

Otter Tail Family Services Collaborative

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Truancy Prevention Work Group

9:00 – 10:30 AM February 12, 2010

Otter Tail Operations Center, Ottertail City

Attendance: Julie Carlson (Battle Lake School-35); Shane Thielke (Fergus Falls Schools-66); Travis Hensch (New York Mills School-30); David Hauser (OTC Attorney's Office -66); Brad Vold (OTC Human Services); Connie Wenker & Caryl Gordy (Parkers Prairie Schools-60); Angie Schreder (Perham Schools-48); and Jane Patrick (Collaborative Coordinator).

1. Brad Vold agreed to chair the meeting and welcomed the group. Introductions were made.
2. Brad and Shane shared information about the most recent County Attorney meeting. It was clarified that it is important for problem areas to be specifically included in the school's individual policies in order for it to be enforced by the county attorney's office. Specifically there have been problems with parent excused absences versus unexcused absences. The county must have written verification of absences in order for it to be used in CHIPS petitions related to truancy. The group requested that we try to determine whether or not the Courthouse Meetings have positively impacted attendance for those students involved. Shane said this would be possible for his district. Jane will check with the other districts to see if they can also collect the information.
3. Caryl Gordy reported on updates with elementary attendance at the Parkers Prairie Elementary School. She is currently sending five, eight and ten day absence letters and is receiving some grief from various community members. Caryl reported that her superintendent is supportive of the letters she is sending. Travis reported that he is also sending letters and has had several students move out of the district after receiving them. His superintendent is also supportive of the letters but has requested that letters not be sent to kindergarten students since the compulsory attendance laws do not apply at this age. The group offered support indicating that most or all schools implementing new policies generally receive some throwback from the community.
4. FY10 Work Plan - With respect to Task #1, it appears that New York Mills, Parkers, Perham and Fergus are conducting new tasks. Jane will ask them to send a short description of what the activities they are doing new this year. Underwood, Henning, Battle Lake and Pelican Rapids need to clarify what, if anything, they are doing new at the elementary level to address attendance. The group discussed the offer from the County to host a parent session at the school with parents of elementary age students who are experiencing a high number of absences during the elementary years. Jane encouraged the group to explore this offer in at least one school to see how it works, and we can then decide whether or not the county will offer it again next year.
5. Task #2 – Jane reported that she is still missing information from four schools as to what attendance activities were conducted in the 2008-09 school years. Each of the district

representatives that were missing information agreed to follow-up to collect the needed information. Jane raised the question about whether or not the group would like to keep collecting, reporting and documenting this information next year. The group reached a consensus that they would like to continue doing so because it acts as a subtle reminder to them of various activities they could and should conduct.

6. The group discussed the school attendance policies handout that Jane compiled in response to their request at the last meeting. The group requested that tardy policy information also be included in the documents. Jane will collect and re-circulate this information to each of the schools for their use and information. The group decided that they would like to host a special meeting in June with schools who wish to work together to develop a best practices guideline for attendance policies within their individual schools. This will be included as part of next year's work plan.
7. The group developed their FY11 Work Plan and budget to be presented to the CEO Group on March 1.
 - Draft a best practices school policy guideline including specific guidelines for excused and unexcused absences, acceptable number of days missed and tardy policies. The group will host a meeting on June 10th at 8:30 AM at the Ottertail Operations Center with schools who are interested in working on this guideline. There will be separate planning sessions and guidelines for elementary and middle/high school levels.
 - The group will then host a meeting on August 17th at Noon in Ottertail and will invite each school's attendance clerk to attend. At this meeting they will share information about the group's tool box of strategies to address attendance, and also discuss the guideline developed at the June meeting. The group requested that Nicole Hansen provide a short presentation on the importance of documenting attendance. Each school will be responsible to invite their own staff with a focus on those that document attendance and take the calls from the parents. Budget needs include the cost of lunch for those participating.
 - Jane shared information about a grant proposal submitted by United Way for funding to establish a food disbursement program in each district. The work group agreed to assist with the implementation of a back pack program in each district including efforts to develop programs even if the grant is not funded.
 - Work with school-based mental health staff as needed to share resources and information about truancy tools and strategies which are available.
 - Continue tracking attendance strategies conducted at each school and continue tracking attendance at each school in the county.
8. Opportunity for Collaboration –
 - Include the June truancy meeting as an opportunity for collaboration for those schools that want to review and fine tune individual school policies related to attendance.
9. The meeting was adjourned by consensus. The next meeting will be held on **Thursday, June 10 at 8:30 in Ottertail City. Breakfast will be provided.** Schools and county folks who are interested in reviewing and exploring changes for their individual school policies are encouraged to attend.