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OCFS Releases Policy Brief on New York State's Responses to Educational Neglect

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) today released "[Getting Teenagers Back to School: Rethinking New York State's Response to Chronic Absence](#)," a policy brief researched and written for the agency by the Vera Institute of Justice in partnership with Casey Family Programs.

This policy brief proposes that the state develop a new non-punitive approach to teenage absenteeism that is rooted in research on adolescent behavior and school engagement. The brief found that the child protective system—the network of state and local agencies that handle allegations of child abuse and neglect—is not well equipped to help teenagers improve their school attendance. At times, it can make matters worse.

OCFS Commissioner Gladys Carrión said, "The report shows that the majority of allegations of educational neglect in NYS are made on families with teenagers who are chronically absent from school, or truant. The data also indicates that these youth present as "very low" on the scales that measure risk for child abuse or maltreatment. The Child Protective system should not be the point of entry for a family in need of assistance in reengaging their adolescent with the educational system. We seldom have the tools to offer meaningful help."

Later this year, OCFS and Vera Institute will host two strategy sessions with stakeholders to help develop an action plan for change. In a letter to colleagues, Commissioner Carrión urged those with an interest in reengaging chronically absent teens to "partner with us as we develop a different approach, shifting away from a child protective response and toward an alternative that is school focused."

In 2009, teens alleged to be educationally neglected accounted for 6 percent of all children involved in child maltreatment reports statewide. In New York City, this figure reached 11 percent. Removing teenagers who are chronically absent could reduce the number of teenagers reported to the child protective system by up to 15,407 statewide, allowing the child protective system to focus its resources on families with child safety concerns.

In some cases, educational-neglect allegations result in a formal neglect petition against the parent or guardian in family court—not because the investigation uncovered maltreatment concerns, but because the efforts of the parent/guardian and the child protective agency have not improved the student's attendance.

If New York amended its laws to remove educational neglect of teenagers from the jurisdiction of the child protective system it would not be alone; half of the states—including California, Florida, Illinois, and Texas—do not recognize teenagers' school absences as grounds for a neglect finding.

[Rethinking Educational Neglect for Teenagers: New Strategies for New York State](#), released in December 2009, described how the state addresses chronic school absenteeism for teenagers through the child protective system and proposed strategies for improving the state's response.

People may link to the policy brief from the OCFS and Vera websites: www.ocfs.state.ny.us and www.vera.org.

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