

AT&T Aspire: University of Baltimore Foundation

Graduating Students, One Community at a Time



Program Description:

The overarching goal of the Truancy Court Program (TCP) is to reduce truancy by reconnecting students and their families with the school. The TCP achieves this goal by implementing a therapeutic, non-adversarial, holistic model that works because it builds connections among schools, parents/caregivers, students, a compassionate judge and mentors. Those connections engage or re-engage students and parents into the education process through a series of confidential interactions with the TCP team that foster strong relationships among the TCP judge, the student, the parent, the TCP/CFCC staff, the teachers, the social services provider and the TCP Mentor.

The TCP is strictly voluntary on the part of students and their families and consists of ten weekly in-school meetings in the fall and in the spring. The TCP operates using a team-based approach and capitalizes on the stature and authority of a volunteer Baltimore City District or Circuit court judge. Participants at each meeting include: a volunteer judge, a team of school representatives, a mentor, a University of Baltimore law student, a law school supervisor, the child and his/her parent. The TCP adopts a therapeutic, non-punitive and holistic approach that rewards students who demonstrate progress with incentives and family events.

In addition to the team that meets weekly with the student and his/her parent or caregiver, CFCC has established a Mentor program, a TCP Volunteer initiative that provides volunteer tutors, a "Kids and Theater" after school program and a partnership with the University of Baltimore School of Law Family Mediation Clinic that offers mediation to all participating students, their families and their schools. The TCP Mentor provides character-building sessions each week and offers guidance to students on issues such as time management, leadership and bullying.

The University of Baltimore School of Law Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) will use AT&T funding to help develop and implement the Truancy Court Program (TCP) for 200 eighth and ninth graders in one K-8 school, one middle school and two 6-12th grade schools. AT&T funding will enable CFCC to expand the delivery of services to TCP participants, including a social worker/case manager and integrate truancy prevention into the school culture and operation, including school-wide trainings for administrators, faculty, and staff, parent workshops and school-wide assemblies.



Students:
200



Funding:
\$300,000

- The TCP has served **over 1,000 students** since its inception in 2005.
- In the 2011-2012 school year, 80 percent of participants graduated based on a **minimum 65 percent decrease** in unexcused absences.
- In addition, CFCC administered surveys to TCP students. **75 percent of the students** report that their parents or guardians ask more often about their school day and half of the students report an improved outlook on doing and completing their homework.

"My participation in the Truancy Court Program as a CFCC Student Fellow dramatically affected my view of the legal system's impact on our communities. I saw firsthand how judges, sitting side-by-side with school administrators, teachers, parents and children, were able to identify and address the problems underlying truant behavior. I learned how much more effective we, as lawyers, could be when using a holistic and therapeutic approach."

Catherine Jackson, a former CFCC Student Fellow and a recent graduate of the University of Baltimore School of Law