



Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program

2002 Evaluation Report

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At the direction of the Illinois State Board of Education, the Division of Data Analysis and Progress Reporting evaluated the Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program. The interpretations and conclusions presented in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or the policy of the Illinois State Board of Education. For more information, please contact Dr. Lilibeth Q. Gumia of the Data Analysis and Progress Reporting Division at 217/782-3950.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following are the major findings of the evaluation of the Illinois Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP) for FY 02.

A. At the Student Level

A1. Student Demographics

- **TAOEP served less students in FY 02 compared to previous years.** There were a total of 26,497 students served by TAOEP in FY 02. This is 8% less than the number of students served in FY 01 and 12% less than the students served in FY 00. The decrease may be due to a change in the rules and regulations limiting services to students with attendance problems only, such as truants, chronic truants, dropouts, or potential dropouts with attendance problems. In the past, programs were allowed to serve students with no attendance problems.
- **The number of truants and dropouts served by TAOEP is increasing.** With the changes in student eligibility for services, serviced populations shifted, i.e., TAOEP projects have slowly moved away from serving students with no attendance problems. From FY 95 through FY 97, over 35% of students served by the TAOEP are potential dropouts with no attendance problems. Then from FY 98 through to FY 00, the major population served shifted to chronic truants, and then in fiscal years 2001 and 2002, the major population served shifted to truants. In FY 02, 56% of students served by the TAOEP are truants compared to 31% of chronic truants. Furthermore, 13% of students served were dropouts which is one percent higher from FY 01 and two percent higher from FY 00.
- **Community colleges served the most number of dropouts compared to other administrative agencies while the other agencies served the majority of truants or chronic truants.** In particular, 53% of students served by community colleges in FY 02 are dropouts compared to only 7% by Regional Offices of Education (ROE) and 9% by local education agencies (LEA). Conversely, 55% of students served by LEAs are truants compared to 13% of community colleges. Moreover, 43% of students served by ROEs are chronic truants compared to 22% served by LEAs and only 9% by community colleges.
- **TAOEP continuously serves a majority of high school students.** TAOEP students are generally in higher grade levels. Generally, over half of the students served by TAOEP are in high school, with a few students whose grades could not be identified. In FY 02, 51% of TAOEP students are in high school and 47% are in elementary grades. However, the rate of participation of high school students in the TAOEP is decreasing while the rate of participation of students from elementary grades is increasing.
- **Dropout students in TAOEP are generally in high school whereas the chronic truants are in elementary grades.** In FY 02, 88% of dropouts served were in high school, whereas 61% of chronic truants served are in elementary grades.

- **Chicago School District 299 continues to serve more students than other projects.** Almost 3,000 students were served by Chicago in FY 02, the largest number served by a project.
- **Black students are over-represented in TAOEP.** Black students consist of 29% of the total TAOEP students compared to 21% of the total public school enrollment.
- **Almost 46% of American-Indian students in the TAOEP are dropouts.** Within an ethnic group, American-Indian students reflected higher dropout participation. Forty-two of 92 American-Indian students are dropouts. This rate separates the American-Indians from other ethnic groups in that the majority of students of the other ethnic groups participating in TAOEP are truants.
- **LEAs served the most number of minority students.** The majority of LEA students are blacks and Hispanics (62.5%). Conversely, the majority of students served by ROEs are whites (70%). Community colleges, on the other hand, appear to equally serve white and minority students.
- **TAOEP students are predominantly male.** TAOEP has always served more male students than female. In FY 02, 53% of students in the program were male. The distribution is similar across administrative agencies and no different from the gender distribution of student enrollment at the state.

A2. Student Services

- **More students are in prevention/intervention programs than optional education programs.** In FY 02, approximately 68% of TAOEP students are in prevention and/or intervention programs, receiving supplementary services only, and 32% were enrolled in optional education programs.
- **High school students are more likely to enroll in optional education programs, whereas elementary students are more likely to receive supplementary services only.** The FY 02 data shows that 89% of students enrolled in optional education programs are in high school. In contrast, 64% of students receiving supplementary services only are in elementary grades.
- **A majority of dropouts are enrolled in optional education programs.** In FY 02, 96% of dropouts in TAOEP were enrolled in optional education programs. In contrast, 81% and 85% of chronic truants and truants, respectively, received supplementary services only. Fifty percent of potential dropouts were either in optional education programs or receiving supplementary services only.
- **All community colleges receiving funding from TAOEP offer optional education program services.** All of the community colleges participating in the TAOEP in FY 02 offered optional education programs. In contrast, only 27% of LEAs and 46% of ROEs offered optional education programs.
- **Counseling is the service commonly received by TAOEP students followed by academic instruction.** Counseling service in TAOEP consists of personal, academic, or career counseling. In FY 02, over 64% of students received counseling and 51%

received academic instruction. Other services received by over 30% of students, include home visits (36%), life skills training (39%), and school visits (37%).

- **The need for academic instruction or counseling is more prevalent among dropouts than chronic truants or truants.** The FY 02 data shows that among the dropouts, 97% received academic instruction or 85% received counseling higher than chronic truants (59%) or truants (67%). On the other hand, chronic truants or truants (since the majority of them are not enrolled in optional education programs) received more school or home visits than dropouts. In particular, 41% of chronic truants and 54% of truants received school visits compared to only 3% of dropouts. Moreover, 40% of chronic truants and 51% of truants received home visits compared to 5% of dropouts.

A2. Student Outcomes

- **The success rate of TAOEP students remained at approximately 85%.** In FY 02, 85% of TAOEP students experienced educational success. Successful outcomes include high school completion, receipt of GED certificate, improved attendance, improved achievement, elementary students advancing one grade level, elementary graduation, completion of program of training, or enrollment in post-secondary programs. The success rate in FY 01 or in FY 00 was 86%.
- **Students enrolled in optional education programs are more likely to receive a high school diploma.** The data show that 78% of those who received a high school diploma were enrolled in optional education programs. In contrast, 80% of 8th grade students graduating from elementary grades were receiving supplementary services only. These results are expected since optional education programs enroll more high school students than programs providing supplementary services only.
- **Students with less truancy problems obtained higher success rates than those with severe truancy problems.** In particular, the high school graduation rate of potential dropouts was 68% compared to 54% of dropouts and 57% of truants. Moreover, 83% of potential dropouts advanced to the next grade compared to 78% of truants and 67% of chronic truants.
- **Retrieved dropouts in TAOEP are more likely to drop out of school again or leave the program.** The FY 02 data shows that 11% of retrieved dropouts, dropped out of school again. In contrast, only 2% of truants or 3% of chronic truants dropped out of school. Furthermore, another 11% of retrieved dropouts voluntarily discontinued participation in the program compared to 2% of chronic truants and less than 1% of truants.
- **More students have improved attendance in FY 02 than FY 01.** Approximately 70% of students with reported pre- and post-attendance rates improved attendance in FY 02 compared to only 55% in FY 01.
- **Students enrolled in optional education programs have a greater change in attendance rates than those students receiving supplementary services only.** The mean difference in attendance rates for students enrolled in optional education programs in FY 02 was ten percentage points compared to seven percentage points for students receiving supplementary services only. This is because those receiving

supplementary services only, started with higher pre-attendance rates than those students enrolled in optional education programs.

- **The students served by ROEs have better attendance performance than those served by LEAs.** Students served by ROEs improved attendance by 8% compared to 5% with that of LEAs.
- **Academic achievement levels of students in FY 02 stayed at the same level as FY 01.** About 69% of students increased their achievement levels in FY 02 compared to 68% in FY 01.
- **Students enrolled in optional education programs have higher academic achievement levels than those receiving supplementary services only.** Approximately 72% of students enrolled in optional education programs improved achievement compared to 66% of students receiving supplementary services only.
- **About 56% of students exited from TAOEP.** Student exits occurred because of graduation, completion of IOEP, removal from the program, dropping out of school, leaving the program voluntarily, transferring to another program, or the student's family moved. Of those who exited the program, 86% experienced positive outcomes. Conversely, 6% dropped out of school, 3% transferred to another program, and 5% voluntarily discontinued the program. Approximately 44% of all students will continue to receive services from the TAOEP for the next fiscal year.
- **The majority of students who exited from TAOEP were in the program less than a year.** Of the students that exited the program, 86% were served by TAOEP for less than one year and 12% were in the program between one and three years.
- **The success rate of students who had been with the TAOEP less than a year is higher than those students who had been with the program between one and five years.** The FY 02 data shows that 86% of students who had been with the TAOEP for less than a year achieved educational success. This success rate is higher compared to the 79% success rate for students who were in the program between one and three years. The success rate is highest (89%) for students who had been in the program for more than five years.

At the Program Level

- **TAOEP served less than 2% of all K through 12 students in the state.** During the last eight years, TAOEP served from 1.3% to 1.5% of K-12 students in Illinois public schools.
- **The number of high school dropouts in the state is expected to continue to drop.** The state numbers on high school dropouts indicate a downward trend. The number of high school dropouts has continued to decline since FY 98. Specifically, the number of high school dropouts significantly declined by 5,900 students in FY 02 from FY 98.
- **TAOEP increasingly serves high school dropouts.** During the last two years, TAOEP increased in the number of high school dropouts served. Relative to state

numbers, TAOEP's high school dropouts represent 9.4% and 9.5% in FY 01 and FY 02 respectively. These rates are higher compared to 8.6% served in FY 00.

- **The number of truants served by TAOEP in FY 02 is one and one-half times larger from FY 97.** TAOEP has increasingly served truants. In FY 97, TAOEP retrieved and served 5,311 truants. This represents 2.8% of the total number of truants in the state. In FY 02, TAOEP served 14,724 truants, which is 5.8% of the total number of truants in the state and one and one-half times larger than the number served in FY 97.
- **While white students appeared to be the highest ethnic group served by the program,** only 1.2% of all white students enrolled in the state are in the TAOEP compared to 1.7% of all blacks or 2.6% of all American-Indians/Alaskans.

INTRODUCTION

The Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program was established pursuant to Section 3.66 of the School Code (105 ILCS 5/2-3.66) requiring the offering of "modified instructional programs or other services designed to prevent students from dropping out of school." Associated with this law is the prevention of truancy and chronic truancy (105 ILCS 5/2-3.41). The students who are eligible to receive services from this program are chronic truants, dropouts, truants, and potential dropouts with attendance problems (23 Illinois Administrative Code, Part 205)¹. The intentions of the law are two-fold:

- 1) to reduce incidences of students dropping out of school, and
- 2) to reduce truancy.

Background

Efforts to reduce truancy in Illinois took impetus in 1973, when policymakers instituted policies to move away from institutionalizing students because of nonattendance. In 1975, truancy was further addressed with the passage of House Bill 2891 known as the "Truancy Prevention Act." This bill resulted in the establishment of the Alternative Prevention Program (APP) in 1976. The APP was regarded as an "interim alternative education for courts assigned truants" and received a legislative appropriation of \$500,000. Many significant changes occurred with the program following its inception - foremost of which were changes in implementation policies. Originally, funds were used to provide educational services to court assigned truants or chronic truants. In 1978, funds were used to prevent truancy and to provide alternative educational services to chronic truants. The program experienced various shifts in service populations which gradually gave birth to the Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP) in 1985. TAOEP, which is part of the School Reform package, replaced and expanded the services of the APP. The TAOEP received an initial funding of \$10 million in 1986 and increased to \$18 million in 1991. Funding dropped in 1992 to a level of \$17,460,000 and stayed in that level for eight years. In FY 00, TAOEP finally received an increase in funding to \$18,660,000 and then received another increase for \$1 million in FY 02.

There was a very wide range in funds received by a project in FY 02, which ranged from a high of \$4,992,300 to a low of \$17,154. Pursuant to the law, grants are awarded through a competitive process to school districts, community colleges, and educational service regions (currently called the regional offices of education). These education agencies submit grant proposals and are reviewed based on the following criteria: a) sufficient need for program services, b) existence of valid criteria and indicators for identifying students eligible for program services, c) program objectives, activities, or services are linked to student educational needs, d) cost-effectiveness of the program, e) evaluation strategies that would yield sufficient data to gauge the success of the program, and f) the proposal demonstrates strategies (than those routinely offered by the regular school program) that will effectively decrease the dropout and truancy rates. In addition to the criteria, the proposals are reviewed on the following major program components: a) a comprehensive community-based program planning with goals and objectives developed from a needs assessment process, b) the development of an Individualized Optional Education Plan (IOEP) for each student receiving services with learning or achievement objectives identified from assessment results, and c) a list of services that will be provided to the students to meet the student's learning goals or achievement objectives. Apart from the written proposal and a copy of

¹ See Appendix A for "Definition of Terms."

their Individualized Optional Education Plan form, no other documentation or evidence is required for approval. Reviewers make recommendations for funding based on these two documents.

EVALUATION PURPOSES, PROCEDURES, AND FINDINGS

PURPOSES

This report presents data and information that make inferences on the impact of the program at the student and program level. The student impact level will be addressed using the 2002 data. Specifically, an analysis of the extent to which program services impact student educational outcomes was conducted. The greater part of the analysis focuses on comparing the students served by the three administrative agencies: community colleges, regional offices of education, and local education agencies. At the program level, the number of students served by the TAOEP (as a statewide program), such as truants, chronic truants, and dropouts, will be compared to the state numbers to determine program impact. Moreover, gaps of needs at the state level will also be presented. This evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:

At the student level:

1. How many students were served by the program? How many students were served by each administrative unit? What were the primary reasons for referring students to the program? How different are these referrals by administrative unit?
2. What is the ethnicity, gender, grade level, and age of students served? How different are these demographics across truancy groups? How different are these demographics across administrative agencies?
2. How and where are students placed for major services?
3. What specific services were provided to the students? What services are most commonly provided by projects? How different are the services received by type of student referral?
4. What are the outcomes of students? How different are the outcomes among dropouts, chronic truants, truants, and potential dropouts?
5. Is there a significant increase in students' attendance and academic achievements? How different are the student outcomes among administrative agencies?
6. How different are the outcomes for students who were served by projects one year, two years, or more than three years?
7. What is the relationship between services and student outcomes? Which service significantly impact student outcomes? How different are the impact of services to student outcomes among the administrative units?

At the program level:

1. How many truants, chronic truants, and high school dropouts were reported in the state?
2. How many students were served by TAOEP relative to the state numbers?

PROCEDURES

The evaluation has three sources of data: 1) the End-of-Year Report which reports statewide statistics on dropouts, chronic truants, and truants, 2) the TAOEP Student Reporting Sheet, and 3) the TAOEP Program Reporting Sheet. The FY 02 TAOEP Student and Program Data are reported electronically by TAOEP-funded projects. Data is sent by projects directly to the Division of Data Analysis and Progress Reporting which has the responsibility of evaluating the program.

FINDINGS

A. AT THE STUDENT LEVEL

A1. Student Demographics

How many students were served by the program? How many students were served by each administrative unit? What were the primary reasons for referring students to the program? How different are these referrals by administrative unit?

A total of 26,497 students were served by TAOEP in FY 02. This represents 1.3% of all K-12 students in the state. This is also 8% less than the number of students served last year due to a change in the rules and regulations limiting services to students with attendance problems only, such as truants, chronic truants, dropouts, or potential dropouts with attendance problems. In the past, programs were allowed to serve students with no attendance problems. Table 1 shows the number of students served by the program disaggregated by type of administrative agency and primary basis of student participation in the program. The majority of students served in FY 02 were truants (41.9%), and slightly more than 30% were chronic truants. About 13% of students served were dropouts.

There were 76 TAOEP projects funded in FY 02, with 37 regional offices of education (ROE), 30 local education agencies (LEA), and nine community colleges. Given that ROEs were the highest number of projects that received TAOEP funds, it is not surprising that they would also serve the greatest number of students. As shown in Table 1, over 50% of students were served by ROEs and about 36% were served by LEAs. Community colleges served the least (since there were only nine of them) with about 3,231 students.

Table 1 also reflects the majority of populations served by each of these administrative agencies. For instance, LEAs served more truants than ROEs or community colleges (55.2%); ROEs served more chronic truants (42.9%) compared to LEAs or community colleges; and community colleges served more dropouts (53.4%) compared to the other two administrative agencies.

Table 1. Number of Students Served in TAOEP by Type of Agency and Student Primary Basis of Referral

Student Primary Basis of Referral	LEA		ROE		Comm College		State	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Dropout	888	9.2	944	6.9	1,725	53.4	3,557	13.4
Chronic Truant	2,085	21.5	5,834	42.9	297	9.2	8,216	31.0
Truant	5,346	55.2	5,322	39.2	421	13.0	11,089	41.9
Potential Dropout	1,361	14.1	1,486	10.9	788	24.4	3,635	13.7
Total	9,680	36.5	13,586	51.3	3,231	12.2	26,497	100.0

What are the ethnicity, gender, grade levels, and ages of students served? How different are these demographics across truancy groups? How different are these demographics across administrative agencies?

Student Ethnicity

Table 2 below shows the ethnicity of TAOEP students by the primary basis of students' participation in the program. The data indicates that within an ethnic group, almost 46% of American-Indian students are dropouts. This separates the American-Indians from other ethnic groups in that the majority of students of the other ethnic groups participating in the TAOEP are truants. The data also indicates that among the ethnic groups, only the black students are overrepresented in the TAOEP. Black students consist of 29% of the total TAOEP students compared to 21% of the total public school enrollment.

While white students appeared to be the highest ethnic group served by the program, only 1.2% of all white students enrolled in the state are in the TAOEP compared to 1.7% of all blacks, or 2.6% of all American-Indians/Alaskans.

Data elsewhere also show that among administrative agencies, LEAs served the most number of minority students; in fact, the majority of LEA students are blacks and Hispanics (62.5%). Most of these minority students were served by Chicago School District 299. Chicago District 299 served almost 3,000 students, the highest among TAOEP projects. The ROE's, on the other hand served a majority of whites (70%). Community colleges, on the other hand, appear to equally serve white and minority students.

Table 2. Student Ethnicity by Primary Basis of Referral

Student Ethnicity	Primary Basis of Referral								State	
	Dropout		Chronic Truant		Truant		Potential Dropout		Count	Pct
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
White, Non-Hispanic	2,010	13.7	4,659	31.8	5,716	39.0	2,285	15.6	14,670	55.4
Black, Non-Hispanic	983	12.9	2,342	30.7	3,267	42.8	1,048	13.7	7,640	28.9
Am-Indian/Alaskan	42	45.7	9	9.8	27	29.3	14	15.2	92	0.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	24	16.1	30	20.1	73	49.0	22	14.8	149	0.6
Hispanic	472	12.5	1,131	30.0	1,940	51.4	228	6.0	3,771	14.2
Other	23	14.6	41	25.9	60	38.0	34	21.5	158	0.6
Total	3,554		8,212		11,083		3,631		26,480	

-- 17 students have no ethnicity reported.

Student Gender

Over half (53%) of the students in this program are male. The distribution is similar across administrative agencies with LEAs having 55% male, ROEs having 51%, and community colleges having 53%. The TAOEP student gender distribution is not different from that of the state. The Illinois public schools enrolled 52% male and 48% female in FY02.

Student Grade Level

Slightly more than half of TAOEP students are in high school (51.5%) (Table 3). However, the distribution by grade level significantly differed among administrative agencies. For instance, 67.4% of LEA students are in high school whereas, the same percentage of students are in elementary grades for ROEs. Community colleges have the highest proportion of high school students served (85.8%). In fact, the majority of students served by community colleges are high school dropouts.

Table 3. Grade Level of Students by Type of Administrative Agency

Grade Level	LEA		ROE		CC		State	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Elementary (K-8)	2,997	31.0	9,153	67.4	229	7.1	12,477	47.1
High School	6,527	67.4	4,256	31.3	2,765	85.8	13,647	51.5
Ungraded	155	1.6	167	1.2	230	7.1	555	2.1
Total	9,679	100.0	13,576	100.0	3,224	100.0	26,479	100.0

-- 18 students have no grade level reported.

Truancy Status and Grade Level

The number and percent distribution of grade levels of students by primary basis of referral is found in Table 4. The data shows that truancy is more severe at higher grade levels. For example, dropouts are more pervasive among high school students (87.7%) than among elementary students (1.3%). In contrast, incidences of chronic truancy are higher among elementary students than high school students (60.9% versus 38.9%). What is revealing from the data is that chronic truancy or truancy or even potential dropouts with attendance problems for that matter, is concentrated in grades K-6. The numbers are a bit alarming and attest to the fact that truancy starts at early grade levels.

Table 4. Grade Level of Students by Primary Basis of Referral

Grade Level	Primary Basis of Referral								State	
	Dropout		Chronic Truant		Truant		Potential			
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
K THRU 6	5	0.1	3,052	37.3	3,906	35.4	1,282	35.4	8,245	31.1
7 AND 8 GRADE	43	1.2	1,934	23.6	1,633	14.8	524	14.5	4,134	15.6
HIGH SCHOOL	3,113	87.7	3,191	39.0	5,494	49.8	1,750	48.3	13,548	51.2
UNGRADED	395	11.1	33	0.4	47	0.4	77	2.1	552	2.1
Total	3,550		8,183		11,035		3,625		26,479	

Age of Students

Table 5 below shows that students in TAOEP tend to be slightly older. Over 54% of students are 15 years old or older. Dropouts tend to be older than chronic truants or truants -- 99.6% of dropouts are 15 years old or older compared to 44.7% of chronic truants and 48.5% of truants.

Table 5. Age of Students by Primary Basis of Referral

Age	Primary Basis of Referral								State	
	Dropout		Chronic Truant		Truant		Potential Dropout			
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
5 to 8 years old	2	0.1	1,101	13.4	1,748	15.8	528	14.6	3,379	12.8
9 to 11 years old	1	0.0	1,212	14.8	1,513	13.7	490	13.5	3,216	12.2
12 to 14 years old	11	0.3	2,219	27.1	2,429	22.0	741	20.5	5,400	20.5
15 to 18 years old	2,451	69.1	3,429	41.9	5,195	47.0	1,662	45.9	12,737	48.2
19 to 22 years old	1,084	30.5	226	2.8	163	1.5	196	5.4	1,669	6.3
Total Valid Cases	3,549		8,187		11,048		3,617		26,401	

The data also indicates that truancy or chronic truancy starts at an early age and could become severe, as the student gets older, without intervention.

A2. Student Services

How and where are students placed for major services?

The TAOEP rules and regulations require projects to assess students' learning needs to enable them to identify services appropriate in meeting those needs and thereby improve student outcomes. These leaning objectives and services are listed in a student's portfolio or the student's individualized optional education plan, a component required by law in implementing a TAOEP program. There are two major service placements for TAOEP students: optional education and supplementary services. Optional Education is a modified instruction program that incorporates state academic standards and, as appropriate to the student's needs, work-based learning and career development, and is established by school board policy to serve as a part-time or full-time option in lieu of regular school attendance. Students enrolled in these programs generally have credit deficiencies toward high school completion. On the other hand, supplementary services are services that provide students who are enrolled in the regular school program with supports, which includes but are not limited to, tutoring, mentoring, health services, home visits, counseling, retrieval, and referral activities, that are needed to increase their attendance rates or prevent them from dropping out of school. Based on these assessments, 8,500 students were placed in optional education and 17,997 students received supplementary services. As expected, the majority of dropouts (95.8%) are enrolled in optional education programs (Table 6). In contrast, the majority of truants and chronic truants received supplementary services only (85.1% and 80.7% respectively). About half of potential dropouts are enrolled in optional education programs, or receiving supplementary services.

Table 6. Service Placement of TAOEP Students by Primary Basis of Referral

Student Primary Basis of Referral	Optional Education		Supplementary Services		State	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Dropout	3,409	95.8	148	4.2	3,557	13.4
Chronic Truant	1,586	19.3	6,630	80.7	8,216	31.0
Truant	1,647	14.9	9,442	85.1	11,089	41.9
Potential Dropout	1,858	51.1	1,777	48.9	3,635	13.7
Total	8,500	32.1	17,997	67.9	26,497	100.0

In implementing the program, administrative agencies are given the option to offer either optional education program services only, supplementary services only, or both. The assumption is that the decision to offer services is based from a project's comprehensive planning/needs assessment results. Major classification of services is also one of the bases for funding. It is a fact that optional education programs cost more to operate than mere supplementary services. Optional education programs require attendance buildings or classroom facilities separate from the regular education facilities and also require the services of teachers; whereas supplementary services

need not have these facilities or personnel. In all cases, supplementary services only involve the services of tutors, counselors, or attendance-outreach workers. Services are normally provided in a regular school facility. Data elsewhere also showed that the majority of students enrolled in optional education programs are in high school (89%), whereas those receiving supplementary services are generally in elementary grades (63%).

Of the 76 projects funded in FY02, 32 offered supplementary services only, 17 offered optional education programs only, and 27 offered both major services. Of the projects offering optional education programs only, nine are community colleges and eight are local education agencies (Table 7).

Table 7. Type of Major Service Provided by Type of Administrative Agency

Type of Administrative Agency	Optional Education		Supplementary Services		Both Services		State	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Community College	9	100.0	---	---	---	---	9	100.0
Local Education Agencies	8	26.7	12	40.0	10	33.3	30	100.0
Regional Offices of Education	---	---	20	54.1	17	45.9	37	100.0
Total	17	22.4	32	42.1	27	35.5	76	100.0

Of the projects offering supplementary services only, 12 are local education agencies, and 20 are regional offices of education. Of the projects offering both services, ten are local education agencies and 17 are regional offices of education. The data shows that all nine community colleges offer optional education program services only.

What specific services were provided to the students? What specific services are most commonly provided by projects? How different are the services received by type of student referral?

TAOEP provides an array of services ranging from structured instruction such as academic instruction to support services which includes tutoring, counseling, transportation, and retrieval among others.

The data show that the need for services varies with the student's truancy status. For instance, the need for academic instruction or counseling is more prevalent among dropouts than chronic truants or truants (Table 8). Dropouts generally participate in the TAOEP to make-up for credit deficiencies, which explains their high enrollments in optional education programs. On the other hand, apart from counseling, the majority of chronic truants, and truants would more likely need school or home visits rather than enrollment in optional education programs. As noted earlier, truants, chronic truants, and potential dropouts are generally enrolled in regular education programs and are in the TAOEP to receive assistance to alleviate their truancy problems.

Table 8. Specific Type of Services Provided by Primary Basis of Referral

Specific Type of Service	Primary Basis of Referral									
	Dropout		Chronic Truant		Truant		Potential Dropout		State	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Academic Instruction	3,414	96.9	2,160	29.2	5,143	51.2	1,845	51.1	12,562	51.1
Enrolled in Community College Course	549	15.6	26	0.4	242	2.4	63	1.7	880	3.6
Received Counseling	3,004	85.3	4,374	59.1	6,764	67.3	1,816	50.3	15,958	64.9
Child Received Day Care Services	33	0.9	47	0.6	22	0.2	2	0.1	104	0.4
Enrolled in Evening School	305	8.7	424	5.7	267	2.7	360	10.0	1,356	5.5
Enrolled in a GED Program	1,166	33.1	68	0.9	75	0.7	26	0.7	1,335	5.4
Received Home Visits	180	5.1	2,936	39.7	5,110	50.9	705	19.5	8,931	36.3
Participated in Life Skills Training	1,862	52.9	1,776	24.0	4,662	46.4	1,287	35.7	9,587	39.0
Received Mentoring	1,000	28.4	1,626	22.0	1,550	15.4	1,037	28.7	5,213	21.2
Enrolled in a Parenting Course	247	7.0	265	3.6	140	1.4	68	1.9	720	2.9
Referred to Other Service Agencies	824	23.4	1,729	23.4	1,029	10.2	527	14.6	4,109	16.7
Retrieved from Truancy or Dropping Out	1,642	46.6	734	9.9	203	2.0	39	1.1	2,618	10.7
Received School Visits	102	2.9	3,002	40.6	5,408	53.8	599	16.6	9,111	37.1
Enrolled in a Summer School	504	14.3	370	5.0	554	5.5	146	4.0	1,574	6.4
Received Transportation	504	14.3	424	5.7	400	4.0	129	3.6	1,457	5.9
Received Tutoring	596	16.9	1,220	16.5	1,246	12.4	1,549	42.9	4,611	18.8
Enrolled in a Weekend School	135	3.8	174	2.4	84	0.8	74	2.1	467	1.9
Participated in Work-Based Learning Activities	1,140	32.4	479	6.5	332	3.3	452	12.5	2,403	9.8
Other Services Received	558	15.8	1,163	15.7	1,339	13.3	505	14.0	3,565	14.5
Unduplicated Total	3,522		7,401		10,045		3,609		24,577	

The data also show that dropouts are more likely to participate in life skills training than other students. In general, counseling is the number one service sought by the majority of the students, followed by academic instruction, participation in life skills training, and school visits, in that order.

A3. Student Outcomes

What are the outcomes of students? How different are the outcomes among dropouts, chronic truants, truants, and potential dropouts?

The data show that approximately 85% of students served achieved at least one positive outcome which includes high school completion, receipt of GED certificate, improved attendance, improved achievement, elementary students advancing one grade level, elementary graduation, completion of program of training, or enrollment in post-secondary programs. Specifically, 55% of 12th grade students and a few 11th grade and ungraded students graduated from high school. Moreover, 74.4% of elementary students advanced to the next grade, and 53.2% of high school students who were enrolled in TAOEP optional education programs returned to the regular school program since they have earned sufficient credits to put them on track toward high school graduation (Table 9).

The data supports the theory that obtaining successful outcomes for less challenging students are readily obtainable compared to students with more challenging truancy problems. As shown in Table 9, potential dropouts (who have the least truancy problems among the four truancy groups), experienced higher rates of success than other students. In particular, the rate of high school

graduation for potential dropouts was 67.5%, slightly higher than the high school graduation rate of chronic truants (65.9%), and significantly higher than the high school graduation rate of dropouts (54.5%).

Table 9. Outcomes of Students by Primary Basis of Referral

Type of Outcome	Primary Basis of Referral				Total
	Dropout	Chronic Truant	Truant	Potential Dropout	
Received high school diploma	547	369	324	398	1,638
<i>Percent</i>	54.5	65.9	56.9	67.5	60.2
Received GED certificate	360	8	11	3	382
<i>Percent</i>	10.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	10.9
Graduated from elementary school	0	225	211	94	530
<i>Percent</i>	0.0	21.3	25.8	35.9	24.4
Advanced to next grade (elementary)	9	3,363	4,332	1,502	9,206
<i>Percent</i>	18.8	67.4	78.2	83.2	74.4
Obtained admission to post-secondary instruction	78	24	15	42	159
<i>Percent</i>	8.6	6.4	4.5	10.5	7.9
Returned to regular school - completed IOEP	170	268	468	227	1,133
<i>Percent</i>	5.0	16.9	28.5	12.2	13.3
Completed a program of training	523	152	115	280	1,070
<i>Percent</i>	16.8	4.8	2.1	16.0	7.9
Reduced discipline referrals	141	614	566	278	1,599
<i>Percent</i>	4.0	7.5	5.1	7.7	6.0
Transferred to another program	101	184	111	63	459
<i>Percent</i>	2.8	2.2	1.0	1.7	1.7
Dropped out of school	404	283	215	117	1,019
<i>Percent</i>	11.4	3.4	1.9	3.2	3.8
Voluntarily discontinued participation in the program	377	133	102	112	724
<i>Percent</i>	10.6	1.6	0.9	3.1	2.7
Moved out of the district	114	434	337	83	968
<i>Percent</i>	3.2	5.3	3.0	2.3	3.7
Removed from the program	114	241	328	108	791
<i>Percent</i>	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.0
Other outcomes	1,054	1,137	1,014	325	3,530
<i>Percent</i>	29.6	13.8	9.2	8.9	13.3

Is there a significant increase in students' attendance and academic achievements? How different are the student outcomes among administrative agencies?

Attendance Performance Levels

Of all students served, only 12,259 or 46% of students have pre- and post-attendance rates reported. The analysis of attendance is limited to these students only. Attendance performance is computed by comparing the student's post-attendance rate to that of the student's pre-attendance rate. The pre-attendance rate is the ratio of student attendance (in days) in the regular

school/optional education program prior to participation in the TAOEP, divided by the number of required school attendance days prior to participation in the TAOEP. The post-attendance rate is the ratio of the number of days the student attended in the regular school/optional education program while receiving or after having received services from the TAOEP, divided by the number of required school attendance days in the regular school or optional education program from the time the student started his/her participation in the TAOEP until: 1) the student exited the program during the reporting period, or 2) at the end of the program, or 3) mid-year completion of the program.

Table 10. Attendance Performance of TAOEP Students by Type of Major Service Received

Major Type of Service	Did Not Increase Attendance Rate		Increased Attendance Rate		TAOEP	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Optional Education	1,173	40.3	1,735	59.7	2,908	100.0
Supplementary Services	2,438	26.1	6,913	73.9	9,351	100.0
Total	3,611	29.5	8,648	70.5	12,259	100.0

Table 10 indicates that overall, 70.5% of students increased their attendance rates. Moreover, the data show that the attendance performance of students receiving supplementary services only are better than those enrolled in optional education programs. Specifically, only 59.7% of students enrolled in optional education programs increased attendance rates compared to 73.9% of students receiving supplementary services. The low percentage of students increasing attendance rates in optional education programs may be explained by the type of students served by these programs. As presented in earlier data, optional education programs served 96% of all dropouts in TAOEP. Moreover, 40% of students in optional education programs are dropouts compared to less than 1% of students receiving supplementary services only. Dropouts have more educational challenges than chronic truants or truants that it would take more time and more services to bring their attendance up.

Achievement Performance Levels

There were only 3,561 students with achievement data reported which represents 13% of all students served. Among the three agencies, community colleges have the highest reporting rate at 23%, followed by ROEs with 13%, and the LEAs with 11%. Similar to attendance, analysis of achievement performance levels are limited to these students only. Achievement data reported include scores on various standardized tests or letter grades on specific subject areas. Letter grades are converted to a numeric scale with 4.0 as the highest grade and 1.0 as the lowest grade. The standardized scores, however, were not converted to Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores. The scores reported were taken at numerical face value and comparisons and computations were based solely on the numerical position of such scores. Given these analysis, the data show (Table 11) that students served by community colleges have higher achievement performance levels than students served by ROEs or LEAs. In particular, 76.5% of students served by community colleges improved academic achievement compared to 69.5% of LEAs and 65.6% of ROEs. An examination of performance by type of program service indicate that the achievement levels of students enrolled in optional education programs are higher (72.1%) than those receiving only supplementary services (66.2%). This is true for both the students served by LEAs and community

colleges but not with ROEs. Students enrolled in ROE optional education programs have lower achievement levels than students receiving supplementary services. Overall, the percent of students who have improved achievement in TAOEP was 69.1%.

Table 11. Achievement Levels by Type of Administrative Agency and Major Service Placement of Students

Type of Administrative Agency	Achievement Levels	Program Service Type					
		Optional Education		Supplementary Services		Total	
		Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Local Education Agency (LEA)	Did not improve achievement	79	13.3	173	34.7	252	23.0
	No change	61	10.2	21	4.2	82	7.5
	Improved achievement	456	76.5	304	61.0	760	69.5
	Sub-Total	596		498		1,094	
Regional Office of Education (ROE)	Did not improve achievement	142	35.1	264	20.3	406	23.8
	No change	31	7.7	151	11.6	182	10.7
	Improved achievement	232	57.3	888	68.2	1,120	65.6
	Sub-Total	405		1,303		1,708	
Community Colleges (CC)	Did not improve achievement	129	17.0			129	17.0
	No change	49	6.5			49	6.5
	Improved achievement	581	76.5			581	76.5
	Sub-Total	759				759	
TAOEP	Did not improve achievement	350	19.9	437	24.3	787	22.1
	No change	141	8.0	172	9.6	313	8.8
	Improved achievement	1,269	72.1	1,192	66.2	2,461	69.1
	Total	1,760		1,801		3,561	

How different are the outcomes for students who were served by projects one year, two years, or more than three years?

To determine if the students' length of stay with the program has any bearing on their outcomes it is essential to run analysis of relationships between outcomes and the length of time the student has been receiving services from the program. The projects are asked to report the entry and exit dates of students in and from the program and the length of stay is computed from these two date points. Analysis is limited to those students who have already exited the program and who have valid entry and exit dates.

About 56% of students exited the program. Of these students, approximately 86% were in the program less than one year (Table 12). Among the four student groups, chronic truants tend to stay longer with the program compared to other groups.

Table 12. Length of Stay with the Program by Primary Basis of Referral

Length of Stay with the Program	Primary Basis of Referral									
	Dropout		Chronic Truant		Truant		Potential Dropout		State	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Less than 1 year	1,697	13.5	2,966	23.6	6,244	49.6	1,672	13.3	12,579	85.7
Between 1 and 3 years	332	18.1	692	37.7	638	34.7	174	9.5	1,836	12.5
Between 3 and 5 years	31	12.3	129	51.0	69	27.3	24	9.5	253	1.7
Greater or equal to 5 years	1	5.6	8	44.4	6	33.3	3	16.7	18	0.1
Valid Total	2,061	14.0	3,795	25.8	6,957	47.4	1,873	12.8	14,686	100.0

How the length of stay affects outcomes is shown in Table 13. Specifically, what is reflected in each cell in Table 13 is the success rate for each student group given their length of stay in the program. The data show mixed results. It appears that, even with less than a year of participation in the TAOEP, students could experience successful outcomes. In fact, the data show that 86% of students who had been in the TAOEP only less than a year obtained successful outcomes. However, as students complete one year and then stayed for three years with the program, there seems to be no value added to their outcomes. As the students stay longer than three years, however, there is greater likelihood for students to experience higher educational success. Further, the data indicates that there is no difference in the level of success among dropouts, chronic truants, truants, and potential dropouts given their lengths of stay with the program.

Table 13. Number and Percent of Students Who Are Successful Relative to Length of Stay with the Program and the Students' Primary Basis of Referral

Length of Stay with the Program	Primary Basis of Referral									
	Dropout		Chronic Truant		Truant		Potential		State	
	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct	Count	Pct
Less than 1 year	1,197	70.5	2,526	85.2	5,750	92.1	1,366	81.7	10,839	86.2
Between 1 and 3 years	216	65.1	559	80.8	528	82.8	150	86.2	1,453	79.1
Between 3 and 5 years	24	77.4	109	84.5	57	82.6	22	91.7	212	83.8
Greater or equal to 5 years	1	100.0	7	87.5	5	83.3	3	100.0	16	88.9
Valid Total	1,438	69.8	3,201	84.3	6,340	91.1	1,541	82.3	12,520	85.3

What is the relationship between services and student outcomes? Which service significantly impact student outcomes? How different are the impact of services to student outcomes among the administrative units?

Table 14 shows a cross-tabulation of categorical positive outcomes with specific types of services received by students. Success rates higher than or equal to 75% are highlighted. The data show that for a specific type of service, academic instruction generates the highest rate of positive outcome (with success rates of 84% to 98%), particularly for high school students pursuing high school diplomas, or GED certificates, or whose goal is to earn high school academic credits. Counseling ranked second with success rates ranging from 77% to 94% on specific outcomes.

The counseling services provided by TAOEP include personal, academic, career, or group counseling. In particular, counseling proved to be very successful for students trying to obtain admission to post-secondary instruction. It is also effective for students who are enrolled in optional education programs working to earn high school academic credits and consequently return to the regular school to complete their high school education. Another service which generated success rates higher than 75% is life skills training. There is a 3:4 probability that students receiving this specific type of service would complete their IOEPs and return to the regular school.

Table 14. Number and Percent of Students Achieving Categorical Positive Outcomes by Type of Service Received

Type of Outcome	Academic Instruction	Enrolled in Community College Course	Received Counseling	Child Received Day Care Services	Enrolled in Evening School	Enrolled in a GED Program	Received Home Visits	Participated in Like Skills Training	Received Mentoring	Enrolled in a Parenting Course	Referred to Other Service Agencies	Retrieved from Truancy or Dropping Out	Received School Visits	Enrolled in a Summer School	Received Transportation	Received Tutoring	Enrolled in a Weekend School	Participated in Work-Based Learning Activities	Total
Received high school diploma	1,440	121	1,272	22	328	29	123	687	513	162	212	268	59	221	72	335	72	477	1,584
Percent	91	8	80	1	21	2	8	43	32	10	13	17	4	14	5	21	5	30	
Received GED certificate	358	83	301	3	2	275	10	163	94	4	101	247	11	15	51	41	4	100	381
Percent	94	22	79	1	1	72	3	43	25	1	27	65	3	4	13	11	1	26	
Graduated from elementary school	100	0	292	1	1	0	270	136	126	2	160	25	304	17	83	85	42	57	527
Percent	19	0	55	0	0	0	51	26	24	0	30	5	58	3	16	16	8	11	
Advanced to next grade (elementary)	744	0	3,659	3	11	15	3,424	1,745	1,531	22	1,288	314	3,295	124	302	1,983	161	173	7,645
Percent	10	0	48	0	0	0	45	23	20	0	17	4	43	2	4	26	2	2	
Obtained admission to post-secondary instruction	133	29	148	3	33	32	3	89	45	4	34	40	6	22	8	34	0	72	158
Percent	84	18	94	2	21	20	2	56	28	3	22	25	4	14	5	22	0	46	
Returned to regular school - completed IOEP	4,203	159	4,038	24	201	10	3,136	3,491	199	56	232	205	3,194	504	130	159	5	236	4,502
Percent	93	4	90	1	4	0	70	78	4	1	5	5	71	11	3	4	0	5	
Completed a program of training	1,036	143	875	43	274	293	63	748	348	79	259	263	50	139	161	138	2	593	1,062
Percent	98	13	82	4	26	28	6	70	33	7	24	25	5	13	15	13	0	56	
Reduced discipline referrals	1,090	14	1,213	17	309	30	347	729	701	22	417	194	246	88	389	405	91	419	1,581
Percent	69	1	77	1	20	2	22	46	44	1	26	12	16	6	25	26	6	27	
Duplicated Total	7,947	463	10,461	72	891	587	7,006	6,873	2,974	282	2,302	1,311	6,853	995	919	2,813	284	1,550	15,794

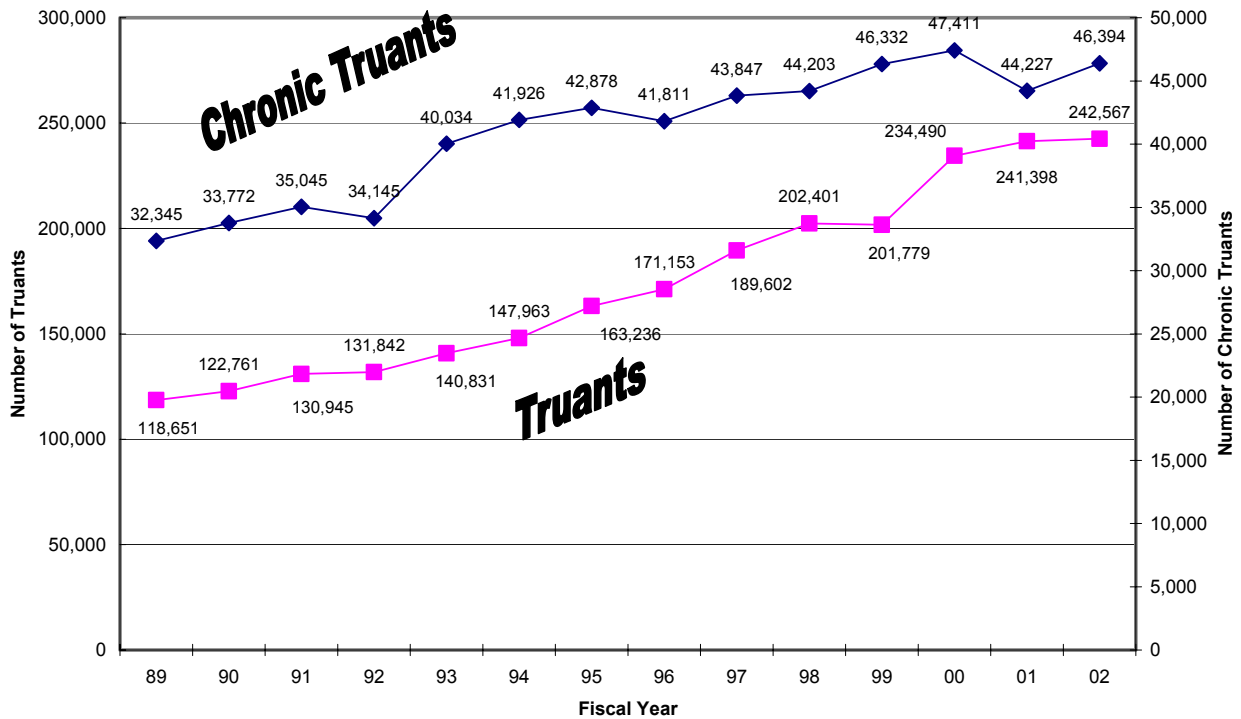
B. AT THE PROGRAM LEVEL

B1. Number and Rates of Truancy and High School Dropouts in the State

How many truants, chronic truants, and high school dropouts were reported in the state?

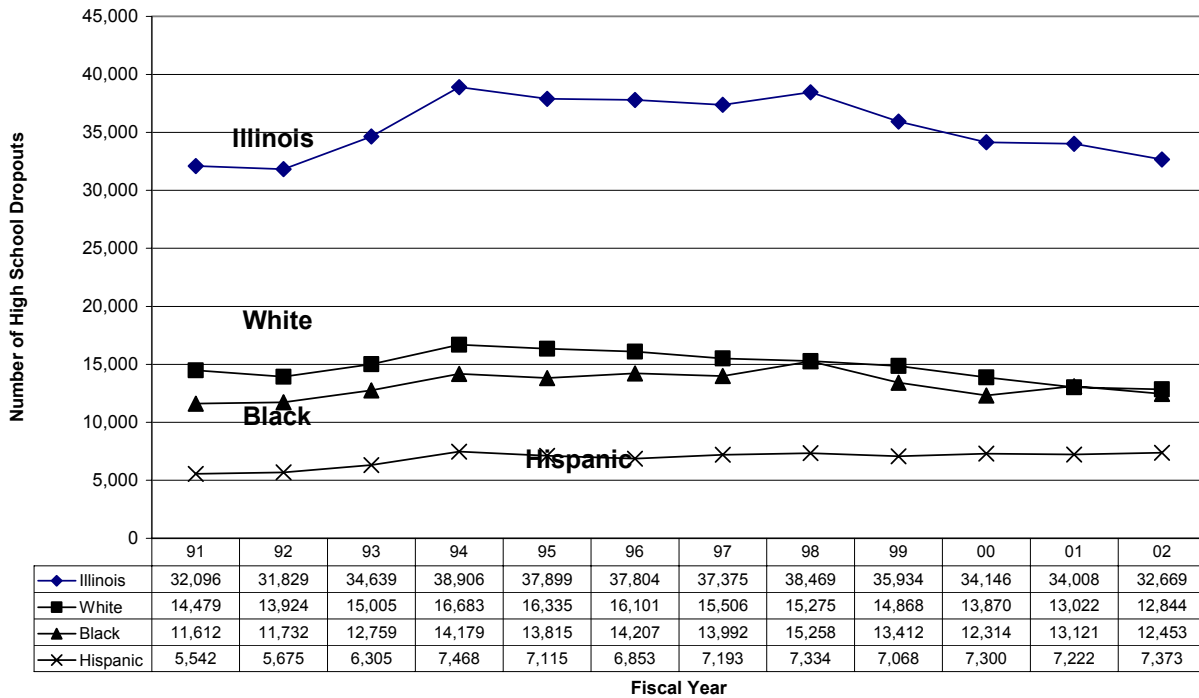
Chart 2 shows the number of chronic truants and truants in Illinois public schools from 1989 through 2002 with 2002 numbers estimated. The trends suggest that even with some decreases experienced in the number of truants in 1999, and that of chronic truants in 2001, the numbers are increasing moderately. The number of chronic truants is expected to increase by 5% and the number of truants less than 0.5% in 2002 from 2001.

**Chart 1. Number of Chronic Truants and Truants in Illinois Public Schools:
FY 89 through FY 02 (FY 02 Numbers are Estimates)**



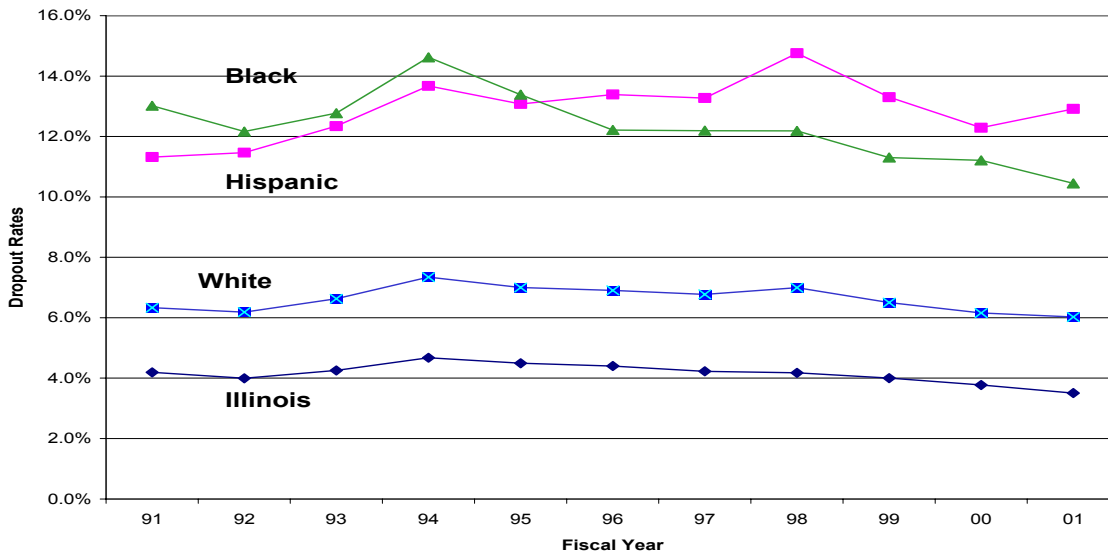
Regarding the high school dropouts in Illinois, similar to chronic truants, a slight drop was experienced in FY 01 from FY 00 by 138 students (Chart 2). But unlike chronic truants, the number of high school dropouts is expected to continuously decline in FY 02.

Chart 2. Number of High School Dropouts in Illinois Public Schools for Selected Ethnic Groups: FY 91 through FY 02 (FY 02 Numbers are Estimates)



To determine if there is a “real” decrease in the number of dropouts in the state, dropout rates are presented in Chart 3. Rates provide a better account of trends than numbers.

Chart 3. High School Dropout Rates in Illinois Public Schools for Selected Ethnic Groups: FY 91 through FY 01



While the numbers show whites as having the highest number of high school dropouts, it is blacks that registered the highest high school dropout rate in the state (Chart 3). Blacks surpassed the Hispanic high school dropout rates since FY 96. In earlier years (between FY 91 and FY 95), Hispanics recorded the highest high school dropout rates – higher than blacks. The

highest high school dropout rate for Hispanics was reported in FY 94 at 14.6%. But by FY 96, the trend shifted, with blacks leading the high school dropout rates in the state – and these rates are projected to increase. The Hispanic high school dropout rates, on the other hand, are decreasing. In general, the high school dropout rate in the state in FY 01 was 6.0% which is a 0.8% drop from FY 98.

B2. Percent Served by TAOEP Relative to State Numbers

How many students were served by TAOEP relative to the state numbers?

Charts 4 through 6 show the number of students served by TAOEP by truancy group, the need gaps (state number-number served by TAOEP), and the percent served by TAOEP.

Relative to the chronic truants, an increase in state numbers is projected in 2002, however, the number of students served by TAOEP decreased (Chart 4). While TAOEP took a 24% share in 2000, that share significantly dropped to 17.7% in 2002. In contrast, TAOEP took a larger share in serving truants and high school dropouts. The number of truants served, for instance, increased by 3,525 students in 2002 from 2001, which consequently increased its percent share by 1.2% during the same two-year period.

Chart 4. Number of Chronic Truants Served by TAOEP Relative to State Numbers with Need Gaps and Percent Served: FY 95 through FY 02 (FY 02 State Number is an Estimate)

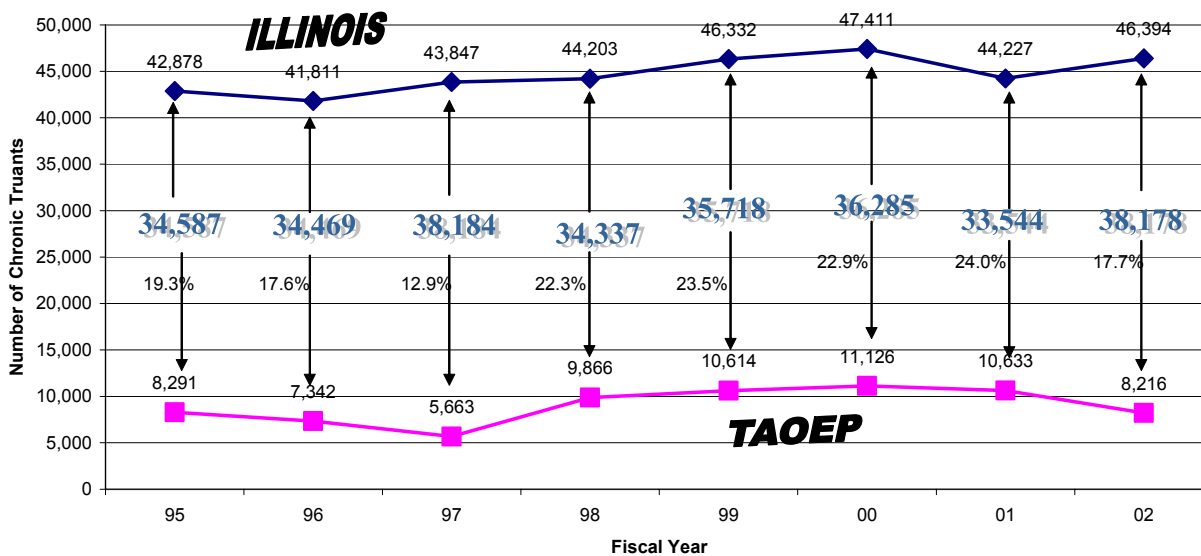


Chart 5. Number of Truants Served by TAOEP Relative to State Numbers with Need Gaps and Percent Served: FY 95 through FY 02 (FY02 State Number is an Estimate)

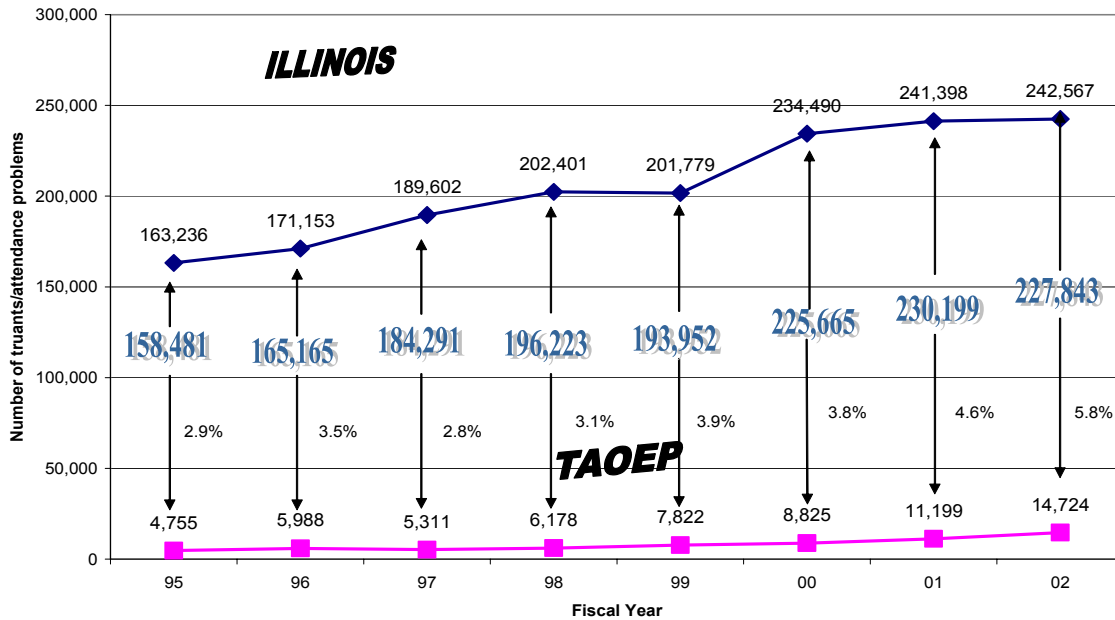
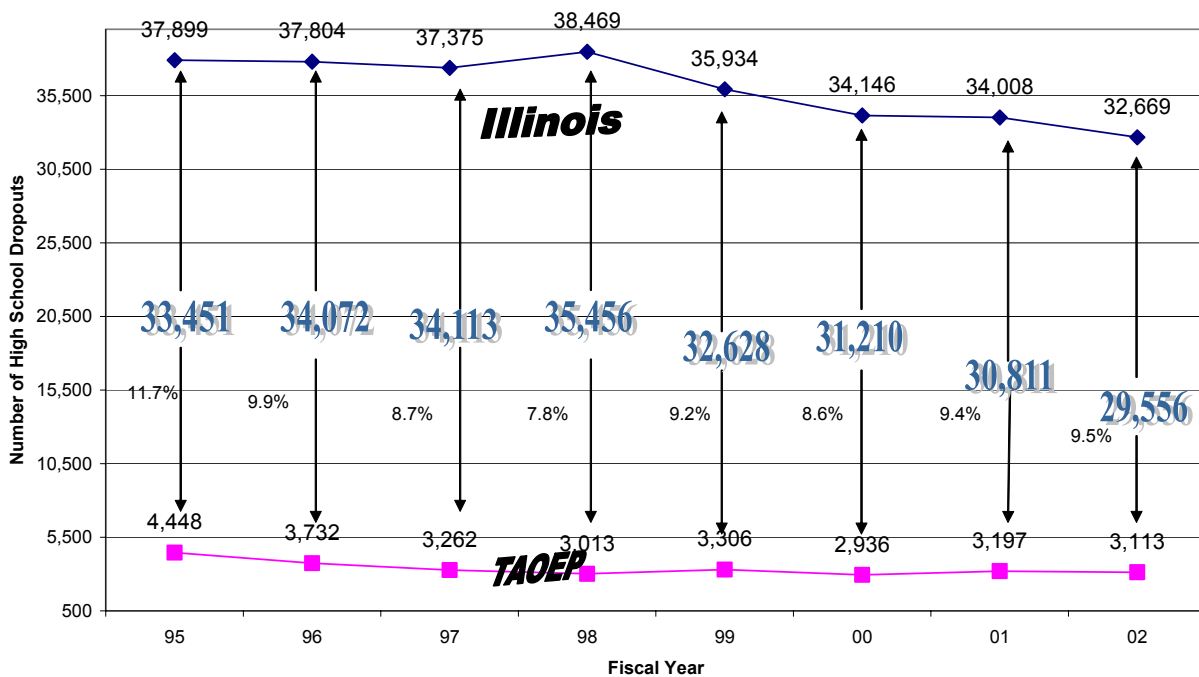


Chart 6. Number of High School Dropouts Served by TAOEP Relative to State Numbers with Need Gaps and Percent Served: FY 95 through FY 02 (FY 02 State Number is an Estimate)



In terms of serving high school dropouts, the number dropped by 84 students in 2002 from 2001. However, this did not change the program's percent of service-share. The percent remained at approximately 9.5%. This percent service-share in 2002 is relatively higher than the service-share in 2000 of 8.6%.

With the full implementation of the changes to the rules and regulations in 2002, requiring TAOEP services only for students who have attendance problems and who have dropped out of school, projects have slowly moved away from serving students who have no attendance problems, which may explain why there was a higher number of truant students served in 2002 compared to previous years. Moreover, the number of high school dropouts in the state is expected to decline further in 2002 giving TAOEP the same percent of high school dropouts served in 2002 from 2001, despite a slight decrease of the total number of students served.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been shown from the FY 02 data that TAOEP appears to be reasonably effective in meeting the needs of the students it served with 85% of the students achieving one or more positive outcomes. The relative success of TAOEP could be attributed to two factors:

- 1) The commitment of the program in bringing truant students back to school.
- 2) The ability of the program to provide appropriate services to students' educational needs.

One of TAOEP's major goals is to bring back to school as many truants, chronic truants, or dropouts as possible. Retrieving these students back to school is not a simple task.

Truancy is just a symptom of bigger problems. The reasons that students skip school are diverse² which is not only related intrinsically to the students' low motivation but extends extrinsically to families' lack of sufficient income, high mobility, the family structure (one parent supporting the entire family), the safety of regular schools, and, for those students who recently migrated to this country, their limited ability to communicate. Moreover, truancy is found to be the most powerful predictor of delinquency. Police departments across the nation reported that many students who are not in school during regular school hours are committing crimes, including vandalism, shoplifting, and graffiti³. Truancy also leads to dropping out of school. As far as dropouts are concerned, research consistently shows that dropouts put themselves at a long-term disadvantage. They are two and one-half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates. Moreover, a high school dropout is twice as likely to be unemployed and earn significantly less than high school graduates⁴. Recognizing the diverse reasons for truancy or dropping out of school, TAOEP provides an array of services cut-out to students' specific needs. TAOEP services not only directly benefit students but the families of these students as well. TAOEP works with other social agencies to provide: a) housing for homeless families, b) treatment for addictive parents, c) transportation, d) medical supplies, or e) clothing. In many cases, TAOEP simultaneously addresses the physical and emotional needs of families and the needs of truant students. This is not an easy feat.

The regular schools also benefit from TAOEP services. Through the years, the regular schools have become increasingly dependent on TAOEP to retrieve their absentee students. For TAOEP, services do not end with retrieval. TAOEP provides all other services necessary for the

² Urban Policies and Programs to Reduce Truancy. *Digest (Clearinghouse on Urban Education)*. No. 129, 1997.

³ Garry, Eileen. *Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, October 1996. ED 408666.

⁴ *Manual to Combat Truancy*, Published by USDE in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice, July 1996.

educational success of these students while in school such as tutoring, counseling, or mentoring.

The majority of students participating in TAOEP were drawn from referrals, and a few participated voluntarily. New referrals or participants are assessed their learning needs. The academic records and family backgrounds of these students are reviewed upon entry into the program. Information derived from these three data sources become the basis for identifying services and educational objectives. As such, the enrollments of students to any of the primary services, optional education, or supplementary services are dictated by the results of these assessments and review processes. What occurs then generally is that almost all dropouts (over 95%) are enrolled in optional education programs, whereas the majority of truants or chronic truants (over 80%) are receiving supplementary services only. Potential dropouts are equally distributed between these two primary services.

The positive impact of TAOEP to the students that it served is undoubtedly shown by the data. In particular, TAOEP's strongest component is its optional education programs. TAOEP optional education programs are significantly effective in meeting the educational needs of dropouts. The data show that 541 of the 547 dropouts (99%) who graduated from high school were enrolled in optional education programs. Moreover, since optional education programs provide direct academic instruction, it enhances the student's opportunity to earn academic credits necessary for graduation. While supplementary services may not be TAOEP's best element, these services are significant in that they are primarily responsible for the retrieval of truants and chronic truants back to school. No learning takes place if students are not in school. More specifically, the combined effect of retrieval, counseling, home visits, and school visits result in a higher success rate for chronic truants and truants. The attendance of over 73% of these students improved.

The other question is TAOEP's impact in reducing the truancy rates and incidences of dropouts in the state. The state numbers of chronic truants and high school dropouts dropped in 2001 from 2000. In 2001, the number of chronic truants in the state dropped to 44,227 from 47,411 in 2000. Further investigation revealed that 54% of the decrease is accounted for by Chicago School District 299. The number of high school dropouts also dropped steadily during the last three years: from 38,469 in 1998 to 34,008 in 2001, and is expected to continuously drop in 2002. An examination of the rates of chronic truants and high school dropouts supported these decreases. These decreases may be plausibly attributed to TAOEP, but it could also be attributed to other factors such as changes in truancy or dropout policies at the school district level, which this evaluation has no data or evidence to draw from, i.e., these decreases could not be validated from the data obtained by the evaluation. Nevertheless, the successes obtained by 85% of students served, combined with the decline in high school dropout rate and chronic truancy rate at the state level, are sufficient information for this evaluation to surmise some degree of effectiveness of the program.

In validating the impact of TAOEP at the state level, and to further examine the validity of TAOEP's impact to the achievement levels of the students that it served, the following processes are recommended:

- 1) The establishment of performance standards at the state level by the TAOEP Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee.
- 2) The full use of the "needs assessment" process in identifying the students that the projects will serve.

- 3) To follow-up the educational performance of students who were enrolled in TAOEP optional education programs and who were subsequently returned to the regular school.
- 4) To follow-up the educational performance of those students enrolled at the regular school while receiving supplementary services from TAOEP and no longer receiving services because they have completed their IOEPs.
- 5) To determine the extent by which TAOEP students meet the Illinois Learning Standards.

These recommendations would not only strengthen the TAOEP's accountability system but could additionally validate the successes obtained by its students.

Appendix A

Chronic truant or habitual truant - a child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for 10% or more of the previous 180 regular school attendance days (105 ILCS 5/26-2a).

Dropout - any child enrolled in grades 1 through 12 whose name has been removed from the district enrollment roster for any reason other than his death, extended illness, graduation, or completion of a program of studies and who had not transferred to another public or private school (105 ILCS 5/26-2a).

Truant - a child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for a school day or portion thereof (105 ILCS 5/26-2a).

Potential dropout with attendance problems - any student subject to compulsory attendance and whose school absences or pattern of school attendance impedes the student's learning or contribute to the student's failure to meet the Illinois Learning Standards and/or district learning standards (23 Ill. Adm. Code 205.20(b)(4)).