

Action Plan for Educational Advocacy Pilot Initiative

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to provide uniform educational advocacy to all minors on probation as well as their parent(s), the Juvenile Probation Department is piloting an Education Advocacy Initiative. In providing educational advocacy to minors on probation, the parent's involvement and input are essential at every stage of the pilot and drive the services that will be provided to the minor. The goals of the pilot are to (1) advocate for minors involved in Juvenile Court to receive the appropriate educational services as guaranteed by Federal and State law from the initial stages of their court involvement (2) to advocate for the appropriate educational services and placement with the goal of reducing truancy and school related technical violations of probation (3) increase parental awareness about their child's educational rights. The Cook County Juvenile Probation Department's Education Task Force will pilot this initiative to provide consultative and advocacy services as it pertains to a minor's education.

TARGET POPULATION

The pilot initiative will target the East division, directed by DCPO John Cosgrove, within the juvenile probation department to solidify effective protocols before recommendations are made for department wide policy implementation.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

DCPO's Kevin Hickey and Kaitrin Valencia and probation officers Carmen Acevedo and SPO Donna Neal will serve as educational advocates for the initiative. All other responsibilities assigned to these personnel will be redistributed to other Advocacy probation officers during the duration of the pilot. The educational advocates will provide training to all personnel assigned to the division (including deputy, supervisors, probation officers, and judges) with an overview of the pilot initiative and staff responsibility.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The pilot initiative will focus on advocating for the educational rights of two distinct populations: (1) newly assigned cases pending disposition and (2) minor's already on probation (referenced as existing cases). No minors that are involved with the Department of Children and Family Services will be involved with the pilot because advocacy already exists for these minor's education.

For both populations, new and existing cases, a mutual consent form will need to be signed for the probation department and the school district to exchange information. This is currently standard operating procedure for probation officers in order to complete their traditional social investigation for the court.

1. New Cases:

The educational advocates will advocate for the first twenty cases assigned to the target population. The educational advocate will contact the field probation officer and inform him/her of their assignment. While the assigned field probation officer must conduct a social investigation, the school section will be completed by the educational advocate assigned to the case. The educational report will summarize the minor's academic and emotional functioning within the school, enumerate the relevant laws applicable to the juvenile's education, and provide educational recommendations to the court and field probation officers. In order to adequately prepare the Educational Report, the educational advocate will assist the field probation officer in obtaining all necessary records from schools and hospitals, pursuant to a

mutual consent. The field probation officer will accompany the educational advocate to obtain all the records, including a signed consent to release information. Within ten (10) days of receipt of all records the Educational Report will be distributed to the supervisor, probation officer, judge, public defenders office and assistant states attorney's office. The educational advocate will be available at any court hearing to answer relevant questions.

While the educational advocate will write the education section of any court reports, it is essential that the field probation officer make him/herself available for any meeting(s) in order to transition the case to the field probation officer who will monitor the minor's education after the advocate has ensured the appropriate services are in place. Having the probation officer present at various stages with the educational advocate will also serve as a training piece for probation officers involved.

Based on the recommendations enumerated in the Educational Report, the educational advocate will provide follow up services for each of the twenty new cases (see follow up section).

2. Existing Cases:

Recognizing that many minors already on probation have educational needs that are not being addressed, the educational advocates will provide services to an additional ten minors that are already on probation/supervision within the target population. Each unit within the East division will provide two cases that have exhibited problems academically or behaviorally in school. An interdepartmental referral form for each case will be sent to Kaitrin Valencia with all relevant records attached.

The field probation officers will obtain **all** school and mental health records (that are not already in the file), pursuant to a mutual consent. Within ten business days of receiving all records an Educational Report will be written for each of the ten minors. The Educational Report will give recommendations for case planning as it relates to the minor's education with the educational advocate working with the family and school system to address the problematic behaviors as an alternative to the traditional method of filing a technical violation.

The Educational Report will be distributed to the supervisor, probation officer, judge, public defenders office and assistant states attorney's office. The educational advocate will be available at any court hearing to answer relevant questions. Based on the recommendations, the educational advocate will provide follow up services for each of the ten existing cases (see follow up section).

Follow Up Services

Follow up services for all new cases and existing cases assigned to the educational advocates will be provided after the Educational Report is completed. The advocacy rendered will be individualized for the specific facts of each case and mirror the school recommendations provided in the written educational report. For example, if a juvenile is not currently classified as a special education student despite ongoing cognitive delays and/or emotional/mental health problems, the educational advocate will work with the field probation officer to request a case study evaluation and attend the Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting with the field probation officer. In preparing for any IEP (whether an initial case study evaluation or a review of an existing IEP) the field probation officer will be responsible to provide all records to the school district that the educational advocate determines is pertinent for the IEP team to review (pursuant to a mutual consent). The records released to school districts will consist of mental health records and other school records not in their possession (out of state records). The minor's police report or court petitions will not be released to the school district in preparing for an IEP.

Assignment of Cases

The educational advocates will begin receiving new cases effective September 1, 2005. The Deputy Chief over the division targeted (John Cosgrove) will provide DCPO Kaitrin Valencia with adjudication materials for twenty cases assigned to the East division and the respective supervisor assigned to the case starting September 1, 2005. Preference will be given to those cases that occurred in the school. The cases will be assigned to the educational advocates by DCPO Kaitrin Valencia on a rotating basis. The educational report will be completed within ten days of receipt of all school and mental health records and distributed to the supervisor, probation officer, judge, public defenders office and assistant states attorney's office.

Beginning September 1, 2005 each unit will provide two cases each that are already on probation/supervision (totaling ten cases) for the educational advocates to be assigned and DCPO Kaitrin Valencia will assign the cases.

In summary, the total number of cases assigned to the pilot initiative will be thirty cases (twenty new cases and ten existing cases).

BENEFITS FOR THE DEPARTMENT

Many violations of probation are filed as a direct result of school related matters (suspensions, truancy, expulsion, new case, etc.). Students get suspended, fail to attend school, get expelled, and get arrested on school grounds for multiple reasons. For instance, many students do not attend their classes because they do not understand the curriculum and to avoid embarrassment they abstain from attending. Others, because of emotional or unserved mental health problems, are improperly placed in school settings where too much stimuli aggravates emotional and mental health problems that manifest themselves in violent behaviors that, arguably, if appropriately placed could have been avoided. Providing educational advocacy during the initial stages of a juvenile's probationary period will allow for minors to be placed in the appropriate educational setting and receive the appropriate educational services.

The goal of proper educational placement and advocacy is to reduce the likelihood of school related violations of probation (reduce recidivism), while at the same time increase their competencies because they are in an environment capable of meeting their special education needs. Furthermore, knowledge in educational laws will assist field probation officers in navigating through extremely complex and time consuming procedures to ensure that the proper services are rendered by the schools.