



*An Evaluation of a  
Comprehensive Community  
Initiative: Switch-Track*

Statistical Analysis Center  
Planning, Grants and Research  
Idaho State Police

# **An Evaluation of a Comprehensive Community Initiative: Switch-Track**

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# Summary of Accomplishments

Canyon County, Idaho has historically been a gang and crime prone area partly due to its higher level of poverty and younger population. Knowing that truancy puts students at risk of becoming adult criminal offenders, the Caldwell Police Chief and The United Way of the Treasure Valley helped bring together community organizations to focus efforts on at-risk youth to reduce truancy. Through collaborative efforts Switch-Track was successful in developing in-house attendance courts in two school districts and a formal Truancy Magistrate Court to criminally prosecute juveniles and parents who fail to abide by attendance court mandates. The Switch-Track initiative was also successful in supporting law enforcement drug and gang strategies and community prevention programs. A summary of activities and accomplishments are described below.

## Overall

- The Caldwell School District truancy program increased the average daily attendance by 4%, which brought in enough state funding to continue the truancy program after grant funds expired.
- Most participants in the initiative believed the community was "better off today" because of Switch-Track.
- Surveyed members of Switch-Track indicated the initiative had:
  1. Positively impacted the lives of school aged youth.
  2. Increased communication and collaboration between organizations.
  3. Improved guardian/parental awareness of truancy issues.
  4. Improved the ability to address issues that contribute to delinquency and crime.

## Law Enforcement

- The Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) provided funding for an officer in the Street Crimes Unit and a drug detection canine which the Caldwell Police

Department continued funding after grant funds ceased.

- Grant funds lead to the seizure of 402.2 grams of marijuana, methamphetamine, and cocaine between July 2006 and July 2008.

## Prevention and Education

- The truancy officer positions were funded by both the Caldwell and Vallivue School Districts after grant funding ended.
- Students in the Mentoring Network increased their ISAT scores, behavior, grades, and attendance.
- Each quarter, truancy officers made up to 2,220 contacts and held up to 231 attendance court sessions.
- Students in attendance court were less likely to drop out of school compared to students who did not have attendance court, even after controlling for the number of absences.
- Caldwell School District students who had attendance court in the first or second quarter of a school year had an average of 12 fewer absences in the following semester.
- Analysis suggests attendance court may reduce behavioral problems and improve grades.
- Other disciplinary or accountability measures did not produce the same positive results as attendance court.

## Prosecution, Accountability, and Research

- Grant funds were used to hire a coordinator who established the Truancy Magistrate Court in February 2008 to handle truant offenders who didn't comply with attendance court mandates.

# Introduction

In 2006, upon seeing promising results from a multidisciplinary project in rural Idaho, the Idaho Criminal Justice Grant Review Board decided to fund a second project that combined the efforts of several agencies from different community sectors. The Byrne JAG Request for Proposal was created with the expectation of one community in Idaho receiving approximately \$250,000 over a three year period for a collaborative, multi-agency effort. It required the involvement of partners from many supporting agencies that would address law enforcement; prevention and intervention; offender accountability; and treatment, research and evaluation.

The City of Caldwell in Canyon County, Idaho was chosen to receive grant funding for the “Switch-Track” initiative. The Switch-Track initiative was designed to focus available resources on programs to “switch a youth from a track of gangs, violence, and drug use toward becoming positive contributors to the community.” Knowing that truancy puts students at risk of becoming adult criminal offenders, the Caldwell Police Chief and The

United Way of the Treasure Valley helped bring together community organizations to focus efforts on at-risk youth and to reduce truancy. Through collaborative efforts Switch-Track developed in-house attendance courts in two school districts and a formal Truancy Magistrate Court to criminally prosecute juveniles and parents who fail to abide by attendance court mandates. The Switch-Track initiative also supported law enforcement drug and gang strategies through collaboration, hiring an additional officer for a specialized unit, and the purchase of surveillance equipment and a drug detection canine. Additional funding went to hiring support staff for the Mentoring Network, Inc., a non-profit organization that provides mentors for at-risk youth.

This evaluation of the Switch-Track initiative was initiated to understand the process and development of Switch-Track, problems encountered, solutions created, and assess the overall project impact. Due to time, funding, and data limitations, the scope of the current evaluation was not to determine whether Switch-Track reached its overall goal of preventing and reducing gang and drug violence through its law

## Switch-Track Grant Partners

Law Enforcement
Caldwell Police Department
Nampa Police Department
Canyon County Sheriff's Office

Prevention and Intervention
The Mentoring Network, Inc.
Caldwell School District
Vallivue School District
Nampa School District
Police Athletic League Association (PAL)
Youth Accountability Board (YAB)
Kiwanis Club of Caldwell
Law Enforcement
United Way of the Treasure Valley
Idaho Migrant Council
St. Mary's Center

Prosecution, Accountability, and Research
Third Judicial District Court
Canyon County Prosecutor
Caldwell City Prosecutor
Nampa City Prosecutor
Juvenile Detention/ Probation
Department of Health and Welfare
College of Idaho

enforcement and prevention efforts. Information for this evaluation comes from: 1) quarterly reports by the Switch-Track project director, 2) Idaho Incident Reporting System (IIBRS) repository of offenses and arrests, 3) the Caldwell and Vallivue School District grade, attendance, and discipline databases, and 4) a survey of Switch-Track members.

Included in this evaluation is a brief background of the project and a synopsis of each component in the initiative. Each section will discuss the resources existing prior to obtaining the grant, gaps identified, project goals, obstacles encountered, and the impact and effectiveness of the project. A survey of members of the initiative will then be reviewed. A summary of findings and recommendations will precede a comparison of this evaluation to an evaluation of a similar community project implemented in a rural environment. By comparing the two different settings, a more complete assessment of the actual feasibility of comprehensive community projects can be gained.

“ . . . I believe Switch-Track has had a very positive effect on our communities. The program enabled us to develop a way to address school attendance concerns, which in turn impacts the future health of our communities. With the devoted resources, we have been able to reach a population that was largely neglected by the justice system. I believe it has also created avenues to assist struggling families at an earlier opportunity, when we have a chance to be more effective and proactive rather than trying to address situations when there is little or no hope to make a significant impact . . . ”

*- a Switch-Track partner*

## Background



### Canyon County

Canyon County's population is the second largest and one of the fastest growing in the state. Between 2000 and 2009, there was a 35% increase in population reaching a high of 186,000 residents in 2009. Located within Idaho's largest urban area, Canyon County contains Idaho's second largest city, Nampa, and eighth largest city, Caldwell.<sup>3</sup>

Compared to the overall population of Idaho, Canyon County residents are more likely to be Hispanic, younger, and live in poverty. According to the American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates from 2006 to 2008, Hispanics make up 20.5% of Canyon County residents (Idaho—9.5%) and are also disproportionately poor (23.2%). Children under age 18 make up 31.3% of the county's population (Idaho—27.2%) and 20.5% of the poor are children (Idaho—15.7%). Overall, poverty affects 15.1% of Canyon County residents (Idaho-12.4%).

Canyon County has three school districts, Caldwell, Vallivue, and Nampa and there is a considerable difference in the poverty rates for children under age 18. The Caldwell School District is by far the most impoverished, with 32.0% of the population under 18 living in poverty (Vallivue-24.0% and Nampa-15.8%).

There is a significant difference in crime rates between Canyon County and Idaho. According to the Caldwell Police Department, in 2006, at least thirteen gangs claimed territory in Canyon County. In addition, Canyon County had a high crime rate in comparison to all of Idaho (73 per 1,000 versus 61.6 per 1,000). Higher crime rates included higher rates of violent crime (15.2-Canyon County; 14.0-Idaho) and property crime (47.2-Canyon County; 37.4-Idaho).

### Development of Switch-Track

The United Way of the Treasure Valley started talking to the mayor of Caldwell, Idaho in 2004 as a way to address gang violence. When the Caldwell Police Chief learned of the Byrne JAG grant Request for Proposals, he decided it was a great opportunity to finally address the issue of truancy as a means of keeping children off the streets and in school. Together, the Caldwell Police Chief and the United Way of the Treasure Valley director invited the necessary partners to join in the effort to reduce crime and gang violence through truancy prevention.

#### Advisory Board Members

United Way of the Treasure Valley  
Canyon County Juvenile Detention  
Canyon County Juvenile Probation  
The Mentoring Network, Inc.  
Caldwell Police Department  
Canyon County Sheriff's Office  
Nampa Police Department  
Caldwell School District  
Nampa School District  
Vallivue School District  
Caldwell City Prosecutor  
Third District Court  
College of Idaho  
Citizen

**"We can keep this great community the way it is by joining together."**

**- Nampa Police Chief Homer**

In January 2006, a Grant Advisory Board was formed in order to plan a comprehensive community initiative.

Truant students are at a high risk of being unemployed and becoming involved in drugs, alcohol, and violence, so the advisory board agreed that

targeting truancy was one of the most advantageous ways to combat and prevent gang and drug related crimes in Canyon County, Nampa, and Caldwell. Therefore, the Board subsequently submitted a grant proposal and the Caldwell Switch-Track Comprehensive Community Initiative was officially inaugurated when it received 2006 Byrne JAG funding. The funding was to be \$250,000 each year during a three year period. However, the third year was not funded due to federal budget cuts.

## Supporting Facts

Students with poor attendance are at risk for dropping out of high school.<sup>1,2,4,10</sup>

In 2009, approximately 51% of Idaho prison inmates had not completed high school prior to their first incarceration.<sup>3</sup>

The 2010 annual cost of incarcerating an individual in Idaho was about \$19,200 per prisoner while the annual cost of public education was \$6,931 per student in 2007-2008.<sup>6,14</sup>

In 2010, high school dropouts were one and a half times as likely to be unemployed.<sup>15</sup>

Nearly 10% of young male high school dropouts were incarcerated in 2006-2007 versus 3% of high school graduates.<sup>3</sup>

Decreasing the number of high school dropouts by half would increase tax revenues, reduce public health and criminal justice costs resulting in a \$45 billion per year benefit to society.<sup>9</sup>



# Law Enforcement

## Connection Between Gangs, Violence, and Drugs

According to the Caldwell Police Department (CPD), gangs and drugs have been one of Canyon County's biggest crime issues since the 1990's. Although several enforcement efforts have been used to combat these crimes, law enforcement wished to implement preventative measures. A Caldwell Police Department analysis of the worst juvenile gang offenders in Canyon County revealed that all of them had a history of gateway crimes. This connection between gateway crimes, drugs, and violence prompted law enforcement to explore ways to target juvenile risk factors like truancy.

The following provides: 1) a synopsis of law enforcement resources existing prior to the grant, 2) gaps identified through initial meetings between stakeholders, 3) project goals, and 4) a review of milestones achieved.

## Prior Existing Resources

In 2006, 245 sworn police officers and deputies served Canyon County. The Caldwell Police Department had a specialized preventative unit targeting gangs and drugs called the Street Crimes Unit. The Nampa Police Department also had specialized officers work preventatively on gang and violence issues. At the time of the grant application, all jurisdictions in Canyon County participated in DARE and PAL activities and a multi-jurisdictional drug/gang task force. In addition, the Caldwell Police Department had one drug canine in the Street Crimes Unit.

## Gaps

In 2006, the Caldwell Street Crimes unit was understaffed. Of the 58 Caldwell Police Department officers, the unit had only two officers and the department's only canine to help combat the growing gang and narcotics problems. Despite this shortfall, these two officers were highly effective. For example, in March of 2005, they were responsible for 59% of all drug seizures in Caldwell. Drugs seizures included 33.3 grams of methamphetamine, 155.7 grams of marijuana, and 42.3 grams of mushrooms. In addition

to their primary duties, the officers also conducted traffic stops and provided assistance to investigators and patrol officers.

Time and budgetary restraints only allowed each law enforcement agency in the county to conduct surveillance about once a week in conjunction with the narcotics Street Crimes Units. Patrol and investigations officers also performed surveillance as time permitted.

## Needs

1. One additional canine to work with the patrol division to help provide 24-hour drug detection assistance.
2. One additional officer in the Street Crimes Unit to gather intelligence regarding gang members and other criminals who transport, prepare and deal illicit drugs.
3. Overtime funds for the Caldwell and Nampa Police Departments along with the Canyon County Sheriff's Office to work collaboratively on special task assignments targeting gang and street crimes.
4. Surveillance equipment, including three night vision goggles, three digital video recorders, and a body surveillance unit to increase the quality and effectiveness of intelligence gathered during surveillance activities.
5. Hire a part-time coordinator to plan, administer, and evaluate the programs funded by the grant. The coordinator duties included organizing monthly update meetings with the Advisory Board, reviewing project tasks and expenditures, and gathering project reports.



## Goals

Law enforcement aimed to increase and expand the Street Crimes Unit, collaborative enforcement efforts, and surveillance to deal with drug and gang related crimes.

Benchmarks for success included:

- Hire an officer to be in the Street Crimes Unit.
- Purchase and train a drug detection canine.
- Acquire equipment to assist in surveillance activities.
- Increase the number of arrests, drug seizures, weapons seizures, and gang contacts compared to the prior year.
- Participate in planning educational prevention activities with community partners.

## Indications of Success

The grant funds used to fund a Street Crimes Officer

Street Crimes Officer's Activities		
	Year1 (July '06- July '07)	Year2 (July '07- July '08)
Traffic Stops	284	355
Citations	53	88
Felony arrests	53	49
Misdemeanor arrests	175	326
Gang member arrests	90	123
Warrants served	60	119
Cleared gang shooting cases	7	-
<b>Seizures</b>		
Paraphernalia (items)	79	97
Marijuana (g)	131	143
Methamphetamine (g)	60	68
Prescriptions/ hydrocodone (pills)	2	87
Cocaine (g)	0	1
Knives	11	5
Guns	16	5
<b>Contacts</b>		
Field interviews	81	161
New Gang Members identified	89	191
Gang associate identified	21	13
Positive Parent contact of known gang members	14	33

lead to the seizure of 190.8 grams of marijuana, methamphetamine, and cocaine between July 2006 and July 2007. The amount of drug seizures increased the following year with a total of 212.1 grams of marijuana, methamphetamine, and cocaine in addition to 87 prescription/hydrocodone pills.

Caldwell and Nampa Police Department drug arrests increased from 2005 to 2006 and increased each year thereafter. Due to the additional Street Crimes Officer, there was a large increase in weapon's law

## Law Enforcement Activities

- A Street Crimes Officer was hired in June 2006.
- Canyon County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) purchased a digital video camera and the Nampa Police Department purchased a body surveillance unit.
- The Caldwell Police Department (CPD) received great publicity when they made the first arrest in the state for soliciting gang members and supplying them with guns, which had recently been made illegal.
- Several Caldwell Police officers made a trip to visit the Los Angeles Police Department's gang unit to learn more about the operation of a big city gang unit.
- The CPD Street Crimes Unit was awarded the Gang Unit of the Year award in 2008 by the Northwest Gang Investigators Association.
- The CPD began using a new computer program, TAG, which keeps data on adolescent gang members, making it easier to quickly obtain information on gang affiliation.
- Using a new process, the Street Crimes Unit made contact with parents before youth were registered as belonging to a gang. Officers found that parents were very cooperative and often put enough pressure on their children to prevent them from becoming gang members.

violation arrests for the Caldwell police department in 2006. In addition, the Street Crimes Officer increased traffic stops by 25% from the first to the second grant year.

The Street Crimes Officer almost doubled the number of arrests he made for misdemeanors in the second year of the grant. The Street Crimes Officer also:

- identified 280 gang members,
- conducted 242 field interviews,
- seized 273 grams of marijuana,
- seized 128 grams of methamphetamine,
- seized 89 prescription pills , and
- seized 21 guns.

CPD increased the number of drug seizure cases and the arrest rates for weapons law violations and drug offenses. In 2005, CPD had 185 drug seizure cases which increased to 236 in 2006. Arrests for weapons law violations doubled from a rate of 0.6 per 1,000 people in 2005 to 1.2 arrests per 1,000 people in 2006. The drug arrest rate for CPD jumped from 19.8 arrests per 1,000 people in 2005 to a rate of 25 per 1,000 in 2006. The CPD drug arrest rate remained above the 2005 rate every year thereafter, as did the drug arrest rate in Canyon County as a whole (see tables to the right).

Year	Number of Drug Seizure Cases			County
	Caldwell PD	Canyon CSO	Nampa PD	Total
2005	185	257	418	860
2006	236	249	212	697
2007	214	160	148	522
2008	218	171	153	542
2009	246	128	228	602
2010	353	116	270	739

Year	Weapons Law Violations: rate per 1,000			County
	Caldwell PD	Canyon CSO	Nampa PD	Total
2005	0.6	0.2	1.0	0.6
2006	1.2	0.1	0.9	0.7
2007	0.9	0.1	0.8	0.6
2008	1.4	0.0	1.3	0.9
2009	1.2	0.1	0.7	0.8
2010	1.6	0.1	0.9	0.8

Year	Arrests for Drug Offense: rate per 1,000			County
	Caldwell PD	Canyon CSO	Nampa PD	Total
2005	19.8	8.7	26.0	18.3
2006	25.0	8.0	27.5	19.9
2007	24.3	8.0	28.9	20.6
2008	23.6	8.7	28.9	20.9
2009	24.4	6.0	25.9	19.0
2010	30.6	5.3	24.6	19.6

# Prevention & Intervention

The school districts in Canyon County identified truancy as one of their major issues and therefore decided that implementing a truancy program would be the best way to identify and assist at-risk youth and their families. The Grant Advisory Board decided to implement a truancy program in the county's school districts as a prevention effort and to use the existing Mentoring Network as a supporting intervention tactic.

The Grant Advisory Board planned to implement the truancy program in the Caldwell School District in the first year, the Vallivue School District in the second year, and the Nampa School District in the third year of funding. However, due to federal funding cuts, the Nampa School District did not receive funds in the third year.

The following provides a summary of: 1) prevention and intervention resources existing prior to the grant, 2) gaps identified, 3) goals of the project, and 4) a review of the project's accomplishments, impact, and effectiveness. Quarterly and annual reports provided by the Caldwell Police Department and school district data were used for this analysis.

*Each 1% increase in high school graduation rates is projected to save approximately \$1.4 billion in incarceration costs.*

*— Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education, & Department of Justice.*

## Existing Resources

### The Mentoring Network, Inc.

Mentoring Network, Inc., is a non-profit organization that provides mentors to meet with at-risk youth at least once a month during school hours.

### DARE/PAL

The Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) and the Police Activities League (PAL) programs work to reduce juvenile delinquency and promote positive interaction between law enforcement, children and

their communities. DARE/PAL activities included the Idaho Youth Games, Halloween Party, DARE Bowl, and others.

### Other Resources

Other resources in existence at the time of the grant application were several afterschool programs, the YMCA, the Hispanic Cultural Center, parenting classes, Natural Helpers, Adopt a Cop, and Youth Accountability Boards (YAB). At the start of the grant, the Grant Advisory Board intended to utilize the YAB, but due to the loss of the YAB coordinator, it was decided to use these funds to support the Truancy Program.

### Gaps

The Grant Advisory Board believed many at-risk youth were needlessly "falling through the cracks." By identifying at-risk youth and providing them with the support they and their families needed, these youth could avoid becoming adult criminal offenders.

### Needs

By utilizing and supporting existing resources like the DARE/PAL program and the Mentoring Network, at-risk youth could be identified and provided additional support. However, the Grant Advisory Board acknowledged that these programs needed further support and could not alone identify the majority of at-risk youth. Since one major risk factor for adult criminality is the lack of education, it was proposed that the best way to target resources towards at-risk youth was through the educational system.

According to grant project directors, before the pilot program, truancy was considered a minor issue with teachers, administrators and school resource officers handling truants. Prior to the grant, approximately 5 to 9% of students in the Caldwell School District were absent from class and an estimated 30% of 9th graders never graduated. The estimated graduation rate in 2006 was 72% for the Caldwell School District.

The Mentoring Network was also identified as needing additional support for its efforts. In 2006, the

Mentoring Network had an abundance of kids who needed mentors. Hispanic mentors were also scarce. Out of the 100 mentors in 2005, only two were Hispanic. The Mentoring Network wished to bridge this gap and focus efforts on recruiting bi-cultural and bi-lingual mentors.

## Goals

***Expand Mentoring Network Inc. Program to increase mentors for at-risk children with emphasis on Hispanic mentors.***

During the first year of the grant, recruitment of volunteer mentors proved slow. However, in the second year, a part-time employee was hired with grant funds to assist the owner and sole operator of the Mentoring Network. The addition of the part-time employee proved invaluable as 17 new volunteer mentors were recruited.

## Goals

***Increase the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) in the first year and increase or maintain it in the following years.***

The most important goal set by the school districts was a one percent (1%) increase in attendance through the truancy program. Because school district funding is based on the Average Daily Attendance (ADA), a one percent increase in attendance would bring an additional \$250,000 in funding. This additional funding would be enough to sustain the program once grant funding ended.

With grant funding, a truancy officer was hired before the 2006-2007 school year and the Caldwell School District provided clerical assistance. In the second year of funding the Caldwell Truancy Officer Assistant was hired by the Vallivue School District to be the new truancy officer for the Vallivue School District. This facilitated consistency of the Truancy Program across school districts.

The following describes the truancy program for each of the school districts and the school district policies adopted to support the truancy program.

## Prevention/Intervention Activities

- The Police Athletic League (PAL) hosted a Halloween Party at the end of October 2008 with over 900 children along with their parents attending.
- The Caldwell School District hired a truancy officer in August 2006. A year later a truancy officer was hired to serve the Vallivue School District.
- The Caldwell attendance court started in late October 2006 and the Vallivue attendance court started in October 2007.
- The Truancy Magistrate Court began in February 2008.
- The Caldwell Police Chief wrote a letter to Caldwell School District parents informing them of the importance of school attendance, the truancy program, and that parents and/or students would be cited with a criminal misdemeanor in magistrate court if students did not adhere to the terms of the attendance court.
- Developed a scholarship program for students completing high school after they had gone through the truancy diversion program.
- Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, all students failing one or more classes were required to attend after school tutoring as a condition of their attendance contract.
- In the 2007-08 school year, the Caldwell Truancy Officer attended school registrations, distributing information about the school district's attendance policies and requirements. 5,200 registration letters were distributed and acknowledgement forms were signed by parents and students.
- In 2009, the City of Nampa passed a resolution allowing its employees one hour of paid volunteer time a week for mentoring youth in the Nampa and Vallivue School Districts through the Mentoring Network, Inc.

## Truancy Program

The Vallivue School District has a stricter attendance policy of allowing only 6 absences a semester compared to the Caldwell School District which allows 9 absences a semester. Consequently, the timing of interventions for the truancy officers are adjusted accordingly and noted below.

### Attendance Court — a diversion program

*The Caldwell School District refers to their diversionary program as “Family Court” and the Vallivue School District calls their diversionary court, “Attendance Review Hearings.” For ease of understanding, both diversionary programs will be called attendance court.*

The diversionary truancy program is a proactive approach to address student issues and to redirect truant offenders and their families to achieve school participation that can prevent students from becoming adult criminal offenders. The goal of attendance court is to give both students and parents a second chance to make school attendance a priority.

Attendance courts were in-house school district supervised hearings that integrated resource referral, accountability, and rewards. Attendance court began

in October 2006 in the Caldwell School District and in September 2007 in the Vallivue School District. In February 2008, the Truancy Magistrate Court was established to hold students and/or their parents/guardians accountable for failing to meet the school district’s attendance policy after having attendance court. Further discussion of the Truancy Magistrate Court is in the next section titled “Accountability, Treatment, and Research.”

Once a student violated the school district attendance policy, they appeared with at least one parent in a night court where a civilian facilitator acted like a judge and executed a contract between the district and the student and parents/guardians. A typical contract stated that: 1) a student cannot be truant or tardy, 2) absences must have a doctor’s excuse or an excuse from the school nurse, and 3) when applicable, grade standards were incorporated.

After a student was referred to attendance court and the underlying issues were discovered, the truancy officer met with the appropriate agencies to discuss possible strategies for assisting students and their families. The agencies and personnel involved included judges, school resource officers, a Health and Welfare Navigator, probation and parole, juvenile

### Intervention Steps for the Number of Absences:

1. Caldwell, 5 absences; Vallivue, 3 absences— Telephone, letter, or e-mail contact is made.
2. Caldwell, 7 absences; Vallivue, 5 absences— a home visit is made by the truancy officer and SRO.
3. Caldwell, 9 absences; Vallivue, 6 absences— parent or guardian is notified by phone or in person. The truancy officer reviews the student’s history to determine if the case meets criteria for attendance court.
4. Caldwell, 10 absences; Vallivue, 7 absences— the parent or guardian and student are summoned to either magistrate or attendance court.

### Intervention based on the number of Truancies:

*A Truancy is when a student is absent without the approval of the parent, guardian, or school authorities.*

1. 1st truancy— the parent/guardian is notified by mail, e-mail or phone of the truancy and consequences.
2. 2nd truancy — the principal or designee will conference with the student and parent.
3. 3rd truancy— truancy officer goes to the home with a notice of a court referral.
4. 4th truancy— the truancy officer and school administration asks the Board of Trustees to declare the student a Habitual Truant.



A habitual truant is a student between the ages of 7 and 16 years of age who repeatedly violates the attendance policy or whose parent or guardian has failed to cause the student to attend school. The board may expel a student because he or she is a habitual truant or put them on a Board of Review Contract. If the board determines that a student is a habitual truant, the board, or its designee, will notify the prosecuting attorney, in writing, in the student's county of residence, pursuant to Idaho Code Section 33-207.

probation, and school counselors. The facilitator and the truancy officer met the same evening as the hearing to discuss the conditions of the contract. During the attendance court, the facilitator talked to the parents and the student about the issues surrounding their attendance and the importance of attending school. After the conditions of the attendance contract are set, the parents and student sign the contract. A follow-up hearing is scheduled after two weeks at the discretion of the facilitator/judge.

Follow-up hearings are preceded by an informal staffing of the case involving the truancy officer, judge, and other supporting agencies in which the student's progress on attendance, grades, and credit earning status is evaluated. Recommendations are also made regarding sanctions, rewards, and/or continuation of the attendance contract. Potential rewards for the successful completion of attendance contracts and the diversion program are: 1) the judges' and truancy officers' personal acknowledgement of success, 2) reduced monitoring and court appearances, or 3) symbolic gifts like a candy bar, awards, or certificates. In 2008, a \$500.00 scholarship funded by the Kiwanis Club of Caldwell was added to the list of potential rewards. Students who fail to meet attendance contracts and complete the diversion program face referral to the Youth Accountability Board, community service, increased review hearing appearances, petitioning to magistrate court, recommendation for expulsion, and/or their parents may be cited for failure to supervise.

## Estimated Impact of Prevention Efforts

### Estimated Impact of the Mentoring Network

The Mentoring Network (TMN) conducts on-going assessments that track a child's development to-

wards improving social behaviors, education, and their ability to become a productive member of society. In 2008, The Mentoring Network, through a research grant, hired a firm to conduct a thorough study of its effectiveness. Following are some results of the study:

- ISAT scores in reading and math showed significant improvements.
- Students who had been in the program longer tended to have higher ISAT scores than those who had been in for a shorter time.
- Other areas of improvement were grades, decision making, behavior and optimism.

The table below shows the percentage of TMN students showing observable improvement since being matched with a mentor (as reported by school counselors and teachers).

% of Students Participating in the Mentoring Network Program that Show Improvement in the Following Areas:	
Area of Improvement	%
Grades	72.6%
Making Good Choices	83.3%
Seeking Help	83.8%
Attendance	69.5%
Staying on Task	73.5%
Caring	85.1%
Behavior	76.9%
Resisting Negative Peer Pressure	69.9%
Optimism	87.5%

From a 2008 study conducted by a firm directed by Dr. Debra Loesch-Griffin.

*“95% of mentors said they personally benefited from being a mentor to a student.”*

## Parent Survey on Attendance Court

A satisfaction survey was given to 20 parents in 2006 whose children were taken to attendance court. Survey results showed that many parents had not known about their child's chronic absenteeism until they were summoned to court. Investigation into the

discrepancy of parental notification revealed that schools had differing parental notification procedures. As a result, all schools adopted the same policies and the truancy office communicates directly with parents.

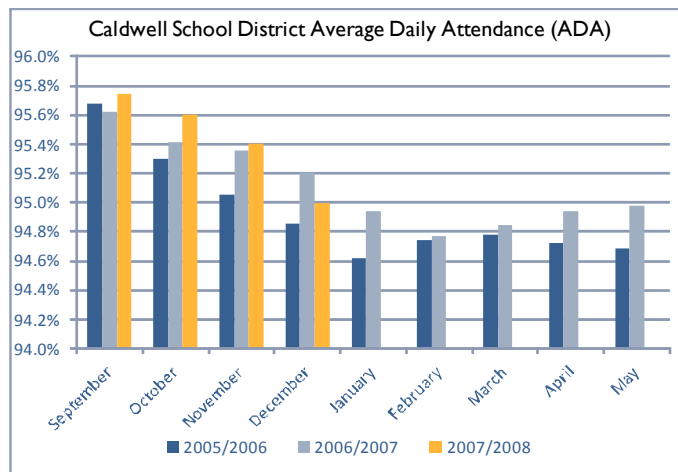
### Data Submitted in Quarterly Reports

The table in the upper right corner displays the truancy court performance measures as reported in the quarterly reports. Truancy officers made between 250 to 2,533 contacts each quarter. An average of 233 attendance court and follow-up hearings were held per quarter during the 2007-08 school year. In the 2007-08 school year, 15 parents were cited for failure to supervise.

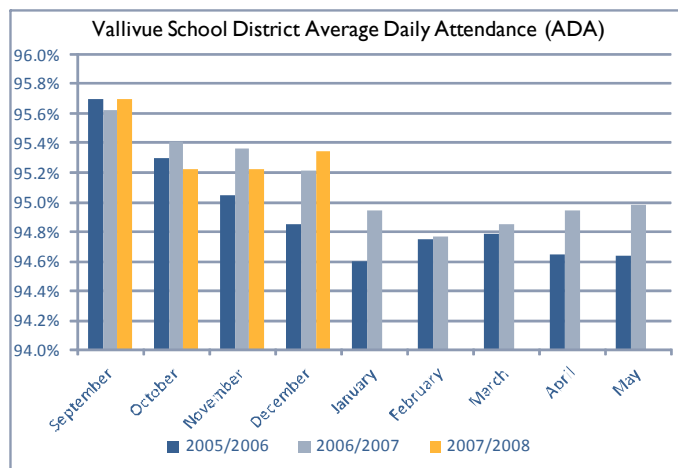
Switch-Track Truancy Program Numbers				
		Truancy Officer Contacts	Attendance Hearings	Failure to supervise citations
Caldwell School District				
Oct-Dec	2006	250	65	2
Jan-Mar	2007	1,550	125	2
Apr-Jun	2007	1,200	54	0
Jul-Sep	2007	452	13	-
Oct-Dec	2007	1,088	145	3
Jan-Mar	2008	2,050	267	8
Apr-Jun	2008	967	126	3
Jul-Sep	2008	-	-	-
Oct-Dec	2008	-	56	0
Vallivue School District				
Jul-Sep	2007	224	1	0
Oct-Dec	2007	891	56	0
Jan-Mar	2008	2,533	249	1
Apr-Jun	2008	2,360	76	0
Jul-Sep	2008	-	-	-
Oct-Dec	2008	-	115	-

Data comes from grant quarterly reports. "-" indicates it was not reported/not applicable.

Caldwell School District Attendance Court Parent Survey	% n=20
Attendance court has helped my child attend school more regularly.	100%
My family was treated in a polite and professional manner by all staff of attendance court.	100%
The school district adequately notified me of my child's absences before entering attendance court.	75%
<b>How do you think we could better serve your family and child?</b>	
The truancy court is working wonderfully the way it is.	75%
More family activities with the school.	5%
"I feel that the punishment needs to be geared more towards the child. If the parents were truly not involved then I could see the punishment being just but for the parent involved there is no punishment for the child."	5%
"I would still like for my daughter to be monitored at school."	5%



The charts to the right display the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) provided by the school districts in their quarterly grant reports. For the Caldwell School District, the ADA was higher in the first year the truancy diversionary program was in place compared to the prior school year of 2005-06. The ADA further improved in the second year of operation for every month except for December 2007. The Vallivue School District experienced an increase in their ADA in September and December compared to the two years prior to the truancy diversion program.





## School Data

Data for this analysis was obtained from each school district's student tracking database. Initial analysis of the data revealed some data issues prohibiting some analysis. For example, the Caldwell School District changed their student tracking system between the school years 2006-07 and 2008-09. Therefore, some comparisons between districts and years were not made due to differences in data systems. Although errors are assumed to occur by chance, caution must be used in relying on the following results for policy making. However, every effort was made to ensure reliability and validity of the following results. The following results were found statistically significant at the .05 level.

Findings suggest that attendance court may reduce the likelihood a student drops out of school. Caldwell students (Vallivue data does not contain drop out information) who dropped out of school had an average of 30.6 absences a year, versus non-drop outs who averaged 11.8 absences a year. Students who went to attendance court averaged 29.3 absences a year but were less likely to drop out of school (0.3%) than students who didn't have attendance court (1.1%). When students who qualified for attendance court but didn't participate (more than 9 absences) were compared to students who did participate in attendance court, the difference is even more obvious. Student drop outs made up 4.2% of students who had more than 9 absences in a semester but didn't participate in attendance court. In comparison, only 1.4% of students participating in attendance court subsequently dropped out.

## Attendance

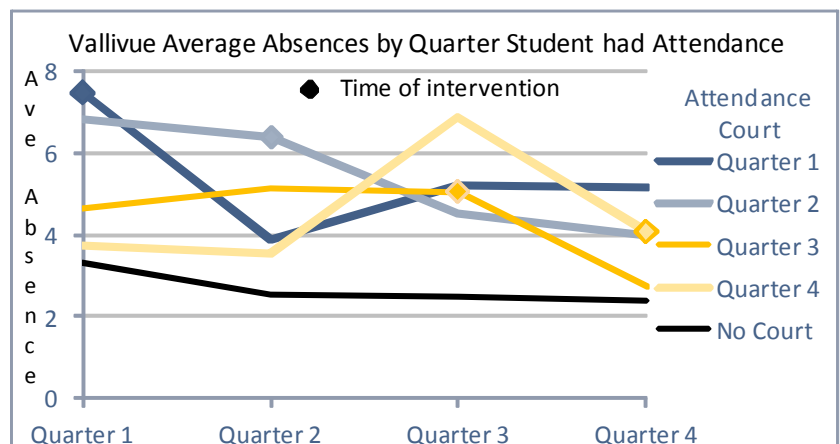
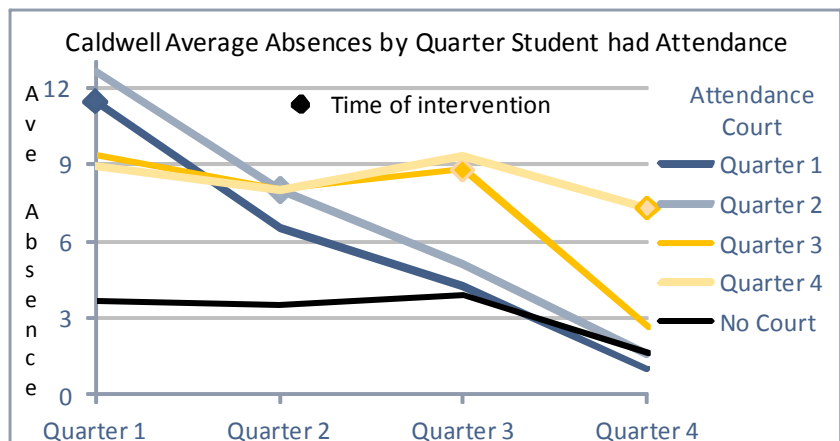
Attendance court involvement in the first and/or second quarters for Caldwell students reduced absences in the third and fourth quarters. The chart to the right shows that Caldwell students with attendance hearings in the first and second quarters of the school year had significantly higher absences on average in those quarters than other students. However, by the quarters 3 and 4 their average absences had dropped to the same level as students who didn't have court. On the other hand, students who had court in the third or fourth quarters had a significantly

higher average of absences in all quarters of the school year compared to students who didn't have court. This indicates that the sooner the intervention occurs, the earlier attendance will improve.

Vallivue students did not show this same pattern of improvement in average attendance but this is most likely due to only one year of reliable data being available and less variance in the attendance rates due to the strict policy of allowing no more than 6 absences a semester. Considering the data limitations, Vallivue students with attendance court in the first quarter decreased their average absences by three and a half days in the second quarter.

## Discipline

Students with attendance issues often display behavioral problems as well. Data from the Caldwell School District suggest that improving attendance can reduce behavioral problems in truant children. Analysis showed that Caldwell students with court in



the first quarter showed an improvement in behavior. In fact, students with court in the first quarter had less disciplinary actions than students in the second and third quarters. Students with a court hearing in the second quarter displayed an improvement in behavior for the third quarter. *There were too few Vallivue students attending court in which discipline information was available to evaluate their behavioral improvement.*

### Grades

Too few students in the available data had both attendance court and grade information to make a reliable analysis of attendance courts' affect on grades. However, analysis reveals that the lack of attendance negatively impacts grades. Therefore, if attendance court increases attendance, then it is also likely that attendance court could positively impact grades.

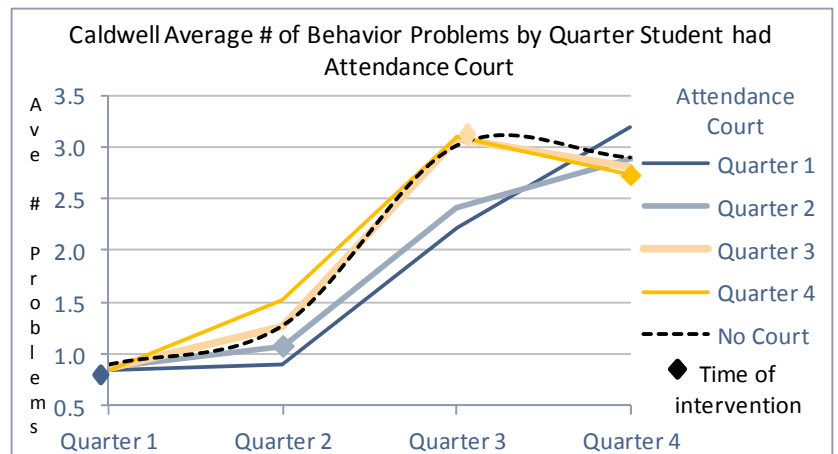
Further information submitted in quarterly reports indicates the truancy program improves truant students' grades. Based on a random sample of truant students, the Caldwell School District reported that attendance court improved student grades.

### How does attendance court perform against detention and/or attendance contracts?

When school data was analyzed for the years preceding the truancy diversion program, it was clear that most attendance issues were handled through detention and/or attendance contracts. Further investigation revealed that neither detention nor attendance contracts decreased absences or behavioral problems, or increased grade point averages (GPA). When school data was analyzed for the same years the truancy diversion program was operating, neither detention nor attendance contracts positively impacted behavior, attendance, or GPA in most instances. Thus, it appears that attendance court is unique in its affect on attendance and behavior that cannot be attributed to other disciplinary or accountability measures.

% of Disciplinary Actions for Excessive Absences or Truancy - Caldwell						
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Suspension/Expulsion	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	1.0%	0.9%	0.8%
Detention	47.5%	48.6%	48.2%	52.3%	22.5%	31.1%
Attendance Contract	0.1%	0.7%	0.6%	3.6%	22.2%	24.5%
Magistrate	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	1.0%	0.9%
Phone Call/Parental Conference	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.6%	7.1%	8.4%
Attendance Court	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	1.6%	46.0%	43.4%
<b>Total Attendance</b>						
Disciplinary Actions	1,801	1,038	2,224	1,184	2,341	1,814

Does not total to 100%



*Even after fulfilling her attendance court requirements, one student asked to be kept on an attendance contract because she said it helps her out.*

# Prosecution, Accountability, & Research

A vital part of the Switch-Track initiative was the establishment of a magistrate court to handle cases in which attendance contracts were not fulfilled. Grant funding was used to hire a Court Coordinator who researched, planned, and coordinated all parties involved to develop the divisionary court.

The following provides a summary of: 1) accountability, treatment, and research resources existing prior to the grant, 2) gaps identified, 3) goals of the project, and 4) a review of milestones achieved. Quarterly and annual reports provided by project directors were used for this analysis.

## Existing Resources

### City and County Prosecutor

The cities of Nampa and Caldwell used the same law firm to prosecute misdemeanors and continued to aggressively prosecute repeat offenders. County prosecutors continued their efforts to prosecute violent offenders, drug dealers, gang members and work with the Caldwell Street Crimes Unit. All prosecutors were an integral part of establishing the Magistrate Truancy Court.

### Juvenile Probation

As the central agency that deals with all youth crimes, juvenile probation played a key role in enforcement, intervention, treatment and adjudication.

## Gaps

The Advisory Board identified a major gap as the lack of formal sanctions to hold truants or their parents accountable for failing to comply with the terms of attendance contracts. In the first semester the attendance court was operational, it was noted that the truancy program didn't have the ability to impose consequences on juveniles, other than juveniles losing school credits. Since the loss of credits could discourage students from attending school, this sanction defeated the purpose of the Truancy Diversion Program.

## Needs

1. To fast track juveniles petitioned on truancy violations rather than waiting for the juvenile justice system to handle cases.
2. To hire a coordinator to organize and establish Truancy Magistrate Court and to coordinate courts, judges, and school truancy officers.

## Goals

*Research, Plan, and Coordinate Court Processes to hold truancy offenders and their parents/guardians accountable.*

## Truancy Magistrate Court

The purpose of the Truancy Magistrate Court was to support and endorse the attendance court process. A court coordinator was hired in September of 2007 to facilitate the implementation of a criminal court to handle truant offenders who did not fulfill their attendance contracts. The coordinator was responsible for researching, planning, training, establishing and initiating the criminal Truancy Court in its first year and to manage the day to day operation of the court. Through collaborative efforts all necessary parties were brought together to assist in the implementation and development of the Magistrate Truancy Court.

### Prosecution, Treatment, and Research Activities

- A court coordinator was hired in September 2007 to plan and establish a specialized criminal misdemeanor court to handle truant offenders who failed in the informal attendance court.
- The first Truancy Magistrate Court was held in February 2008.
- In the first 3 months of operation, the Truancy Magistrate Court handled 30 cases.

The first Truancy Magistrate Court was held in February 2008. Once students are petitioned, they appear before the judge at the juvenile detention center where they either admit or deny the charge, or request an attorney. If students don't admit guilt, they appear at an evidentiary hearing followed by a disposition hearing. If students admit to the charges, a family attendance plan is then developed. Any violation of the plan results in a violation hearing then a disposition hearing. Completion of the terms of the attendance plan results in case dismissal.

Parents or guardians of truant children, who, in the judgment of the attendance court, do not do everything they can to ensure the child attends school, will be ticketed for failure to supervise. In addition, the attendance court recommends that parents be ticketed whenever two scheduled attendance courts are missed. Once a parent/guardian is charged with the misdemeanor of failure to supervise a child, the case is handled like a regular misdemeanor case. A diversionary method of handling these cases is to enter into a probation agreement with the parents as part of an informal adjustment order. Compliance with the terms and conditions of the informal adjustment resulted in case dismissal. However, if the parents are not in compliance, then contempt charges are filed by the prosecuting attorney resulting in an initial appearance. If the parent admits to the charges they could either comply with the agreement or be sanctioned.

## Truancy Magistrate Court Performance

According to grant quarterly reports, 27 truancy cases were sent to Truancy Magistrate Court in its first two months of existence. By June 2008, 30 students had been seen in magistrate court and two of them failed to comply with the requirements. According to school district data, both district attendance courts sent 31 students to Truancy Magistrate Court in the 2008-09 school year and Caldwell sent 16 in the first half of the 2009-10 school year.

Students who were taken to magistrate court did not differ in their gender, parental living situation, or their number of disciplinary actions for behavior in a school year. However, students in magistrate court had more absences (yearly average of 41.6 compared to 15.6) and more disciplinary actions for attendance than all other students (5.7 instances a year vs. 1.1).

Truancy Magistrate Court		
Reporting Period	# Cases	# Failed
Mar-07	27	
Jun-08	30	2
Sep-08	3	

Data comes from submitted quarterly reports

Number and Percent of Students in attendance court Each Year Who Were Petitioned to Magistrate Court				
	2008-09		2009-10	
Quarter Pe-titioned	N	%	N	%
Quarter 1	3	0.5%	4	1.2%
Quarter 2	16	2.7%	8	2.4%
Quarter 3	12	2.0%	4	1.2%
Quarter 4	0	0%	0	0%

The 2009-10 data is from the Caldwell School District for the first semester.

Description of Students Petitioned to Magistrate Court		
	N	%
Live with parent	10	91%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	9	45%
Female	11	55%
Dropped out	1	2%
Transferred Out of District	2	4%
Average Yearly Absences	41.60	
<b>Ave. # Disciplinary Actions for Attendance</b>		
Quarter 1	1.72	
Quarter 2	2.33	
Quarter 3	1.24	
Quarter 4	.50	
<b>Ave. # Disciplinary Actions for Behavior</b>		
Quarter 1	1.28	
Quarter 2	2.39	
Quarter 3	2.79	
Quarter 4	2.64	

## Research

College of Idaho interns developed a survey for Caldwell High School students on truancy issues and graduation. The survey was administered December 6, 2006 at Caldwell High School to investigate: 1) student opinions and knowledge of the truancy policy, and 2) reasons for truancy and other related issues. The survey was modified and administered in fall of 2007 to Caldwell and Vallivue Students. Students' self-reported information supported the following generalizations.

- Caucasian students were less likely to report being in trouble for truancy than Hispanic students.
- Hispanic students were more likely to describe their attendance as poor.
- Students involved in extracurricular activities were not as likely to be truant.
- 50% of truant students and 62% of non-truant students felt they had a teacher that cared about them personally.
- Self-reported data showed no significant difference between: males and females; students with outside jobs; or the number of hours worked.
- 33% of truants were cognizant of the truancy policy but 19% of truants were not aware they were truant.

# Views on Performance

## Member Responses to the Switch-Track Performance Survey

In March and May of 2010, the Idaho State Police Statistical Analysis Center surveyed Switch-Track participants regarding project successes, struggles, and overall impact. The survey was created using the online application, “Survey Monkey.” A webpage link was e-mailed twice to participants, encouraging participation. Out of the 44 members receiving an e-mail, 27 responded (after receiving a second e-mail reminder), resulting in a 61% response rate. Table 7 shows the number of respondents by project area. Questions and answers to the survey are provided in Appendix A.

## Rating the Accomplishments of Switch-Track

- Respondents were most likely to say Juvenile Gangs (70%), Truancy (63%), and Adult Drug Crimes (63%) were major problems before the project. A majority of respondents felt these problems, with the exception of adult drug crimes, had decreased since then (70% and 81% respectively).
- A majority of respondents (85%) agreed that the community is better off today because of the project.
- 81% of respondents agreed that services and programs had improved and 74% agreed that the project was an efficient use of public resources.
- Switch-Track was rated as performing good or excellent in the following areas: positively impacting the lives of school aged children (74%), redirecting youth away from gangs (55.5%) and drugs (51.8%), and preventing more serious crimes (55.5%).

## Truancy Diversion Program

The majority of respondents felt the Truancy Diversion Program improved the following “a lot” or “to a great extent”:

- Guardian/parental awareness of truancy issues (74%),
- Ability to address issues that contribute to later delinquency and crime (70%),
- Graduation rate (63%),
- Truancy rate (63%),
- Preventing habitual truancy (59%),
- Parent/guardian empowerment (56%), and
- Ability to identify students’ needs (59%).

When respondents who were involved in project meetings (n=13) were asked how well each component addressed juvenile truancy and delinquency, 100% of respondents said the truancy officers and the magistrate truancy court did good or excellent. Other project areas rated as having performed well

What has been your position or role in the project? (n=27)		
	%	n
Juvenile Probation/Juvenile Detention	3.7	1
Truancy Officers/Assistants	11.1	3
Judge, Prosecutor, or Court Coordinator	7.4	2
Other Court Administration	3.7	1
Mentoring Network	7.4	2
School or School District Official	14.8	4
School Resource Officer	22.2	6
Street Crimes Unit Officer/Other Law Enforcement	25.9	7
Other Community Organization	11.1	3
Other Government Agency	7.4	2

More than one selection allowed



were attendance court (84.6%), The Mentoring Network (76.9%), law enforcement (76.9%), and prosecution (76.9%).

### Prevention/Intervention

- Most respondents (85%) believed the initiative had positively impacted the lives of school aged youth.
- 55.5% felt the initiative performed "good" or "excellent" in preventing more serious crimes.
- Respondents felt that the initiative performed good or better at redirecting youth away from drugs (51.8%) and gangs (55.5%).
- 59% felt the Truancy Diversion program had prevented habitual truancy,

### Law enforcement

Law enforcement was rated positively by 76.9% of the respondents when it came to addressing juvenile truancy and delinquency.

Law enforcement agencies in the initiative also received positive ratings by 65.4% on their collaborative efforts with other initiative organizations.

Law enforcement officers were asked to rate how well the project contributed to certain law enforcement areas.

- Law enforcement officers gave "good" to "excellent" ratings to the projects contribution to reducing gang criminal activity (76.9%), preventing future crimes (69.2%), reducing juvenile delinquency (61.6%), sharing intelligence with other agencies (61.5%), reducing gang membership (53.8), and apprehending drug users.
- Less than a majority of respondents rated the following areas as "good" or "better": dismantling drug networks (46.2%), ability to investigate higher level drug cases (46.2%), and reducing gang membership (38.5%).

### Collaboration Between Organizations

According to respondents, the initiative's biggest impact was increasing communication and coordination between groups.

Since their involvement with the initiative, the majority (81.4%) of respondents said communication and collaboration between organizations concerned with youth had increased as well as collaboration between groups concerned with preventing other types of problems.

- 67% considered other organizations within the project easy to work with.
- 92.4% felt committed to the project.
- 84.6% indicated that all partners necessary to project success were involved.
- 92.4% felt that new or improved networking and relationships were built among groups, agencies, and organizations.
- 53.9% of respondents agreed that they now work with organizations they didn't work with prior.
- 46.2% felt that organizations in the project were cooperative, and 66.7% felt there was enough communication between organizations.

Almost all partners in the initiative were rated as "fair" to "excellent" in how well they collaborated with other organizations involved in the project. The following partners were rated as "excellent" by a majority of respondents:

- Caldwell Police Department (85%),
- Vallivue and Caldwell School Districts (62%),
- Probation (62%), and
- Prosecutors and School Resource Officers (54% each).

### Respondent comments on areas for improvement, best practices, successes, obstacles, and new or unanticipated problems

#### Areas needing improvement:

- A list of support services for parents/students.
- Interdisciplinary approach to each student due to lack of collaboration with other resource agencies like Health and Welfare.



- Better working relationships between police and truancy officers.
- Funding
- Increase the drop out age to 18.
- Better awareness of data collection needs.

### **What is Working Best?**

Respondent comments indicated that collaboration, communication, the truancy program, street crimes enhancement, educating parents about their responsibilities, and addressing the issues students face were working best.

### **Project Successes**

Successes described by participants included:

#### **What effect has Switch-Track had?**

Based on responses, Switch-Track improved: ADA and graduation rates, grades, collaboration, and ability to address truancy issues. Other positive effects reported were preventing truancy, bringing agencies together, and other prevention effects.

### **Obstacles**

In response to the question, “What obstacles have you or your agency encountered,” one respondent wrote “the lack of communication between the attendance review personnel, school and parents.” Other obstacles mentioned were organizing the truancy magistrate court, finding resources to continue the project after the grant, and interagency collaboration.

### **New or Unanticipated Problems**

The complexity and number of issues students and families face was discussed as an unanticipated problem to the project. Other unanticipated problems included: the need to expand the truancy program without increased funding, not being able to work with students 16 and older due to the dropout law, and teamwork issues between agencies.

## Summary & Conclusion

The truancy diversion program produced more positive results than detention or attendance contracts, but it is unknown what part of this program makes its results so unique. Perhaps it is a combination of the knowledge truants have that they will be held accountable, that someone else cares about them, the increased expectations, and the ability of the court to address the root causes of attendance issues. According to several studies,<sup>2,3,6,7</sup> truancy diversion programs are cost-beneficial. Thus, the ability of the truancy diversion program to reduce absences and truantries is likely more cost effective and produces better outcomes for youth and society than strict reliance on the criminal justice system. As the Caldwell City Police Chief said “increased attendance brings more funding to the district and has long-term benefits for both crime prevention and the economy.”

### Recommendations:

Several steps can be taken to further improve the effectiveness of the Switch-Track Comprehensive Initiative and the programs implemented through it. In fairness to the project partners, several of these recommendations were planned to be fulfilled in the third year of the grant which was not funded due to federal budget cuts.

#### 1. Find methods to reduce absences for high school students.

High school students in both school districts have higher median absences and unexcused absences compared to middle school and elementary students. Students at Caldwell High School have a median absence of 15 (6 unexcused) and those at Vallivue High School have a median of 14 absences (5 unexcused). Several possible solutions are listed below.

- Encourage and support adult to student relationships at school. The student survey conducted by the College of Idaho, the Mentoring Network evaluation, and other studies have shown that students who feel an adult at school cares about them are more likely to have good attendance and behavior.
- Reward attendance with school parties, dances, etc.
- Educate students on the reasons for good attendance.
- Develop afterschool programs for teens that give them a safe and fun environment to hang out.

Median absences by school district and type of school			
	Elementary	Middle	High
Total absences			
Caldwell	6	11	15
Vallivue	6	12	14
Unexcused absences			
Caldwell	1	3	6
Vallivue	0	3	5

#### 2. Risk assessments to help coordinate services to address needs.

Risk assessments can help employ the appropriate academic, recreational, social, and health resources to remove the barriers to good attendance.

### **3. Better coordination of resources and partners.**

Several survey respondents commented that resources, collaboration, and communication need improvement. To truly address the multitude and complexity of barriers to attendance, an interdisciplinary approach to each student is necessary. Collaboration and communication between necessary parties like school resource officers, truancy officers, and social services is essential.

### **4. Evaluation of data management systems.**

Information sharing, communication, and coordination are vital to a successful community and multi-agency initiative. Although some data issues discovered during this evaluation process have since been addressed, Canyon County agencies and the school districts should consider whether additional or improved data management systems could assist in their multi-agency projects. Adequate data management systems assist with ongoing evaluation, information dissemination, coordination between agencies, and case management.

### **5. Increase personnel and resources to address all students with attendance issues in a timely manner.**

In January 2008, the Caldwell School District Truancy Officer said that only 70% of the students with attendance issues had been seen by the attendance court due to time constraints. As shown previously, the timeliness of addressing attendance issues is important to preventing further absences, behavioral issues, and dropping out of school.

## **Lessons Learned from Rural and Urban Multi-Agency Projects**

As directed by the Idaho Criminal Justice Grant Review Board (now part of the Idaho Criminal Justice Commission), the Idaho Statistical Analysis Center was given the unique opportunity of evaluating two comprehensive community initiatives in Idaho. To assist future planning and evaluation efforts of comprehensive community initiatives, a few observations are made. Specifically discussed are the unique benefits and challenges of the two vastly different comprehensive community initiatives, one in an urban setting and one in a rural environment. For example, urban areas are likely to face the challenges of inconsistent leadership and project partners and difficulties organizing a cohesive project plan. Rural areas are likely to encounter challenges in hiring personnel and sustaining and expanding their projects without grant funds due to a lack of resources and infrastructure. The following briefly describes the challenges experienced by the rural initiative, Lemhi County/City of Salmon Integrated Community Based Problem Solving Initiative, and the urban initiative, Switch-Track.

Rural and urban comprehensive community initiatives each have their challenges and advantages unique to their population size. As demonstrated with Switch-Track, urban initiatives can be difficult to organize and plan due to the vast numbers of potential partners and the many players inside of those organizations. Switch-Track struggled to develop a cohesive initiative that focused on one singular goal. While the majority of funds and efforts were directed at the truancy program, law enforcement efforts and grant funds were not officially integrated into this program through the use of School Resource Officers, truancy sweeps, or other measures. Moreover, other community partners were not integrated into the project or were poorly utilized to assist truants after they entered the truancy program. For example, the Mentoring Network, Inc. received very few referrals from the truancy program. The Lemhi County/City of Salmon Integrated Community Based Problem Solving Initiative, on the other hand, utilized funding to support project partners to reach one overall goal of preventing and reducing drug and alcohol abuse. In this effort, funds were used towards a school resource officer program, a joint narcotics task force, probation officer, a host of prevention and education efforts, as well as a drug court and drug and alcohol treatment services.

Urban initiatives, like Switch-Track, have the advantage of more resources and infrastructure available to incorporate into their projects which help to sustain and expand them. For example, a multi-agency drug task force and school resource officer program were already established in Canyon County. Further, the city and county courts were able to contribute personnel time to the truancy program. In contrast, Lemhi County /City of Salmon had limited resources to contribute to their project, making it difficult to sustain and expand their pro-

ject without additional grant funds. Still, rural areas like Lemhi County tend to have consistent leaders and members of their initiative who are more vested due to their long time residency and intimacy with the community and other initiative partners.

## Conclusion

Overall, Switch-Track was successful in developing two in-house attendance courts and a formal Truancy Magistrate Court, as well as supporting law enforcement drug and gang strategies and community prevention programs. The law enforcement component of the grant project was successful in making drug arrests, drug and weapon seizures, and gang member investigations. The truancy diversion program was successful in redirecting truant and absent students to better attendance, grades, and behavior. Although the long-term implication of the truancy program is unknown, the short-term findings are encouraging. The establishment of new relationships and new means to identify and assist at-risk youth resulted in a more students in school, more drugs off the streets, and a better future for many students and their families.

## Appendix A: Switch-Track Survey Results

Are you currently active in Switch-Track meetings or activities? (n=27)	
Yes	4%
I Used to be involved	37
I've never been involved	19
How many years have you been involved with this project?	
1 year	7%
2 years	4
3 - 4 years	22
Never been involved	52
Is the community better off today because of the project?	
Yes	85%
No	0
Undecided	15
Have you been involved in meetings or the planning process concerning Switch-Track?	
Yes	52%
No	48

In your opinion, prior to the project in mid 2006, how much of a problem were the following in Canyon County? (n=27)				
	Minor problem	Moderate problem	Major problem	Don't know
	%	%	%	%
Violent Crime	7	44	37	11
Truancy	0	22	63	15
Juvenile Crime	4	39	46	12
Youth Drug Abuse	4	44	37	15
Underage Drinking	0	44	33	22
Juvenile Gangs	0	19	70	11
Adult Gangs	0	22	59	19
Adult Drug Crimes	0	22	63	15

Do you feel Switch-Track has increased or decreased the following since the project began in your area? (n=27)

	Greatly Decreased %	Decreased %	No Change %	Increased %	Greatly Increased %	Don't know %
Violent Crime	15	59	11	0	0	15
Truancy	33	48	11	0	0	7
Juvenile Crime	0	77	4	4	0	15
Youth Drug Abuse	0	41	15	4	0	41
Underage Drinking	0	33	22	4	0	41
Juvenile Gangs	7	63	11	4	0	15
Adult Gangs	7	63	11	4	0	15
Adult Drug Crimes	0	41	22	4	0	33

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning Switch-Track. (n=27)

	Agree to Strongly Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree to Strongly Disagree %	Don't know %
Services/programs have been improved.	81	11	0	7
The project is an efficient use of public resources.	74	15	0	11
Other organizations within the project are easy to work with.	67	19	0	15

Please rate how well you think Switch-Track has performed in the following areas: (n=27)

	Excellent/ Good %	Fair %	Poor/ Very Poor %	Don't know %
Preventing more serious crimes.	55.5	7.4	7.4	29.6
Redirecting youth away from drugs.	51.8	18.5	3.7	25.9
Redirecting youth away from gangs.	55.5	18.5	7.4	18.5
Promoting positive interactions between youth and the community.	48.1	25.9	7.4	18.5
Positively impacting the lives of school aged youth.	74.0	11.1	0.0	14.8
Increasing communication and coordination between organizations concerned with youth.	59.2	22.2	3.7	14.8
Increasing collaboration between groups concerned with preventing other types of problems.	51.8	29.6	3.7	14.8
Reducing the availability of drugs.	22.2	14.8	11.1	51.9

To what extent has the Truancy Diversion Program: (n=27)						
	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot	To a great extent	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increased parental/guardian awareness of truancy issues.	0	7	4	26	48	15
Increased the ability to identify students' needs.	0	4	15	41	19	22
Increased the chance that youth will graduate.	0	7	11	33	30	19
Increased students' commitment to school.	0	4	30	30	19	19
Empowered parent(s)/guardian(s).	0	7	15	41	15	22
Addressed family issues.	0	7	19	41	7	26
Addressed issues teenagers have.	0	4	30	30	11	26
Addressed truancy issues that could contribute to delinquency and crime later in life.	0	4	4	52	19	22
Reduced truancy for the School District.	0	4	15	22	41	19
Prevented habitual truancy.	0	7	19	26	33	15
Improved truants' grades.	0	4	19	26	15	37
Increased the availability of resources for students.	0	4	33	30	4	30
Increased the availability of resources for parent(s)/guardian(s).	0	8	28	36	4	24

Have you been involved in meetings or the planning process concerning Switch-Track?	
Yes	52%
No	48

Please rate how well you think the project has contributed to the following law enforcement areas: (n=13)				
	Excellent/ Good	Fair	Poor/ Very Poor	Unsure
	%	%	%	%
Intelligence sharing with other agencies.	15.4	15.4	15.4	7.7
The ability to investigate higher level drug cases.	38.5	30.8	15.4	15.4
Collaboration with non-law enforcement agencies.	46.2	15.4	15.4	23.1
Apprehension of drug users.	53.8	23.1	7.7	15.4
Dismantling of drug networks.	38.5	30.8	15.4	15.4
Reducing gang membership.	53.9	30.8	7.7	7.7
Reducing gang criminal activity.	76.9	7.7	7.7	7.7
Reducing juvenile delinquency.	61.6	23.1	0.0	15.4
Preventing future crimes.	69.2	15.4	7.7	7.7



Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning Switch-Track. (n=13)

	Strongly Agree/ Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree %	Don't know %
Since grant funding ended, collaboration has decreased.	38.5	7.7	30.8	23.1
I now work with organizations that I did not work with prior to this project.	53.9	15.4	30.8	0.0
Some organizations participating in the project were uncooperative.	15.4	7.7	46.2	30.8
There was not enough communication between organizations.	8.3	16.7	66.7	8.3
The project activities took into account the issues in the community.	84.6	7.7	0.0	7.7
I felt committed to this project.	92.4	7.7	0.0	7.7
All necessary partners were involved.	84.6	7.7	0.0	7.7
New/improved networks and relationships were built among groups, agencies, and organizations.	92.4	0.0	0.0	7.7

Please rate how well each component addressed juvenile truancy and delinquency. (n=13)

	Excellent %	Good %	Fair %	Poor/ Very Poor %	Don't Know %
Mentoring Network	15.4	61.5	0.0	0.0	23.1
Truancy Officers	76.9	23.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Magistrate Truancy Court	84.6	15.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Law Enforcement	61.5	15.4	15.4	0.0	7.7
Prosecution	61.5	15.4	0.0	0.0	23.1
Probation	69.2	0.0	7.7	0.0	23.1
Court Administrators	53.8	15.4	0.0	0.0	30.8
Health and Welfare	7.7	23.1	23.1	0.0	46.2
Attendance Court	76.9	7.7	0.0	0.0	15.4

Please rate how well each component collaborated with other organizations involved in the project. (n=13)

	Excellent %	Good %	Fair %	Poor/ Very Poor %	Don't Know %
Mentoring Network	30.8	53.8	0.0	0.0	15.4
Truancy Officers	46.2	53.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
United Way of Treasure Valley	38.5	46.2	0.0	0.0	15.4
School Resource Officers	53.8	38.5	7.7	0.0	0.0
Prosecutors	53.8	30.8	0.0	0.0	15.4
Probation	61.5	23.1	0.0	0.0	15.4
Canyon County Courts	46.2	38.5	0.0	0.0	15.4
Health and Welfare	7.7	23.1	23.1	7.7	38.5
Caldwell School District	61.5	38.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Vallivue School District	61.5	30.8	0.0	7.7	0.0
Caldwell Police Department	84.6	15.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Canyon County Sheriff's Office	41.7	8.3	25.0	0.0	25.0
Nampa Police Department	15.4	30.8	30.8	0.0	23.1
College of Idaho	0.0	30.8	15.4	0.0	53.8
County Juvenile Detention/Probation	46.2	30.8	7.7	0.0	15.4

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