

Western Citizen Review Panel
Minutes of the Meeting
September 12, 2008

Attendance:

Dennis Walczyk
Danny Sklarski
Augusta Welsh

Stefan Perkowski
Ellen Kennedy

Lourdes Iglesias
Paula Mazur

OCFS: Terry Palumbo
SCAA: Diane Mastin

Handouts:

Agenda

State Department of Education web page on Attendance

2008 Child Welfare Legislation update

Governor's Press Release: Governor Paterson Announces Agreement with Legislature to Enact an over \$1 billion, two-year savings plan at Special Economic Session

OCFS Budget Cut Information

OCFS FAR letter of September 9th to local Commissioners

Draft Letter and information regarding Fostering Connections to Success Act

NYS CRP 2008 Report and Recommendations Content Suggestions and Timeline

NYS CRP 2008 Recommendations Working Document

Minutes from the June 13th meeting

CRP Travel Claim

Hotel information for joint panel meeting.

Article: *Evaluating Children's Advocacy Centers' Response to Child Sexual Abuse*, *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, August, 2008, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/offdp

Present, Engaged, and Counted for: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades. The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades, National Center for Children in Poverty, Hedy N. Chang and Mariajose Robero, Sept. 2008

The meeting began with a welcome and introduction of new panel member, Lourdes Iglesias. Panel members then discussed the input they received from Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Directors of Social Services in the 17 county region of the Western Panel. All agreed that the meeting was very productive. Panel members look forward to collaborative efforts to change policy.

Concerns about staffing were prominent. As an example, Erie County is staffed at 53% and now hires new employees at 39 hours per week to achieve savings in benefits offered. In another county, an inordinate amount of time is spent by caseworkers just locating family members. Panel members expressed their concerns for minority populations, training of mandated reporters to increase their understanding of what constitutes reasonable suspicion and what to report to the SCR, and the need to educate county executives and legislators about child welfare as a priority for their budgets.

OCFS is drafting a module for their training that includes critical thinking skills to be used in training of civil servants, not mandated reporters.

Panel members then discussed their conversations with school district personnel on the reporting of child maltreatment by schools. Their discussion centered on the lack of consistency across schools in the same district as well as across districts, lack of tracking such reports and their outcomes, and the difficulty when a person other than the one who has directly observed a concern about a child makes the report. Sometimes, schools are identified as the reporter of a case which can lead to repercussions. This can lead to some reluctance to make reports when required. Special considerations and difficulties occur when school districts are in another county than the department of social services and when a case involves someone located on an Indian reservation.

Panel members agree that the partnership that used to exist between a police officers, school attendance officers, and child welfare workers has been dismantled over time. School districts no longer have attendance (truancy) officers. In addition, State Department of Education honors schools districts home rule and therefore does not provide guidance or model protocols that lead to consistency across the state. State Department of Education has yet to approve a model protocol for reporting as required by law.

Panel members received an update from Jamie Greenberg, OCFS, regarding implementation of the Family Assessment Response (FAR) in six counties in New York. Three will begin implementation in November and three in January. In addition, six other counties have now expressed interest and representatives from those counties will attend an upcoming conference in Ohio to learn more about the response. There is a great deal of variance among the counties in terms of the populations each will serve with FAR, the types of cases to be offered this response, and their plans for implementation. Each county's proposal is available on the OCFS web site. The Marguerite Casey Foundation is offering some financial support to counties for wrap around services. The American Humane Association will offer individualized training. Additional funding would be helpful towards implementation and evaluation.

Panel members received updates on federal legislation, the Children's Cabinet and Advisory Board and former NYC panel member Eric Brettschneider's work on system reform for OCFS. Members would also like to have representatives from counties in their region who are implementing FAR to attend a future panel meeting.

The remainder of the discussion centered on possible panel recommendations for this year's report. Panel members approved the content for the report as presented.