

“ I have worked with ASAP for the past three years. They provide quick and proactive communication and have done a wonderful job supporting our students and families through identifying barriers to attendance and assisting with creating solutions and connecting to local resources when needed. ”
– Educator
Reading School District

“ The SAM ASAP Program is excellent to work with. Their staff are friendly, consistent, reliable, and very supportive of my family. Over the years, my family has worked with many programs; this one is very involved with not only the parents, but with the student! Thank you SAM for all that you have done for my family. ”
–Parent

“ In you we found a true advocate! Someone unjaded by past experiences that could look at our case for what it is. ”
– Parent




BISA

Berks Initiative For School Attendance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2011-2021 OVERVIEW





BISA

Berks Initiative For School Attendance

HISTORY

In 2011, the Berks County commissioners and judges convened a series of stakeholder meetings to gather input on the problem of truancy in Berks County schools. From these meetings, the Truancy Reduction Initiative was created with a steering committee that included representatives from education, the court system, mental health agencies, Berks County Juvenile Probation Office, and the Berks County Children and Youth Services program. A Truancy Intervention Program was formed which enabled schools, Magisterial District Judges (MDJs), parents, and community partners to refer a student to a more intensive intervention with the goal of improving attendance, decreasing truancy, and increasing graduation rates.

In 2016, the initiative changed its name to the Berks Initiative for School Attendance (BISA) to reflect the goal of improving student attendance in all grades and decreasing absences for any reason. In partnership with Service Access Management (SAM), the Truancy Remediation Program was renamed the Advancing School Attendance Program (ASAP).

GOALS

The main goal of both BISA/ASAP is to improve school attendance throughout Berks County and to decrease the number of students who are chronically absent or truant.

FUNDING

The Berks Initiative for School Attendance/Advancing School Attendance Program is funded through a combination of state and local monies. Due to the continued success of the program, Berks County has been approved to receive this grant since 2012. Because it is categorized as a special grant, the state portion of the grant is 90% and the county portion is only 10% of the total allocation.

MAJOR CHANGES

1

FROM TRUANCY TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The original programs – The Berks County Truancy Initiative and the Truancy Remediation Program – were created to reduce truancy in Berks County. However, following a Federal initiative, the program changed to an emphasis on chronic absenteeism. The goal was to improve attendance at all levels whether the absence was legal or illegal. The program names were changed to Berks Initiative for School Attendance and Advancing School Attendance Program.

2

NEW PA TRUANCY LAW

In 2017, Pennsylvania implemented a major revision in the truancy law that now requires schools to work with parents and students to determine why the student is absent and try to correct the problem before filing truancy citations. BISA revised its protocol to incorporate those changes and trained all Berks County schools and MDJ's to use the new process.

3

COVID-19

Beginning in March 2020, school buildings closed due to COVID-19, and attendance was not kept by the state or many of the schools. In the 2020/2021 school year, instructional models varied across Berks County. Some were in-person, some virtual, or ran a hybrid schedule. School attendance in Berks County and across the nation deteriorated.



ATTENDANCE STATISTICS

2009

~~2010~~

school year

Prior to the start of the Berks County Truancy Reduction Initiative

2017

2018

school year

Statistics from federal government, the latest available in 2021



Comparison of Berks County schools to similar size counties

2nd	5th	7th
highest percent of dropouts (1.89%)	highest percent of habitual truants (6.9%)	lowest daily attendance (ADA) percentage rate (86.5%)

Comparison of schools in Berks County to all of Pennsylvania

	Berks County	All of PA
Low or Modest Chronic Absence	65%	49%
Extreme or High Chronic Absence	5%	22%



CASE STUDY

A fifth grade elementary school student was referred to the ASAP program multiple times. He repeatedly refused to go to school and would not get out of the car when his mother would try dropping him off at school.

The student said he was anxious and did not feel comfortable while in school. An Attendance Specialist assigned to his case helped his mother enroll him into a different school.

Since the transition to his new school, this student has not missed a day. The Attendance Specialist advocated for this student by attending his school meetings and counseling appointments. The specialist's involvement helped in the success of this student's attendance.

GRADUATION STATISTICS

For the five-year cohort in the 2019/20 school year

89.5%

State Average Graduation Rate

Berks County Graduation Rates

17 high schools have a graduation rate of:

90+%

8 high schools have a graduation rate of:

95+%

While **Reading High School** is the only county high school below the state graduation rate, **it has raised its graduation rate from 60% to almost 77%!**

ASAP

Advancing School Attendance Program

Berks County contracts with Service Access and Management (SAM) to provide the Advancing School Attendance Program (ASAP). The program utilizes a case management model to complete assessments and interventions to provide individualized, person-centered, family-focused services with the goal of improving the student's attendance.

STATISTICS

Referrals increased from 181 in 2011-12 to 879 in 2020-21

Staff increased from four to nine members

Referrals come from all 18 Berks County school districts, private / parochial schools, magisterial district judges, and other agencies

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Stephanie Esser | ASAP Director
Advancing School Attendance Program
Service Access Management
610-301-7918 | sesser@sam-inc.org

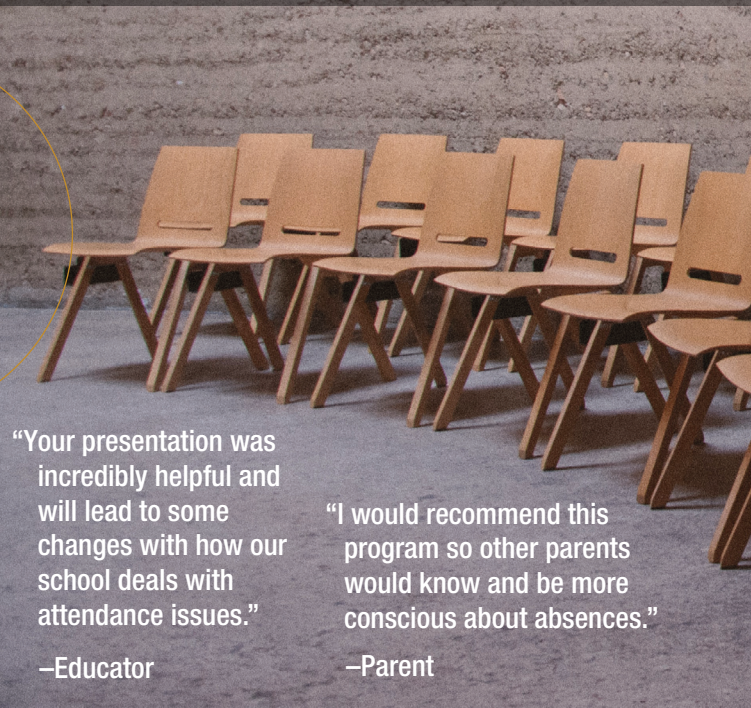
Of the students and families who engaged in the process, **71%** improved their attendance!

BISA

More than 70 training sessions were held for educators, parents, and social services staff on the problem of chronic absenteeism, the importance of school attendance and truancy law and procedures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Dr. Betsy Adams | BISA Coordinator
Berks Initiative for School Attendance
610-488-0744 | BISAb@comcast.net



“Your presentation was incredibly helpful and will lead to some changes with how our school deals with attendance issues.”
—Educator

“I would recommend this program so other parents would know and be more conscious about absences.”
—Parent

Berks Initiative for School Attendance

Advancing School Attendance Program

FUTURE GOALS

1. Continue educating and supporting school districts as they work to reduce chronic absenteeism
2. Continue and increase use of alternative programs: Preparing All Student Superstars (PASS) and the two-hour program seminar held at Reading Area Community College (RACC)
3. Work with entire community to improve attendance especially organizations such as the United Way of Berks County, Olivet Boys and Girls Clubs, local government, religious and community organizations, etc.
4. Implement programs for students on importance of school attendance
5. Assist schools in developing and implementing their own programs to increase attendance

1. Continue success in improving attendance for students referred to the ASAP program
2. Improve rate of cooperation of families so more families referred to ASAP participate in the program
3. Build better partnerships with schools and MDJ's to increase appropriate referrals and improve the cooperation of families