EVIDENCE-BASED
NEBRASKA

ARRIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION

FY 22/23

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Executive Summary

Programs across Nebraska have been working to reduce chronic school absences and excessive absenteeism through targeted intervention and prevention strategies. The purpose of this mixed-methods program evaluation was to investigate the effectiveness of the ARRIVE intervention program on attendance problems. The ARRIVE intervention program was chosen for this analysis as it showed prior success in working with specific populations in reducing the risk of excessive absenteeism. The goal of this report was to highlight aspects of the program that appear to be working and make recommended changes. Some elements of this evaluation may be informative for programs across the state of Nebraska.

In the beginning of this report, we present quantitative findings on the youth served and the effectiveness of the truancy intervention within the ARRIVE program. In the second part of this report, we present qualitative findings from one-on-one interviews with ARRIVE participants on their experiences and recommendations on how to reduce truancy and improve system functioning.

The Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program fund specifically outlines funding particular activities, including truancy prevention and intervention programs, and setting state policy. The philosophy of the fund is that youth who are having problems attending school regularly are best served in our communities, not through the court system. To measure effectiveness, data was collected using a pre-enroll-post design. That is, programs entered youth absences prior to enrolling in the truancy program, during the truancy program, and then after they complete the truancy program. The Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) then calculated the change in attendance for these three time periods to be able to determine the program's impact during and after engagement with the program.

A total of 532 youth were referred to the ARRIVE truancy intervention program between FY 2013 and 2022. Of these, 407 youth had sufficient enrollment data to analyze the effectiveness of ARRIVE's truancy intervention program (FY21-23). ARRIVE was able to improve absence types whether the youth was ill, excused, unverified, or parent acknowledged. Only absences for suspension, religious, and truant reasons were unimproved. We then examined whether age, gender, race or other factors impacted change in attendance. Age, gender, and race did not affect attendance across pre-enrollment to enrollment; ARRIVE effectively served all members of their population.

While the one-on-one interviews were successful in gaining an in-depth understanding of parent perceptions of the program, there were some drawbacks to this method. First, our ideal sample size for one-on-one interviews was 10 participants or more to allow us to gather participant's diverse experiences. However, we were only successful in recruiting five participants. Focus group questions focused on the student's experience during the pandemic, how the program was beneficial, and what improvements could be made to the program. Common themes that emerged were grouped in the following categories (Pandemic, Lack of Communication/ Understanding the Program, Unclear Program Success).

Introduction

Reducing chronic absenteeism is at the forefront of student attendance policies across the nation. Prior research has repeatedly documented that poor school attendance has long term impacts on youth, schools, and society. Interventions have traditionally been geared towards measuring unexcused absences, and often neglected to include excused absences (Hobbs et al., 2018, Gottfried, 2009; Sutpen et al., 2010). Further, truancy has been linked to long-lasting associations with negative life outcomes, especially for non-violent crime and problem drinking (Rocque, et. al 2016). In the most general sense, truancy refers to a legal term that defines a set number of unexcused absences over a designated period of time (Supten et al., 2010). This report uses the terms chronic absence and/or excessive absenteeism to capture poor school attendance owing to the myriad of reasons why a youth may be absent from school.

Dropping out of school is not the result of a single event, but rather the culmination of a lengthy process of school disengagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Reshcly & Christenson, 2013). This process involves patterns established during the early school years, such as being held back a year or chronic absences. (Im et al., 2013). Aucejo and Romano (2016) found that students who were absent a mere ten days had reduced scores in math and language arts. Falling behind academically then places students at higher risk of dropping out of school, employment issues, and financial consequences (Robert Woods Foundation, Attendance Works, n.d.).

In response to research linking negative outcomes to irregular school attendance, many states like Nebraska passed more stringent laws to discourage excessive absenteeism. According to statute, schools "may report to the county attorney" when the school's efforts to curb absenteeism have not been successful and a student has twenty or more absences (Neb. Rev Stat. § 79-209). Statute requires the schools to form collaborative plans to "reduce barriers to improve regular attendance" prior to referring a case to the county attorney. These include:

   a. Verbal or written communication by school officials with the person or persons who have legal or actual charge or control of any child; and

   b. One or more meetings between, at a minimum, a school attendance officer, a school social worker, or a school administrator or his or her designee, the person who has legal or actual charge or control of the child, and the child, when appropriate, to attempt to address the barriers to attendance. The result of the meeting or meetings shall be to develop a collaborative plan to reduce barriers identified to improve regular attendance. The plan shall consider, but not be limited to:

      i. Illness related to physical or behavioral health of the child;

      ii. Educational counseling;

      iii. Educational evaluation;

      iv. Referral to community agencies for economic resources;

      v. Family or individual counseling; and

      vi. Assisting the family in working with other community services. (Neb. Rev. Stat §79-209(a) and (b)).

To make recommendations for best practices for interventions that target reducing chronic absences and excessive absenteeism, it is important to understand all the factors related to this phenomenon. For this report, a mixed-methods approach was employed by the Juvenile Justice Institute researchers conducting 5 one-on-one interviews with parents and assessing total number of youths served in the ARRIVE truancy program (n=407).

Methods/Results

When programs first began compiling program data for the Community-based Aid program, they utilized excel sheets. These early data collection efforts lacked sophistication and did not contain usable data. The data utilized for this report starts with August 16, 2013, and ends on November 22, 2022. Table 1 below shows the number of referrals per year and illustrates that the program accepted the most referrals in 2015. This spike in referrals is likely related to changes in Nebraska statutes.

Table 1. Referrals Per Year to ARRIVE Program

Year	Frequency	Percent
2013	4	0.8%
2014	33	6.2%
2015	106	19.9%
2016	69	13.0%
2017	35	6.6%
2018	79	14.8%
2019	65	12.2%
2020	24	4.5%
2021	50	9.4%
2022	67	12.6%
Total	532	100%

Truancy Status Case Type

Table 2 displays the truancy status case type of ARRIVE during FY 2021-2023. The majority of cases (66.0%) referred to ARRIVE involved monitor only (n=351); 30.3 % for truancy intervention (n=161), 2.6% for truancy diversion (n=14); and 1.1% were missing a truancy status type (n=6). Monitor only cases are those cases in which the program is monitoring attendance (but is not intervening). Truancy intervention cases are those cases in which the program has begun to take steps to intervene with the juvenile or family at the request of the school or parent. Truancy diversion cases are those cases in which the County Attorney has received a request to file.

Table 2. Truancy Status Case Type

Case Source	Frequency	Percent
Monitor Only	351	66.0%
Truancy Intervention	161	30.3%
Truancy Diversion	14	2.6%
Missing	6	1.1%
Total	532	100%

However, based upon discussions with ARRIVE staff in early April 2023, the program used "file number" to report the case status type. This variable allows programs to enter the data manually without a pre-designed category. Therefore, more missing data is prevalent with this variable and especially before 2018, which is the year when the ARRIVE program begin consistently utilizing the measure to track "Truancy Status". Both variables should be considered in making inferences about the truancy status of the program participants (i.e., Truancy Status & File Number).

Table 3. File Number Case Type

Case Source	Frequency	Percent
Level 0	13	2.4%
Level 1	119	22.4%
Level 2	75	14.1%
Warning Letter	15	2.8%
Contract	42	7.9%
Transferred	24	4.5%
Home School	3	0.6%
Other	17	3.2%
Missing Data	224	57.9%
Total	532	100%

Upon our discussion with the ARRIVE staff, Table 2 monitor only cases (66.0 %) did not mean that participants weren't receiving any services. Rather the categorization in Table 3 depicts a more accurate portrayal of the youth's truancy status while in the ARRIVE program. Most cases were Level 1 (intervention; 22.4%) meaning that the program was working with youth and/or their families actively before they reached 20 days of absenteeism (n=119); 14.1% for Level 2 (county attorney) meaning the youth had entered a contract with the school and had missed more than 20 days and was now under an active attendance plan (n=75). However, Level 0 (2.4%; n=13) of cases were monitor only, while 2.8% of cases received a warning letter (n=15). The remaining cases were contract (7.9%; n=42), home school (.6%; n=3), other (3.2%; n=17), and 57.9% had missing data (n=224).

Referral Source

Table 4 displays the referral source for each case. It is noteworthy that schools are the most frequent referral source (96.1%), followed by the parent/guardian (.4%). A smaller number of cases came from a county attorney (3.4) or were missing a referral source (.2%). This indicates that the schools are using the ARRIVE program as intended under Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-209.

Table 4. Referral Sources for Each Case to Truancy

Case Source	Frequency	Percent
School	511	96.1%
Parent/Guardian	2	.4%
County Attorney	18	3.4%
Missing	1	0.2%
Total	532	100%

Cases by Gender

Programs served a similar number of females and males. Overall, 47.7% (*n*=254) of the cases during this time frame involved female youth and 52.3% (*n*=278) of the cases involved male youth.

Table 5. Cases by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	254	47.7%
Male	278	52.3%

Cases by Age

Table 6 presents the frequency of cases by age. Students referred to the program ranged from 5 years old to 18 years old, with a mean age of 13.07. The most frequent age was 14. There was 1 case with missing information (either missing a date of birth or a referral date); thus, age could not be calculated for that 1 youth.

Table 6. Cases by Gender

Age	Frequency	Percent
5	6	1.1%
6	25	4.7%
7	22	4.1%
8	20	3.8%
9	16	3.0%
10	20	3.8%
11	36	6.8%
12	32	6.0%
13	61	11.5%
14	78	14.7%
15	65	12.2%
16	81	15.2%
17	65	12.2%
18	4	0.8%
Missing	1	0.2%
Total	532	100%

Cases by Race and/or Ethnicity

Most youth referred to truancy programs were White (*n*=504; 94.7%), followed by Black/African American (*n*=15; 2.8%). For one case, race and/or ethnicity was not specified (*n*=1; .1%). Fewer youth were Hispanic (*n*=1, .2%), American Indian (*n*=7; 1.3%), Asian (*n*=1; .2%), and Other Race or Multiple Races (*n*=3; .6%). When we compared the race of youth referred to the ARRIVE Program to the racial and ethnic composition of Saunders County school enrollment, we found that Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Other or Multiple Races

were underrepresented in truancy programs; relative to White and Black/African American youth. Referrals of Hispanic youth were underrepresented to the greatest degree (Table 7).

Table 7. Saunders County School Enrollment Race and Ethnicity Ages 5-18 Compared to Referrals to ARRIVE Program

Saunders County			ARRIVE Program	
Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
White	2887	91.3%	504	94.7%
Hispanic	137	4.3%	1	0.2%
Black/African American	41	1.3%	15	2.8%
American Indian	9	0.3%	7	1.3%
Asian, Pacific Islander	25	0.8%	1	0.2%
Other or Multiple Races	60	1.9%	3	0.6%
Unspecified	0	0%	1	0.2%
Total	3,159	100%	532	100%

Truancy Program Outcome Measures

Methodology

To accurately measure a program's impact, personnel had to ensure the following time periods were correctly labelled. Without this diligence JJI would not be able to measure impact in the ARRIVE program.

The Juvenile Justice Institute calculated attendance patterns for three time periods:

- Pre-enrollment: This is the period before a youth was enrolled in the program and serves as the baseline before an intervention. At least one semester is requested to ensure an adequate sample of a participant's attendance. If that was not possible, we requested as much of the semester as possible before enrollment. All pre-enrollment data were combined across semesters or data blocks.
- Enrollment: The period a student was actively involved in the program until a student was discharged. All enrollment data were combined across semesters or data blocks.
- Post-Enrollment: The semester(s) following active enrollment in the program. These data are used to ascertain whether the student regressed in attendance or maintained gains in the program. All post-enrollment data were combined across semesters or data blocks.

Programs entered data in JCMS for eight absence types, categorized under both excused and unexcused absences. It should be noted that for the purposes of these analyses we did not include administrative and school activity absences because youth are in school those days, even if away. We also did not include excused or unexcused tardies because practices across the state vary widely on whether these are considered absences and the number of total tardies that becomes a single time absent.

Discharge Reason for Youth in Truancy Programs

First, we examined reasons youth were discharged from the ARRIVE program. Of the 407 cases referred to ARRIVE, a discharge reason was included in 386 cases. In 15 of the cases (3.7%), a discharge reason was missing, which may indicate that the youth was still involved in the program. Table 8 displays the discharge reasons for all youth.

Table 8. Discharge Reason

Discharge Reason	Frequency	Percent
Completed Program Requirements	237	58.2%
Did Not Complete Program Requirements	21	5.2%
Open Cases	0	0%
Transferred Schools	40	9.8%
Transferred to GED Program	1	0.2%
Other (Moved Away/Death, etc).	20	4.9%
Transferred to Homeschool	12	2.9%
Dropped Out	1	0.2%
Graduated	7	1.7%
Referred to Higher Services (Referred to County Attorney)	41	10.1%
Case Type Changed	4	1.0%
City/County Attorney Withdrawal	1	0.2%
Youth/Parent Refused	7	1.7%
Missing System	15	3.7%
Total	**407**	**100%**

Discharge

To streamline analysis, the eight different discharge categories were condensed into 4 categories: (1) successful completion (completed program requirements and graduated), (2) unsuccessful completion (did not complete program requirements and dropped out), (3) other (cases with a discharge date but no reason indicated, transferred schools, transferred to GED program, transferred to homeschool, referred to a higher level of service, and case type changed), (4) open cases (cases with no discharge date or reason indicated). The breakdown for ARRIVE is listed in Table 9. In addition, Table 10 displays discharge categories by specific program type.

Table 9. Successful, Unsuccessful, and Other Discharge Reasons

Program	Successful	Unsuccessful	Other	Open	Missing	Number of Cases
Arrive Program	244 (60.0%)	22 (5.4%)	105 (25.8%)	21 (5.2%)	15 (3.7%)	407

A large percent of cases closed as "Other." We then attempted to analyze cases by status type to examine which youth were most likely to transfer schools, move away, or be referred to a higher level of services.

We used both the status and the file number variables, but even combined they do adequately reflect the level of youth served.

Table 10. Successful, Unsuccessful, and Other Discharge Reasons by Truancy Status Type

	Monitor Only		Truancy Intervention		
	N	%	N	%	Total
Successful	189	69.5%	52	45.6%	241
Unsuccessful	15	5.5%	7	6.1%	22
Other	57	21.0%	45	39.5%	102
Open	11	4.0%	10	8.8%	21
					N=386
				Missing	21

Table 11. Successful, Unsuccessful, and Other Discharge Reasons by File Number Type

	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Warning Letter	Contract	Transferred	Home School	Other
Successful	1 (0.01%)	56 (28.2%)	21 (10.6%)	11 (5.6%)	14 (7.1%)	7 (3.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.01%)
Unsuccessful	0 (0%)	1 (0.01%)	3 (1.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.01%)	1 (0.01%)	1 (0.01%)	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)	17 (8.6%)	23 (11.6%)	0 (0%)	15 (7.6%)	3 (1.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.01%)
Open	0 (0%)	9 (4.6%)	6 (3.0%)	2 (1.0%)	3 (1.5%)	1 (0.01%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	1 (0.01%)	89 (44.6%)	53 (26.8%)	13 (6.6%)	33 (16.7%)	12 (6.1%)	1 (0.01%)	2 (1.0%)
		Number of Missing Cases=209			Number of Total Cases=198			

Impact on Attendance
Cases Included in the Attendance Analysis

To assess whether ARRIVE is having an impact on absenteeism, we compared pre-enrollment attendance patterns to enrollment attendance patterns. Cases that did not have complete data for two points in time, (pre-enrollment and enrollment) could not be included in the analysis. As such, program impact on attendance could only be calculated for 407/535 cases, which was only 76% of the total sample. The reasons a case may not have been included are listed below:

- Youth transferred in and out of school districts and attendance information was not available
- Youth were new to a program and only enrollment data was available.
- Programs were not able to accurately enter data during the training/data quality assurance period, so the absence data was not split by enrollment date or absences were missing;
- Cases had obvious data entry error that could not be reconciled for analysis.
- Cases did not have the data required to calculate required attendance

Table 12. Cases Breakdown by Data Available

Reason not Included	Frequency	Percent
Only enrollment data	151	1.7%
Only pre-enrollment data	982	11.2%
No required attendance	140	1.6%
Did not split by enrollment date	402	4.6%
Multiple reasons	373	4.2%
Has both enrollment and pre-enrollment data	6693	76.1%
Missing	49	0.5%
Total	8,790 (Lines of Data)	100%

Successfully Closed Cases

We employed a Repeated Measures ANOVA, to determine if there were significant mean differences between absences from pre-enrollment and absences from enrollment. A repeated measures ANOVA compares mean values at time 1 (pre-enrollment) to mean values at time 2 (enrollment) to estimate whether significant change occurred between those two time periods. We examine the programs impact by determining whether significant reductions of absenteeism occurred for youth who participated in the program.

In addition, we examined post enrollment attendance to determine whether programs have an impact on attendance after youth complete the ARRIVE program. To do this, we compared mean values at time 2 (enrollment) to mean values at time 3 (post enrollment) to estimate significant change between those two time periods, again employing repeated measures ANOVA.

Table 13 displays the number of cases included in analysis, percent absent pre-enrollment, percent absent enrollment, percent change, and the effect size of this change. Effect sizes measure the magnitude of effects, so even if a percent change is not significant, effect sizes greater than .10 indicate there are likely effects that are not apparent because of small sample sizes.

Table 13. Change in Overall Absences from Pre-enrollment, Enrollment & Post-enrollment for Successful Case Closures

	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	N	M (SE)	M (SE)	%	N²
Pre to Enroll ANOVA	244	15.73% (0.71)	9.47% (0.45)	-6.27%***	0.24

	Number of Cases	% Absent Enrollment	% Absent Post Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
Enroll to Post ANOVA	123	9.65% (0.69)	10.25% (0.76)	0.60%***	0.01

Note. *=p<.05 **=p<.01; ***=p<.001. Significance tests or means for programs with only 1 case could not be calculated.

Our findings indicate that youth made significant improvements in attendance, demonstrating a 6.27% increase in attendance and a large effect size. It is less clear whether youth maintain those improvements after completing the program, as youth showed a slight (but significant) increase in absenteeism once they completed the ARRIVE Program.

Youth Characteristics on Attendance within Successful Program Cases

Next, we examined whether changes from pre-enrollment to enrollment significantly differed by age, gender and race/ethnicity. In other words, whether demographic information (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity) could explain students' improved attendance during their involvement in the program. We did not examine changes from enrollment to enrollment and whether they differed by age, gender and race/ethnicity due to the small sample size in post-enrollment.

Attendance Change and Age

There were also no significant differences in total attendance by age [F (407) = .880, p=.57, n²=.01.] This means that across all ages, youth were absent roughly the same amount and received the same benefits in the ARRIVE program.

Attendance Change and Gender

Overall, there were not any significant differences in total attendance by gender [F (407) = .215, p <.66, n² = .01.] This means that for both males and females, youth were absent roughly the same amount and received the same benefits in the ARRIVE program.

Attendance Change and Race/Ethnicity

Overall, there were not significant differences in total attendance by race/ethnicity [F (407) = 1.80, p<.08, n² = .01] . This means that the total amount absence across both time periods was not statistically different based on race/ethnicity.

Change in Specific Attendance Types within Successful Program Cases

We then looked at specific absence types to determine if the ARRIVE Programs impacts particular attendance problems more than others. For successful cases, the change in absences was compared by absence type from pre-enrollment to enrollment and enrollment to post-enrollment. Table 14 shows that all types of absences exhibited a significant effect, excluding religious excused absences. This stands to reason because religious absences would not necessarily be the types of absences that could be affected by a program.

Table 14. Change in Overall Absences from Pre-enrollment, Enrollment & Post-enrollment for Successful Case Closures

Absence Type	% Absent Preab-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	M (SE)	M (SE)	%	N²
All Excused Absences	8.33 (0.74)	5.25 (0.37)	-3.07%***	0.09
Suspension	0.098% (0.05)	0.093% (0.03)	-0.005%	0.00
Religious	1.73% (0.30)	0.75% (0.19)	-0.97%*	0.04
Medical	6.94% (0.70)	4.40% (0.33)	-2.09%***	0.04
All Unexcused Absences	7.40% (0.52)	4.21% (0.34)	-5.66%***	0.18
Truant	0.94% (0.18)	0.64% (0.13)	-0.301%	0.01
Parent Acknowledged	4.05% (0.40)	2.14% (0.26)	-1.91%***	0.12
Illness	1.54% (0.22)	0.88% (0.12)	-0.60%***	0.04
Unverified	0.85% (0.16)	0.54% (0.08)	-0.31%***	0.01

Table 15. Change in Absences by Absence Type from Enrollment to Post-enrollment for Successful Case Closures

Absence Type	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	M (SE)	M (SE)	%	N²
All Excused Absences	5.05 (0.48)	3.28 (0.30)	-1.77%***	0.06
Suspension	0.26% (0.08)	0.19% (0.10)	-0.06%	0.00
Religious	0.90% (0.23)	0.88% (0.16)	-0.18%	0.00
Medical	3.88% (0.39)	1.47% (0.20)	-2.09%***	0.16
All Unexcused Absences	8.71% (0.93)	14.72% (1.37)	6.01%***	0.08
Truant	2.00% (0.46)	4.58% (1.09)	2.58%**	0.03
Parent Acknowledged	3.02% (0.48)	2.05% (0.28)	-0.97%*	0.02
Illness	1.95% (0.30)	3.61% (0.28)	1.66%**	0.09
Unverified	1.72% (0.49)	1.75% (0.57)	0.03%	0.00

Unsuccessfully Closed Cases

We also examined cases that closed unsuccessfully. Occasionally programs can make the situation worse. We checked this by comparing whether there was any change from pre-enrollment to enrollment and enrollment to post-enrollment for unsuccessful cases. There were no significant differences from pre-enrollment to enrollment (*n*=21), nor enrollment to post-enrollment (*n*=5).

Even youth whose case closed unsuccessfully improved attendance by 13.53%, but this is not statistically significant due to the small number of cases. Technically, absences neither significantly improved, nor got significantly worse while enrolled in the programs.

Table 16. Change in Overall Absences from Pre-enrollment, Enrollment & Post-enrollment for Successful Case Closures

	Number of Cases	% Absent Pre-enrollment	% Absent Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
	N	M (SE)	M (SE)	%	N²
Pre to Enroll ANOVA	21	49.66% (21.57)	36.13% (6.52)	-13.53%	0.02

	Number of Cases	% Absent Enrollment	% Absent Post Enrollment	% Change	Effect Size
Enroll to Post ANOVA	5	24.91% (5.28)	27.58% (7.73)	2.67%	0.03

Note. *=p<.05 **=p<.01; ***=p<.001.

Although it is a small number of cases, youth that were unsuccessful (n=22) were 100% White, Male (63.6%; n=14) and 14.41 years old on average.

The School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS)

An evidence-based approach recommends the use of a validated assessment tool to uncover underlying reasons for attendance issues. The ARRIVE Programs utilized the School Refusal Assessment Scale – SRAS (Kearney and Silverman, 1993). This brief instrument offers a snapshot of reasons the youth and parent cite for missing school. Although this tool may not uncover the complex and multi-varied reasons that contribute to truancy, it does provide an entry point for the therapist or social worker to get at underlying reasons for absenteeism. The SRAS categorizes absences under four primary reasons for school refusal (Kearney, 1993). These include:

1. Stimuli Provoking a Negative Affect (SPNA), which refers to a specific stimulus leading to school refusal. High scores in the SPNA domain indicate that the child is escaping specific, unpleasant things or people (e.g., lunch, fire alarm, restrooms, or a bully).
2. Escape from Aversive Social/Evaluative Situations (EASE). High scores in the EASE domain indicate that a child is escaping or avoiding unpleasant social or evaluative situations (e.g., public speaking, halls, or tests).
3. Attention Seeking Behavior (ASB) indicates that the child receives positive reinforcement for school refusal. High scores in the ASB domain indicate that school avoidance (e.g., tantrums, somatic complaints, or non-compliance) is rewarded emotionally by a parent or caregiver.
4. Tangible Reinforcement Outside of School (TR) refers to situations where the child receives a tangible reward for avoiding school (e.g., sleeping, TV, friends, or going to the mall).

The results below represent the average scores for school refusal for children and parents for all cases (Figure 1), in addition to average scores for school refusal for children and parents for successful cases (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Average Individual SRA Scores: Parent compared to Youth (All Cases)
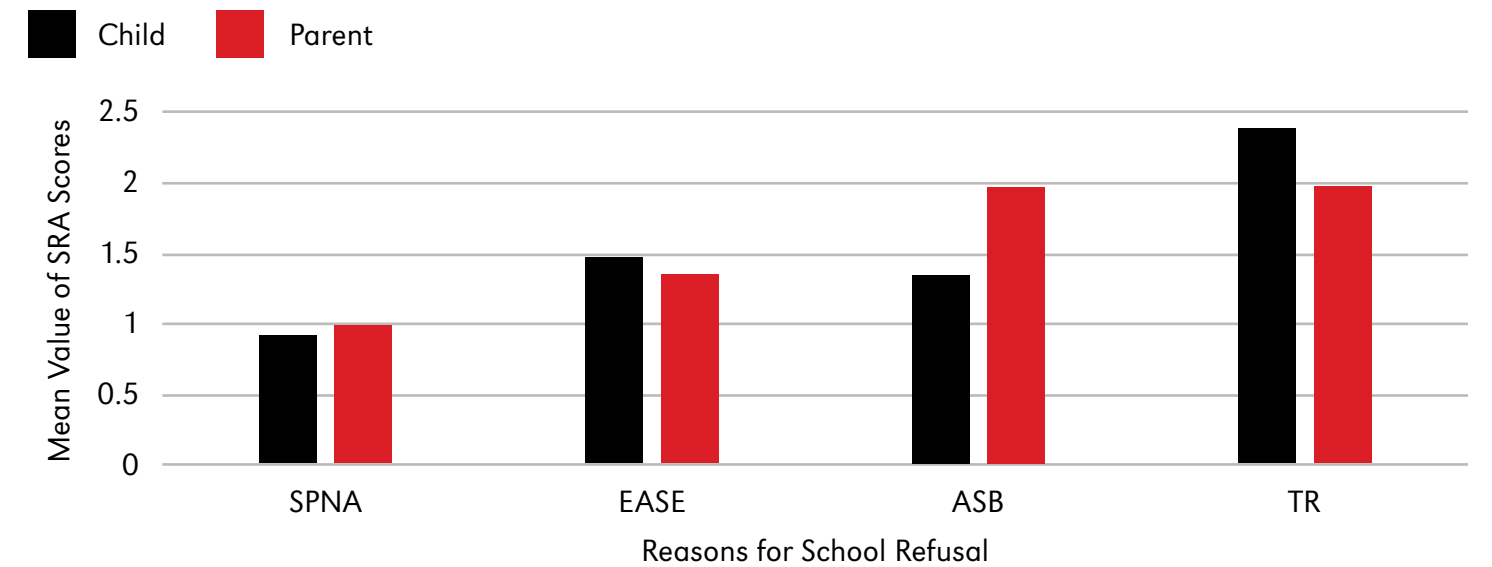
All Cases				
	SPNA	EASE	ASB	TR
Child	0.91	1.47	1.33	2.37
Parent	0.98	1.33	1.98	1.97

We examined the use of the SRAS as a tool for targeting specific needs and underlying reasons for absenteeism. Figure 1 shows that SPNA and ASB scores were higher for parents compared to children, however, EASE and TR scores were higher for children. This indicates that parents believed their child was avoiding a negative situation at school, or were seeking attention by missing school. Youth were likely to report receiving a tangible reward for missing school.

Figure 2. Average Individual SRA Scores: Parent compared to Youth (Successful Cases)
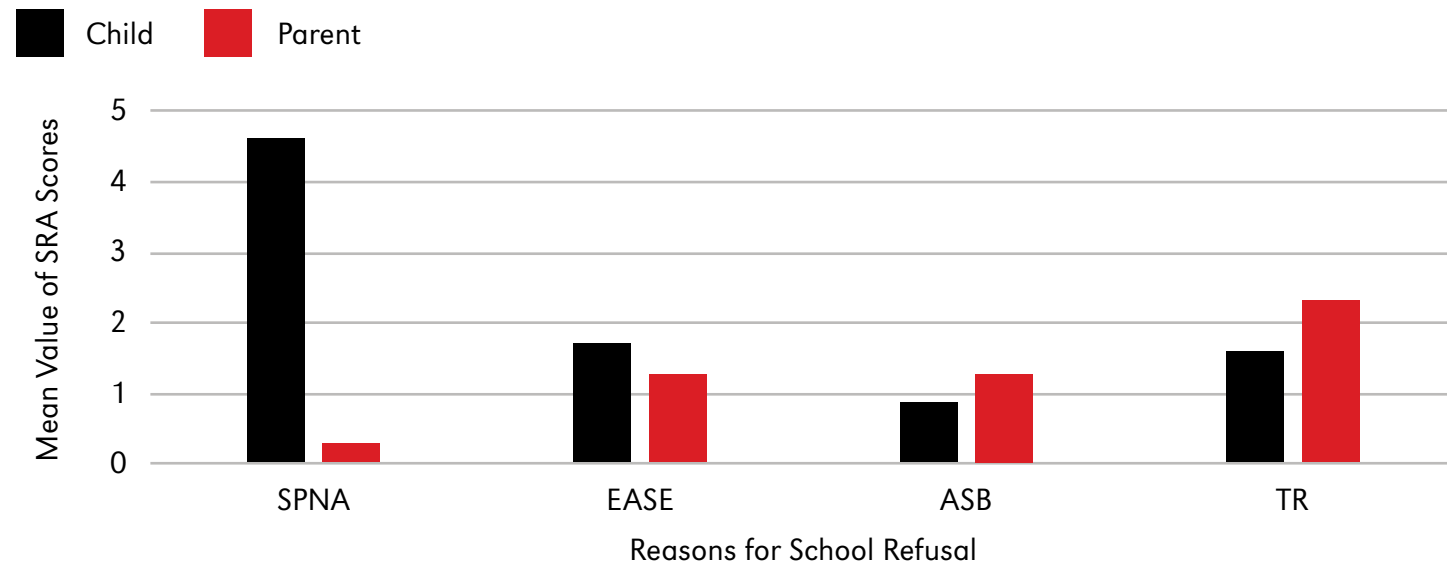
All Cases				
	SPNA	**EASE**	**ASB**	**TR**
Child	4.60	1.71	0.88	1.60
Parent	0.32	1.29	1.28	2.32

We then examined only successfully closed cases. Figure 2 shows that SPNA scores were significantly higher for children with successful cases relative to parents, in addition to EASE scores being marginally higher for children as well. However, ASB and TR scores were higher for parents relative to children.

For successful cases, the ARRIVE program appears to have an impact on specific stimuli, such as bullying and anxiety related reasons for missing school. The program coordinator for ARRIVE also noted that bullying is addressed by providing extra supports, such as weekly meetings and mentors for youth experiencing bullying.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The diverse origins of problems in juvenile justice program evaluation research require a diversity of research methodologies. There is a growing body of literature on the role of qualitative research in evidence-based practice and recognition of a need to move beyond the effectiveness of quantitative approaches. The following report utilized a mixed methods approach to evaluate the ARRIVE truancy program.

To ensure no data was missed during the one-on-one interviews, notes were supplemented with audio recordings of each session. Participants were informed of the recoding and asked to keep all personal identifiers out of the discussion to help retain participant anonymity. The recordings were then transcribed by JJI and methodologically entered into MAXQDA, a tool for qualitative text analysis. Passages were annotated and then summarized into coded themes. For example, in MAXQDA material was sorted into groups (Pandemic, Lack of Communication/Understanding the Program, Unclear Program Impact) that could be analyzed with the actual text from the participants. We then linked relevant quotes to each of these participants and assigned different codes to important information in the data.

One-On-One Interviews With Parents

In order to recruit parents to participate in interviews, the JJI received a list of parent contact information. JJI attempted to contact parents four times by phone. We left voicemails in the event the parent did not answer, but most were not returned.

Five interviews were held with parents either through Zoom or by phone. Four of the interviews were with one parent, while one interview had both parents and the student enrolled in the ARRIVE program. Questions focused on the student's experience during the pandemic, how the program was beneficial, and what improvements could be made to the program. Common themes are grouped below. Because of the nature of the sample size, it is important to note that 80% of the group's participants mentioned their students had a major health episode that triggered their enrollment into ARRIVE or had a chronic health condition they were managing.

The Pandemic

Unsurprisingly, the pandemic influenced student's attendance and performance. Sixty percent of the parents acknowledged that the pandemic was a difficult period for their family and for the school experience, with one participant calling it "A nightmare and a half at the beginning of the pandemic." Not only was there difficulty in connecting to their schoolwork, but difficulty in engaging with the program. Complaints of teachers not being present, or from staffing issues reducing the amount of people that could help their student (one participant specifically mentioned paras being short staffed, but no support from them during the online only sessions). The two quotes below from different parents highlight how the pandemic affected more than just physical attendance (pronouns and ages have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants):

- "I feel like, I don't know they're a teenager. So it really didn't bother them to not be in school. But as far as not getting the education that they should have. I feel like it affected a lot. I don't feel like the school wasn't necessarily equipped to deal with this, it seems like, especially when they first closed the school down, it was just kind of like, Oh, if you want to do some work, you can work on this. There wasn't really any structure or anything like that. So of course, a, you know, (teenager) isn't gonna willingly do homework, you know?"
- Parent 1- "We seen a huge decrease in that (the student's social skills) during (the) pandemics. In fact, I'll be honest with you, we fight with them now to, you know, come downstairs as a family…Because they will literally, if we allow them, go up to their room and they'll be in their own little world."
- Parent 2- "And they….were a social butterfly before all this started"

Lack of Communication/Understanding the Program

Eighty percent of the parents cited a lack of communication as one of the top areas for improvement for ARRIVE, while 60% of the parents divulged they were unsure of the program timeline or what the program was doing for their child. Some of those parents could recall having an orientation to the program while others could not. The student involved in this focus group appreciated the communication they had with the program coordinator, but noted an area of improvement would be to help advocate for the student with the school administration, as many of the teachers were unaware or unaccommodating to their health issues.

- Participant: "Even if they just did something like once a month, like, hey, we just wanted to give you an update, we've noticed this, or like, Hey, here's the timeline, because I don't know what the timeline is on the program. As far as I know, I'm in it for the next four years."
- Interviewer: "So do you know if you're still in the program or not?"
- Participant: "I have no idea."

Unclear Program Impact

Sixty percent of the parents in the interviews either did not know if the program was helping their child's attendance or stated that it was not helping their attendance. One parent shared their child was close friends with a previous participant in the program, which had a large effect on their child. The friend told their child,".. Oh, that's (the program) nothing. They literally talk to you and say, hey, you need to start going to school. And that's it."

Incentives and Activities Amount by ARRIVE

Based on conversations with ARRIVE, we were able to pull their qualitative notes on the amount to times they provided incentives to youth, and the number of times that they initiated some sort of contact (i.e., activities) with the youth. The results in Table 17, show a total of N=52 incentives were provided to youth.

Table 17. Incentives Provided to Youth

	Number of Youth
1 Incentive	38
2 Incentives	7
3 Incentives	4
4 Incentives	1
6 Incentives	2
	N=52

A total of 38 students received one incentive, while seven students received two incentives, four students received three incentives, one student received four incentives, and two students received six incentives during their time in the program. The most common type of incentive was a giftcard across the sample of 52 youth.

Table 18. depicts the number of activities that were provided to youth in the program. The most frequent category was 0 activities for youth (42.3%; n=172). The most frequent number of activities provided to youth was 2 (5.9%; n=24). Overall, a total of n=245 (60.1%) youth received some contact with the program.

Table 18. Activities Provided to Youth

Number of Activities	Number of Youth	Percent
0	172	42.3%
1	16	3.9%
2	24	5.9%
3	22	5.4%
4	15	3.7%
5	13	3.2%
6	12	2.9%
7	7	1.7%
8	11	2.7%
9	15	3.7%
10	16	3.9%
11	9	2.2%
12	4	1.0%
13	6	1.5%
14	8	2.0%
15	4	1.0%
16	10	2.5%
17	2	0.5%
18	2	0.5%
19	5	1.2%
21	1	0.2%
22	1	0.2%
24	1	0.2%
25	1	0.2%
26	2	0.5%
27	1	0.2%
28	3	0.7%
40	2	0.5%
44	2	0.5%
54	2	0.5%
62	1	0.2%
64	3	0.7%
Total	407	100%

However, the evidence from the statistical analyses performed suggests that contacts with youth did not improve outcomes for successful students.

Limitations

Quantitative Data

Data collection was the most serious obstacle to the evaluation of ARRIVE. Several data entry issues continued to be prevalent, which set forth some obstacles (i.e., only providing enrollment/pre-enrollment data, no attendance data, missing data, etc.). There were some variables that were inconsistently entered into JCMS and could not be examined as control variables. In 2015-2016, the Juvenile Justice Institute provided interns to enter data, and extensive individualized training, to fix inconsistencies in reporting for a majority of the programs, and this appears to have been the needed intervention. The FY 2015-2016 data allowed us to calculate 66.4% of the total sample for all programs while the FY 2021-2023 data allowed us to calculate 76% of the total sample for just the ARRIVE program. The program also had a change in personnel the end of 2020.

Qualitative (One-on-One Interview) Sessions

One-on-one sessions provide the opportunity to gain in-depth understanding from several individuals about a specific topic. The strength of this approach rests in being able to follow up on interesting findings at that point in time with participants. As is the case with any research method, there are several challenges that can emerge. First, it is important to note that the willingness of parents to participate in the focus groups varied significantly. Second, there were a few sessions that researchers set up that participants did not attend altogether. Third, in most of the interviews the parents were not very familiar with the activities of the truancy program that their children were a part of. Finally, the researchers were not able to reach the youth population that participated in the program; thus, this serves as a notable limitation of the qualitative component of this evaluation.

Future System Involvement

Successful

A total of N=375 cases had successfully closed cases which allowed us to evaluate future system involvement (i.e., law violation, status offense, probation, and detention). Out of the closed cases, only 2.1% committed a status offense, 1.6% committed a law violation, 0% were sent to probation, and 1.86% were sent to detention. The youth that were FSA were White (68.4%), Male (60.5%) and 15.92 years old on average. Refer to Appendix X for the definition of Future System Involvement.

Table 19. Future System Involvement

2.1%	1.6%	0%	1.9%
Status Offense	Law Violation	Probation	Detention

Unsuccessful

A total of N=20 cases had unsuccessfully closed cases which allowed us to evaluate future system involvement (i.e., law violation, status offense, probation, and detention). Out of the closed cases, only 0% committed a status offense, .05% committed a law violation, 0% were sent to probation, and .05% were sent to detention. The youth that were FSI were White (100%), Male (100%) and 17 years old on average (n=1). Refer to Appendix 1 for the definition of Future System Involvement.

Table 20. Future System Involvement

0%	0.05%	0%	0.05%
Status Offense	Law Violation	Probation	Detention

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this report of youth who participated in the ARRIVE truancy intervention program between FY 21-23, the results were rather promising. First, we employed two Repeated Measures ANOVAs to determine if there were significant mean difference between absences from pre-enrollment and absences from enrollment (decrease -6.27%), as well as the mean difference between absences from enrollment to post-enrollment (increase .60%). It is noteworthy to mention that there was a slight increase from enrollment to post-enrollment, but this should be interpreted with caution given the high eta effect and small sample size in the post-enrollment category. Second, one-on-one interviews (*n*=5) were conducted with parents whose children were participating in the ARRIVE truancy intervention program. However, the qualitative results should be interpreted with caution given the small sample size (<1% of total population, *n*=407).

As we look to improve student attendance in the FY 23-24 school years, this data offers lessons for policy and practice both within the ARRIVE program and beyond.

Strengthen program communication with truant students and their families
Target Parent/Family Communication

One of the greatest gaps identified in the qualitative interviews was the communication between program, students, and their families. This could be due to a myriad of reasons, including support staff capacity and the number of truancy students, which requires on-going intervention and case management. It might be beneficial for the program to focus on set times for communicating with the parents. Another strategy might be to employ creative approaches to engage parents around attendance. They can hold special events on half days or holidays when attendance is usually lower across districts. In addition, the truancy program can send monthly newsletters to parents to highlight upcoming events, strategies to improve attendance, tips to avoid tardiness, and giving positive feedback on students. The program mentioned that they have tried a newsletter in the past and they did not have a high level of people reading the newsletter. Another program in Nebraska offered a meal and daycare, to get families to attend. The program has also offered free parenting classes in the past, however, this initiative garnered very low engagement. One alternative mechanism for engaging parents might be to send mandatory check-in's once a month via text message to see how things are progressing. Finally, it might be beneficial for schools to provide resources for parents lacking family support to ensure regular school attendance during times of instability, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Address changing barriers to attendance

As students get older, the barriers to attendance change. Future research should focus on specific barriers by age group, to better understand the intricacies of school absenteeism in the programs being assessed. It might be beneficial to address the individual needs of youth—as they present on an assessment (the SRAS) would be a best practice approach and likely to yield better outcomes. For instance, determining where and how to target resources that can address common challenges of absenteeism and might help build a local culture of attendance. It is important for schools and communities to start creating various resources to address these common barriers throughout the course a student's time in school.

For instance, the program appears to be making an impact on bullying for successful cases as it pertains to the SRA domain of Stimuli Provoking a Negative Affect (SPNA). The ARRIVE staff noted that mentors and therapy being offered to youth might be driving these positive results. The program also offers incentives to youth to help with Tangible Reinforcement Outside of School (TR). For instance, if a youth wants to stay at home to play video games, the program might offer a gift card for the youth to buy games. In terms of attention seeking behavior (ASB), the program plans to continue therapy and relationship building with teachers and other school personnel for the youth to feel connected with someone other than the parent or caregiver. These are all positive approaches and will need to be assessed in the future for their continued impact.

Maintaining Good Attendance Habits Post-Enrollment

The ARRIVE is having a statistically significant impact on reducing attendance issues while youth are enrolled. After students complete the program, youth attendance issues return, especially around unexcused absences. The ARRIVE Programs may wish to examine ways to maintain student engagement after enrollment. One approach to maintain student engagement might be to incentivize it for the youth. Upon completion, ARRIVE could notify the family that if the youth continue at the same rate of attendance their name could be included in a drawing for a gift card, an iPad, or some other items that is appealing to youth. If incentives are difficult due to resources, ARRIVE could also work with the school to provide a certificate of achievement for any youth who maintains their attendance each semester.

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Appendix 1

Definition of Future System Involvement

To accurately assess post-program law violations across Community-based Aid (CBA) funded programs, the Juvenile Justice Institute and other researchers shall utilize the following uniform definition of future law violations for juveniles who participated in a CBA-funded program.

I. Court Filings

(A) This definition shall apply to both juveniles, and individuals who have aged out of the juvenile justice system:

1. Future System Involvement shall mean that within 1 year following discharge from a CBA-funded program the juvenile has:

(a) been filed on, which has not been dismissed or dropped, for an act that would constitute a felony under the laws of this state, and who, beginning on July 1, 2017, was eleven years of age or older at the time the act was committed.

(b) been filed on, which has not been dismissed or dropped, for an act that would constitute a misdemeanor or an infraction under the laws of this state, or a violation of a city or village ordinance, and who, beginning on July 1, 2017, was eleven years of age or older at the time the act was committed.

(i) Future system involvement shall include minor in possession under Neb. Rev. Statute 53-180.02 and is coded as a law violation.

(ii) Future system involvement shall not include less serious misdemeanors or infractions that do not impact community safety, including animal(s) at large, failure to return library materials, and littering.

(iii) Future system involvement shall not include failure to appear.

(c) been filed on, which has not been dismissed or dropped, for an act that would constitute a status offense to include truancy under Neb. Rev. Statute 43-247(3)(b)(3) or Neb. Rev. Statute 79-201 ("compulsory attendance"), uncontrollable juvenile under Rev. Statute 43-247(3)(b)(2), curfew violations under city or village ordinance, or Tobacco use by a Minor under Neb. Rev. Statute 28-1418.

(i) Although status offenses are included in the definition of future system involvement, status offenses shall be reported separately from law violations.

(d) been filed on, which has not been dismissed or dropped, for an act that would constitute a serious traffic offense to include driving under the influence under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-6, 196 or similar city/village ordinance, leaving the scene of an accident under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-696(A), reckless driving under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-6, 214(A), engaging in speed contest/racing under Neb. Rev. Statute 60-6, 195 (a) or (b) or related city/village ordinance.

(i) Future system involvement shall not include less serious traffic violations that do not impact community safety, including careless driving, failure to yield, failing to stop, speeding, violating learner's permit, driving on suspended license, no valid insurance, no helmet, following too close, failure to display plates.

2. Future law violation shall not include the following:

(a) been filed on and that has not been dismissed or dropped, for an act that would constitute a Games and Parks violation as found in Neb. Rev. Statute Chapter 37

(b) been filed on for being mentally ill and dangerous, under Neb. Rev. Statute 43-247(3)(c) or harmful to self or others under 43-247(3)(b)(2)

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