

Otter Tail Family Services Collaborative

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Working Together...

Serving Families

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Truancy Prevention Work Group

9-11 AM December 8, 2011

Kenney Secondary School, Fergus Falls

Attendance: Pete Remboldt (Ashby School – 50); Ken Gagner (Battle Lake School- 34); Tindy Rund, Kristin Tuel, Amy Campbell, Jon Harris and Shane Thielke (Fergus Falls Schools); Carey Johnson & Travis (Parkers Prairie Schools-130); Angie Schreder (Perham Schools-75); Brian Korf (Pelican Rapids Schools – 34); Tamra Jokela (OTC Human Services – 66); Nicole Hansen (OTC Attorney’s Office-3); Joannie Gontarek (OTC Probation-3); and Jane Patrick (Collaborative Coordinator).

1. Jane Patrick began the meeting and welcomed the group.
2. Updates from partners:
 - Parkers Prairie – some students are leaving/going to ALCs, etc., when pushed on attendance.
 - Perham- loves the new process. It is going well and making a difference on attendance.
 - Fergus Falls – lots of meetings with students happening; they are experiencing tardy issues, especially at the elementary level; the new attendance person is helping to engage parents in discussions about attendance and is reaching more students earlier.
 - Ashby – sent out more letters and have been using the materials but are getting calls from angry parents.
 - Battle Lake reported that their attendance is way up. They have only sent out one letter so far this year. Ken is making more calls with the additional support staff time to keep track of who needs calling, etc.
 - Nicole reported that Marie is doing a great job of coordinating meetings and letters. The schools are very pleased with the quick turn around and response time. The group discussed using a student contract as part of the truancy meetings at the courthouse. Nicole will revamp one of the existing forms and implement it into the meetings. Consequences for lack of follow through should be included in the contract. The group discussed the fact that only students who may “truly benefit” from the meetings should be invited. It is waste of time to bring students, parents and schools to the meetings if it is pretty likely the student will drop out anyway. Ticketing parents might also be a good “last resort” to improving attendance issues for elementary students.
 - Tamra Jokela shared that lots of letters have been sent out and copied to her at Human Services. Some of these are the letters being sent directly from school, and not the ones sent by the County Attorney’s office. There is no need for schools to copy Tamra on the letters they send and these should just be kept in the student’s file at the school for future reference as needed on truancy actions.
 - Joannie noted that the school and county partners need to remember to notify probation officers if their students are skipping school. They want and need to be notified of this so they can follow through with consequences from the Probation side of things.
3. Jane shared a collection of data that has been compiled to date including:
 - SY 2010-11 Attendance Clerk Summary report

- This report shows that cumulative absences are down slightly from 10.62 to 10.13 per student. The group reported that they felt the majority of these absences are caused by a handful of students and that most students are not gone 10 or more days in a single school year. The group would like to take out the absences for the “top 10” list of kids from last year and see what the average is for the remaining/majority of the student body.
 - Approximately 10% of all absences are unexcused/unverified. This is down from 12% in the previous year. This data is showing a positive trend in that more parents are calling in or sending notes pertaining to absences.
 - Overall absences are down however, student enrollment numbers have also declined from 8,528 in 2002-03 to a current number of 7,283 documenting the overall decline in students and explaining the significant decline.
 - Absences were separated by grade level and school district. Principals were asked to review and verify these numbers to be sure they appear accurate.
- Baseline and current data has been collected from all districts for attendance and graduation rates for the past five years. The overall average for both at the present time is 95% of students are graduating and coincidentally schools are also reporting average daily attendance at 95%.
 - Data collected year-to-date for the “top 10 student” list was reviewed. There were several challenges identified within the reporting including the fact that elementary schools do not report letter grades. Therefore, elementary grades will be removed from the compilation. Letter grades will be reported in 4.0 scale for grades 7 – 12.
 - The group discussed the best ways to document their successes and determined the following:
 - The group would like to use the data showing an improvement in excused versus unexcused documenting an improvement in parents reporting attendance.
 - Total interventions as reported from the spreadsheet will show baseline data for this year.
 - Each district will write a short narrative documenting the successes of their increased attendance.
 - Attendance clerks may choose to report on the number of letters sent directly from the school but this will NOT be required as part of this grant.
 - Schools will pull attendance data on the students that receive letters from the county attorney’s office to see if the letters make a difference in attendance.
4. The group reviewed and suggested changes to the student and teacher surveys. Students will be given the surveys when the complete detention for skipping school. Administrators will forward the Survey Monkey link to teachers to complete.
 5. The group briefly discussed the backpack program. Most schools have now implemented backpack food for some middle and high school students. United Way has indicated that a brief student/parent/teacher survey will be coming out soon. Each school will need to get this survey out and return the results to Jane.
 6. The meeting was adjourned by consensus. The next meeting of the work group was changed to **Thursday, December 8th from 9 – 11 a.m.** at the Otter Community Room at the Kennedy Secondary School in Fergus Falls. Shane will make the room reservations and arrange for refreshments for this meeting.