the end of the school year to ensure that parents are satisfied with the program and have an opportunity to provide suggestions for improvement. As part of the substance abuse prevention activities, during mediation each parent is given a parenting guide (Growing Up Drug-Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention) and other anti-drug information. As indicated in Table 5, **Parent Satisfaction Survey**, at least 90% of the 30 parents surveyed reported that their family benefited by participating in Project THRIVE. In addition, more than 65% of the respondents indicated that their knowledge regarding the importance of school attendance increased because both parent and child participated in Project THRIVE and slightly more than half indicated their knowledge about substance abuse increased because parent and child participated in Project THRIVE. Nearly all of the parents were satisfied with Project THRIVE's case management services and would like the program to continue in the future.

Overall, the findings suggest that parents who participate in Project THRIVE are more knowledgeable about the truancy state law and have become increasingly more aware of

the negative correlation between truant behavior and risks of substance abuse when compared to last year.

Table 5		
Parent Satisfaction Survey (n=30)		
Survey Questions	True %	False %
Do you feel that you benefited from participating in THRIVE?*	90.0	6.7
Do you feel that your child benefited from participating in THRIVE?	93.3	3.3
Has your knowledge regarding the importance of school attendance increased because you and your child participated in THRIVE?*	66.7	30.0
Has your knowledge about substance abuse increased because you and your child participated in THRIVE?*	56.7	40.0
Were you satisfied with the help that you received from the case manager?	96.7	3.3
Would you like Project THRIVE to continue in the future?	96.7	3.3
*Unknown = 3.3%;		
Source: Project THRIVE 2004-05 Parent Satisfaction Survey		

Goal 3: *Decrease substance abuse among targeted population achieved by the following objectives: Reduce the number of suspensions for drug-related offenses among youth that have a history of truancy in pilot schools and reduce substance-related criminal activity by program participants.*

Objective 1: Reduce School Suspensions for drug-related offenses & substance-related criminal activity

Since the implementation of Project THRIVE, all of the participating schools have noticed a decrease in the number of suspensions related to drug offenses and criminal activity. Each school year, school representatives to the Truancy Task Force are surveyed and asked to provide the number of students suspended for drug-related offenses and the number of students suspended for substance-related activity. Students are referred to diversion programs, treatment programs, and the Crossroads program (a program for juveniles convicted of an offense who have mental health and substance abuse issues). During truancy hearings, court Magistrates determine if a substance issue is present and the court may order an assessment and treatment program, when necessary. Magistrates will refer youth to social service agencies to provide them with continuity of care. Schools frequently give youth the option of participating in assessment and treatment as an alternative to suspension when ATOD issues are identified.

In SY 2001-02 and SY 2002-03, all of the participating schools reported no suspensions for drug-related offenses and no suspensions for substance-related criminal activity. In SY 2003-04, only one of the twelve schools receiving services from Project THRIVE reported statistics on substance abuse among targeted participants - Woodridge Middle School reported having six drug-related suspensions that involved four youth. In SY

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2004-05, the number of drug-related offenses and substance-related criminal activity reduced. Only one school reported criminal activity among students who participated in Project THRIVE – in Sill Middle School, 1 student was suspended for criminal activity. The decrease in the number of students suspended for AOD and criminal activity can be attributed to the quality of support that students receive from Project THRIVE, participating schools and members of the Truancy Task Force.

Goal 4: *Reduce truancy by adhering to State mandate of 93% school attendance achieved by the following objectives: Increase attendance rates of youth in selected schools to meet 93% attendance rate; decrease recidivism of juvenile complaints of both youth and families by 50%.*

Objective 1: Increase School Attendance Rates

In SY 2003-04, all of the schools participating in Project THRIVE continued to maintain school attendance rates at or above the State mandate of 93%. As indicated in Table 6, **School Attendance Rates**, the average attendance rate for the schools in the program has remained at 95% for the past two school years.

Table 6				
School Attendance Rates by School Year				
	SY 2001-02	SY 2002-03	SY 2003-04	SY 2004-05
Akron Public Schools				
Barber	-	-	95.6%	-
Bettes Elementary	-	-	95.9%	95.8%
Leggett Elementary	-	-	-	92.8%
McEbright Elementary	-	-	94.3%	-
Perkins Middle	-	-	-	94.3%
Portage Path	-	-	-	95.2%
Rankin Elementary	95.3%	95.8%	95.9%	94.9%
Schumacher Elementary	95.4%	96.7%	96.3%	-
Barberton				
Memorial Elementary	-	-	-	94.2%
Oakdale Elementary	94.4%	93.8%	95.0%	-
Cuyahoga Falls				
Dewitt Elementary	-	95.8%	96.3%	-
Price Elementary	-	-	95.3%	94.9%
Sill Middle	-	-	94.2%	94.4%
Woodridge				
Woodridge Primary	94.7%	95.4%	95.0%	95.0%
Woodridge Intermediate	-	-	95.4%	95.3%
Woodridge Middle	-	-	95.8%	95.1%
Average*	95%	94%	95%	95%
Source: Ohio Department of Education Local School Report Cards, www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard				
* Average of Project THRIVE schools reflects a cumulative average.				
- Indicates school did not participate in Project THRIVE in reported school year.				

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Objective 2: Decrease Juvenile Recidivism Rates

Since the implementation of Project THRIVE, the number of families found in violation of S.B. 181 (court hearings for truancy/failure to send cases) continues to decrease each year. As indicated in Table 7, **Comparative Data for Summit County Juvenile Court Truancy Cases**, the number of truant cases filed in Summit County for SY 2004-05 was 642, down from 725 since SY 2003-04. This finding suggests that Project THRIVE and the Truancy Task Force has been successful in decreasing truancy in Summit County.

Table 7		
Comparative Data for Summit County Juvenile Court Truancy Cases		
School Year	SY 2003-04	SY 2004-05
July	1	0
August	42	0
September	4	0
October	63	31
November	76	71
December	63	120
January	90	29
February	48	81
March	129	101
April	50	88
May	103	19
June	56	102
Total	725	642
Source: Summit County Juvenile Court, Incident Comparison Reports by Month and Year.		

III. Summary

Project THRIVE has stayed on course this year. The truancy awareness campaign, which began at the start of the school year, was very successful. Billboards and posters which espoused the message – “The classroom or the courtroom: It’s your choice ... Go to school. It’s the law.” - reminded members of the community that truancy is taken seriously in Summit County. Prevention, mediation, and chronic truancy programming continued on course as case managers assisted families in addressing personal issues that lead to habitual or chronic truancy. Fundraising to sustain the program continued throughout the summer and additional grants were submitted to assure that funding is available to support case management, mediation and referral services to families in need.

Project THRIVE continues to work diligently to prevent substance abuse and truancy through the Summit County Juvenile Court and Truancy Task Force - a strong coalition of Juvenile Court staff, parents, youth treatment providers, community/agency partners, police department representatives, and Summit County school administrators and educators. Project staff has done an excellent job of increasing collaboration when planning prevention, extra-curricular, and family activities in conjunction with coalition members and community organizations. The downsizing of the Truancy Task Force has enabled the coalition to include key decision-makers who are directly involved with school districts and closely interact with families at-risk. Current membership on the Task Force include diversion specialists, social service directors, attendance officers, truancy officers, parents, students, business leaders and other school and judicial administrators and faith-based participants who are consider essential to improving and enhancing communication between the courts, schools and communities. The successful redirection of the Task Force allows all stakeholders to examine the processes and procedures used when referring cases to Juvenile Court and effectively change the referral process so that judicial intervention can be pursued for those families who are chronically or habitually truant.

The level of collaboration has improved among the courts, schools and communities served by Project THRIVE. Since January 2004, the Task Force has worked with Barberton Public schools to ensure that truant cases are referred and heard in a timely manner at Summit County Juvenile Court. Initially the Task Force met quarterly; however, many members of the Task Force felt the need to standardize the meeting schedule and the Task Force has returned to a monthly meeting schedule. Task Force planning continued throughout the year despite challenges in establishing a meeting schedule to accommodate all of the members of the coalition. In SY 2004-05, the Task Force continued the campaign poster, beginning August/September 2004 and had approximately 30 billboards in targeted school districts. Throughout SY 2003-04, more than 1000 public service announcements were made on local cable programs and the Task Force increased its market for this school year. The Task Force throughout the SY 2004-05 year marketed the new theme, “You Missed School/You Missed Out”.

As part of a planned truancy campaign, Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio (Summit County Juvenile Court Judge) held truancy hearings in schools. In SY 2003-04, Judge Teodosio launched a pilot program, Court in the Community at Goodrich Middle School. Court in

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the Community was a well-attended truancy program. As such, the Judge continued truancy hearings in the SY 2004-05 and expanded the truancy hearings to be held at U. L. Light Middle School in Barberton, Ohio. This type of cutting-edge programming brought the juvenile court into the community and heightened truancy awareness among students, parents and school staff. The Juvenile Court, on behalf of Judge Teodosio, continued to send letters to all superintendents of schools reminding them of the truancy laws in the State. This information was passed on to parents as part of a coordinated effort to inform at-risk families of Senate Bill 181. In addition, court magistrates conducted mock trials at schools within Summit County, presented truancy information to the Girl Scouts of the Western Reserve and Caring Communities (grandparents with school-age children living in their home), and conducted seminars at the University of Akron outlining truancy issues and the law. Diversion units within the local police departments assisted the court by escorting parents to truancy hearings. Court probation officers went into school systems and provided information to school administrators, teachers, and children. In addition, court staff developed a “best practices” referral manual that served as an school/court resource for families in crisis.

IV. Lessons Learned

There were several factors that significantly impacted the implementation of Project THRIVE and the coordination and collaboration of the Summit County Truancy Task Force initiative. These factors, identified as “lessons learned,” are explained in detail below:

Funding. One of the successful factors identified in this evaluation of Project THRIVE and the Truancy Task Force initiative is the coalition’s ability to develop community partnerships to support programming. Several grant applications were submitted to agencies and foundations to implement Project THRIVE in SY 2004-05. In addition to a federal grant in the amount of \$75,000 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)/Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), Akron Public Schools provided an in-kind match of \$52,500, participating public schools provided an additional in-kind personnel match of \$20,000 and the Summit County Juvenile Court provided an in-kind match of \$5,000 to help support program services for Project THRIVE. The Community Health Center successfully secured four additional grants totaling \$46,100, from the Community Health Center Foundation (\$1,100), Summit County Department of Job and Family Services PRC (\$25,000), Summit County Department of Youth Services (\$19,000) and OMNOVA (\$1,000). In order to continue to meet the objectives of the Summit County Truancy Task Force and Project THRIVE, funding is crucial to support the myriad of prevention and intervention activities that this initiative provides.

Task Force Membership. During the SY 2003-04, the court administrator who inspired many members on the Summit County Truancy Task Force left the employment of the Juvenile Court. While the focus of the court remained extremely supportive of the goals and objectives for Project THRIVE, the Task Force was reorganized and downsized. In past years, Task Force membership had increased to almost 50 members – members were invited to join the Task Force upon an invitation to speak about the services offered by their local organization. In SY 2004-05, the new coordinator of the Task Force encouraged the downsizing of the Task Force to ensure that its goals were met and to offer membership to those who directly influence/educate the court, schools and families about truancy and substance abuse. Since downsizing membership on the Task Force, Project THRIVE has continued to fulfill its stated goals and objectives. Court administrators and magistrates, school personnel and project staff remain committed to improving coordination and service-related information used to assist families at-risk. Additionally in the spring of 2005, Summit County Juvenile Judge Teodosio hired a full time education coordinator to lead the Truancy Task Force and expand truancy programming.

Citizens (parents) currently hold membership on the Summit County Truancy Task Force and are strongly encouraged to become involved in all of the prevention and intervention activities held in the community. The Task Force has also expanded membership to include citizens and business leaders on special subcommittees when needed. In addition, the coalition solicited citizen participation through focus groups conducted by Project THRIVE. To encourage student participation and input on the Truancy Task

Force, two monthly meetings were held at area schools, one at the Akron Alternative School and one at the Barberton Middle School. As part of their prevention activities, Project THRIVE staff collaborated in several parent/child nights at the schools and in the communities served by the program.

Program Enhancements. During this school year, Project THRIVE expanded the number of participating schools. The program picked up four additional schools and continued to provide intervention and prevention activities for a total of eleven schools in four districts. The efforts of the program are documented through extensive prevention logs and mediation summaries kept by case managers for each activity held in the past twelve months. In addition, parent satisfaction and truancy knowledge surveys as well as student perceived risk & disapproval surveys document intervention and prevention efforts for families at-risk. In addition, the court provides members of the Task Force with minutes that express action items and planned activities. These minutes serve as the official record for coalition planning efforts. Schools also assist the coalition in documenting the impacts of planning and prevention efforts. For example, schools provide attendance data when students are sent a school letter, when they are referred to Project THRIVE, and when they are terminated from the program. When cases are terminated from the program, closing attendance data, outcome data (i.e., family status regarding services and truancy behavior) and the number of days students are in the program is recorded in the THRIVE database.

Collaboration among stakeholders. Collaboration levels have improved over the past year. Specialists directly impact the manner in which the Task Force currently operates – now, the Task Force is focused on truancy and substance abuse issues and communication has improved between the court and the schools. Each of the stakeholders on the Task Force share a common concern and focus on the social problems that at-risk families face. Now when families are summoned to appear in court on a truancy charge, the Sheriff will sometimes escort them to court. School officials are in court to provide relevant information regarding the truancy case brought before the Judge. Improvements in the truancy docket have been more effective since the court streamlined its approach to hearing truancy cases. The court is more aggressive when following up on dispositions and requiring that families needing more support attend counseling and receive social support services. As previously noted the court has re-created a full-time education coordinator position to expand truancy services and programming.

Case managers assigned to work in participating schools offered suggestions for improving the implementation of Project THRIVE. Project THRIVE staff suggested that there be a general meeting of school personnel to ensure that administrators in participating schools are aware of the compliance requirements for the grant. This meeting could be held each quarter since it is likely that turnover among school personnel will occur. Referrals to mediation were sometimes problematic when families are sent for services late in the school year. A team approach in determining when and who will be referred for mediation might help to alleviate this problem next year. While parents have become more knowledgeable about the truancy laws and there has been a decrease in the number of absences among at-risk youth, some youth continue to incur excessive

(excused) tardies throughout the school year. School programming which focuses on tardies and absences might prove beneficial for at-risk youth, given this finding. Case managers report that for the most part, participating schools fully understood the prevention and intervention services provided to students through Project THRIVE. However, in some instances, there was a lack of consistency among support staff - some were not compliant with sending out 3-day letters and others were not accurate when reporting attendance data.

Through direct programming to families at-risk, Project THRIVE continues to collaborate with numerous agencies to provide intervention, prevention and diversion programming. These local and community agencies include: Akron Public Schools, Akron After School Youth Program, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA), Family Solutions/Child Guidance, Akron-Summit Library, Woodridge Schools, The University of Akron, Summit County Juvenile Court, Summit County Detention, Cuyahoga Falls Schools, Western Reserve Girl Scouts, First Tee of Akron, Barberton Public Schools, and the Community Health Center Prevention Program.

School Satisfaction. As evidenced by all of the school systems that participate in THRIVE, each feel that the program is effectively serving the needs and the interests of families at-risk. At the end of the school year, 31 school representatives in the participating schools responded to the School Satisfaction Survey. Ninety-seven (97%) percent of 31 school administrators surveyed indicated that they felt their school benefited by participating in Project THRIVE. All (100%) percent were satisfied with the job performance of the case manager assigned to their school and 97% would like Project THRIVE to continue at their school in the future.

Family Support. Each of the case managers encountered unique challenges when working with students at-risk for truancy and families who receive case management and mediation services through Project THRIVE. Almost always, Project THRIVE's involvement when providing family support represents a "win-win" situation for families, schools and the court. Case managers reported the lack of communication and the lack parental involvement as a major obstacle when intervening on behalf of children. Some parents are hesitant when getting involved with Project THRIVE because of their previous experience with the social service system. In the most extreme cases, poverty significantly contributes to truant cases. After receiving case management, parents reported shelter, food, clothing, shoes, and other necessities as the most significant issue preventing regular attendance at school.