

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



Public Oversight Roundtable on
Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and
the Implementation of Reform Activities

Testimony of
Joseph Osiecki
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Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
and
Committee on Education
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairperson

Council of the District of Columbia
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Room 412
John A. Wilson Building,
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairperson Grosso, Councilmembers, and staff. I am Joseph Osiecki, Supervisor of the Educational Neglect Triage Unit at the Child and Family Services Agency. I appreciate the opportunity to provide an update regarding CFSA's activities around addressing chronic absenteeism and supporting D.C. public and charter schools in improving school attendance.

CFSA's role

In 2013, CFSA implemented a specialized extension of the District's hotline for reporting child abuse and neglect with the sole purpose of partnering with D.C. schools. CFSA's Educational Neglect Triage Unit is responsible for processing all educational neglect reports from D.C. public schools (DCPS), public charter schools (DCPCS), and all other D.C. schools. The Triage Unit processes, screens, and gathers additional information on reports of educational neglect to determine whether a child welfare response is warranted. In addition to processing reports, the Triage Unit can connect schools and families during the triaging process to schedule meetings and create attendance plans. We also collect and share necessary information with the reporting school.

Collaborative Partnership with DCPS and PCSB

The collaboration and communication between CFSA and D.C. schools is continuously improving. The Triage Unit acts as a resource for school officials, social workers, and attendance counselors. Schools use my team to provide technical support, referral status updates, answers to questions, and clinical consultations regarding educational neglect and other attendance issues. Every summer, the Triage Unit completes visits to nearly all D.C. public and charter schools to identify contact persons who will be responsible for submitting educational neglect referrals. The purpose of this visit is to ensure that people are familiar with the reporting process and understand CFSA's role in attendance issues.

CFSA Educational Neglect Referral Data

School Year 2016-2017

- In SY 2016-2017, CFSA received 3,347 reports of educational neglect. Of these, 3,133 represented children ages five to 13.
- Of the 3,133 reports, we accepted 1,032 for a child welfare response. We responded to 939 reports through the family assessment pathway and 93 through the investigations pathway.
- Of the educational neglect reports CFSA received during SY 2016-2017, 60 percent came from DCPS, 34 percent from the public charter schools, and the remaining 6 percent from other sources.

School Year 2017-2018

- As of April 6, 2018, CFSA has received 2,651 reports of educational neglect in SY 2017-2018. Of these, 2,353 represented children ages five to 13.
- Of the 2,353 reports, we accepted 930 referrals for a child welfare response. We responded to 724 via family assessment and 206 via an investigation.
- Of the educational neglect reports CFSA received during SY 2017-2018, 44 percent came from DCPS, 31 percent from the public charter schools, and the remaining 25 percent from other sources.

Trends and Services

Based on CFSA past case reviews and involvement in years of educational neglect assessment and investigations, educational neglect stems from a variety of factors. We frequently see families who are overwhelmed with numerous issues so that they struggle to give school attendance the priority it deserves. Prominent among these issues are: homelessness, behavior issues, untreated mental health issues, special educational needs, bullying, neighborhood violence, parent or child medical concerns, lack of parental supervision, and substance use. Families are typically dealing with a combination of these factors, and all can present significant barriers to getting children to school regularly and on time. CFSA will continue to work alongside our sister agencies and schools to best serve students and families in our efforts to improve school attendance and address chronic absenteeism.

Conclusion

CFSA appreciates your interest and oversight on this important issue, and we look forward to strengthening our partnerships across systems to gain better results for children and families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.