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Government of the District of Columbia



Child and Family Services Agency

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Testimony of  
**Brenda Donald**  
Director

***Joint Public Oversight Hearing***  
***“Truancy Reduction in the D.C. Public School System”***

Council of the District of Columbia  
Phil Mendelson, Chairman, Committee of the Whole  
David Catania, Chairperson, Committee on Education

June 24, 2013

John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW • Room 412  
Washington, DC 20510-6250  
1:00pm

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Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Catania, and Councilmembers. I am Brenda Donald, director of the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). I appreciate the opportunity to update you on the number of educational neglect referrals CFSA has received for school year 2012 and 2013 and to highlight our strategies in addressing educational neglect referrals both internally and through our collaboration with the DC Public Schools (DCPS) and the Public Charter School Board (PCSB).

### **CFSA Educational Neglect Referrals**

In SY 2012-13, CFSA accepted 2,246 reports of educational neglect for investigations involving 2,630 children. Of these reports, we substantiated 244 representing 398 children. We removed 16 children stemming from 11 referrals.

In SY 2011-12, CFSA accepted 1,493 reports of educational neglect for investigations involving 1,781 children. Of these reports, we substantiated 344 representing 544 children. We removed 23 children as a result of these investigations.

Of the educational neglect reports CFSA received during SY 2012-13, 68 percent came from DCPS, 21 percent from the public charter schools, and the remaining 11 percent came from other sources.

During SY 2011-12, 54 percent came from DCPS, 18 percent from public charter schools, and the remaining 28 percent came from other sources.

CFSA meets with DCPS and PCSB monthly on data sharing and referral reconciliation.

### **Trends**

Starting in February 2013 to date, CFSA is reviewing reports of educational neglect that we substantiate to identify underlying reasons. We are finding that educational neglect is a flag for a host of issues. We are seeing the following themes:

- Caretaker history of mental health issues.
- Children with behavioral issues (e.g. stealing) and the parent keeps the child out of school as punishment.
- Domestic violence.
- Children have excessive absences from school due to illness and parents don't provide formal medical slips from a doctor to support the absences.
- Caretakers show no interest in the children's education, resulting in frequent absences from school and poor academic performance.
- Lack of uniforms for the children.
- Caretakers' erratic work schedules undermine children getting to school on time.

A common thread among the investigations was a history with CFSA and previous substantiations for physical abuse and/or neglect- lack of supervision. Of note, one of the caretakers was formally in foster care due to abuse. Several investigations found issues of chronic absence where the caretaker fabricated a health issue and sickness of the child. Another investigation found chronic

absences due to accumulated tardiness reports. Several investigations involved domestic violence and suspicion of substance abuse by the parent.

### **CFSA Strategies to Address Reports**

CFSA knows through our initial case reviews that underlying factors, ranging from specific needs to more severe factors, within the family contribute to truancy. We are encouraged by the District's focus on truancy prevention and see this as an opportunity for systemic change in enhancing the lives of children. We are currently working on this effort by identifying and planning for barriers and using prevention and intervention activities.

We appreciate the Council's interest and oversight on this important issue, and we look forward to working with you to get better results. Thank you.

## CFSA Educational Neglect Referral Summaries

August 14, 2012-June 18, 2013

### SY2012-2013 Educational Neglect Child(ren)

SY2012-2013	Count
Referrals	2,246
Children represented in the referral count	2,630

### SY2012-2013 -Reporting Source (s):

Status	Children Count	Percentage
DCPS	1,793	68%
PCS	563	21%
Other <sup>1</sup>	274	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,630</b>	<b>100%</b>

### SY2012-2013 – Disposition from CPS Closed Investigations:

Status/Disposition	Referral Count	Percentage	Child(ren) Count	Percentage
Substantiated	244	27%	398	35%
Unfounded	554	62%	642	56%
Inconclusive	26	3%	31	3%
Incomplete	72	8%	78	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,149</b>	<b>100%</b>

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<sup>1</sup> This count includes reporting sources other than schools (i.e., government agency, neighbors, friend, and law enforcement). This count also includes private.

**Of the 63 investigations reviewed, 35 families are represented  
Substantiation/Unfounded Investigation Issues Quantified<sup>2</sup> : February 2013-May 2013**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Support System to get Children to School	3	8%
Housing Conditions	3	8%
Uniforms	10	26%
Medical/Health Related Issues	2	5%
Parent mental health issues	1	3%
Special Needs Child	1	3%
Parent work schedule	3	8%
Behavior Issues	2	5%
Transportation	2	5%
Lack of School Cooperation	2	3%
Homelessness	1	3%
Issues of Chronic/Excessive Absence w/o cause	4	11%
Delayed Immunizations	1	3%
Excessive Absences due to illness w/o medical slip	3	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Substantiation/Unfounded Investigation Recommendation Quantified: February 2013 – May 2013**

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Referral to Collaborative <sup>3</sup>	6	19%
Counseling Services	6	19%
Housing Support <sup>4</sup>	5	16%
Mental Health Services/Assessment	5	16%
Transportation Voucher	1	3%
Testing (Paternity/Drug)	1	3%
Immunizations	1	3%
Support with Attendance	3	10%
Financial Management	3	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>2</sup> Underlying issues and recommendation are not mutually exclusive

<sup>3</sup> Employment, Grief Counseling, Housing Services

<sup>4</sup> Inclusive of equipment assistance