

Student Attendance and School Climate Protocol Meeting Minutes

November 15, 2021

Honorable Judge McBride, Chief Judge of Superior Court, called the meeting to order. Judge McBride welcomed everyone in attendance. This Student Attendance and School Climate Protocol Meeting was held virtually via Zoom to ensure proper social distancing and safety protocols were followed.

Approval of the minutes:

The Student Protocol Committee reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting on May 7, 2021. Judge McBride asked for a motion to accept the minutes. Chief Greg Arp, Muscogee County School District Police Department, made a motion to accept the minutes; Ginny Jones, Muscogee County School District School Social Worker, seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as written.

Old Business:

- **Student Attendance Data and Attendance Support Services**

School Social Worker Jeannelle Bryan began the meeting by acknowledging that Covid-19 has made this an interesting year and has impacted all of our lives. Ms. Bryan compared the attendance data from the school year 19-20 and the school year 20-21. Ms. Bryan acknowledged that there had been some changes in attendance. Parents and students were given a choice model this year. Students could either choose to be virtual students or attend in person. The schools with more virtual learners have had a more significant decline in attendance. Some reasons are that students have been left home alone, have been disengaged from the classroom setting, and have had computer-related challenges. As we looked at the attendance data for middle school, Ms. Bryan noted that statistically 1 in 3 students in the school setting deal with anxiety and depression. Covid-19 has created a variety of mental health challenges. Ms. Bryan also reviewed the attendance data for high school. Ms. Bryant stated that ninth grade is a transitional year. More efforts and supports are offered to the ninth graders to have a continuum of support. Ms. Bryan also discussed a variety of attendance supports that have been put in place to increase attendance. Some of them include the following: the Muscogee County Attendance Panel, Attendance Count spearheaded by Dr. Vickers-Ward, a community laundry service, an attendance incentive program at Spencer High School, psycho-educational groups in various schools, and the Truancy Intervention Project (TIP). TIP has been in existence for over twenty years and was reinstated in Muscogee County this school year. Each student in the program is assigned a mentor. TIP mentors are local attorneys from the community. There were five students serviced by the family this year.

- **School Climate: Building a Culture of Mental WEalth and Kindness**

Dr. Nelson explained to attendance protocol that building a mental wealth and kindness culture is important to the Muscogee County School District. Dr. Nelson went over some of the school climate interventions. Some of the interventions include individual/family counseling sessions, group counseling sessions, consultations with parents, staff, and community agencies, classroom core counseling lessons, and referrals to DFCS. Dr. Nelson stressed that Muscogee County is involved in many efforts to promote mental wealth and kindness. Some of the examples include the following: Bully Prevention Program, Character Education, Words of Affirmation Program, Social Emotional Learning Curriculum, school-based

health centers, district-wide brain breaks, care team, wellness rooms, Great Kindness Challenge, and Children's Mental Health Week. Dr. Nelson highlighted the Muscogee County School District's mental health week: Mental Wealth is for everyone. She encouraged the participants to take part in some of these activities throughout the week.

- The Impact of Positive School Climate

Mr. Kevin Aviles, Muscogee County School District, gave his life story of how the positive school climate affected him in his time in school and how it shaped him to become a school principal. Mr. Aviles states that education looks different now- we look at the whole child. Mr. Aviles states that there was physical, sexual, and verbal abuse in his home while growing up. The school was a way to get away from all of those things. His family experienced poverty and was homeless at times. Mr. Aviles hated Fridays because school was out, and he knew he would not have food on the weekend. When he was in the ninth grade, his dad went to prison. His dad was nineteen years old. Mr. Aviles wanted to quit school. However, the relationships with his English teacher and coaches kept him coming to school. The relationships had meaning and value. He felt the positive impacts from the teachers that invested in him. Mr. Aviles has been in education for 23 years. Mr. Aviles' philosophy as a school principal is to love the kid, then teach them what they are: a student.

New Business:

- Student Attendance Data and Truancy Intervention Program

Ms. Jeannelle Bryan, MCSD School Social Worker, began by discussing the student attendance data. Ms. Bryan compared the average daily attendance by grade level from August 2020-October 2020 and August 2021-October 2021. The average daily attendance increased in the following grade levels: KK, 1st, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th during the August 2021-October 2021 time frame. Ms. Bryan also compared the average daily attendance between elementary, middle, and high school. The elementary average daily attendance was stagnant at 94.67% compared to 94.64%. The middle school average daily attendance increased from 92.45% to 93.60%, and the high school average daily attendance dipped slightly from 92.30% to 92.14%. Ms. Bryan also discussed the progress of the Truancy Intervention Program (TIP). TIP provides positive early intervention for children identified with excessive school absences. TIP has 3 primary goals: (1) to reduce the number of days children are absent from school, (2) to reduce delinquency behaviors at school, and (3) to identify barriers to school attendance. Mentoring can help improve educational performance and behavior, which improves a child's chances of being successful in school. Success in school can redirect a child toward a more positive and constructive future. So far five Muscogee County families have been linked with mentors. Attorney David Rayfield spoke about his experience as a TIP mentor. Mr. Rayfield said this experience has been frustratingly rewarding. He has helped identify barriers to the educational success of his student. He has been able to work with School Social Worker, Shannon Floyd to remove these barriers. He states his student's attendance is improving. Mr. Rayfield is looking forward to what his student will accomplish in the future.

- MCSD Graduation Rate

Mrs. Selena Walker-Banks, MCSD Graduation Coach, reviewed the current MCSD graduation rate. The graduation rate for the 2020-2021 school year was 91.2%. The graduation rate for the State of Georgia was 83.7%. The graduation rate is based on the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class.

- Muscogee County Attendance Panel (MCAP)

Mrs. Tonya Lindsey, MCSD Social Worker, gave an overview of MCAP. MCAP, an ongoing community effort to address school attendance, serves as an interagency resource and problem-solving body to reduce chronic unexcused absences, tardiness, and high school dropout rate. MCAP meets once a month to discuss truancy cases. Mrs. Lindsey also went over all of the members and agencies that take part in MCAP. For the 20-21 school year, MCAP received 50 referrals. Various referrals were made through MCAP to assist families. Some of the referrals included The Boys and Girls Club, Municipal Court, New Horizons Behavioral Health, and Twin Cedars Youth and Family Services.

- Behavioral Emotional Screening System (BESS)

Ms. Courtney Lamar, MCSD Mental Health Coordinator, discussed how Muscogee County School District utilizes the BESS. The BESS was developed by Randy Kamphaus, PhD. and Cecil Reynolds, PhD. The BESS includes teacher, student, and parent forms with 20-30 statements. The questions are answered with responses of Never (0), Sometimes (1), Often (2), and Almost Always (3). If a student score 60 or lower, the classification is a normal risk (green). If a student scores 61 to 70, the classification is elevated risk (yellow). If a student score 71 or higher, the classification is an extremely elevated risk (red). The district uses the results of this screener to help students. Behavioral characteristics screened include: (1) Externalizing Behaviors (e.g. hyperactivity and aggression), (2) Internalizing Behaviors (e.g. anxiety and depression), and (3) Adaptive Skills (e.g. functional communication and social skills).

General Remarks:

Judge McBride stated that attendance numbers are lower across the circuit. We are all working to continue to make progress amid COVID 19 shutdowns. Judge McBride was encouraged with the increase in the graduation rate. He also acknowledged all of the stakeholders and thanked them for their commitment to education. He also encouraged all of us to keep up with work as we dig out of the holes COVID created. The next meeting will be held in Spring 2022. Judge McBride adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting: Spring 2022