

**PROJECT THRIVE**  
**(TRUANCY HABITS REDUCED, INTERVENTIONS VIA EDUCATION)**

**FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**



**SCHOOL YEAR 2002-2003**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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. It is a program 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, intervention, treatment, intervention and prevention, and mediation services for students identified as at-risk youth. The goals and objectives of Project THRIVE include the following:

- 1. Prevent substance abuse among “at-risk” students by decreasing the number of absences among the “at-risk” population, increasing understanding of substance abuse and increasing participation in extra-curricula activities.*
- 2. Prevent substance abuse by increasing family awareness of the correlation between truancy and substance abuse and reducing the number of families found in violation of SB 181.*
- 3. Reduce substance abuse by decreasing school suspension of drug-related offenses.*
- 4. Reduce substance abuse by reducing substance-related criminal activity of program participants by 40%.*
- 5. Reduce truancy by adhering to State mandate of 93% school attendance by increasing attendance rates of youth in selected schools to meet 93% attendance rate and decreasing recidivism juvenile complaints to both youth and families by 50%.*

The evaluation of Project THRIVE reveals 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. During the 2002-2003 school year, Project THRIVE served four school districts in Summit County (i.e., Akron, Barberton, Cuyahoga Falls, and Woodridge) and offered numerous intervention and prevention activities in six schools (i.e., DeWitt, Oakdale, Preston, Rankin, Schumacher, and Woodridge Primary). School administrators identified 231 students as being “at-risk” for truancy during SY 2003. Fifty-six percent (56%) of the families who fully participated in Project THRIVE improved their attendance rate during the school year. Drug, tobacco, and alcohol use among program participants remained significantly low. Family awareness of the correlation between truancy and substance abuse increased among parents and children. Criminal activity and school suspensions related to substance abuse decreased considerably in schools served by Project THRIVE. As a result of Project THRIVE, overall school attendance rates remain at 94%, above the State mandate. The support that families receive from Project THRIVE continues to lay a strong foundation that improves school attendance for at-risk youth and increases awareness of substance abuse among school-age children and their families.

## **SY 2002-2003 EVALUATION OF PROJECT THRIVE**

### **Introduction**

RaJade M. Berry, Ph.D. and Lucinda M. Deason-Howell, Ph.D., evaluators and professors at the University of Akron conducted the evaluation of Project THRIVE, Truancy Habits Reduced, Interventions Via Education. During this grant cycle, the evaluators attended monthly meetings with the Summit County Juvenile Truancy Task Force, met with Project THRIVE staff and assisted in the management of the data collected. The evaluation report assesses the stated goals and objectives of the program and identifies program accomplishments to date.

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. It is a central program 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, intervention, treatment, intervention and prevention, and mediation services for students identified as at-risk youth.

THRIVE serves four school districts in Summit County (i.e., Akron, Barberton, Cuyahoga Falls, and Woodridge) and offers numerous intervention and prevention activities in six schools (i.e., DeWitt, Oakdale, Preston, Rankin, Schumacher, and Woodridge Primary). Most students referred to the THRIVE Program are from the Akron school district (see Table 1 – **Frequency Distribution of At-Risk Students by School District**).

<b>Table 1</b>		
<b>Frequency Distribution of At-Risk Students by School District</b>		
	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Akron	86	37.2
Barberton	38	16.5
Cuyahoga Falls	46	19.9
Woodridge	61	26.4
Total	231	100.0
<b>Source:</b> CHC Project THRIVE Demographics Database		

Since the passing of Ohio Senate Bill (S.B.) 181 in June 2000, Ohio law mandates that children must attend school according to the minimum standards set by the State Board of Education - making children identified as habitual or chronic truants designated as delinquents by juvenile courts and setting serious penalties for parents whose children have been deemed delinquent. According to S. B. 181, “habitual truancy” is defined as more than 5 consecutive unexcused school days, 7 in a month, or 12 in a year and “chronic truancy” is defined as 7 or more consecutive unexcused school days, 10 in a

month, or 15 in a year. Parents who fail to comply with the intervention strategies established by school district boards of education may face the following penalties:

- Mandatory mediation;
- Mandatory parenting classes;
- Up to 70 hours of community service;
- Up to a \$2,500 fine and/or \$500 bond; and
- Up to six months in jail.

Project THRIVE continues to work diligently to address issues of truancy and substance abuse with the Summit County Juvenile Court and Truancy Task Force, a strong coalition of Juvenile Court staff, parents, religious organizations, the business community, youth treatment providers, community agency partners, police department representatives, and Summit County school administrators and educators.

The goals and objectives of Project THRIVE include the following:

6. Prevent substance abuse among “at-risk” students by decreasing the number of absences among the “at-risk” population, increasing understanding of substance abuse and increasing participation in extra-curricula activities.
7. Prevent substance abuse by increasing family awareness of the correlation between truancy and substance abuse and reducing the number of families found in violation of SB 181.
8. Reduce substance abuse by decreasing school suspension of drug-related offenses.
9. Reduce substance abuse by reducing substance-related criminal activity of program participants by 40%.
10. Reduce truancy by adhering to State mandate of 93% school attendance by increasing attendance rates of youth in selected schools to meet 93% attendance rate and decreasing recidivism juvenile complaints to both youth and families by 50%.

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**Goal 1:** *Prevent substance abuse among “at-risk” students by decreasing the number of absences among the “at-risk” population, increasing understanding of substance abuse and increasing participation in extra-curricula activities.*

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#### *Decreased Number of Absences*

During the school year 2002-2003 (SY 2003), the number of absences among the “at-risk” population decreased considerably. School administrators identified 231 students as

being at-risk for truancy during SY 2003. At-risk students are defined as those students who have had three or more unexcused absences since the beginning of the school year. Administrators can also refer students to Project THRIVE if they determine that a child's excused absences are excessive and place the child at-risk.

As indicated in Table 2, **Attendance Outcome Data for Program THRIVE**, attendance outcomes were 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 and/or were non-compliant (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.

<b>Table 2: Attendance Outcome Data for Project THRIVE<sup>1</sup></b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent*</b>
<b>Outcomes</b>		
Successful Attendance	89	56.3
No Change	28	17.8
No Service	37	24.4
Court Referral	4	2.5
Total	158	100.1
* Percentage due to rounding.		
Source: Project THRIVE Client/Termination Database		

Of the 158 students who were on active caseload and received case management services and mediation, Table 2 reflects that 56% of the families who fully participated in Project THRIVE decreased their number of absences and improved their attendance rate during the school year – these students had fewer than 3 unexcused or excused absences from the time of last contact with the program. Only 2.5% of the at-risk students were referred to the Court for violation of S.B. 181. Project THRIVE continues to provide support for parents and at-risk children. Between January and June, there were 1,073 direct service contacts between THRIVE staff and families. These finding suggests that Project THRIVE has made a significant impact on the lives of at-risk students and their families.

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<sup>1</sup> Of the 231 students identified as at-risk, attendance analysis in Table 2 reflects an unduplicated headcount of the 158 students/families who were terminated from Project THRIVE by end of the school year and received case management and/or mediation services from Project THRIVE staff. Four of the 231 families had contact with the program during the mediation sessions that were held. During this evaluation period, 89 early intervention letters were sent to parents informing them of their child's absences and warning them of the risks to their family (e.g., academic consequences and violation of S.B. 181). These families had no direct contact with case management staff.

*Understanding of Substance Abuse*

As part of the numerous prevention activities conducted by Project THRIVE and members of the Task Force, classroom presentations were made to students in grades 2 thru 5. Pre- and post-test results for classroom presentations clearly demonstrate the effect of prevention activities on students exposed to information geared to increasing their awareness of substance abuse. As indicated in Table 3, **Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use for SY 2003**, pre and post-test results reveal that an increased number of students report a positive understanding of substance abuse. In the post-test results, for example, at least 97% of the students indicate that their parents would disapprove of any substance abuse (i.e., alcohol, cigarette, or drugs) use. Student perceptions regarding the use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco are interesting. While more than 90% of the students have indicated that their friends think people who smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol hurt themselves, survey data reveal that 87% of them indicated that their friends who use drugs are stupid. Almost all of the students surveyed in the post-test (99%) indicate that their friends think that marijuana usage is bad. Nine students (3.4%) reported using alcohol in the last 30 days compared to one student (0.4%) reporting the use of cigarettes and/or marijuana. Overall, post-test results revealed modest changes in the perceived risk and disapproval of drug use – representing increased awareness regarding substance abuse after student participation in the prevention activities conducted by Project THRIVE. Drug, tobacco, and alcohol use among the program population remains significantly low, family values regarding substance abuse are positive and peer pressure regarding AoD issues are appropriate for this age group.

<b>Table 3</b>			
<b>Survey of Perceived Risk &amp; Disapproval of Drug Use (Pre- &amp; Post-test Results)*</b>			
<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Pretest Results</b>	<b>Post-test Results</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Would your parents be mad if you drank alcohol?	96.2	96.6	0.4
Would your parents be mad if you smoked cigarettes?	96.6	98.1	1.5
Do your friends think it is bad if you try marijuana?	96.6	98.9	2.3
Do your friends think people who use drugs are stupid?	85.7	87.2	1.5
Do you think people hurt themselves by smoking cigarettes?	95.1	93.2	-1.9
Do you think people hurt themselves by drinking alcohol?	91.3	92.8	1.5
Have you drunk alcohol in the last 30 days?	3.8	3.4	-0.4
Have you smoked cigarettes in the last 30 days?	0.8	0.4	-0.4
Have you smoked marijuana in the last 30 days?	1.0	0.4	-0.6
<b>* Pre &amp; Post-test Results reported for “yes” responses only</b>			
<b>Survey results for SY 2002-2003; N=265</b>			
<b>Source:</b> CHC Project THRIVE Database, Student Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use			

In Table 4, **Parent Satisfaction Survey**, families who benefited from case management and mediation through Project THRIVE were surveyed, in part, to assess their knowledge of substance abuse and their satisfaction with the program. Approximately 94% of the

parents report that their knowledge regarding the importance of school attendance has increased due to their participation in the program. 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. Sixty-one (61%) of parents surveyed believed that their knowledge about substance abuse increased because their family participated in Project THRIVE. Further analysis of the parent satisfaction data can be found in the section entitled “Suggestions for Program Improvement.” Despite the efforts to provide anti-drug education, more than one-third of those surveyed did not feel their knowledge about substance abuse increased by participating in Project THRIVE.<sup>2</sup>

<b>Table 4</b>			
<b>Parent Satisfaction Survey (n=31)</b>			
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Survey Questions</b>	Yes	No	Unsure/ Unknown
Do you feel that you benefited from participating in THRIVE?	87.1	12.9	--
Do you feel that your child benefited from participating in THRIVE?	83.9	16.1	--
Has your knowledge regarding the importance of school attendance increased because you and your child participated in THRIVE?	93.5	6.5	--
Has your knowledge about substance abuse increased because you and your child participated in THRIVE?	61.3	38.7	--
Were you satisfied with the help that you received from the case manager?	90.3	9.7	--
Would you like Project THRIVE to continue in the future?	83.9	6.5	9.7
Source: Project THRIVE Parent Satisfaction Survey			

### *Extra-Curricular Activities*

Project THRIVE staff continues to increase student participation in extra-curricula activities focused on truancy and substance abuse awareness. The project staff continues to provide age-appropriate information to approximately 1,300 children participating in extra-curricular prevention activities. During this project period 64 extra-curricular prevention activities were conducted. Some of the extra-curricular activities organized or provided by the project staff included: passing out information about Project THRIVE and truancy to families at the “Child Abuse/Family Awareness Mall Event, presenting drug, alcohol and tobacco prevention activities at the Schumacher, Rankin, Oakdale, and Woodridge Elementary schools’ after-school programs, providing information about the dangers of tobacco in collaboration with “Students Working Against Tobacco,” as well as a host of other prevention activities. Moreover, the project staff is dedicated to ensuring that at-risk students participate in extra-curricular activities during the summer months and the school year.

<sup>2</sup> This finding suggests that parents who had previous knowledge about substance abuse are less likely to perceive their knowledge about substance abuse increased because of participation in THRIVE.

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**Goal 2:** *Prevent substance abuse by increasing the family awareness of the correlation between truancy and substance abuse and reducing the number of families found in violation of SB 181.*

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*Family Awareness of Truancy and Substance Abuse*

Project staff conducted numerous workshops at various school functions that involved family participation and presented information related to the program modalities of Project THRIVE. Each of these workshops focused on the correlation between truancy and substance abuse and encouraged parents to remain active in supporting the campaign to prevent truancy and substance abuse among school-age children. Approximately 400 families participated in various school functions that included: Open Houses, Parent-Teacher Organization meetings, parent conferences, Family literacy night, and Family coffee hour, just to mention a few. Additionally, a total of 276 house visits were made by project staff to children's homes in order to educate parents about truancy and substance abuse.

*Family Awareness of Ohio State Bill (S.B.) 181*

Project THRIVE has been very successful in encouraging parents to take an active role in the academic lives of their children. A survey of parents in the target population indicates that overall, parents have been educated about the state law regarding truancy and are increasingly aware of its consequences. Additionally, the survey data reveal that parents are aware of the negative correlation between truant behavior and academic success. As indicated in Table 5, **Frequency Distribution of Truancy Knowledge Survey Results for Parents**, 107 parents whose children were exposed to the THRIVE Program were surveyed. While some parents are unaware of the prominent link between youth substance abuse and truancy (25%), most clearly understand school attendance leads to academic success (78%). Among those surveyed, 97.2% of the parents indicated that kids who attend school regularly are likely to graduate from high school.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly all of the parents surveyed understand the statutory provisions of S.B. 181. Eighty-six percent understand that serious penalties will result when parents fail to send their children to school. Ninety-three percent know that failure to comply with S.B. 181 could lead to imprisonment. Ninety-three percent are aware that they can be referred to juvenile court if their child is deemed a habitual or chronic truant.

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<sup>3</sup> Only one parent indicated that kids who attend school regularly are likely to drop out of school. Two parents did not respond to this question.

<b>Table 5</b>			
<b>Frequency Distribution of Truancy Knowledge Survey Results for Parents (N=107)</b>			
	<b>% False</b>	<b>% True</b>	<b>% Unknown</b>
If kids are not in school, they are more likely to use illegal drugs**	25.2	73.8	0.9
Being absent from school doesn't affect a child's grades	77.6	21.5	0.9
A new state law can send parents to jail if their children don't go to school	5.6	92.5	1.9
Students who drop out of school are more likely to be unemployed	11.2	88.8	-
Missing school makes children feel bad about themselves**	19.6	72.9	7.5
There is no penalty for parents if their children miss school**	86.0	10.3	3.7
If a child misses too much school, the parents may have to go to court	5.6	92.5	1.9
Most people in prison have a high school diploma	84.1	9.3	6.5
Source: CHC THRIVE Database Parent Survey			

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**Goal 3:** *Reduce substance abuse by decreasing school suspensions for drug related offenses.*

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*Decreased School Suspensions*

Much of the literature that highlights the correlation between truancy and substance abuse addresses the increased number of suspensions due to drug-related incidents. As such, schools that participate in Project THRIVE have noticed a significant decrease in the number of suspensions due to drugs. During the school year 2000-03, none of the schools participating in Project THRIVE reported any drug-related suspensions. Similarly, there were no drug-related suspensions during the previous school year (2001-02) either.

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**Goal 4:** *Reduce substance abuse by reducing substance related criminal activity during school hours by 40%.*

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*Reduced Criminal Activity<sup>4</sup>*

In SY 2003, Oakdale, Dewitt, Preston, Schumacher, Rankin, and Woodridge Primary elementary schools did not have any students who were suspended for criminal activity.<sup>5</sup> Last year, in comparison to the number of students suspended for criminal activity during

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<sup>4</sup> The program modalities of Project THRIVE such as early intervention, intervention, mediation, and intervention-prevention services are designed to reduce substance-related criminal activity in participating schools. Although data on substance-related criminal activity are currently unavailable, the data in this section report aggregate data on school suspensions for criminal activity and serve as a reasonable indicator to monitor the outcome of Goal 4.

<sup>5</sup> There were a total of 7 suspensions (Woodridge Primary [3], DeWitt [2], and Preston [2]) for fighting that did not involve police action and are not consider criminal activity for the purposes of this analysis.

school hours, criminal activity decreased by 100% as indicated in the Table 6 – **School Suspensions for Criminal Activity**.

<b>Table 6</b>				
<b>School Suspensions for Criminal Activity</b>				
	<b>SY 2002</b>	<b>SY 2003</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Suspensions	15	0	-15	(-100%)

Goal 5: *Reduce truancy by adhering to State mandate of 93% school attendance by increasing attendance rates of youth in selected schools to meet 93% attendance rate and by decreasing recidivism of juvenile complaints of both youth and families by 50%.*

*School Attendance Rates*

In SY 2003, 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 7, **School Attendance Rates**, the average attendance rate for the schools in the program remains at 94%.

<b>Table 7</b>			
<b>School Attendance Rates<sup>6</sup></b>			
<b>Schools</b>	<b>SY 00-01</b>	<b>SY 01-02</b>	<b>SY 02-03</b>
Dewitt	-	-	95.8%
Oakdale	94.1%	94.4%	93.8%
Preston	96.2%	95.8%	95.9%
Rankin	95.3%	95.3%	93.0%
Schumacher	95.4%	95.4%	93.0%
WD Primary	94.6%	94.7%	95.0%
<b>Average*</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>94%</b>

\* Average of Project THRIVE schools reflects the average of the average.

*Juvenile Recidivism Rates*

In Summit County, the number of families found in violation of S.B. 181 (court hearings for truancy/failure to send cases) has decreased significantly since the implementation of Project THRIVE. As of May 2003, the Juvenile Court reported that a total of 1108 court hearings were scheduled to date. Compared to 1,332 hearings in May 2001, juvenile

<sup>6</sup> School attendance rates were obtained from school representatives and reflect attendance rates for the entire school. Dewitt School became affiliated with THRIVE SY 2003.

court cases for “truancy/failure to send” have declined by 17% since the inception of Project THRIVE<sup>7</sup>.

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**Goal 6:** Strengthen the coalition by encouraging participation of new members, seeking additional funding, and increasing collaboration among coalition members.

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### *Participation of New Members*

During the first year of Project THRIVE, the initial membership of the Juvenile Court Truancy (S.B. 181) Task Force was 20 and by the end of school year 2002, the membership increased to over 50 members. Membership on the Truancy Task Force has continued to increase each year. An evaluation of the Task Force monthly minutes and attendance rosters reveal that membership on the Task Force include representatives from the Summit County Sheriff’s Office, Nardon High School, Akron Public Schools, ADM Board, Green High School, Cuyahoga Falls Schools, Summit County Education Services, Akron Police Department, Summit County Prosecutors Office, Magistrate, Juvenile Court, Edutek, Family Visitation, Barberton City Schools, Summit County Juvenile Court, Ida B. Wells Academy, Project THRIVE, Children Services Board, Domestic Relations Court, Child Guidance, Roosevelt High School, Akron Child Guidance, YMCA, Summit County Department of Job and Family Services, Community Partnership, and the Community Health Center - just to name a few.

The Task Force employs numerous techniques for increasing its membership size. One of the most effective methods for recruiting Task Force members is to invite guest speakers from local organizations to present information at the monthly meetings and then ask them to join the Taskforce toward the end of the meeting. Guest speakers over the current project period included representatives from the following programs:

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- Youth Advocacy of Summit County
  - Mother to Son Program
  - Boys and Girls Club of Summit County
  - Helping Educators Remove Obstacles (HERO)
  - Summit County Health Department
  - Intensive Day Treatment
  - Man Talk to Mentoring
  - No More Bullies
  - Akron Urban League
  - Akron Digital Academy
  - H.M. Life Opportunity Services
  - Ida B. Wells Academy
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<sup>7</sup> Juvenile Court Truancy (S.B. 181) Task Force Minutes for Meeting of May 7, 2003.

Some of the guest speakers representing the programs above became members of the Task Force as a result of attending the meeting and being made aware of the goals of Project THRIVE. In addition, the H.M. Life Opportunity Services program is one of the first religious groups to become a member of the Task Force and has agreed to take court referrals for battered women with children.

#### *Additional Funding*

In order to sustain Project THRIVE, the grant writer pursues every grant opportunity that is feasible. Between July 2002 and June 2003, 31 grant applications were submitted to numerous agencies and foundations, totaling \$283,000. To date, six grants were approved, totaling \$150,058 from the following entities:

- Akron Public Schools (\$17,500)
- AOH Foundation for Children (\$2,000)
- Laura R. & Lucian Q. Moffitt Foundation (\$500)
- DYS (\$29,058)
- CHC Foundation (\$1,000)
- OJJDP (\$100,000)

#### *Increase Collaboration Among Coalition Members*

Between January and June 2003, the project staff had 1,836 consultations with school staff in order to address implementation barriers that were identified by service providers and school staff. Furthermore, the Protocol Committee played a significant role in helping to develop a common process for dealing with attendance problems and to communicate that process to local school districts. During the current project period, the Protocol Committee developed a new program with the Juvenile Court diversion units where emphasis will be placed on early intervention in order to avoid matters escalating to the point where they are then referred to the Juvenile Court. The project staff has done an excellent job of increasing collaboration by planning prevention, extra-curricular, and family activities in conjunction with coalition members and community organizations.

#### **Data Required by Office of Justice Programs**

##### *Age of Student Population in Targeted Schools*

Since the beginning of the 2002-03 school year, school administrators identified and referred 231 students at-risk for truancy. At-risk students are defined as those with three or more unexcused absences in the first semester of the school year. Schools can refer students to Project THRIVE at any time during the school year when a child reaches three or more unexcused absences or determine that excused absences are excessive and place the child at-risk. During this evaluation period (July 1, 2002 thru June 30, 2003), age-related data was available for the 211 students referred to the program by grade level only. As indicated in Table 8, **Frequency Distribution of Ages of Participating**

**Students**, more than 20% of all at-risk students referred to Project THRIVE are in kindergarten, between ages 5 and 6. In fact, nearly 60% of the students referred to Project THRIVE are in kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades.

<b>Table 8</b>		
<b>Frequency Distribution of Ages of Participating Students (Shown by grade level)</b>		
<b>Grades</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent*</b>
Kindergarten	49	21.2
1 <sup>st</sup>	43	18.6
2	45	19.5
3	30	12.9
4	22	9.5
5	15	6.5
Unknown	27	11.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>99.9</b>
* Percentage due to rounding.		
<b>Source:</b> CHC Project THRIVE Demographics Database		

#### *Drug Use Among Program Population*

A sample of the population served by Project THRIVE revealed that substance abuse among students in the school districts remains significantly low. Self-reported data indicates that only nine students (3.4%) out of the 265 surveyed consumed alcohol, 1 student (0.4%) smoked cigarettes, and 1 student (0.4%) smoked marijuana in the past 30 days.<sup>8</sup> By grade level, a more detailed analysis of those students indicating alcohol consumption showed that the students were in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (n=2), 4<sup>th</sup> grade (n=1) and 5<sup>th</sup> grade (n=6). One student who indicated that he/she smoked cigarettes in the last 30 days was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the student who indicated that he/she smoked marijuana in the last 30 days was also in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade (See Table 3, **Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use for SY 2003**).

#### *Perceptions of Risk and Disapproval*

As indicated in Table 3, **Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use for SY 2003**, pre- and post-test results for students the prevention activities of Project THRIVE clearly demonstrate an increased understanding of the risks involved with substance abuse. In both the pre- and post-test, student perceptions indicated that most peers perceive that drug use is bad yet fewer believe that those who use drugs are stupid or lack good judgment. In addition, more than 96% of the students perceive that their parents will be mad or disapprove of their substance abuse. At least 90 percent of students believe that those who drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes hurt themselves. Overall, test results reveal increases in knowledge of substance abuse and disapproval with regard to substance abuse.

<sup>8</sup> Survey of Perceived Risk & Disapproval of Drug Use (Post-test Results)

## **Suggestions for Improving the Program**

### *Program Satisfaction*

To assess program satisfaction, two surveys were administered at the end of the school year: School Satisfaction with Project THRIVE and Parent Satisfaction with Project THRIVE. The results of client satisfaction surveys (i.e., Schools participating in THRIVE and families participating in THRIVE) are described below:

### *School Satisfaction with Project THRIVE*

First, a telephone survey was conducted to assess the school administrator's satisfaction with Project THRIVE. The survey content consisted of the following questions:

1. *Do you feel your school has benefited by participating in Project THRIVE? Why?*
2. *Were you satisfied with the job (performance) of the case manager assigned to your school? Why?*
3. *Would you like Project THRIVE to continue at your school in the future? Why?*
4. *Do you have any comments or suggestions that would improve the delivery of Project THRIVE?*

Representatives (principals and other administrators) from each of the six schools were contacted and each represented expressed their overwhelming satisfaction with Project THRIVE. In fact, 100% of those surveyed felt that their school benefited by participating in Project THRIVE. All of the representatives were satisfied with the job (performance) of the case manager assigned to their school and all indicated that they would like Project THRIVE to continue at their school in the future. Specifically, school representatives noted that the school's participation in THRIVE helped increase parental involvement and awareness and that the program staff were very helpful in providing parents with supplemental information on additional social services. Additionally, school representatives were very impressed with the dedication of the program staff and noted that staff performed an excellent job when working with children and when following up with parents. All of the school representatives interviewed had a strong desire to see Project THRIVE continue at their school and most strongly felt that THRIVE should be expanded to include the other schools in their district.

When asked for comments and/or suggestions that would improve the delivery of Project THRIVE, school principals and administrators noted the following improvements:

- *Having additional monies available to assist families with immediate concerns (e.g., rent, clothing, utilities, etc.) would be helpful;*
- *Access and delivery of services is difficult for the Summit County Department of Job and Family Services (thereby implying that Project THRIVE could be expanded to provide additional services);*
- *Families need quick and immediate attention and access to our own pot of money to take care of these needs when they arise would be helpful;*

- *Letting parents know about Project THRIVE at Open House would be helpful;*
- *Doing outreach for parents who don't come to Open House is needed;*
- *Continue to reinforce that education is important;*
- *Increase public awareness and emphasize that it is important to catch kids when they are absent;*
- *Availability in all schools is needed;*
- *The project staff is very involved in school activities;*
- *A system of transportation is needed since transportation is a barrier to parental compliance;*
- *Home visits may encourage parents to participate even more, since notices and follow-up are already done;*
- *There's been good success at schools;*
- *Do more publicity about the program before the school year begins;*
- *Be more proactive by sending out Newsletters to parents or by putting an article in the local newspaper late in the summer;*
- *Communicate more about the program and the law by sending periodic reminders to parents about the importance of attendance;*
- *Create a Project THRIVE Newsletter;*
- *The Program runs well – more communication with parents is needed (in general) rather than just with parents whose kids are truant;*
- *Newsletter would be helpful – one that would go out to all parents in the school;*
- *Create a Newsletter from the Court as well*
- *Put an article in the newspaper that emphasizes how important school is and how absenteeism and tardiness affects kids;*
- *Have someone go to the house and pick up parents (since transportation for mediation services can be a barrier);*
- *Would like to see more of a parent component to support the other needs of parents (i.e., social service needs beyond referrals to other agencies);*
- *Some families need extensive assistance in helping parents understand the importance of schools.*

#### *Parent Satisfaction with Project THRIVE*

Second, parents whose children participated in the THRIVE program were mailed a parent satisfaction survey. To increase response rates, case managers contacted parents via the telephone and asked them to respond to the survey items. As indicated in Table 3, the results of the **Parent Satisfaction Survey**, revealed that an overwhelming majority of parents are satisfied with the assistance that they receive by participating in Project THRIVE and feel that their family has benefited from the program.

This year, the survey instrument was redesigned to allow parents the opportunity to provide a qualitative assessment of the program. While most of the comments revealed the parents' personal explanation of why they were referred to the program, programmatic comments indicates satisfaction with THRIVE and true appreciation for the case management services offered to assist at-risk families.

Parents were also asked to provide comments regarding the program:

- *(Student's) grades really improved and program helped a lot; Thanks so much.*
- *Made parents send their child to school sick because of THRIVE took away a parents better judgment; the case manager helped me more than my child.*
- *It helps me a lot; Please continue the program; God bless you.*
- *I have a big problem with the case manager thinking she is above everybody; I also do not like the fact that she felt she could talk down to me as a parent.*
- *The Project THRIVE has helped my family a lot; Thanks a bunch.*
- *This wasn't a case of (student) being truant; (Student) is very ill (ESRD<sup>9</sup>); Preston School knew this, yet I was deemed a parent that contributed to (student's) absences and there was no substance abuse at all.*
- *Our involvement was due to my inability to drive at the time due to knee surgery (which made my son late a very few times to school); Frankly, I was upset that our school failed to contact us with their concerns before assuming there was a problem; As far as question #6, above I feel like Project THRIVE is a way for our schools to bail from their involvement with its families!*
- *Family has been facing many problems; Great support!*
- *Info at mediation very good.*
- *(Case Manager) was a great case manager. She really loves the job and cares for both the children and their families. Thank you!*
- *I suppose this program may effective for families in need. We don't have drug/alcohol abuse issues. We just were tardy to school too often. For the school's liking, ...we had no problem rectifying the problem with the caseworker.*
- *I felt it was very encouraging – the girls enjoyed it.*

The qualitative data collected from school administrators and parents clearly identify the need to find new and creative ways to communicate to families the importance of school attendance and the negative correlation between truancy and academic success. Some suggestions like (1) writing an article to be placed in the local newspaper to appear just before school begins, (2) developing a newsletter, (3) creating a social service resource, (4) attending Open House, and (5) providing transportation to families attending mediation are all noteworthy ideas that may improve communication among families, schools, and Project THRIVE.

The support that families receive from Project THRIVE continues to lay a strong foundation that improves school attendance for at-risk youth and increases awareness of substance abuse among school-age children. During SY 2003, Project THRIVE has been very successful in achieving its stated goals and objectives.

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<sup>9</sup> We assume ESRD to be End Stage Renal Disease.