



The CAST project grew out of a research study by Dr. Mary Beth Celio in 2012 that examined 7,000 third through twelfth graders in Spokane Public Schools in classes of 2008 and 2010. **The research found that of all the students studied who had 4 or more unexcused absences in 7th grade, only 30% graduated from high school. The effect was even stronger for students with 4 or more unexcused absences in 8th grade; only 26% of those students eventually graduated.**

CAST was created to:

- ◆ *provide intervention at a younger age and before the school is required to file a petition with the court.*
- ◆ *provide resources before issues become too large for the student and family to overcome.*
- ◆ *involve students and families, schools, and community partners working collaboratively to solve the truancy problem.*
- ◆ *provide a mechanism for determining underlying causes of the truancy and provide family support for overcoming obstacles.*
- ◆ *build a bridge between family and school.*



CAST: Tackling Truancy in Spokane

Last year Spokane Public Schools (SPS), Priority Spokane, and partners implemented a **Community Attendance Support Team (CAST)** for each of the six SPS middle schools. CAST targets students with four unexcused absences for a supportive intervention to try to resolve the student's attendance problem *before* a Truancy Petition is filed with the court.

CAST includes the student and his/her parent or guardian, school counselors, the assistant principal, representatives from community organizations, and the CAST Coordinator. During the meeting, the CAST members ask thoughtful questions to unearth the root causes of the problem.

The hoped-for outcome is an individualized plan of supports for that student and his/her family.

*CAST was established as a pilot project in 2012 through lead funding from the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** (www.rwjf.org), the nation's largest philanthropy devoted solely to the public's health. CAST has proven to be so successful that Spokane Public Schools is continuing the program on its own past the grant.*

CAST: Evaluation Research

Washington State University Research Partners:
Nicholas Lovrich, Paul Strand and Maureen Erickson

Community Attendance Support Teams (CAST) were implemented in all six **Spokane Public Schools (SPS)** middle schools during the 2013-2014 academic year. The schools initiated their CAST meetings at different times and it took the better part of the year for all six to have an effective system in place.

By the close of the year, a total of **86 high-risk students** had been through a complete CAST Intervention, defined as including parents or guardians, school administrators and counselors, and community resource volunteers, and resulting in a contract specifying a plan for addressing the truancy issues. Each CAST meeting was based on data about the student's attendance and other risk factors that was generated from the SPS Early Warning System.

Qualitative and quantitative research activities were carried out throughout the year. Results showed:

- ◆ **Improved Attendance** following CAST - 10 cases (11.6%)
- ◆ **Improved Attendance** but CAST held late in year so not as much time to evaluate - 10 cases (11.6%)
- ◆ **No BECCA Truancy Petition Filed with Court** following CAST (relapses in attendance addressed through counseling) - 29 cases (33.7%)
- ◆ **BECCA Stay Petition Filed** following CAST (school controls truancy sanctions for "one last chance") - 22 cases (25.6%)
- ◆ **Juvenile Court Hearing and court involvement** following CAST (court assumes oversight when school decides to lift the stay) - 15 cases (17.4%)



Researchers described it as "noteworthy" that a large percentage of high-risk youth showed improved attendance following the intervention or inspired additional engagement from their school before court involvement.

Furthermore, school staff were asked, "Is the CAST process worth the time and energy it takes?" The following theme recurred in their answers: **IF IT HELPS ONE CHILD, IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT.** Evaluative interviews also asked whether the interviewee could offer an example of an at-risk student being helped by CAST; *virtually all interviewees gave such an example, which was described by researchers as being "significant."*

A Deeper Dive into the Research

The following qualitative and quantitative evaluation research activities were carried out:

- ◆ Observations of over 50 CAST interventions across all six middle schools using a *Model Replication Fidelity Checklist* to document faithful implementation of the CAST intervention;
- ◆ Completion of interviews with all 7th and 8th grade counselors and lead building administrative staff implementing the CAST process regarding prior expectations, actual experiences, and assessment of the process for addressing attendance problems based upon their own personal experience;
- ◆ Completion of comparable interviews with 10 community resource volunteers participating in CAST sessions (e.g., representatives of United Way, YMCA, Spokane Libraries, Communities in Schools, Martin Luther King, Jr. Family Outreach Center, etc.);
- ◆ Collection of quantitative data on 86 complete CAST interventions for determination of short-term outcomes; and,
- ◆ Creation of a dataset of all SPS middle school students (5,000+) for use in the comparison of CAST and non-CAST student populations, and for the creation of matched pairs of CAST and controlled comparison students for the determination of intermediate and long-term outcomes going out to 2020.

To learn more about CAST research, please contact: Dr. Nick Lovrich at nlovrich@hotmail.com.

The CAST project represents, in many respects, an extension and advancement upon the Community Truancy Board (CTB) process, which served as its original inspiration. For more information about Community Truancy Boards, go to: <http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/475>.

For information about CAST implementation, please contact:
Joan Poirier
Spokane Public Schools
509.354.7327
JoanPo@SpokaneSchools.org