

Otter Tail Family Services Collaborative

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Working Together...

Serving Families

... Improving Lives

Truancy Prevention Work Group

8:30- 11:30 AM June 28, 2010

Thumper Pond, Ottertail City

Attendance: Tindy Rund (Fergus Falls Schools-66); Travis Hensch & Blaine Novak (New York Mills School-60); Nicole Hansen (OTC Attorney's Office -66); Connie Wenker (Parkers Prairie Schools-60); Angie Schreder & Julie Vomacka (Perham Schools-48); John Hamann (Underwood School-45); Brian Korf & Sheila Flateau (Pelican Rapids Schools – 75); Thomas Williams (Henning Schools – 35); and Jane Patrick (Collaborative Coordinator).

1. The group began the morning with a breakfast and discussion. Jane reviewed the agenda for the day's activities.
2. Jane shared information about the school food back pack program which is currently in place in the Perham School District and being replicated in the New York Mills. Jane shared a handout projecting approximately how many students might be covered in each elementary school. This information was calculated on approximately one-fourth of the students receiving free lunch. Jane also shared that there is a local non-profit organization in Otter Tail County interested in supporting a back pack program in each school in Otter Tail County. Jane shared information about the volunteers from each community from the CEO and Executive Council that are interested in helping in each community. Volunteers still need to be identified in the Fergus Falls and Battle Lake districts. Jane requested that each school discuss this with their superintendent and make a decision on whether or not they will participate. Each school that is interested will need to identify a primary school liaison to be involved in the program. Jane requested a response from each district by Monday, July 12th as to what their decision is about this program.
3. Jane also shared information about the Minnesota Health Care Program Outreach and Enrollment grant which was received by the Collaborative. At the time the application was made, all of the schools were interested in participating. Otter Tail County Public Health has now received word that the Collaborative has been funded. This grant will pay for staff time in each school district for a person to provide outreach to families that do not have health insurance coverage. Each district was given the allocation included in the grant based on the projected number of students to be identified in each district. These preliminary calculations were again based on the Free and Reduced Lunch numbers from each district. Jane again requested that administrators go back to their superintendents and identify a staff person that can add the allocated number of hours written into the grant to serve in this position. Suggestions for adding this to a staff person included part-time school counselors, para educators, and school health aides. Training will be set up for the identified staff person in each district and their primary responsibilities will include providing outreach and support to families that do not have health insurance coverage but who will likely qualify for Minnesota Health Care Programs. A decision on the designated staff person for each districts needs to be reported to Jane by Monday, July 12th.
4. The group discussed what they hoped to accomplish during today's session with regard to attendance. The following goals were identified:
 - Draft a best practices guideline based on current attendance policies for the individual schools to be specific for high school & elementary attendance including acceptable/unacceptable excuses and number of absences per year.

- Share the best practices guidelines with each school in the county so they can make a decision on how their individual districts will utilize the information.
 - Distribute the best practices guideline to the school attendance clerks so they have something to refer to when making judgment calls about individual student attendance issues.
5. The group broke into small groups and reviewed the individual attendance policies of each school district. Recommendations for the best practice guideline were made and shared with the entire group for approval.
6. The group discussed how to provide preliminary interventions for students who struggled with attendance last year. A request was made for the county attorney's office to send out letters at the start of the school year to students that received letters last year, reminding them of the importance of attendance. Nicole will check with David on this. In addition, the group felt it would be valuable if attendance clerks could pull the names of students who last year had more than the allowable AYP 10% of absences and who would potentially have attendance issues for the new school year.
7. The group identified a list of "tools for success" that they would ideally like to have available. These items included:
- Elementary students rewards for good attendance
 - Stickers
 - Extended or additional recess
 - Opportunities for increased physical exercise
 - Outstanding Attendance awards for all students with fewer than 3 absences during the school year
 - High school rewards for good attendance
 - Weekly or monthly drawings for lunch passes, free food, movie passes, etc.
 - Drawing for "open lunch" passes
 - Countywide Fitness Day
8. Based on the results of the planning meeting, the group developed their agenda for the August 17th Attendance Clerk luncheon. Items to be covered will include:
- Overview of Truancy Work Group, county wide initiatives and attendance reports
 - Overview of tools, resources, forms, etc. – one complete set to be provided to each person in charge of attendance
 - Information sharing by County Attorney's Office for laws pertaining to attendance, legally required documentation, process for making referrals for letters; clarification on excused vs. unexcused for suspensions
 - Information sharing by OTC Human Services for truancy related referrals
 - New school year strategies:
 - Review of attendance improvement strategies
 - Review of attendance clerk reporting requirements
 - Overview of letters going out to students who received letters last year from County Attorney
 - Request to identify students with poor attendance last year based on AYP requirements
 - Review of Best Practice Guidelines
 - Small group discussions for individual schools elementary/high school staff
 - Large group sharing of ideas, thoughts, concerns
 - Question & Answers
9. The meeting was adjourned by consensus. The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday, August 17th. Each school is reminded to be sure their attendance staff are in attendance at this meeting.** The meeting will be held at the Ottertail Operations Center in Ottertail City.