

The Worcester County Model for Elementary/Secondary School Intervention Program (ESSIP)

Collaborative, proactive, preventive work has long-characterized efforts in partnership with Worcester County Public Schools (WCPS), the Worcester Juvenile Probation Department and the Worcester Area Offices of the Department of Social Services and the Department of Mental Health (as needed).

Schools provide the arena in which children come into their most significant contact with others beyond the immediate family. Schools provide structure, expected parameters of behavior, opportunities for expanded peer and adult interactions as well as educational experiences. In the WCPS, members of the support staff, particularly Guidance Counselors, Adjustment Counselors and School Psychologists work with children and adolescents who encounter challenges complying with the expectations in schools. They attempt to work with parents/guardians to resolve challenges in settings beyond the school (such as in the home or community) that may contribute to adjustment difficulties in school. They may facilitate access to specialized school services or to community-based services when necessary. They may initiate the Student Support Process (SSP) in the school to engage additional school personnel with parents in clarifying the issues and strategizing for problem-solving. For most students and their families these efforts are effective in addressing attendance, learning and behavior problems.

School Adjustment Counselors may also be the designated Supervisors of Attendance for the WCPS. As such, they have the responsibility to bring truancy matters (including chronic significant tardiness to school) before the Juvenile Court. The usual vehicles for this are a Failure to Cause School Attendance Complaint against the parent (for a young child) or a Child In Need of Services (CHINS) filing for those students who do not meet the compulsory attendance requirement in spite of the efforts of their parents/guardians. The use of the Court is reserved for those situations where school-based efforts to engage parents in cooperative problem-solving around attendance and severe behavior problems have not been successful. The work of selecting appropriate families falls primarily to the School Adjustment Counselors. Logistics of the process vary from one school site to another, but our hope is to standardize the essential features of ESSIP to facilitate adoption by additional school sites.

Experience has shown us that, in many situations, the involvement of the Juvenile Court Probation Department and/or the Department of Social Services brings a higher level of authority to parent meetings and helps us to effectively engage parents who may be reluctant to work with school staff to address attendance and behavior problems. Hearings on Adult Failure to Cause Attendance matters with the Clerk Magistrate are generally well-attended, frequently enabling the School Adjustment Counselor to communicate with the parent for the first time and begin to work on resolving issues that have interfered with attendance or other aspects of successful school performance. As an example, ESSIP has been used for many years for a select few families as an effective diversion from the need for court involvement, in a small number of Worcester Public Schools. An ESSIP meeting is a family meeting, held at the student's school and attended by a Probation Officer and a caseworker from the Department of Social Services. Additional school staff members may attend as appropriate. **From the perspective of probation and DSS, this is an "informal and informational" meeting with a family.** (Originally, the

Department of Mental Health was also represented at ESSIP meetings; however, due to reductions in staff with that agency they currently are invited only to selected meetings.) **Letters of invitation** to the family are sent from the Juvenile Probation Department.

Parents who have been reluctant to engage with school staff usually attend ESSIP meetings and are often motivated to resolve the issues at hand avoiding formal involvement of the court or DSS. In many cases, through the ESSIP meeting process, student and family situations improve and formal filings with the Juvenile Court are avoided.

Typical outcomes of these meetings may include, but are not limited to:

- an informal contract with a student, signed by all parties, to improve attendance and/or behavior at home and at school;
- parents learning about school services that may be appropriate for their child and how to access these;
- parents signing on for voluntary services with DSS;
- referral for attention to other agencies or community-based service-providers (after-school programs, housing or other supplemental assistance programs, medical services, domestic-violence, court clinic or other mental health service providers, legal assistance, child care assistance, etc.)
- a follow-up meeting is scheduled to revisit progress, acknowledge success or consider additional efforts, if necessary.

By providing the ESSIP process as part of a continuum of supports for our students and families in the Worcester Schools, additional elementary and secondary sites in Worcester and throughout the county will be able to avail themselves of this preventive tool. With this standardized model, it is anticipated that “Mobile Teams” may be established to provide this service to those schools that are need of only periodic meetings. ESSIP will include additional middle and high schools in Worcester, as well as, in many school districts throughout the County, as the model is considered and adopted by individual school administrations.

ESSIP Process in Brief:

(As currently implemented; revisions for a high school level process should be discussed)

1. School Adjustment Counselor identifies student and family appropriate for an ESSIP meeting based on the following criteria:
 - Continued truancy from school in spite of increased monitoring, efforts to communicate with family, offers of additional support, school conferences;
 - Continued serious behavior problems in school, either willfully by a student or with apparent roots in situations beyond the purview of school intervention efforts, with limited or no cooperative engagement of family to address the problems and in spite of in-school interventions and offers of other supports;
 - Challenges in engagement of family indicate that court involvement is likely to become necessary.
2. Adjustment Counselor completes the ESSIP referral form and faxes it to Juvenile Court designee.
3. Juvenile Probation sends an invitation letter to the parent's home, stating date and time of ESSIP meeting and identifying those planning to attend.
4. Meeting is held. At the meeting the concerns of the school relative to attendance or other student needs are reviewed with the family. The family is invited to present their concerns relative to the student's situation. The family is advised of the regulations around attendance and the need for students to comply with basic behavioral expectations at school. Appropriate school and/or community-based resources, services and the steps to access these are identified.
5. Plans that are developed are documented (the specific format of the agreement plan document varies among schools) and the family is provided a copy of the plan. families are offered additional support, if necessary to follow through on the steps agreed upon.
6. When appropriate the student is invited in for the final part of the meeting (particularly if the child is deemed a willful truant or habitual school offender) and plans are reviewed with them. The probation officer may develop an informal (no docket number) contract with the student in order to clarify the student's responsibilities within the plan.
7. A follow-up meeting is scheduled, usually at an interval of one to two months.
8. At the follow-up meeting progress is reviewed, success is acknowledged and additional intervention plans are developed if needed.
9. If truancy or serious behavior problems are unremitting in spite of the ESSIP process, appropriate action is filed with Worcester Juvenile Court.

Worcester Public Schools Currently Using ESSIP:

Elementary	SAC	Probation Officer	DSS Social Worker
ALL	Elaine Irizarry-Kline	Rafael Ortiz	Julie Creen
Belmont	Kelly McNamara	Bill Cantwell	Julie Creen
Canterbury	Kelly Deneault	Irena Stumbras	Julie Creen
Elm Park	Rob Pelczarski	Penelope Wolosz	Julie Creen
Fanning El	Maura Mahoney	Penelope Wolosz	Julie Creen
Lincoln St	Cindy Harnois	Irena Stumbras	Julie Creen
Vernon Hill	Mellisa Fergus	Darlene Charleston	Julie Creen
Secondary	SAC	Probation Officer	DSS Social Worker
BMS	Cindy Vail	Herb Donahue	Julie Creen
Modified version:			
NHS	Carmen Grant/ Felicitie Boisvert	Bill Cantwell	n/a

Frequency of ESSIP meetings:

Currently this varies by school with most meeting bi-weekly or monthly on a prearranged day determined by the schedules of participants