

Meeting Minutes
CT Kid's Report Card Chronic Absenteeism Strategic Action Group (CA SAG)
December 3, 2015 Meeting
9:00AM Room 2B of the LOB

1. Welcome and Introductions
 - a. The meeting was convened at 9:00AM
 - b. Co-Chair Charlene Russell-Tucker began by stating the purpose of the CA SAG and its relationship with the CT Kid's Report Card. She explained that the purpose for showcasing four model programs is to further understand how the state is working to turn the curve on chronic absenteeism in order to better align, coordinate, and connect the work across the state.
2. Showcase of Model Programs to Reduce Chronic Absence
 - a. Waterbury Regional Children's Probate Court/Tuancy Clinic by Judge Brunnock
 - i. Judge Thomas Brunnock provided remarks regarding the history and establishment of the Tuancy Clinic in Waterbury as well as its mission statement. He emphasized he has been involved with the clinic for seven years and has produced a number of reports. He indicated that this program is a voluntary, non-judicial program. Parents meet with their team to discuss the layers behind their child's truancy and chronic absenteeism. Judge Brunnock's role in this process is to act as a facilitator to identify issues for the families and the school system. When necessary, a nurse from Yale New Haven provides bilingual health education services. Judge Brunnock went on to discuss the mental health issues and the efforts DCF has taken to assist their program, noting that roughly 50% of the youth engaged/involved currently or were previously involved with DCF. He indicated one reform undertaken since the program began was to install a full time social worker in every school in Waterbury. Another common issue is transportation, particularly during the winter for youth who are required to walk through neighborhoods with poorly maintained sidewalks. Finally, Judge Brunnock discussed those youths, who are truant due to neglectful parenting who are least likely to engage, and that these youth often drop out in high school.
 - ii. Joe Vaverchak asked how long the meetings usually are and who is present. Judge Brunnock replied that the meetings can last up to an hour and that he is in the room as facilitator, as well as appropriate staff from the school: principals, administrators, and social workers. Joe Vaverchak asked if teachers are included. Judge Brunnock responded that they are, but usually not in the first meeting. He went on to discuss the forms that are provided when the family chooses to enroll in the program, stating they are a disclosure form to allow the exchange information between this program and the school and another form is a participation agreement form.
 - iii. Erica Bromely asked the average age of the clients in this program. Judge Brunnock responded the children they work with are strictly elementary school. They would like to consider developing a follow-through program in the middle schools, but issues with staffing are a primary concern.
 - iv. Emily Rorke asked long they work with a family. Judge Brunnock responded the program lasts one year.
 - v. Katheryn Meyer asked who provides case management. Judge Brunnock responded that he used to do it himself, but recently the work had become overwhelming so the school provided him the funds to hire an assistant to handle case management.
 - b. Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance by Valerie LaMotte, Office of Policy and Management (OPM)
 - i. Valerie LaMotte provided a presentation on the Connecticut Consortium of School Attendance and its historic relationship with the judicial department, truancy prevention initiatives, Families with Service Needs programs, and general court referral programs. She explained that the consortium receives grants from OPM, which they use to conduct meetings and trainings across the districts, and collect the student attendance data to share on a consortium-wide basis, broken down by district, school, grade, District Reference Group (DRG), special populations, consortium total, etc. She then discussed issues that arose including ensuring programs had enough participants to make the data meaningful, maximizing the use of dollars beyond the highest-risk children, and the focus on 8th and 9th grade youths when studies have shown earlier interventions have a greater likelihood of establishing long-term improvements. Valerie LaMotte then discussed funding provided to the New Britain kindergarten program that was then made into a consortium-wide project those districts could apply for funds to implement. She noted the initial difficulty in replicating the model exactly when some districts only had the population to implement it in one school versus larger towns and cities with multiple schools. Right now there are 10 school districts working on this program and OPM is evaluating the data, which will be reported on next year. Valerie LaMotte provided information on all the districts currently in the consortium and the process that a district would have to go through to become a member. She then discussed the data they have collected. The overall trend of which has remained flat or gone down in the past seven reporting periods. She concluded her presentation by providing a series of recommendations: student attendance as a higher priority for funding, attendance targets, more data driven planning processes in local districts, and establishing training/technical assistance for these processes.
 - ii. Chris Leone asked what occurred to make the data easier to get over time. Valerie LaMotte responded that changes to the PSIS system and federal changes enacted by No Child Left Behind influenced the process of collecting data by mandating local districts to get it. Chris Leone asked if they've looked at the changes in absenteeism rates by month. Valerie LaMotte responded that they currently collect the data as days of membership vs. days of attendance. They will have that data, however, for kindergarten programs and they do engage in interviews with outreach workers to get a better idea of the problems at the kindergarten level.
 - iii. Joe Vaverchak noted that the New Britain school system has been a part of the consortium since its inception and stated it has had a transformative impact on their focus on chronic absenteeism. He stated the Kindergarten Counts grant was a great example of how they discovered 30% of their chronic absenteeism

was in kindergarten. He indicated the consortium is moving in the direction of early interventions on chronic absenteeism for both urban and non-urban districts.

- c. Personalized Intervention Program for Absenteeism (PIPA) by Wendy Silverman and Eli Lebowitz, Yale Child Study Center for Anxiety Disorders
 - i. Wendy Silverman stated the key takeaway from her presentation on PIPA is to understand that mental and physical health are key factors in chronic absenteeism. Going forward, it is also important to differentiate the mental and physical health challenges children face, as they often vary significantly by age or grade. She then discussed the use and implementation of PIPA in school systems and its development as an evidence-based model. Wendy Silverman noted in her presentation that the overarching goal of PIPA is to improve the environment of the entire classroom by having no empty chairs, stating the whole class is equally affected by the chronic absence of even one child throughout a school year. She went on to briefly highlight in her presentation the federal guidelines they use for PIPA in regards to chronic absenteeism, state data, and the disparities we face in our state along racial/ethnic lines. She then stated that personalizing each youth who is chronically absent is important because every child grows up in unique environments and have both internal and external factors impacting their responses to adversity every day. In the U.S. a sample of 6,500 adolescents found more than 25% reported somatic symptoms due to the co-occurrence of anxiety and depression. Wendy Silverman then provided common examples of everyday avoidance-based absences that are often a part of underlying mental health issues. Conversely, she identified approach-based absences, including increased time with parents, access to TV/Internet/Games, extended sleep time, access to preferred foods, and positive socializing opportunities (parks, malls, etc.). The convergence of avoiding negative experiences/events and approaching positive experiences/events creates an environment where a child will be at risk to become chronically absent. PIPA provides both assessment and treatment models to identify where avoidance/approach are being used by the child and provide strategies for the parents and the school to address areas of separation anxiety, social anxiety, parental monitoring/supervision, etc. Wendy Silverman then highlighted psychological reviews and studies done by her and others as early as 1987, which highlighted the notion that chronic absenteeism and general absences require individualized investigations and responses. They have so far found through their program that after a series of treatment sessions, they substantially reduced the absenteeism of the youth. She went onto to discuss the assessment/treatment module delivery process, noting that they are developing the modules for use on laptops/tablets as well as smartphones in addition to traditional physical packets. In addition, she noted there is an implementation and sustainability procedures provided to ensure results are both quantifiable and trackable over time by schools/districts.
 - ii. Katheryn Meyer asked how they work directly with the schools and how their relationship is formed. Wendy Silverman responded that she utilizes an approach similar to what she did previously in Florida, which includes meetings and presentations with local school district leaders on both the program and general data on chronic absenteeism impacts. She noted positive outreaches are crucial, as parents/schools can have their own approach/avoidance challenges when it comes to buying into a new program or concept.
 - iii. Donna Marino asked for additional details on the modules mentioned in the presentation. Eli Lebowitz responded that the various phases of the modules begin with the assessment, which is intended to identify the factors that are causing the chronic absenteeism. He indicated this module continues to be reviewed and refined over time. Intervention modules are the next phase, which can vary by the results of the assessment module. These modules are intended to be low-barrier so extensive training or certified expertise to implement these modules is not required. After the initial intervention model is applied a reassessment would be done if the child's absenteeism has not improved over a period of time.
 - iv. Judith Meyers asked what age group does PIPA apply to and what the anticipated cost would be per school and per district to implement PIPA. In addition, she asked if she could estimate how many children were engaged in PIPA and whether their absenteeism declined as a result. Wendy Silverman responded that the procedures themselves have been well-studied and shown to reduce absenteeism and improve certain behaviors. She went on to say that implementation for a new district should ideally occur in one or two schools, elementary through 12th grade, but with a focus on elementary where the impact of interventions are greatest. Eli Lebowitz added that the costs associated with PIPA include initial training for those designated to implement the program, and consultation to address questions. Additional costs would be the physical supplies for the assessment and treatment packets, but they hope to reduce those costs with the development of electronic packets.
- d. Truancy Prevention Project (TPP) by Marissa Helm, Center for Children's Advocacy. Aldwin Allen, Sr., Village for Families and Children
 - i. Marissa Helm provided a history of the program's first iteration at Hartford High School in 2006 and how it shifted its focus onto the middle school children (6th-8th) grade in preparation for the transition to high school. Their programs are now in the process of piloting in 1st and 2nd grade and with select kindergartners with high rates of absenteeism. She went on to indicate that the Center for Children's Advocacy plays a legal consultation and advisory role to the program in regards to its implementation and maintenance. The Village for Families and Children provide case management and clinical components to the program. Marissa Helm discussed the process of establishing connections with the school system and their coordination with four volunteer judges, who serve as mentors to students in the program. Aldwin Allen then presented the data on the 60 children in the program, specifying their absences ranged from 15-40 days during the previous school year. He noted the program is voluntary with an emphasis on building a meaningful relationship with parents to improve the likelihood of continued enrollment. Marissa Helm then discussed the main goals and objectives, short term for attendance and long-term for academic performance and improved social engagement. Aldwin Allen reviewed the efforts of the truancy court regarding the case management and the mentoring and oversight meetings, which are set up to be informal, with the students engaged and expressing sincere concern over the future of the child. Based on these conversations and meetings,

recommendations are made with input from the child. He reiterated that their staff works within the school full-time on both those students who have been recruited and the school system as a whole towards trending reductions in absenteeism. Marissa Helm provided examples of children whose barriers to consistent attendance may be as simple as clarifying their transportation needs with the district or as involved as a transfer from a school with an extensive 504 education plan to one that does not provide those plans in place. She added if the issues are significant enough that the child's family needs legal representation, their offices provide those services. Aldwin Allen then discussed the importance of keeping children at the center of the conversation and their attendance in the school. In addition to meetings with the student, meetings are held between school staff, their two organizations, the judicial branch, and the parents to ensure continuity, fluidity, and to smooth out any communication or interpersonal issues that may arise. Marissa Helm then provided a brief example of a success student that was enrolled into the program. After the student's period of enrollment concluded they continued in a special education program, their scores rebounded and they were identified as a star student the following year. Aldwin Allen went on to discuss the collection and reporting of data, noting gradual improvements in the process. He then showcased the data of improvements to attendance at both sites. He noted in both sites there was turnover in their staff in the second year, which played a role in the decline of improving outcomes. Aldwin Allen then highlighted data on average attendance of those children who were or were not enrolled in TPP. At one school, both years the TPP student outpaced the school average and the other school saw better results the first year, but just below average in year two. Marissa Helm stated that in addition to these programs, they have established their first pilot project with a school in Bridgeport and at the Barnum School for 5th to 8th grade.

- ii. Chris McCardle asked about the estimated cost per pupil and where the funding primarily comes from. Aldwin Allen responded that the cost is \$2,500 per child per year. At The Village they run a variety of programs that receive both state and private funds. The \$2,500 price tag is for 5 days a week, three hours every afternoon for programs, meetings, and in-home visits. Chris McCardle asked what would be their estimated costs per child if they could implement the program 100% in the city of Hartford. Aldwin Allen stated that it would primarily be impacted by the size of the defined population, which would be all youths with 15-40 absences in the prior school year from elementary or middle school. Charlene Russell-Tucker stated that they could get an estimate of the student population for Hartford that would fall under these guidelines to the group to better understand the total cost and cost per pupil. She went onto to highlight the purpose of this exercise as a way to bring programs to the forefront for review and analysis by the leadership committee and by the legislature for funding/policy considerations. Marissa Helm stated that their group also brought physical packets detailing their program as well as a list of similar programs that are being implemented or piloted across the state to be provided to the members. She then briefly went over the recommendations, which included: an evaluation to analyze the models we currently have, eliminate absenteeism in congregate care facilities, provide school stability for children within the juvenile justice system, and monitoring the implementation of Public Act 15-225 in regards to data tracking, student assistance teams, and the development of chronic absenteeism plans at the district level.
 - iii. Joe Vaverchak asked if they have data on suspensions or referrals to juvenile court, even referrals to DCF to see if they correlate with improved attendance. Aldwin Allen responded that they do receive data on out-of-school and in-school suspensions, but no data on DCF referrals. He indicated a large number of families they work with are involved with DCF, but they do not track that.
3. CT Kids Report Card Update by Steve Jones, Special Projects Assistant, Committee on Children
 - a. Steve Jones provided a brief overview of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) process. He indicated the suggestions made at the October quarterly Leadership Committee meeting would be presented to the Appropriations Committee RBA Subcommittee for consideration and that subcommittee would be charged with considering other programs that could impact the indicators within the CT Kid's Report Card. He then thanked the SAG for their four presentations as models of identifying programs with potential turn the curve for Connecticut. Charlene Russell-Tucker indicated that this is an opportunity to bring programs forward regarding what works and providing feedback so discussions on funding can move forward.
 4. *Accomplishments and Strategic Next Steps*; Charlene Russell-Tucker and Joseph Vaverchak
 - a. Charlene Russell-Tucker noted the need to recognize the successes we've seen moving forward and Connecticut's status as being ahead of the federal curve to combat chronic absenteeism. She highlighted a federal letter presented by multiple federal agencies with a series of action steps. She went on to discuss a snapshot of progress at this time since their first meeting. She also identified areas for ongoing progress including expanded access to data, Alliance District Data Analysis and Profile Reports, a data mapping project with the CT Data Collaborative, and continued efforts to consistently define attendance for data purposes. Other successes included building best practices, coordinating conversations and presentations/meetings/conferences with a variety of local organizations and community groups, engaging strategic partners, and continued report card development as a communication tool. Charlene Russell-Tucker noted that they've been able to get both the Alliance Districts and Commissioner Network districts to develop chronic absence plans and the introduction of chronic absenteeism into SDE's new accountability system.
 5. Member Roundtable & Planning Forward
 - a. Charlene Russell Tucker indicated that moving forward, the SAG will continue to improve stakeholder engagement and improve guidance and instruction to districts across the state. A concern for districts has been that P.A. 15-225 includes in-school suspensions equaling half a day or more as an absence from school. She also indicated that a staff position at SDE that was established has yet to be filled due in part to the slowdown in hiring.
 6. *What's happening and what more can we be doing! Review of Action Plan.*
 - a. Due to time limitations, this section will be covered at a later date.
 7. Adjournment
 - a. The meeting was adjourned at 11:00AM