

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING JUNE 9, 2009

REPORT ON THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES FOR DENTON ISD

PREPARED BY BARB HAFlich COORDINATOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Overview of the Social Services Department

Social Work has a rich heritage and although the profession historically has been committed to serving the poor and the disadvantaged, its domain has steadily expanded, and today social workers serve in many diverse settings, including schools. We take pride in being referred to as the profession that serves the nations conscience. Social Workers describe their work in many ways, from rewarding and frustrating to satisfying and challenging. However, our profession's activities involve helping individuals, groups, or communities to enhance their capacity for social functioning and to improve the quality of life for everyone. This involves addressing common human needs that must be met in order for individuals to achieve a reasonable degree of fulfillment and to function as productive and contributing members of society. It makes sense that to meet those needs, essential resources and opportunities must be available.

In considering the Mission Statement of Denton Independent School District, social work, in partnership with the home and the community, assists families and staff, to provide the best educational opportunities in a challenging and yet supportive environment. As the Coordinator of Social Services for this district, I strive to assume a leadership role that will help formulate policy into operative goals; implement programs that meet the needs of our campuses, families and students; look for funding and resource allocation; supervise effectively; and continue to build the type of relationship within our district and the community that my predecessor, mentor and friend, Rosemary Rodriquez, began when she was hired for this position over 20 years ago. While I understand that this position involves administrative skills and practice, my love of the direct practice of social work remains. Building relationships with the people is important to me, and I will continue to find ways to deliver services directly to families, as a social workers common objective, regardless of our title, is to improve the quality of life for people and help them cope more effectively with their challenges. The fundamental values of my profession, which includes the worth, dignity, and uniqueness of all persons, as well as their rights and opportunities, fits very well with the Mission of our District, as well as the goals we work towards, each and every day.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the various services provided through Social Services and highlight the often less well known programs offered to students and families fortunate enough to be a part of the Denton ISD community. Being a part of the Counseling and Guidance Department, with the guidance and leadership of Melanie Lewis, has made the transition from Teen Parent Social Worker/Coordinator, to Coordinator of Social Services almost easy. Melanie is an advocate for each of us and assists us to be the best we can be every day.

Services Provided through the Social Work Office

Coordination of district wide Parent Education Program Family Connections

It is evident that Denton ISD recognizes the challenges our families face today. We, as a district, understand the value of a consistent, stable and nurturing home environment. Children, provided this safety net, thrive academically, socially and emotionally. Through Parent- School Partnerships, like **Family Connections**, educators and families come together as a team and demonstrate a common focus. We become more accessible to our families and learn, through our work with them, that we all have the potential to learn and grow. Parent education and family involvement provide opportunities to influence positive behavior and attitudinal changes in the child, the parent, and, perhaps most importantly, ourselves. Cooperation, responsibility, courage and self esteem are what we want for all of our children. **Family Connections** helps to provide the skills and identify the strengths and assets of our families, which will help them to raise children who are empowered by these qualities. **Family Connections** gives us all the ability to be proactive instead of reactive; we become prevention promoters instead of crisis caretakers.

Parent Education sites for 2008-2009 School Year

1. Rivera Elementary in collaboration with Borman Elementary

- Classes held in English and Spanish
- Elementary families
- Utilizing Practical Parent Education and Love and Logic curriculums
- Childcare and light snacks provided
- 50-60 parents attended monthly classes
- 30 children required childcare (Staff provided childcare)

2. Newton Rayzor Elementary (District wide classes)

- Classes held in English and Spanish
- Elementary and Secondary families
- Utilizing Practical Parent Education Curriculum
- Childcare and dinner provided
- 20-30 parents attended monthly classes
- 40-50 children required childcare (Volunteers from Helping Hands through UNT)

3. 380 Corridor (Navo, Savannah, Providence, and Paloma Creek)

- Classes held in English
- Elementary and Secondary families
- Utilizing Practical Parent Education Curriculum
- Childcare and dinner provided
- 15-20 parents attended monthly classes
- 15 children required childcare (Volunteers from TAMS at UNT)

4. Blanton Elementary in collaboration with E.P. Rayzor

- Classes held in English
- Elementary families
- Utilizing Love and Logic Curriculum
- No childcare provided
- 6-8 parents attended 7 classes

Facilitators for all parent education events were trained in Practical Parent Education and or Love and Logic and included academic counselors, student assistance counselors and social workers

5. Service Center Annex Stop Truancy Classes

- Classes held in English and Spanish on a monthly basis
- Elementary and Middle School parents and children
- 55 families attend the court ordered classes after they appear in truancy court

The first semester, **Sandra Golden and Roberta Rosario**, attendance officers for Denton ISD, taught their classes at Newton Rayzor, during Family Connections. Families ate dinner with those attending parenting classes and childcare was provided for those children who were not court ordered to attend the class. At the beginning of the second semester, Sandra and Roberta, began meeting with their families at the Service Center. They plan to continue these classes in the 2009-2010 school year and have gained the support of the judges in ordering the classes for families facing truancy charges.

New Parent Education Sites for 2009-2010 school year

1. Lee Elementary

- Classes held in English and Spanish
- Elementary and Secondary families
- Utilizing Practical Parent Education and Love and Logic Curriculums
- Childcare and dinner provided

2. Calhoun ESL Classes

- Classes held in English
- Elementary and Secondary families
- Utilizing Practical Parent Education Curriculums

3. AWSYC ESL Classes

- Classes held in English
- Elementary families
- Utilizing Practical Parent Education Curriculum

4. Friends of the Family at Friends of the Family

- Classes held in English and Spanish
- Elementary and Secondary families
- Utilizing Practical Parent Education Curriculum

STATEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Robert Gonzalez, principal at Tomas Rivera states, "We have had a huge response to our Parent Education classes. Just this year we had at least 45 families participate monthly. The Parent Education classes provided very good information for parents to support their students, and this has helped strengthen student-teacher relationships. However, one of the most enlightening and refreshing outcomes from the classes for me, was the parent leadership that was demonstrated as a result of these classes. We have also created a parent library to support their "professional development" in parent education."

Elena Esparza, diagnostician and parent education facilitator for Family Connection, had this to say when asked why she is so committed to this endeavor. "Parent Education is important because many parents are completely at a loss as to HOW to keep their children in school. They lack the tools that are necessary to encourage their children to attend school and do not know what to do when children are truant. By the time parents with kids in middle and high school come to us, they are frustrated, angry, and have pretty much given up on their child and the school system. They tell you that their interaction with the schools has not been a positive one. Parent Education provides parents with basic parenting techniques and provides the environment in which they can dialogue with other parents about their specific situations with their children. They are able to rehearse with other parents on how to "talk to their children so they will listen" and learn about the myriad of choices their students can make, resulting in both positive and negative consequences. Parent education provides a platform from which parents can spring into action armed with the necessary tools to be pro-active about their academic success."

When parents are asked, in the written evaluations, what they found most helpful in the class they attended, nearly everyone responded that they liked the conversations with the facilitator and other parents. The interaction and shared information was better than they expected. They much preferred an informal setting, rather than too much structure and they liked having information to take home. Most also mentioned that they liked having additional resources provided and knowing who to call if they had problems. They especially enjoyed and learned from topics regarding communication, discipline, and self esteem. They asked for classes on transitioning to high school; blended families; overcoming peer pressure; and more classes on discipline. Several inquired about classes to assist them to be better advocates for their children. They preferred having the same facilitator for all classes, but understood why that was not always possible.

Work in Progress

While we feel very confident with the efforts in Parent Education for our families with children in elementary school, our secondary program remains a work in progress. **Larry Mankoff** is planning to utilize the Student Assistance Counselors to provide parent education, as they are very aware of what issues families and students confront daily. The target population would be

ninth graders, students in The Ninth Grade Initiative at Fred Moore High School, Davis, and Care Team referrals.

Maria Dudash, Coordinator of Bi-Lingual and ESL for secondary programs and Kathleen Ashton, Counselor at Fred Moore High School, working in collaboration, put together a program for secondary students and their families, in English and in Spanish that will include three evenings of sharing and learning. Topics to be covered include frequently asked questions and an overview of graduation requirements for students in Denton ISD, as well as two parent/student focus groups on Self Esteem and Raising Children of Character.

Denton ISD Conference “Empowering Families”

This district wide initiative, led by the Bi-Lingual ESL Department, will be held on Saturday, October 3, 2009, at Ryan High School. The event will hold most sessions in English and Spanish, with breakout workshops for families of elementary and secondary students, as well as sessions for secondary students. Workshops may include: Gifted and Talented; accessing community resources; explanation of ESL; literacy in the home; dual language; TEA study guides; science fair; Internet safety; four year plans; IB program; Financial Aid for undocumented students; getting ready for college and understanding high school life. Childcare, breakfast, entertainment, and utilizing the talents of DISD students throughout the workshop guarantee a successful conference.

Social Services/Direct Practice

- Information and referral and crisis and support assistance
- Identifying resources; advocating for clients; insuring services are available and accessible within the district and the community
- Supporting campuses to provide services and assistance to identified families
- Coordination and Collaboration with churches, social service agencies and organizations within the community
- Donations for Yarbrough Pharmacy and Holland Mattress Company from private individuals
- Shoe vouchers from First Steps in Collaboration with Kroger Grocery Stores
- Thanksgiving and Christmas assistance from Communities in Schools and Salvation Army, as well as local churches

Homeless Liaison for Denton ISD McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act

- Assist campuses to have the information necessary to identify families and students who are homeless or near homeless so they can go to school, receive transportation to school, free lunch and receive the same services and access to programs that all students are entitled to
- Provide these students school supplies, clothing, and personal hygiene products in order that they retain their dignity and self respect, despite their homelessness

- Provide case management services to the families and students identified as homeless, to insure that they attend school, have the resources necessary for them to provide for themselves and their children
- Provide trainings and support for campuses and the community regarding McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act

Coordination of the Teen Parent Program

- The goal of the Teen Parent Program is to reduce school dropouts, increase high school graduation rates, and enhance parenting skills for students who are pregnant or parents and at risk of dropping out of school
- The Teen Parent Program is an integrated program of education and support services
 1. Individual and peer counseling
 2. Career counseling and job readiness training
 3. Provision of child care
 4. Provision of transportation to school and child care centers
 5. Provision of instruction related to knowledge and skill in child development, parenting, and home and family living
 6. Provision of assistance for obtaining available services from governmental agencies or community service organizations, including prenatal and post natal health and nutrition programs

Audra Williams is the social worker for Fred Moore and Ryan High Schools and Martha Puga is the social worker for Guyer and Denton High Schools. They share middle school campuses and Davis School.

Teen Parent Program data for 2008-2009 school year

Total Students: 168 Males served: 39 Total Pregnancies: 85 Graduates: 41 Dropouts: 0

Coordination of Compensatory Education Homebound Instruction (pregnant teens only)

CEHI is the mandatory support service component school districts offer through their Pregnancy Related Services Program. It provides academic services to the student at home or hospital bedside when a valid medical necessity for confinement during the pregnancy or postpartum periods prevents the student from attending classes on a district campus. When students are provided CEHI, the district will continue to receive the 2.41 weighted funding they received prior to being placed on homebound. Four hours of face to face instruction time is equal to five days of full attendance. CEHI students are typically seen two hours a day, twice a week.

Denton ISD also receives a waiver from the state to provide campus based homebound services to those students who are four weeks postpartum or who are released by their physician to attend campus based services. This campus based service is provided at Fred Moore High School, and is utilized when our numbers of students in homebound is high and for those students currently attending Fred Moore.

These students attend four hours in a morning of their choosing, are allowed to bring their babies, and have transportation provided. **Judy Barnes, the parent education instructor** at the campus, provides the instruction to these students.

Maria Harris is our certified CEHI instructor. This school year 46 students were served through CEHI.

Coordination of General Education Homebound (all students not receiving Special Education)

Any student who is served through the general education homebound program must be confined to the home or bedside for at least four weeks, for medical reasons only. The medical condition must be documented by a physician licensed to practice in the United States. A designated campus committee reviews and considers the necessity of providing instruction at home/hospital bedside. Four hours of instruction per week is equal to five days of full instruction. GEH students are typically seen one hour per day, four days a week, and must have an adult present during instruction.

Debbie Taboada is the homebound instructor for GEH. She is certified in grades K through 12th, special education certified, and bi-lingual. 21 students required homebound services this school year. Due to the high caseload, Leah Cuellar, certified teacher, provided additional instructional assistance this semester.

Final Thoughts

In closing, I hope that I have conveyed the depth of caring and concern demonstrated on behalf of families who may not feel they have a voice or an advocate for them and their children. Genuine caring does not require a degree, training or a workshop. I am humbled by the opportunity to work with such wonderful people and being a part of their team makes it so easy to come to work every day. There will always be setbacks and challenges in the work we do with families but they have taught me the importance of being optimistic, enthusiastic, and above all keeping a sense of humor. I want to continue to build upon the solid foundation Rosemary provided to me when she retired. I won't try to fill her shoes, but will feel she is walking with me when things are especially difficult or when there is a joy to celebrate.

I want to thank Dr. Rutherford who has listened to me and supported me for many years and always made me feel that what I did was important. I also want to thank Jamie Wilson for helping me to be a better administrator and assisting me to make wise choices in the teen parent and homebound programs. Both of them helped me to see that when we do what is best for kids, we are never wrong.

Lastly, I am having a wonderful time in the Counseling Department and in my new role. I only have had three major anxiety attacks, wondering what in the world made me think I was up to doing this job. Being a part of a small, but cohesive and supportive team, has given me a new perspective personally and professionally. Each member of this department works towards making their co-workers the best that they can be and together we build bridges, programs, and

relationships that benefit the district and our families, while at the same time giving us the confidence to grow and continue to succeed. I could not ask for anything better than this.