



Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program

2003 Evaluation Report

Illinois State Board of Education
Data Analysis and Progress Reporting Division
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Dr. Janet Steiner, Chair
State Board of Education

Dr. Robert E. Schiller
State Superintendent of Education

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Executive Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Evaluation Purposes, Procedures, and Findings	1
At the Student Level.....	2
A1. Student Demographics	2
A2. Student Services.....	7
A3. Student Outcomes	9
At the State Level.....	12
Conclusion and Recommendations	14
Appendix	
A - Definition of Terms	16
B – Number of Students Served by Each TAOEP Project	
by Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03.....	17

TABLE OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1 Number of Students Served in TAOEP by Type of Agency and Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03	3
2 Secondary Reasons for Students' Participation in TAOEP, FY 03	5
3 Student Ethnicity by Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03	5
4 Grade Level of Students Served by Type of Administrative Agency, FY 03	6
5 Age of Students by Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03	6
6 Service Placement of TAOEP Students by Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03	7
7 Major Service by Type of Administrative Agency, FY 03	8
8 Services Received by Over 1,000 Students by Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03	9
9 Outcomes of TAOEP Students, FY 03	10
10 Length of Stay of Students in TAOEP Programs by Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03	11
11 Success Rates of TAOEP Students with Length of Stay in the Program, FY 03	11
12 Student Success Rates for Each Type of TAOEP Service, FY 03	12

TABLE OF CHARTS

	PAGE
Chart 1. Number of Students Served by TAOEP: FY 98 Through FY 03	3
Chart 2. Number of Students Served by TAOEP by Primary Basis of Referral: FY 98 Through FY 03	4
Chart 3. Number of Chronic Truants in Illinois Public Schools: FY 92 Through FY 02.....	12
Chart 4. Number of Truants in Illinois Public Schools: FY 92 Through FY 02.....	13
Chart 5. Number of High School Dropouts in Illinois Public Schools: FY 92 Through FY 02.....	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were 71 projects funded in FY 03 but two of the projects, Rantoul Township School District 137 and J S Morton High School District 201, did not submit data for this report. These projects were not funded in FY 04. Therefore, this report only represents data from 69 projects. The following are the major findings from the FY 03 Illinois Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP) evaluation.

A1. Projects and Student Demographics

- ◆ **More regional offices of education (ROE) were funded in FY 03.** Thirty-seven of the 69 projects that were funded in FY 03 were ROEs compared to 27 school districts and nine community colleges.
- ◆ **The number of students served by TAOEP continue to drop.** There were 22,757 students served by TAOEP in FY 03. This is approximately 3,000 students less from what was reported as served in FY 02.
- ◆ **The cost per student in FY 03 is higher than in FY 02.** Despite the drop in state appropriations in FY 03 from FY 02 by almost \$704,000 and the students served by unreported projects factored in, the cost per student in FY 03 is still slightly higher than the cost per student in FY 02 (\$821 versus \$742).
- ◆ **A majority of the students served are truants or chronic truants.** Thirty-nine percent of students served by TAOEP in FY 03 were truants and 31% were chronic truants. Dropouts constitute 13% and potential dropouts 17%.
- ◆ **Community colleges still served the most number of dropouts.** About 54% of dropouts in the program were served by community colleges compared to only 22% served by ROEs and 23% served by school districts. School districts served 51% of potential dropouts while ROEs served 74% of truants and 71% of chronic truants.
- ◆ **There was a shift in population served by grade and location.** For several years, TAOEP has consistently served more high school students than elementary students. In FY 03, however, the population served shifted with more elementary students being served (52%). Moreover, prior to FY 03, Chicago School District 299 has always served the most number of students – but this too has shifted and St. Clair ROE, a southern project, served the largest number of TAOEP students in the state in FY 03.
- ◆ **Almost 51% of American-Indian students in the TAOEP are dropouts.** Within an ethnic group, American-Indian students reflected higher participation of dropouts. Thirty-one of 61 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 or chronic truants.
- ◆ **School districts or LEAs served the most number of minority students.** The majority of students served by school districts are blacks and Hispanics (60%). Conversely, the majority of students served by ROEs and community colleges are whites (66% and 62%, respectively).

- ◆ **The majority of TAOEP students were male.** TAOEP has always served more male students than female. In FY 03, 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 level.

A2. Student Services

- ◆ **More students are in prevention/intervention programs than optional education programs.** Similar to FY 02, approximately 68% of TAOEP students are in prevention and/or intervention programs receiving supplementary services only. The other 32% were enrolled in optional education programs.
- ◆ **Supplementary services are received by over 90% of elementary students.** In contrast, only 44% of high school students and 16% of ungraded students received supplementary services. Most high school and ungraded students are enrolled in optional education programs.
- ◆ **96% of dropouts are enrolled in optional education programs.** Again similar to FY 02, 96% of dropouts in TAOEP were enrolled in optional education programs in FY 03. In contrast, only 28% of truants and 15% of chronic truants enrolled in optional education programs.
- ◆ **All community colleges that received funding from TAOEP offered optional education program services.**
- ◆ **More students received school visits.** Almost 52% of students received visits from TAOEP staff at their schools. In most cases, school visits are conducted to follow-up attendance and academic progress of retrieved truants or chronic truants. Among the remaining services provided by TAOEP, academic counseling and personal counseling were the services commonly received by students with 47% and 37% of students receiving such services respectively.

A3. Student Outcomes: The following are the student outcomes for FY 03.

- ◆ **70% of non-GED students with reported attendance data improved attendance.**
- ◆ **54% of 12th grade students graduated from high school.**
- ◆ **41% of 8th grade students graduated from elementary school.**
- ◆ **64% of elementary students advanced to the next grade.**
- ◆ **65% of high school students earned high school academic credits.**
- ◆ **Half of the students will continue to receive services from the program in FY 04.**

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.

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 that 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 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, other 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) 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 students' learning goals or achievement objectives.

EVALUATION PURPOSES, PROCEDURES, AND FINDINGS

PURPOSES

Since there is no sufficient data to determine the TAOEP's impact to the state's truancy and high school dropout rates, this evaluation report focuses only on the following: the types of students served by TAOEP projects, services provided to students, and outcomes achieved by these students in FY 03. Among the student outcomes achieved; attendance, high school credits earned, employment, academic achievements, and graduations are given emphasis in reporting since these outcomes present valid measures in determining TAOEP's impact on student achievements. The relationship of services to outcomes is also analyzed. Specifically this evaluation asks the following questions:

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?

¹ See Appendix A for "Definition of Terms."

2. 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?
3. How and where are students placed for major services?
4. 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?
5. What are the outcomes of students?
6. How long do students stay with TAOEP?
7. How different are the outcomes for students who were served by projects one year, two years, or more than two years?
8. What is the relationship between services and student outcomes? Which services significantly impact student outcomes?

The number of chronic truants, truants, and high school dropouts in the state during a ten-year period are presented for informational purposes only. No inferences could be established between state truancy and high school dropout trends to the number of students served by TAOEP.

PROCEDURES

The data comes from the TAOEP Student Reporting Application (TSRA). TSRA is a computer software program specifically designed for TAOEP projects to provide them the capabilities to create their own databases, print reports, and efficiently submit data to ISBE. These end-of-year student reports are due to the Division of Data Analysis and Progress Reporting (DAPR) at ISBE 60 days after completion of the project for the fiscal year. The evaluation findings are limited to the statistical data submitted to ISBE. No project visits were conducted to validate or support the self-reported data submitted by projects during this reporting period.

FINDINGS

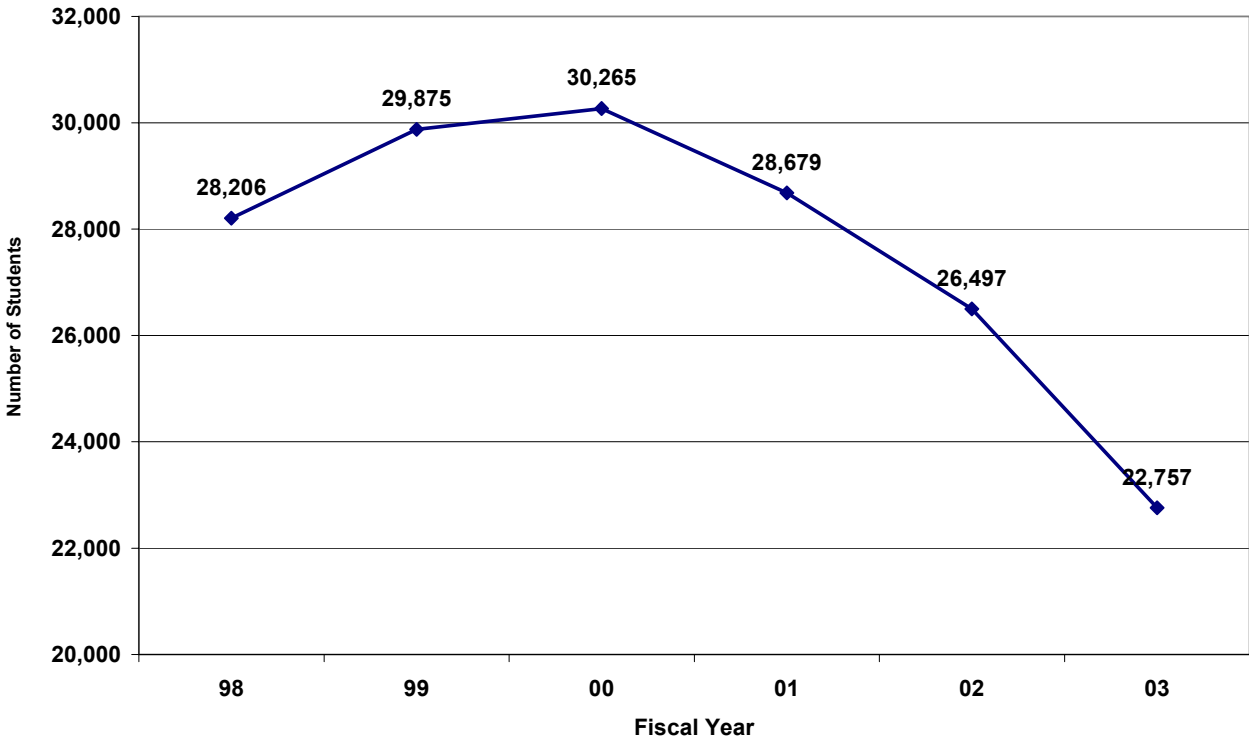
A. AT THE STUDENT LEVEL

A1. Student Demographics

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

There were 22,757 students served by TAOEP in FY 03, the lowest in a six-year period. TAOEP's student enrollments continue to drop since FY 00 (See Chart 1). Relative to the state numbers, TAOEP served only 7% of the total truants, chronic truants and high school dropouts in the state.

Chart 1. Number of Students Served by TAOEP: FY 98 Through FY 03



There were 71 TAOEP projects funded in FY 03 but only 69 submitted reports. Of these 69 projects, 37 were regional offices of education (ROE), 23 were local education agencies (LEA), and nine were community colleges. Given that ROEs were the highest number of projects that received TAOEP funds, they also served the most number of students. As shown in Table 1, about 62% of students were served by ROEs compared to only 27% served by LEAs. Community colleges which have the least number of projects funded served about 11% of students.

Table 1. Number of Students Served by Type of Agency and Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Student Primary Referral	Regional Office of Education		School District or LEA		Community College		Row Totals	
	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.
Potential Dropout	1,865	47.1	2,030	51.3	62	1.6	3,957	17.4
Truant	6,556	74.0	1,629	18.4	679	7.7	8,864	39.0
Chronic Truant	5,083	71.7	1,828	25.8	176	2.5	7,087	31.1
Dropout	636	22.3	665	23.3	1,548	54.3	2,849	12.5
Column Totals	14,140	62.1	6,152	27.0	2,465	10.8	22,757	100.0

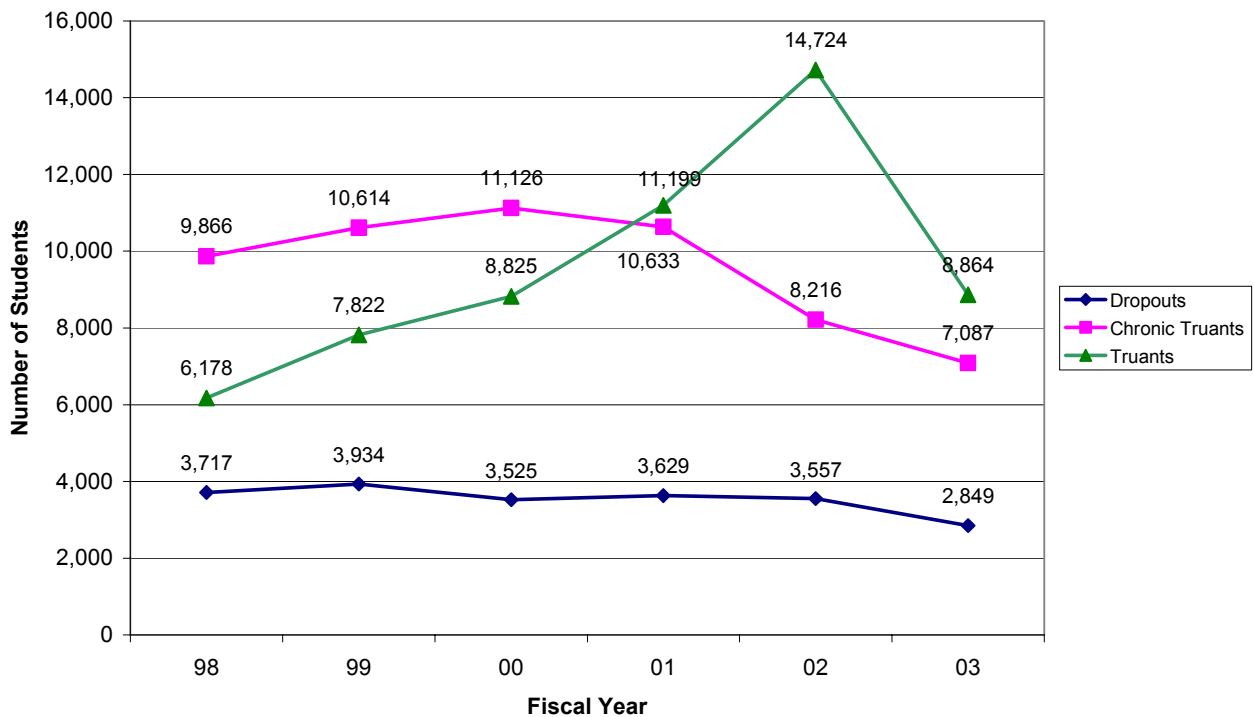
Table 1 also shows the majority of populations served by each of these administrative agencies. For instance, LEAs served more potential dropouts than ROEs or community colleges. On the other hand, ROEs served more truants (74.0%) or chronic truants (71.7%) compared to LEAs or

community colleges; and community colleges served more dropouts (54.3%) compared to the other two administrative agencies. With regards to the number of students served by projects, prior to FY 03, Chicago School District 299 has always served the most number of students – but this too has shifted and St. Clair ROE, a southern project, served the largest number of TAOEP students in the state in FY 03. (See Appendix B for the number of students served by each project.) The number of students served by a project ranged from a high of 969 to a low of 44.

Student Primary Basis of Referral

Chart 2 shows the number of students served by TAOEP by the students’ primary basis of referral from FY 98 through FY 03. The chart shows that from FY 98 through FY 00, TAOEP served more chronic truants than truants. That trend shifted, starting in FY 01, when more truants were served than chronic truants. The number of truants served was at its highest in FY 02 with 14,724 students – but this number dropped significantly to 8,864 (40%) in FY 03. The number of chronic truants and dropouts served also dropped by about 1,000 students in FY 03 from FY 02.

Chart 2. Number of Students Served by TAOEP by Primary Basis of Referral: FY 98 Through FY 03



Secondary Student Referrals

There are underlying reasons for a student’s truancy. In the case of TAOEP students, these reasons vary depending on the student’s truancy status. Table 2 shows that except for dropouts, the common reason forwarded for the student’s truancy is low-income. In particular, the majority of truants and chronic truants referred for services come from low-income backgrounds. The second most common reason reported for a student’s truancy is low academic achievement. There were 27.4% of potential dropouts and 22.8% of chronic truants whose attendance problems may have been caused by low academic achievements. On the other hand, the majority of dropouts were referred to the program because of academic credit deficiency (29.5%).

Table 2. Secondary Reasons for Students' Participation in TAOEP, FY 03

Secondary Referral	Potential Dropout		Truant		Chronic Truant		Dropout		Row Totals	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Court/Law Mandated Participation	156	2.3	223	2.3	223	2.1	104	2.7	706	2.3
Credit Deficient	768	11.2	1,588	16.1	1,053	10.0	1,141	29.5	4,550	14.6
High Failure Rate	811	11.9	1,238	12.5	1,607	15.2	545	14.1	4,201	13.5
Low-Achievement	1,877	27.4	1,846	18.7	2,417	22.8	680	17.6	6,820	21.9
Low-Income	1,592	23.3	2,520	25.5	2,957	27.9	561	14.5	7,630	24.5
Teen Parent	148	2.2	209	2.1	182	1.7	287	7.4	826	2.6
With Drug and/or Alcohol Problems	718	10.5	889	9.0	706	6.7	161	4.2	2,474	7.9
With Multiple Discipline Referrals	732	10.7	1,158	11.7	1,106	10.5	157	4.1	3,153	10.1
With Physical/Emotional Health Problems	38	0.6	215	2.2	330	3.1	234	6.0	817	2.6
Duplicated Totals	6,840		9,886		10,581		3,870		31,177	

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 3 below shows the ethnicity of TAOEP students by the primary basis of students' participation in the program. Analysis of the data within an ethnic group showed that over 50% of American-Indian students are dropouts. This separates the American-Indians from other ethnic groups in that the majority of students participating in the other ethnic groups are truants or chronic truants. Moreover, relative to state enrollments in FY 03, blacks are overrepresented in the TAOEP while Hispanics are underrepresented. There were approximately 27% of blacks and 14% of Hispanics in the TAOEP compared to 21% and 17% enrollments of these ethnic groups at the state, respectively.

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 (60.2%). Most of these minority students were served by Chicago Public School District 299. The ROEs and community colleges, on the other hand, served a majority of whites (66.0% and 62.4%, respectively).

Table 3. Student Ethnicity by Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Student Ethnicity	Potential Dropout		Truant		Chronic Truant		Dropout		Row Totals	
	No.	Row Pct	No.	Row Pct	No.	Row Pct	No.	Row Pct	No.	Row Pct
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	3.3	22	36.1	6	9.8	31	50.8	61	0.3
Asian or Pacific Islander	15	14.3	37	35.2	26	24.8	27	25.7	105	0.5
Black Not of Hispanic Origin	1,235	20.4	1,934	32.0	2,110	34.9	766	12.7	6,045	26.6
Hispanic	604	19.4	1,158	37.1	945	30.3	413	13.2	3,120	13.7
White Not of Hispanic Origin	2,050	15.5	5,673	42.8	3,948	29.8	1,579	11.9	13,250	58.2
Other	51	29.0	40	22.7	52	29.5	33	18.8	176	0.8
Column Totals	3,957	17.4	8,864	39.0	7,087	31.1	2,849	12.5	22,757	100.0

Student Gender

Over half (52%) of the students served by this program are male. The distribution is similar across all administrative agencies. The TAOEP student gender distribution is not different from that of the state. The Illinois public schools enrolled 52% male and 48% female in FY 03.

Student Grade Level

Slightly more than half of TAOEP students served in FY 03 are in elementary grades (52.3%) (Table 4). This is in contrast to last year's data where slightly more high school students (51.5%) were served. However, the distribution by grade level significantly differed among administrative agencies. For instance, 63.4% of LEA students and 84.6% of community college students are in high school. In contrast, 67.8% of students served by ROEs are in elementary grades.

Table 4. Grade Level of Students Served by Type of Administrative Agency, FY 03

Grade Level Group	Regional Office of Education		School District or LEA		Community College		Total by Student Grade	
	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.
Elementary	9,585	67.8	2,214	36.0	95	3.9	11,894	52.3
High School	4,186	29.6	3,901	63.4	2,083	84.6	10,170	44.7
Ungraded	369	2.6	37	0.6	284	11.5	690	3.0
Total by Agency	14,140	62.1	6,152	27.0	2,462	10.8	22,754	100.0

Age of Students

Table 5 below shows that over 51% of TAOEP students are 15 years and older. Looking at ages by truancy group, it appears that the majority of truants and chronic truants are younger, ages 14 and below whereas practically all of the dropouts (99.7%) are older (15 and higher).

Table 5. Age of Students by Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Age Group	Potential Dropout		Truant		Chronic Truant		Dropout		Row Totals	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
5 to 8 years old	505	12.8	1,231	13.9	917	13.0	2	0.1	2,655	11.7
9 to 11 years old	577	14.6	1,422	16.1	1,119	15.8	0	0.0	3,118	13.7
12 to 14 years old	791	20.0	2,218	25.0	2,143	30.3	6	0.2	5,158	22.7
15 to 18 years old	1,845	46.6	3,746	42.3	2,779	39.3	1,797	63.2	10,167	44.7
Over 19 years old	237	6.0	242	2.7	120	1.7	1,039	36.5	1,638	7.2
Colum Totals	3,955	17.4	8,859	39.0	7,078	31.1	2,844	12.5	22,736	100.0

A2. Student Services

How and where are students placed for major services?

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 7,363 students were placed in optional education and 15,394 students received supplementary services (Table 6). Specifically, approximately 96% of dropouts are enrolled in optional education programs. In contrast, the majority of potential dropouts, truants, and chronic truants received supplementary services only (73.8%, 71.6%, and 84.7% respectively).

Table 6. Service Placement of TAOEP Students by Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Primary Basis of Referral	Optional Education		Supplementary Services		Row Totals	
	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.	No.	Row Pct.
Potential Dropout	1,038	26.2	2,919	73.8	3,957	17.4
Truant	2,518	28.4	6,346	71.6	8,864	39.0
Chronic Truant	1,083	15.3	6,004	84.7	7,087	31.1
Dropout	2,724	95.6	125	4.4	2,849	12.5
Column Totals	7,363	32.4	15,394	67.6	22,757	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 on 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.

Major Service by Type of Administrative Agency

Forty-four of the 69 projects that submitted reports offered optional education programs. The remaining 25 offered supplementary services only. Moreover, 27 projects offered both optional

education and supplementary services. In particular, all community colleges offered optional education services (Table 7).

Table 7. Major Service by Type of Administrative Agency, FY 03

Type of Administrative Agency	Supplementary Services Only	Optional Education Only	Both	Row Totals
Community College	----	7	2	9
Local Education Agencies	8	6	9	23
Regional Office of Education	17	4	16	37
Column Totals	25	17	27	69

Of the projects offering supplementary services only, eight are local education agencies, and 17 are regional offices of education. Of the projects offering both services, nine are local education agencies and 16 are regional offices of education.

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 a specific type of service varies with the student's truancy status. For instance, the need for academic instruction or academic counseling is more prevalent among dropouts than chronic truants or truants (Table 8). Specifically, 81% and 79% of dropouts received academic counseling and academic instruction, respectively. The data also show that dropouts are more likely to participate in life skills training than other students.

Overall, a service which was received by over 50% of students was "school visits," the highest among all services. This service is largely received by truants (63.1%) or chronic truants (69.6%). Other services received by over 37% of students were academic counseling (46.9%), personal counseling (38.6%), and home visits (37.2%).

Data elsewhere indicated that services or programs with very minimal participation of students or enrollments includes unpaid work experience (0.3%), entrepreneurship training (0.2%), and weekend school (0.1%).

Table 8. Services Received by Over 1,000 Students by Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Type of Service	Potential Dropout		Truant		Chronic Truant		Dropout		Row Total	
	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct
School Visits	1,039	26.3	5,593	63.1	4,930	69.6	225	7.9	11,787	51.8
Academic Counseling	1,984	50.1	2,799	31.6	3,563	50.3	2,318	81.4	10,664	46.9
Personal Counseling	1,189	30.0	2,853	32.2	3,475	49.0	1,277	44.8	8,794	38.6
Home Visits	1,058	26.7	3,339	37.7	3,839	54.2	227	8.0	8,463	37.2
Academic Instruction	934	23.6	1,553	17.5	862	12.2	2,262	79.4	5,611	24.7
Life Skills Training	1,242	31.4	1,924	21.7	1,226	17.3	1,215	42.6	5,607	24.6
Tutoring	1,137	28.7	1,343	15.2	1,115	15.7	656	23.0	4,251	18.7
Support Services	562	14.2	1,353	15.3	1,745	24.6	537	18.8	4,197	18.4
Mentoring	1,022	25.8	1,565	17.7	1,075	15.2	211	7.4	3,873	17.0
Dropout/Truancy Retrieval	547	13.8	234	2.6	1,763	24.9	1,324	46.5	3,868	17.0
Referral to Social Service Agencies	507	12.8	1,139	12.8	1,205	17.0	648	22.7	3,499	15.4
Career Service	361	9.1	866	9.8	441	6.2	1,055	37.0	2,723	12.0
Transportation	251	6.3	776	8.8	703	9.9	517	18.1	2,247	9.9
Health-Care	216	5.5	352	4.0	739	10.4	856	30.0	2,163	9.5
Field Trips	368	9.3	439	5.0	299	4.2	754	26.5	1,860	8.2
Court-Related Service	53	1.3	404	4.6	878	12.4	225	7.9	1,560	6.9
GED Instruction	3	0.1	104	1.2	36	0.5	1,042	36.6	1,185	5.2
Enrolled in Summer School	39	1.0	417	4.7	201	2.8	376	13.2	1,033	4.5
Total	3,957		8,864		7,087		2,849		22,757	

A3. Student Outcomes

What are the outcomes of students?

The data show that approximately 88% of students served achieved at least one positive outcome, which includes, but are not limited to high school completion, receipt of GED certificate, improved attendance, improved achievement, elementary students advancing a grade level, elementary graduation, receipt of high school academic credits, or meeting educational objectives. This success rate is slightly higher than last year's 85%.

In particular, 54.5% of 12th grade students graduated from high school, 41% of 8th grade students graduated from elementary, and 64% of elementary students advanced to the next grade. Moreover, 65% of high school students earned high school academic credits, 58% of non-GED students improved attendance, and 54% of high school students who enrolled in optional education programs improved academic achievement. Moreover, about 50% of the students will continue on with the program, i.e., students have not exited from the program and are expected to re-enroll in FY 04 (Table 9).

Conversely, approximately 8% were retained in school, 5% dropped out of school, and 4% were removed from TAOEP.

Table 9. Outcomes of TAOEP Students, FY 03

Type of Outcome	Number Achieved	Valid (Cohort) Percent	Cohort/Base Description
Earned high school credit	7,078	65.2	High school students
Advanced to next grade	7,581	63.7	Elementary students
Improved attendance*	12,624	69.8	Non-GED students w/ attendance data
Improved achievement**	1,064	54.5	H.S. in optional ed programs
Received high school diploma	1,337	54.4	12th grade students
Continued in the program	11,266	49.5	All students
Elementary graduation	1,000	40.7	8 th grade students
Employment (post-high school)	139	10.4	H.S. graduates
Retained in school	1,776	7.8	All students
Returned to regular school	773	7.1	Students in optional ed programs
Transferred to other programs	1,091	4.8	All students
Dropped out of school	1,069	4.7	All students
Removed from TAOEP	820	3.6	All students
Voluntarily discontinued participation	799	3.5	All students
Employment (curricular)	280	2.6	High school students
Received GED certificate	250	2.3	High school students

* All students who are not enrolled in GED programs and who have attendance data are included in the cohort or in the "improved attendance" analysis. 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.

** 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.

How long do students stay with TAOEP?

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.

Over 49% of students served by TAOEP in FY 03 exited the program. Of the students that have exited, approximately 87% were in the program less than one year (Table 10). In particular, chronic truants tend to stay longer with the program compared to other groups with approximately 18% staying with the program longer than one year compared to only 7% of dropouts or potential dropouts.

Table 10. Length of Stay of Students in TAOEP Programs by Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Length of Stay with the Program	Potential Dropout		Truant		Chronic Truant		Dropout		Total	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Less than or equal to 1 year	1,713	92.7	3,760	87.9	3,053	82.3	1,281	92.5	9,807	87.4
Between 1 and 2 years	112	6.1	450	10.5	544	14.7	92	6.6	1,198	10.7
Between 2 and 4 years	11	0.6	35	0.8	71	1.9	10	0.7	127	1.1
More than 4 years	12	0.6	33	0.8	41	1.1	2	0.1	88	0.8
Total Exits	1,848	46.7	4,278	48.3	3,709	52.3	1,385	48.6	11,220	49.3
Have not exited from the program	2,109	53.3	4,586	51.7	3,378	47.7	1,464	51.4	11,537	50.7

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

The descriptive statistics showed mixed results. Potential dropouts who stay longer in the program tend to have higher success rates. In contrast, the success rates for chronic truants were high for students who stayed only one year but lower for students who stayed longer with the program. Similarly, success rates for dropouts are high for students who stayed between one and two years but lower for students who stayed longer than two years. Moreover, the success rates for students who continued on with the program are higher than those who have exited. Finally, a univariate F-test statistic showed that years in the program has no relationship with a student's success ($F=0.4730, p=0.492$).

Table 11. Success Rates of TAOEP Students With Length of Stay in the Program, FY 03

Length of Stay with the Program	Success Rates				
	Potential Dropout	Truant	Chronic Truant	Dropout	All Students
Less than or equal to 1 year	88.8	89.1	86.1	73.8	86.1
Between 1 and 2 years	88.4	88.7	83.1	88.0	86.1
Between 2 and 4 years	90.9	91.4	84.5	60.0	85.0
Successful Exits	88.9	89.1	85.6	74.7	86.1
Continued in the program	93.8	92.3	91.1	78.1	90.4

What is the relationship between services and student outcomes? Which service significantly impact student outcomes?

Except for GED instruction which has less than a 70% student success rate, all other services received by over 1,000 students have student success rates of over 80%. Among the services listed in Table 12, tutoring has the highest student success rate with approximately 93%. Other services which experienced student success rates of over 90% but less than 93% were school visits, personal counseling, home visits, mentoring, career-related services, and health-care. As a caveat, the numbers reported in Table 12 are duplicated numbers. A student could receive as many as three types of services. So it is the combination of services (not just one service) that may have contributed to student educational success.

Table 12. Student Success Rates for Each Type of TAOEP Service, FY 03

Type of TAOEP Service	Number of Students Receiving the Service	Number of Successful Students	Success Rate
School visits	11,787	10,653	90.4
Academic counseling	10,664	9,558	89.6
Personal counseling	8,794	7,957	90.5
Home visits	8,463	7,650	90.4
Academic instruction	5,611	4,850	86.4
Life skills training	5,607	5,018	89.5
Tutoring	4,251	3,945	92.8
Mentoring	3,873	3,538	91.4
Dropout/chronic truant retrieval	3,868	3,254	84.1
Referral to social service agencies	3,499	3,097	88.5
Career-related services	2,723	2,456	90.2
Transportation	2,247	1,889	84.1
Health-care	2,163	1,981	91.6
Court-related services	1,560	1,263	81.0
GED instruction	1,185	822	69.4

B. AT THE STATE LEVEL

Charts 2, 3, and 4 show the number of chronic truants, truants, and high school dropouts reported at the state level.

Chart 3. Number of Chronic Truants in Illinois Public Schools: FY 92 Through FY 02

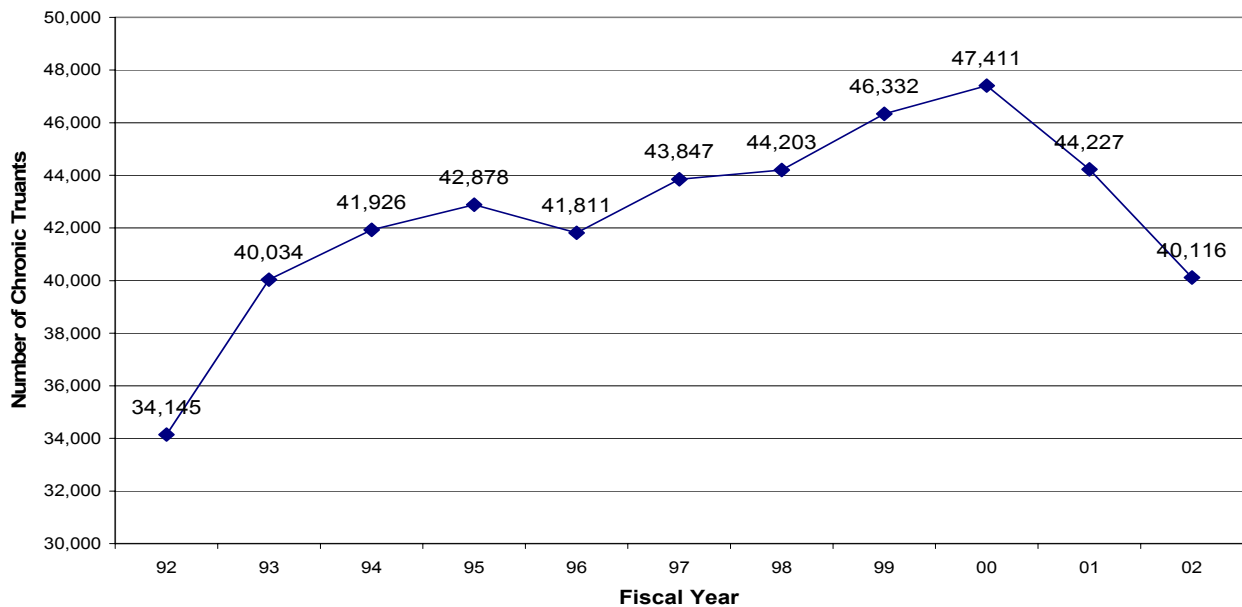


Chart 4. Number of Truants in Illinois Public Schools: FY 92 Through FY 02

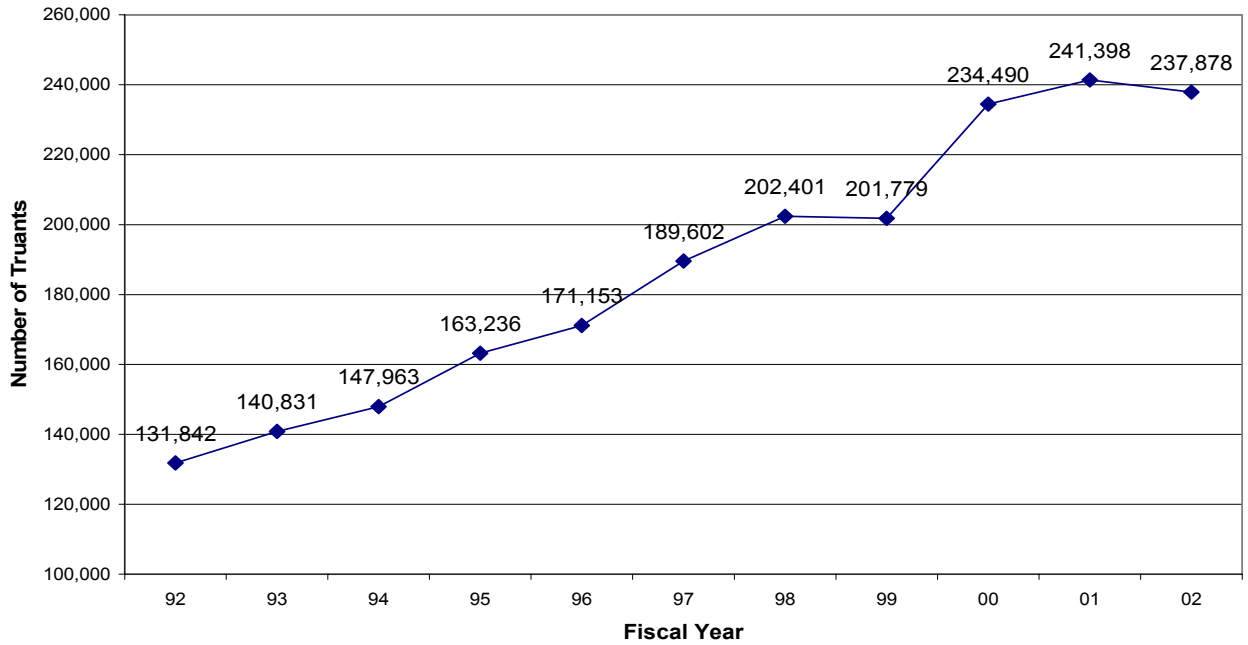
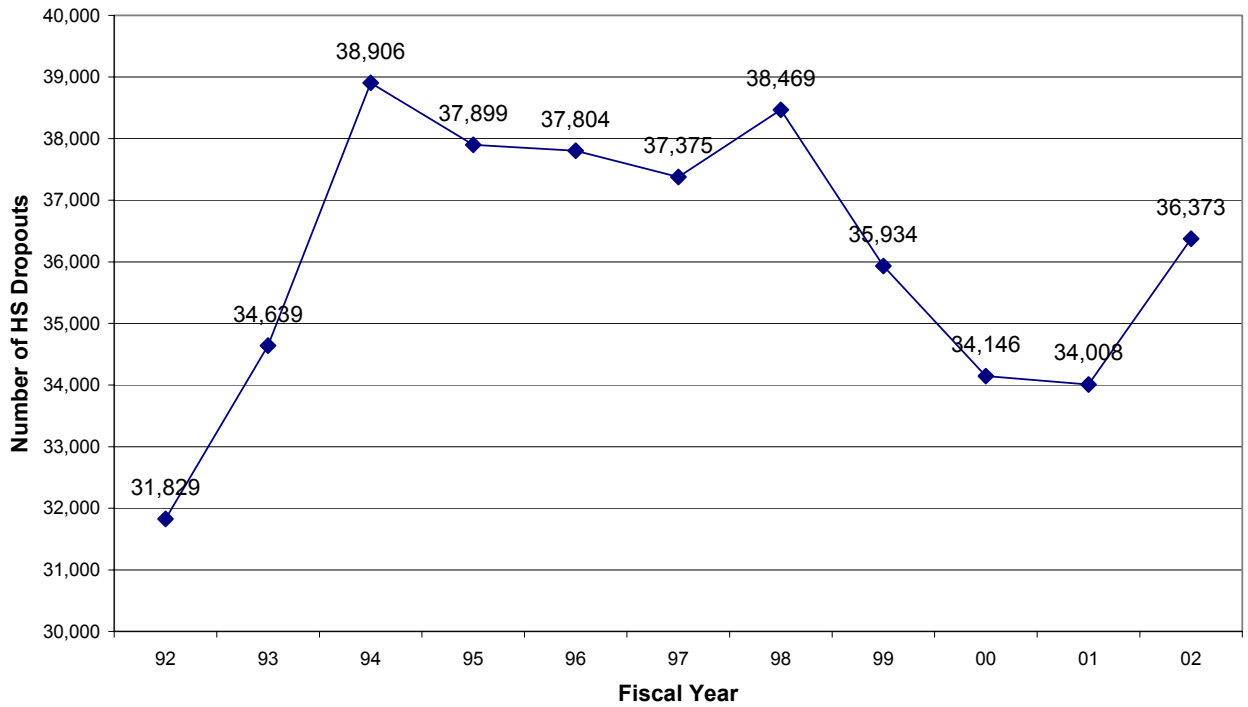


Chart 5. Number of High School Dropouts in Illinois Public Schools: FY 92 Through FY 02



The number of chronic truants significantly dropped by over 4,000 students or 10% in FY 02 from FY 01. Similarly, the number of truants also dropped by 4,000 students or 1% during the same period. In contrast, the number of high school dropouts increased by over 2,000 students or 7% from FY 01 to FY 02. The reasons for the decrease or increase in the state numbers are not known.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the overall student success rate of 88% seems high, of concern is that some of the outcomes reported are somewhat in conflict with each other. For example, of the 8,235 students who were reported to have met their educational objectives, 76 dropped out of school, 98 voluntarily discontinued, 133 were removed from the program, 212 were not promoted, and 31 were transferred to the court system. "Meeting educational objectives" denotes a positive outcome and yet some of these students appear to simultaneously achieve non-positive outcomes as well. Another blatant inconsistency is that there were 69 students of the 7,776 students who were reported to have advanced to the next grade who were not promoted. These inconsistencies make one question the reliability and validity of the data reported and therefore makes the 88% success rate suspect.

Another concern is that despite trainings conducted in reporting the student data, there were still about 3,500 students or 16% of students whose school attendance were not reported. About 1,540 of these students are enrolled in optional education programs and about 1,960 students were receiving services from prevention/intervention programs. Responses received from projects upon requesting such missing data, indicate a lack of understanding or guidance of the projects' responsibilities in the importance and significance of submitting attendance data.

There is no question, however, that this program provides alternative opportunities for these "at-risk" students to complete their high school education. For instance, the optional education programs give dropouts another chance to earn academic credits which may lead eventually to their graduation from high school. In FY 03, these programs enrolled 96% of dropouts of which 68% earned academic credits. Moreover, the crucial role of prevention/intervention programs in retrieving truants and chronic truants allows for the re-enrollment of these students in school. In addition, they conducted follow-ups of these students' attendance and academic achievements through their school and home visits. However, the question of "sustainable" outcomes (in other words, do students continue to achieve positive outcomes after they have left the program) is one big issue that this evaluation could not answer. For example, do high school students who earned credits in TAOEP's optional education programs and subsequently returned to the regular school eventually graduate? Do elementary students who achieved positive outcomes in TAOEP one year continue to do so the next year without TAOEP services?

An even bigger question is: at what level and to what extent could one measure TAOEP's effectiveness? Should it only be limited to the students that it served or should the program's effectiveness be measured also in terms of its impact to the truancy and high school dropout rates in the state? Has TAOEP helped in reducing the truancy and dropout rates in the state?

The state numbers on truants and chronic truants appear to decline – but are these decreases attributed to TAOEP or are these decreases attributed to changes in school district policies regarding chronic truancy? Moreover, if the number of truants and chronic truants decline in the

state, why is it that the number of high school dropouts increase? These are questions that need to be addressed by the TAOEP Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee and TAOEP program consultants at the Illinois State Board of Education.

In light of the aforementioned questions and this year's evaluation, the following are recommended:

- 1) To revisit last year's recommendation of establishing performance standards at the state level by the TAOEP Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee. One of the performance standards may address the proportion of students that TAOEP needs to serve from the number of chronic truants, truants and high school dropouts reported in the state given the program's levels of funding. In FY 02, TAOEP served 8% of truants, chronic truants and high school dropouts in the state. The serviced population reduced to 7% in FY 03.
- 2) Again, it is highly recommended that projects conduct "needs assessment" in identifying the students to be served using the statistics on truants, chronic truants, and high school dropouts published by the Illinois State Board of Education. These needs assessments should be the foundation for the project's RFP (Request for Proposal) goals and objectives.
- 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.
- 6) For program consultants at the Illinois State Board of Education to conduct training to clarify not only the rules and regulations of the program but also other reporting issues, such as validity and reliability of outcomes and services reported. The student reporting system could be modified to include the collection of the data related to follow-up activities.

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

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)).

Appendix B

Number of Students Served by Each TAOEP Project by Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Name of Project	Potential Dropout		Truant		Chronic Truant		Dropout		Total	
	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct
Adams/Pike ROE	2	0.1	37	0.4	309	4.4		0.0	348	1.5
Alexander/Johnson/Massac/Pulaski/Union	185	4.7	103	1.2	92	1.3	53	1.9	433	1.9
Alton Comm Unit School District 11	42	1.1		0.0	388	5.5	55	1.9	485	2.1
Aurora East School Dist	518	13.1	180	2.0	22	0.3	4	0.1	724	3.2
Belleville West Night School	237	6.0		0.0		0.0	62	2.2	299	1.3
Black Hawk College	11	0.3	49	0.6	46	0.6	425	14.9	531	2.3
Bloom TWP HS Dist 206	1	0.0	159	1.8	60	0.8	22	0.8	242	1.1
Bond/Effingham/Fayette ROE		0.0	208	2.3	21	0.3	5	0.2	234	1.0
Boone/Winnebago ROE	1	0.0	266	3.0	32	0.5	188	6.6	487	2.1
Brown/Cass/Morgan/Scott ROE		0.0	93	1.0	51	0.7	1	0.0	145	0.6
Bureau/Henry/Stark ROE	157	4.0	270	3.0	81	1.1	5	0.2	513	2.3
Chicago Public School Dist 299	441	11.1	162	1.8	175	2.5		0.0	778	3.4
Cairo School District 1	17	0.4	58	0.7	64	0.9	2	0.1	141	0.6
Calhoun/Greene/Jersey/Macoupin ROE	62	1.6	100	1.1	15	0.2	116	4.1	293	1.3
Carbondale Comm H S District 165	11	0.3	54	0.6	55	0.8	183	6.4	303	1.3
Carroll/JoDavie/Stephenson ROE	181	4.6	47	0.5	12	0.2		0.0	240	1.1
Champaign/Ford ROE	32	0.8	37	0.4	90	1.3		0.0	159	0.7
Christian/Montgomery ROE	68	1.7	144	1.6	62	0.9		0.0	274	1.2
City Colleges of Chicago		0.0		0.0		0.0	592	20.8	592	2.6
Clay/Cwford/Jsper/Lwrnce/Rhland ROE	2	0.1	198	2.2	51	0.7	39	1.4	290	1.3
Clinton/Marion/Washington ROE	28	0.7	1	0.0	11	0.2	4	0.1	44	0.2
Clk/Cls/Cmbn/Dglas/Edgr/Mltr/Shlb ROE		0.0	320	3.6	70	1.0		0.0	390	1.7
Danville School District 118	116	2.9	30	0.3	45	0.6		0.0	191	0.8
DeWitt/Livingston/McLean ROE	174	4.4	54	0.6	33	0.5	4	0.1	265	1.2
DuPage ROE	91	2.3	187	2.1	195	2.8		0.0	473	2.1
East Alton-Wood River C H S D 14	7	0.2	34	0.4	17	0.2	1	0.0	59	0.3
Edwd/Gltn/Hdin/Pop/Sine/Wbh/Wn/Wh	4	0.1	51	0.6	88	1.2	4	0.1	147	0.6
Franklin/Williamson ROE	21	0.5	333	3.8	133	1.9		0.0	487	2.1
Fulton/Schuyler ROE		0.0		0.0	115	1.6		0.0	115	0.5
Galesburg C U School Dist 205	140	3.5	16	0.2	18	0.3		0.0	174	0.8
Granite City CU District 8	5	0.1	79	0.9	47	0.7	5	0.2	136	0.6
Grundy/Kendall ROE	52	1.3	96	1.1	723	10.2	18	0.6	889	3.9
Hamilton/Jefferson ROE		0.0	480	5.4	26	0.4	7	0.2	513	2.3
Hancock/McDonough ROE	98	2.5	52	0.6	19	0.3	67	2.4	236	1.0
Harlem Consolidated School District 122	200	5.1	11	0.1	9	0.1		0.0	220	1.0
Harvard CUSD #50	13	0.3	39	0.4	25	0.4		0.0	77	0.3
Illinois Central College	25	0.6	409	4.6	46	0.6	113	4.0	593	2.6
Iroquois/Kankakee ROE		0.0	172	1.9	456	6.4	11	0.4	639	2.8
Jackson/Perry ROE	128	3.2	226	2.5	3	0.0		0.0	357	1.6
Jersey C U School District 100	18	0.5	126	1.4	30	0.4	2	0.1	176	0.8
John A. Logan College	1	0.0	69	0.8	31	0.4	34	1.2	135	0.6
Kane County ROE		0.0	228	2.6	499	7.0	70	2.5	797	3.5
Kishwaukee College	25	0.6	33	0.4	41	0.6	162	5.7	261	1.1
Knox County ROE		0.0	34	0.4	44	0.6	14	0.5	92	0.4
LaSalle County ROE	170	4.3	48	0.5	41	0.6		0.0	259	1.1
Lake County ROE	17	0.4	535	6.0	308	4.3	2	0.1	862	3.8

Appendix B

Number of Students Served by Each TAOEP Project by Student Primary Basis of Referral, FY 03

Name of Project	Potential Dropout		Truant		Chronic Truant		Dropout		Total	
	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct	No.	Col Pct
Lake Land College		0.0		0.0		0.0	167	5.9	167	0.7
Lee/Ogle ROE		0.0	200	2.3	31	0.4		0.0	231	1.0
Lewis Clark Community College		0.0		0.0		0.0	53	1.9	53	0.2
Lincoln Community H S District 404		0.0	33	0.4	74	1.0		0.0	107	0.5
Logan/Mason/Menard ROE		0.0		0.0	175	2.5		0.0	175	0.8
Macon/Piatt ROE	25	0.6	19	0.2	108	1.5	10	0.4	162	0.7
Madison County ROE		0.0	100	1.1	175	2.5		0.0	275	1.2
Monroe/Randolph ROE	12	0.3	113	1.3	22	0.3	3	0.1	150	0.7
Peoria ROE	45	1.1	139	1.6	169	2.4		0.0	353	1.6
Peoria School District 150		0.0	1	0.0	51	0.7	1	0.0	53	0.2
Rend Lake College		0.0	119	1.3	12	0.2	2	0.1	133	0.6
Rock Island ROE		0.0	413	4.7	149	2.1	1	0.0	563	2.5
Rockford Board of Education	1	0.0		0.0	494	7.0	13	0.5	508	2.2
Round Lake Area SCHS District 116	1	0.0	310	3.5	98	1.4		0.0	409	1.8
Sangamon County ROE		0.0	6	0.1	534	7.5	7	0.2	547	2.4
School District U-46	95	2.4	285	3.2	16	0.2	34	1.2	430	1.9
Springfield School District 186		0.0	63	0.7	68	1.0		0.0	131	0.6
St. Clair County ROE	35	0.9	913	10.3	21	0.3		0.0	969	4.3
Suburban Cook County ROE		0.0	84	0.9		0.0		0.0	84	0.4
Triton Community College	159	4.0	43	0.5	37	0.5	7	0.2	246	1.1
Urbana School District 116	283	7.2	18	0.2	20	0.3	156	5.5	477	2.1
Waukegan CUSD 60		0.0	1	0.0	97	1.4	125	4.4	223	1.0
Whiteside County ROE		0.0	176	2.0	37	0.5		0.0	213	0.9
Total		3,957		8,864		7,087		2,849		22,757