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
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 and Management, Inc. (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 programs 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 followed a hybrid schedule. School attendance in Berks County and across the nation deteriorated.
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.

CASE STUDY

### Executive Summary 2011–2021

#### BISA: Berks Initiative for School Attendance

### ATTENDANCE STATISTICS

#### Comparison of Berks County schools to similar size counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Prior to the start of the Berks County Truancy Reduction Initiative</th>
<th>Statistics from the federal government; the latest available in 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Comparison of Berks County schools to all of Pennsylvania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Berks County</th>
<th>All of PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low or Modest</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Absence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest percent of habitual truants</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th lowest average daily attendance rate (ADA) percentage</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GRADUATION STATISTICS

#### 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, Inc. (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

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

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
BISA Berks Initiative for School Attendance
610-488-0744  |  BISAbalcomcast.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

BISA_ExecutiveReport_Dec2021