

Making Attendance a Priority

Justice Intervention Group Progress and Recommendation Report September 28, 2007

Purpose: To support students and families involved in the court system.

Initial Committee Goals:

1. Review and discuss the appropriateness of the current County Attorney Referral form.
2. Evaluate the referral procedures, and encourage the use of the uniform County Attorney Referral by each school district.
3. Develop strategies and programming options to work with student/families in the court system.
4. Determine effective practices regarding truancy cases in the court system.
5. Bring forward dollar requests for strategies that support students and families involved in the court system.

Three Objectives have evolved during our committee meetings. These objectives incorporate the initial goals. Areas of focus, Committee role, and Next steps and Connection with Bright Futures are summarized below.

Objective: Review the Uniform County Attorney Referral Processes and Forms

Areas of Focus:

- Review the development of the uniform referral form
 - The form was developed in a collaborative effort between all metro-area school districts including the archdiocese, and the Juvenile Douglas County Attorney, to address the various non-standardized types of referrals.
 - The uniform County Attorney Referral Form encompassed all information previously provided by each district.
- Review the effectiveness and procedures for submission of the County Attorney Referral
 - 361 total referrals, representing all school districts, were submitted to the Douglas County Juvenile Attorney's Office during the 2006-2007 school year.
 - The review demonstrated that 29 of 30 referrals submitted to the Juvenile Assessment Center, from the courts, were submitted on the uniform form.
 - Additions to the form were discussed to reflect the race of the student. Decision not to include this information based on making sweeping generalizations.

- Develop protocols for submission of the County Attorney referrals:
 1. The inclusion of teacher reports,
 2. The inclusion of qualitative input to provide a rounded view of the student,
 3. The inclusion of pre-referral steps that were taken by the school/school district, and
 4. A historical attendance pattern and/or family history of involvement with the court system on attendance issues.
- Develop greater understanding with the Sarpy County Juvenile County Attorney and staff regarding the use of the uniform reporting form.

Committee Roles:

- Serve as resources to individual districts for the consistent application and use of the uniform reporting form.
- Advocate for a Learning Community program to identifying truant and high non-attending students for consistent referral to the Juvenile County Attorney prior to ‘habitual’ status being attained.
- Introduce the uniform reporting form to the staff of the Sarpy County Juvenile Attorney’s Office and gather input for additional fields of information that this office may require for implementation onto the form.

Next Steps and *Connections to Bright Futures*

- Search out and identify programs used throughout the nation to address truancy and non-attending youth. *Visit noteworthy programs on site to survey applicability to Douglas and Sarpy County juvenile justice intervention practices, working in collaboration with all school districts located in these counties.*
- Determine interest in the use of a program to be used by all districts *and secure financial support for the development and implementation process.*
- *Implement a Juvenile Assessment Center and Omaha Public Schools cooperative effort to intervene on student absences earlier to determine if earlier intervention can curb referrals to the Douglas County Attorney.*

Comments / Suggestions:

Objective: Develop a position statement regarding current systemic limitations in structures in governmental agencies that assist children and to open the lines of communication to advocate for legislation and governmental rule changes to better address the needs of high-risk truant and non-attending students.

Areas of Focus:

- Examine present legislation that authorizes student release from mandatory attendance laws prior to age 18, and

- Examine present practices implemented in governmental and sub-governmental agencies that limit intervention(s).

Committee Role:

- Invite and chair discussions, both private and public, with leaders in governmental agencies to address present legislation and systemic problems. These agencies may include health (physical and emotional/mental), law enforcement, child welfare (public and private), school districts, state legislative and judicial components.

Next Steps and *Connections to Bright Futures*

- *Invite community, school and governmental leaders to participate in courageous conversations regarding the attendance of students in public and private schools.*
- *Host forums for addressing issues of educational neglect, home schooling exemptions, truancy enforcement and judicial adjudication options.*

Comments / Suggestions:

Objective: Inter-District Communication for the Verification of Enrollment and Notification of Movement of Student Records

Areas of Focus:

- Identify students who withdraw from school and indicate a move to another Douglas or Sarpy County school district.

Committee Role:

- Enhance present communication between school districts
- Develop a tool for communication providing the intention of enrollment into another school district.
- Develop, distribute and in-service the use of the developed form.

Next Steps and *Connections to Bright Futures*

- *The document is in draft form. Encourage school district representatives to review for appropriateness and potential for use. Share the form (computer generated for email compatibility) and implement its' use.*

Comments / Suggestions:

The collegiality of our committee has contributed to developing a working document that is not dependent upon a single entity but embraces each other's strengths and augments

our deficits. We have not promoted a single agency agenda, but have looked towards addressing a community concern for our mutual clients, the children of Douglas and Sarpy Counties.