

Western Citizen Review Panel
Minutes of the Meeting
September 21, 2007

Attendees:

James A. Vazzana
Augusta Welsh

Ellen Kennedy
Danny Sklarski

Dennis Wittman

OCFS Staff: Renee Rider
SCAA Staff: Diane Mastin

Linda Brown

Gwen Bennett

Guest: Carl Friedman, Associate in Planning and Evaluation, Office of Student Support Services, New York State Department of Education (by phone)

Handouts:

Meeting Agenda

Communication from two parents to the panel

2007 Commissioner's Survey Report

Chart: Child Fatality Reports

Chart: 2007 Child Welfare Legislation

Kentucky CRP Evaluation Report

Press Release: Governor Spitzer Announces First Program in Nation To Provide Supportive Services Exclusively to Children in Foster Care with Serious Disabilities.

2008-09 Executive Budget Call Letter

Articles:

Creating a Village to Foster a Child, The New York Times, 8/16/07

Joint Panel meeting materials:

Draft Agenda

Timeline and Draft Content Suggestions

Working Document for 2007 Recommendations

Minutes from the May 18th meeting

Articles:

Examining the Disproportionate Representation of Children of Color in the Child Welfare System
The Race + Child Welfare Project, Center for the Study of Social Policy

Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update, Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in the Child Welfare System.

Places to Watch, Promising Practices to Address Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare, The Center for the Study of Social Policy.

The meeting began with introductions and a review of OCFS Response to the panel's recommendations. Panel members received an update on Differential Response legislation. Six counties in the state have expressed interest in offering what OCFS will now call a Family Assessment Response. They include: Erie, Chautauqua, Westchester, Onondaga, Tompkins, and Albany. OCFS may send a state team to a November conference on Differential Response. OCFS also plans to contract with David Thompson a national expert on the issue. Panel members suggested a need for a rural model to use in NYS. SCAA staff gave an overview of the Commissioner's Survey Report for the panel, directing the panel to the last two pages of the report for specific comments from Commissioners with input towards this year's recommendations.

Panel members then heard from Carl Friedman, State Department of Education. He gave an overview of his department and work on attendance issues with school districts across NYS. His department used to be called the Bureau of Guidance, part of the division dealing with all pupil personnel areas. When he joined the department, there were 13 people staffing it. They are now down to 3 (one guidance, one attendance, and one social worker) and their priorities have shifted. They now work with professional organizations and have taken on all work having to do with discipline. They also do grants management for the 21st Century funds. There are approximately 12 others in the unit who work in the area of health services, violence reduction, the risk behavior survey, and data collection. They have centers around the state with whom they have contracted. As part of their anti-violence work, they are moving towards an emphasis on social skills development.

Allegations of abuse have been associated with PPS for a long time. Schools must decide when an attendance problem rises to an educational neglect report. If a school believes that a parent is the reason for a child not getting to school, the school will call in a report to the SCR. If the parent is doing what he/she can do to get a child to school, the school may then file a PINS case. There are three instances with which school districts address: when the school district believes a parent is being abusive or neglected, when parents think the school is being neglectful and when a mandated reporter thinks something has taken place and calls in a report.

In response to several questions, Mr. Friedman stated that there is no one definition of educational neglect used by the schools and there is no singular protocol in place. He stated that there is a great deal of variation across the state in terms of how Family Court decides these issues, making uniform protocols difficult. In response to a question about SED protocols covering private and parochial schools he indicated that there is also no review of individual school districts plans by SED. The only requirement is that they have a plan in place. He indicated that parents enter into a contract with a private or parochial school district and therefore do not have the same recourse under education law as those parents who enter their children into public schools. He also stated his willingness to work with OCFS to provide uniform protocols but stated that a lack of manpower could be an issue in getting the work done. He also indicated that he was unaware of data reaching SED from the truancy courts that exist in Buffalo.

Panel members continued to discuss educational neglect issues after the phone call ended. Teachers are trained as mandated reporters using OCFS curriculum. Panel members suggested that they could make a recommendation asking legislators for a shift in priorities or for SED to integrate practices with other state agencies. Approximately 60% of calls that come in from the SCR in Region 1 are educational neglect cases. Panel members agreed to devote a 2008 meeting to continue to talk about educational neglect issues.

Panel members discussed information in their packets regarding two complaints for the panel's attention brought by parents who have a case with a local department of social services. Panel members agreed to table the agenda item until their next meeting at which time they will address any systemic issues the complaints highlight.

Panel members were given specific information and reading materials regarding the joint panel meeting on Oct. 18, 2007. Panel members requested an opportunity to participate by phone conference call for the joint panel meeting.