

**Washoe County School District Student Attendance Review Board
Summary of 2016-17 School Counselor Focus Groups**

Prepared by the WCSD Office of Accountability

June 2017

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The Intervention Department and the Office of Accountability would like to thank the Counseling Department for their support of these focus groups. Counseling specialists Keeli Killian and Roger Bahten were instrumental in arranging time for these discussions and they would not have happened without their help. We are especially appreciative of the school counselors who contributed their time and insight to improve SARB and to address the challenge of truancy and chronic absenteeism more generally.

**Washoe County School District Student Attendance Review Board
2016-17 School Counselor Focus Groups**

Executive Summary

June 2017

The Washoe County School District (WCSD) Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) and SARB for elementary school (E-SARB) is a truancy intervention that utilizes a multidisciplinary interagency team¹ to assess and address the underlying causes of truancy. The goal of these boards is to provide students with immediate support to restart their commitment to learning while also decreasing student involvement in the juvenile justice system. The primary objectives of SARB and E-SARB include identifying unmet needs that may be preventing students from attending school regularly, providing wraparound supports to meet those needs, and following-up with students to monitor progress and ensure continued commitment to meeting attendance goals.

Questions Addressed by the Focus Groups

In spring of 2017, the Intervention Department asked that a study be conducted to explore school counselor perspectives about SARB and E-SARB processes at referral, hearing, and post-hearing times. The Office of Accountability met this request by facilitating three focus groups with elementary, middle, and high school counselors. The primary purpose of these discussions was to capture information to refine the SARB process in order to improve outcomes for students. A secondary purpose, although not directly addressed in the focus groups, was to inform the overall system response to truancy and chronic absenteeism. Toward these ends, the conversations were guided by the following five questions:

1. What concerns do school counselors have about SARB and E-SARB?
2. How can the referral process be changed to be more efficient?
3. How do school counselors envision the structure of the hearings?
4. What can be done to support students after a hearing?
5. What additional thoughts do school counselors have about SARB and E-SARB?

Themes, ideas, and suggestions that emerged from the discussions fall within three categories, which include (1) purpose of SARB, (2) hearing structure and (3) post-hearing support.

¹ The SARB and E-SARB is a collaboration of the WCSD, the Washoe County Department of Social Services, the Washoe County Department of Juvenile Services, and several community partners.

Key Findings of the School Counselor Focus Groups

Purpose of SARB

School counselors described themselves as having a range of understanding of SARB and offered their perspectives based on their experiences.

- Counselors held three points of view about what ought to be purpose of SARB, which included: (1) Provide access to intensive supports beyond what schools can offer; (2) Initiate consequences for truancy (e.g., impose fines); and (3) Provide a combination of intensive supports *and* consequences.
- Counselors asked for clear communication about the purpose, protocols for referral and support, and role expectations pertaining to SARB to school administrators and counselors. They also welcomed guidance for schools to support internal processes.
- Several counselors also asked for increased flexibility on who can be referred to SARB to allow for students who are known by counselors to be candidates for SARB, but who seem to know how to avoid referral.
- Counselors were concerned that the overall institutional response to truancy is failing students. Areas where the response to truancy described as inadequate included:
 - Lack of alternative educational options within the WCSD for students who struggle academically and/or socially in traditional comprehensive schools.
 - Support provided by the Intervention Department, including access to truancy officers, is constrained by limited resources.
 - Sense that partner agency response is lacking: Child Protective Services cannot do anything about educational neglect and Parole and Probation do not consistently follow-through with attendance citations.
 - Lack of meaningful consequences for students and parents for truant behavior.

Hearing Structure

The format of the hearing likely affects how guidance provided by board members is received by students and their families, which can influence attendance outcomes of students.

Counselors recounted their perceptions of the hearings and offered suggestions.

- The presence of an administrator at hearings was described as important to many school counselors because they believe it is the administrator's responsibility to attend and administrators are better positioned to enact SARB recommendations.

- Some believed the hearings include too many people who are not directly connected to students, which is thought to create an impersonal experience and lead to overly-complicated action plans that are unlikely to be enacted.
- A view shared by many is the SARB hearing is an opportunity to directly connect students and families to people who will help them address barriers to attendance. To create a more personalized experience, counselors suggested:
 - Limiting board member attendance to only those who will be directly involved with supporting individual students.
 - Scheduling hearings by zone so that community partners who will provide support can be introduced to the students and families they will be serving.
 - Holding SARB hearings to the same standards as IEP meetings to legitimize the resulting plan, ensure accountability, and increase the level of personalization.

Post-Hearing Support

A central aspect of the SARB intervention is the creation and enactment of a plan to address each student's needs. School counselors recognize the importance of this aspect of SARB and offered their insights into the challenges and strengths they encountered post-SARB hearing.

- Several counselors described the SARB plan as inadequate: Most often, the interventions prescribed have already been attempted with little or no success.
- Some recounted a history of poorly executed or non-existent follow-through by SARB members in supporting the plan. It was explained that the lack of accountability for the commitments outlined on the plan diminishes its value.
- Deep frustration was expressed by some who explained that their outreach to SARB for support often results in *"feeling like we are right back where we started."*
- The assignment of a case manager to assist with the enactment of SARB recommendations was viewed as essential to successful follow-up. Counselors who interacted with newly positioned case managers reported increased communication about students and increased follow-through with families.
- Although not directly linked to SARB, counselors repeatedly described the value of truancy officers in fostering deep connections with students and bridging the gap between home and school. Access to truancy officers provides insight into the barriers individual students face, which is invaluable when addressing individual student needs.

**Washoe County School District Student Attendance Review Board
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The Washoe County School District (WCSD) Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) and SARB for elementary school (E-SARB) is a truancy intervention that utilizes a multidisciplinary interagency team² to assess and address the underlying causes of truancy. The goal of these boards is to provide students with immediate support to restart their commitment to learning while also decreasing student involvement in the juvenile justice system. The primary objectives of SARB and E-SARB include identifying unmet needs that may be preventing students from attending school regularly, providing wraparound supports to meet those needs, and following-up with students to monitor progress and ensure continued commitment to meeting attendance goals. SARB and E-SARB are authorized by the Nevada Revised Statutes, which mandates the creation of Student Attendance Advisory Boards (SAAB) in every Nevada county.³

Three focus groups were held in the spring semester of the 2016-17 school year to explore school counselor perspectives about how to improve SARB and E-SARB processes at referral, hearing, and post-hearing times. Separate focus groups were held for elementary, middle, and high school counselors. The number of people who participated in each discussion ranged from 8 to 13 and each lasted an average of 45 minutes. These confidential discussions were guided by 5 questions (see callout) and were facilitated by two program evaluators from the WCSD Office of Accountability. The discussions were recorded for note-taking purposes and the digital recordings were erased after a thematic analysis of the information was complete. Several topics emerged from the discussions and each is described under three area headings, which include (1) purpose of SARB, (2) hearing structure and (3) post-hearing support. Differences in perceptions of SARB and E-SARB processes are mentioned where they exist. Specific suggestions requested by school counselors are bolded throughout the summary.

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. What concerns do school counselors have about SARB and E-SARB?
2. How can the referral process be changed to be more efficient?
3. How do school counselors envision the structure of the hearings?
4. What can be done to support students after a hearing?
5. What additional thoughts do school counselors have about SARB and E-SARB?

² The SARB and E-SARB is a collaboration of the Washoe County School District (WCSD), the Washoe County Department of Social Services, the Washoe County Department of Juvenile Services, and several community partners.

³ Nevada Revised Statutes 392.126 through 392.130 defines the structure and requirements for school attendance advisory boards. These statutes provide the underpinnings of WCSD SAAB, SARB, and E-SARB.

The WCSD Department of Intervention intends to use this information to strengthen the SARB and E-SARB by incorporating school counselor suggestions into referral, hearing, and post-hearing processes. Additionally, school counselor insights will be used to inform the discussion about the overall system response to truancy and chronic absenteeism more generally.⁴

“As counselors we need to understand what is the purpose of SARB, why are we using it, what is it doing for our students, and what type of kid do we get there.” – High School Counselor

Purpose of SARB

School counselors who participated in the focus group discussions described themselves as having a wide-range of experiences with SARB.⁵ Many of them

had attended multiple hearings while others were only somewhat knowledgeable of the board through their professional practice. Regardless of their familiarity with the intervention, most expressed a need for clarification about the purpose, specific processes, and expectations of SARB.

Purpose and approach. The purpose of SARB, including its specific goals and objectives, was vague to most school counselors. All of them understood that the ultimate goal of SARB is to reduce truancy, but they were less certain about how SARB aims to achieve this. The conversation largely focused on whether the approach taken by SARB ought to (a) focus on providing intensive supports schools cannot access without the help of SARB or (b) focus on providing consequences to students and their parents for truant behavior.

Proponents of the increased support approach explained that schools have exhausted their resources and have attempted a range of interventions prior to holding a SARB hearing. They believe **access to more intensive supports** (e.g., family therapy, mental health care) is required to break through the complex barriers that are preventing students from attending school. Proponents of the consequences approach also believe that school personnel have attempted a range of interventions, which suggests that the **imposition of meaningful consequences** (e.g., minimal fines, community service) is a logical and likely more effective next step in the response to truancy. These two sentiments are exemplified in competing statements about the approach counselors would like to see SARB take towards parents, specifically:

Intensive supports approach Our administrators call and threaten them, people threaten them, it doesn't work. They need support, they need mental health counseling, they need family counseling, they need support.

⁴ This information is timely: the Nevada Department of Education is adopting a measure of chronic absenteeism into its school performance frameworks for comprehensive and alternative schools beginning the 2017-18 school year. The adoption of this measure provides an opportunity to renew action planning within districts and schools to target the challenge of chronic absenteeism.

⁵ In this paper reference to SARB also includes E-SARB.

Meaningful consequences approach *I have been to SARB hearings where everybody in the hearing wants to help fix the problem and I have been to SARB hearings where it has been very punitive in nature. And I always come back out of all of them thinking there is only one solution, it is mom and dad getting junior to school... at that point the only thing in my opinion that we need is something punitive.*

Counselors noted the importance of establishing a set SARB approach because it has implications for the role of the school counselor. One person asked: *“Is it a support thing?... Or, is it a fear tactic to scare you [students] going back to school? Because those are two different things and two different roles for a counselor.”* Many counselors did not stand firmly on one side or the other of the approach debate, but rather advocated for a combination of increased supports for students and their families *and* meaningful consequences.

Process and expectations. School counselors, particularly those serving middle and high schools, described varying protocols for responding to truant students within their schools. Some explained how they follow clear processes that are aligned to the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework⁶, while others described their schools’ responses as inconsistent and sometimes haphazard.

One person explained that when email notifications of SARB hearings arrive with several people copied on the message, none of those people know who is responsible for responding. Another person confessed to simply deleting the notifications altogether because they *“have too much on their plates already.”* Several other people also expressed reluctance to participate in SARB processes, citing:

- Required paperwork (i.e. pre-hearing packet) is cumbersome and overly intrusive
- School counselor expertise is not well-utilized within the hearing
- Lack of improved attendance outcomes for students who participate in SARB: Viewed as extra-work for schools with little, if any, benefit to students
- Belief SARB is punitive in its approach, which is thought to be inappropriate for students with mental health concerns

One counselor suggested that school prevention and response to truancy needs improvement: *“I think the system prior to SARB needs to be improved so that we are not having to SARB so*

⁶ MTSS follows the Response to Intervention (RtI) approach, whereby interventions are provided based on a protocol to identify and monitor student needs and interventions increase in intensity within a tiered system of delivery. Kearney and Graczyk (2013) concluded that an RtI framework promotes regular attendance for all students at Tier 1, targeted interventions for at-risk students at Tier 2, and intense and individualized interventions for students with chronic absenteeism at Tier 3.

many people.” This comment suggests that adherence to the MTSS framework within schools may affect SARB participation and outcomes.

School counselors would like their involvement in the SARB process to be meaningful, valued, and result in improved outcomes for the students and families they serve.

Role of the school counselor. Several counselors asked for clarification about their roles pertaining to SARB and the expectations of them. One person explained that in order for them to contribute meaningfully, “*we need to understand what is the purpose of SARB, why are we using it, what is it doing for our students, and what type of kid do we get there.*”

Counselors acknowledged they have special knowledge about students experiencing truancy and they **would like to be informed** about the involvement of their students in SARB: “*I may have some insight or I may know something like ‘that kid’s dad has cancer’ or, you know, whatever that somebody else might not know. So, I like to know it is happening.*” Some people expressed their desire to increase their involvement in SARB, but they would like their involvement in the SARB process to be meaningful, valued, and result in improved outcomes for the students and families they serve.

Referral criteria. Several people expressed concern that the requirements for students to receive a hearing allows students (and their families) to avoid SARB. For example, “*The third one [truancy letter] has to be sent out and then it is like the kid wanders in and then, oops, well let’s start all over again.*” The delay in receiving a hearing is thought by some to reduce the effectiveness of the intervention. One person explains: “*It seems like by the time a kid gets SARBed that habitual truancy, not coming to school thing is so ingrained it has become a habit... it is very hard to change behavior at that point.*”

Counselors across all school levels noted the challenge of intervening with students whose absences are excused. One person shared their experience with this challenge:

I have kids with 50 medicals and I can’t do anything about it. And I’ll say ‘I know this kid isn’t sick and I know that someone is calling in for him’ and I can’t do anything. Our hands are tied and I have been told several times there is nothing we can do.

Counselors asked for **increased discretion about who they can refer for a hearing**: “*It needs to be a little more flexible and if we see a need as counselors for SARB, then I think people need to pay attention because we know the family and the kid best.*” Many of them are leading efforts to combat truancy in their school by conducting home visits, initiating targeted interventions for students who are truant (e.g., Check In Check Out, buying alarm clocks for students, reaching out to truancy officer for support) and have insight about which students SARB support is most appropriate for.

Institutional response. School counselors expressed deep frustration with the current institutional response to truancy. Several people commented that the response to truancy represents “*a broken system*” that is failing students. Specific areas where the system is deficient were described by school counselors, including:

- Lack of alternative educational options within the WCSD for students who struggle academically and/or socially in traditional comprehensive schools
- Support provided by the Intervention Department, which includes truancy officers, is constrained by limited resources.
- Unreliable response by Washoe County Department of Social Services (i.e. Child Protective Services was specifically mentioned) to calls for assistance, sometimes resulting in no response at all.
- Sense that the Washoe County Department of Social Services cannot do anything about educational neglect beyond referral to Differential Response .
- Parole and Probation Division of the Department of Public Safety do not follow-through with attendance citations and citations are inadequate when they are enforced.
- Overall lack of meaningful consequences for students and their parents for truancy.

Counselors asked for a **cohesive system to support students** with attendance issues. Elements described by counselors that comprise such a system include:

- Schools have a defined process for supporting students who are chronically absent (i.e. tiered intervention protocol and supports);
- Roles and expectations of school staff pertaining to SARB are established;
- Communication about truant students is clear and consistent. Information communicated would include student attendance goals and supports provided by the Intervention Department and partner organizations;
- Commitments to the SARB action plan are adhered to by all parties, including partner organizations (i.e., Social Services, Juvenile Services), WCSD staff, and school representatives
- Schools have increased access to truancy officers

Additionally, counselors would like **more alternative learning options**, including alternative school options (e.g., career and technical education schools, credit recovery school, small school options) to meet the needs of students who struggle within traditional school

environments. Several people mentioned the importance of these options in helping to overcome attendance challenges, particularly for students who experience extreme anxiety related to school and other mental health challenges.

Hearing Structure

The format and protocol of the hearing may affect how students and their parents receive and respond to the guidance provided by board members, which can influence attendance outcomes of students. Prior to the focus groups, several concerns were brought to the attention of the Intervention Department by school counseling staff. These concerns were revisited in the discussions and explored more fully. Three prominent concerns emerged, including the presence of an administrator at the hearing, training for SARB members and changes to the hearing format.

Administrator participation. Several counselors stressed the importance of having an **administrator present at the hearings**, and most stated that an administrator does usually attend from their schools. However, a small number of counselors described their administrators as consistently absent from hearings and leaving the responsibility in the hands of the counselor. This is viewed as problematic because administrators are responsible for referral to SARB. One person explains that attending without an administrator increases the likelihood that the responsibility will shift to the counselors: *By doing so, “I would have established that the counselors are able to go without an administrator and then it will be pushed off on me and it will be our job completely.”* It was also implied in discussion about follow-through that administrators are better positioned within the school to ensure the resulting action plan is enacted.

Training for SARB members. Several counselors requested **more training for board members** to properly listen and respond to students, their families, and school representatives. Several people recalled moments in hearings when board member comments made them uncomfortable. For example, one person felt comments by board members sympathized with students and parents and encouraged them to provide excuses that had already been addressed within the school. Another person described an exchange where a board member insinuated that the school had not adequately attempted to address the student’s issue, which placed the counselor into a defensive position. Another person described sensing that board members feel obligated to contribute, which ends up overly complicating the plan and confusing students and their parents.

Number in attendance. School counselors noted that there is an unnecessarily large number of people who attend hearings. Although many appreciated that these individuals participate for the purpose of supporting the students, it was acknowledged that the sheer number of people in

the room may actually hinder the ability of the panel to hear and respond to the needs of the student. It was also suggested that many of the people at the hearings are not or will not be directly connected to students and their families. Additionally, counselors speculate that the plan that results from the hearing is complicated by the large number of people present: *“The more people you have the more people who want a piece of the plan and so now all of the sudden it gets a little convoluted and confusing for everyone.”*

Improving the format of the hearings. Several people described their vision of the hearing as an opportunity to connect students and families to people who will be supporting them. By connecting students to their supporters in this way, some familiarity might be established and students and their parents may be disarmed and more engaged in addressing their challenges. Counselors offered a range of suggestions to improve the format of the hearings, they include:

- **Schedule hearings on school campuses** to lessen the anxiety of the experience and to make more convenient for families, students, and school representatives to participate.
- **Schedule hearings by zone** so that community supports (e.g., Family Resource Centers) and people who will be directly involved in supporting the student will attend
- Require board members to **study packet information well-advance of the hearing**
- **Invite only people who will be directly involved** with supporting students to attend hearings
- **Allow for more student input:** Create a safe and respectful atmosphere where students can contribute more fully to guiding the development of the plan
- **Treat the hearing and the resulting plan in a similar fashion as an IEP** (i.e. limit to members who directly participate in and affect the plan, highly personalized, apply similar rules for adherence, high level of legitimacy and accountability)

Post-Hearing

Action plan. At the end of each hearing a plan to address issues that contribute to a student’s absences is written. This plan contains goals agreed upon by the student and a list of commitments by board members and school representatives. Each student is also matched with a Reengagement Specialist who provides case management and works with the students, parents, and schools to implement and monitor the plan. Several counselors described challenges with the plan, including:

- Interventions prescribed have already been attempted by the school (e.g., Check In Check Out)

- Commitments to address student and family issues mostly fall on the shoulders of school staff, leaving counselors to “*feel like we are right back where we started.*”
- The plan is often not feasible to implement, there are too many commitments, and adherence to the plan is often inconsistent as a result.
- Contact information for people responsible to support the plan often includes people who were not at the student’s hearing, which is troublesome for two reasons:
 1. Students and their parents do not have any familiarity with the people who will be supporting them (i.e. they cannot connect the names to the faces)
 2. The commitments made were not made by the people responsible for seeing those actions through fruition

School counselors asked for **simplified, highly personalized plans that are actionable**. One person described the benefit of a simplified plan this way: “*when it is one or two things, you can meet those goals, you see that success and then you want to work towards something else too.*”

Follow-through. Several people recalled long histories of non-existent follow-through by SARB members on commitments made within the hearing and documented within the plan. One person’s comments exemplify the frustration among counselors about the lack of follow-through and support:

People sit there and they are like... ‘we are going to do this and that’, and we never hear from anyone again. It is like this [hearing] happens in a vacuum, it’s over, its done. ‘We’ve SARBed them!’ That’s it. Check the box. And then it is done. And it falls back on us. And that is fine. It is what we have been doing. But SARB is not doing anything to help our situation.

Poor follow-through was cited as a primary reason for the lack of improvement made by students and their families toward meeting attendance goals. One person noted that by following-through, students and their parents learn that the SARB has no authority, or “teeth,” and the behavior is left unchecked. Some noted that there is no accountability for board members, school staff, parents, or students for their commitments and they are able to ignore their commitments without any ramifications.

Beginning school year 2016-17, case managers were assigned to students and their families to assist them with the SARB process and to help them navigate the plan. Several school counselors praised the **assignment of a case manager** as an important step that will help ensure follow-through is made. The counselors who had contact with the case managers reported experiencing increased communication about students who received a hearing. Many

said they appreciated even brief updates, which were typically communicated through email messages, texts, and short phone calls.

Counselors at secondary schools suggested **designating a point person at each school** to be responsible for acting as a liaison with SARB. Several counselors expressed a desire to be involved, but they do not want to be in charge of the SARB action plan. A designated liaison would help ensure all of the necessary people at the school site would be informed and involved as necessary. Several people suggested that this responsibility would best fit under the prevue of the Parent Involvement Facilitator, Safe School social work staff, Deans who oversee attendance (some are currently acting in this role) and counselors who volunteer for this role.

The Role of Truancy Officers

Truancy officers were mentioned repeatedly in all three focus group discussions. The reference to them varied in topic, but their repeated emergence in the discussions suggests they have an important role within the system's response to truancy. Comments about truancy officers included:

- Truancy officers play a huge role in affecting attendance outcomes
- Truancy officers have an ability to build relationships with families and uncover barriers to attendance school staff may not be aware of
- Truancy officers, by providing transportation run the risk of actually perpetuating truant behavior. They were referred to as students' personal Uber drivers, minus the cost.
- Having a direct line to truancy officers is viewed as beneficial, in comparison to having to connect to officers through dispatch

School Counselor Questions

In the course of the discussions, several questions about the SARB process were raised by school counselors. These questions point to specific areas where clarification is needed and can be helpful when considering what information needs to be communicated more clearly.

1. Can students with an Individualized Education Plan who do not have stated attendance goals written in their plans receive a SARB hearing?
2. What are the outcomes of students and their families as a result of receiving a SARB hearing?
3. Why is sensitive information (e.g., substance use, sexual orientation) required in the SARB referral packet? How is this information used and is it necessary?

4. What is the assistant principal's role in the SARB process?
5. What is the District Intervention Assistance Team (D-IAT), what is its purpose, and who do school counselors access it for support?

Discussion

Many discussion points made by school counselors have implications to SARB, particularly to its approach, process, and outcomes. In school year 2017-18, the Intervention Department is revising SARB and embarking on a rebranding campaign in effort to strengthen the process, increase awareness and knowledge about SARB among school staff, and improve outcomes for students. The rebranding of SARB is intended to broaden awareness of this intervention to the school district community and increase the community's knowledge of the intervention's place within the MTSS framework, purpose and approach, and intended outcomes. Prior to rebranding, the SARB seeks to revise its mission and strategies for addressing truancy.

Comments made by school counselors suggest the revamping of the mission and vision of SARB is welcomed. The rebranding process will provide an opportunity for SARB to communicate information about SARB, including the expectations of those involved in the process, its expected goals and outcomes, and progress toward meeting those goals. Frequent communication of this information will ensure new administrators and other school personnel are knowledgeable of SARB and are intentional about its use within their school's response to truancy. Sharing this information values the contributions of school staff to the SARB process and allows them to be better informed so that they are positioned to contribute to solutions when they are asked to do so. Communicating the mission, vision, purpose, and outcomes also generates buy-in for SARB.

Follow-up support. The addition of a case manager to assist students, parents, and school staff navigate the post-SARB plan will likely lead to stronger outcomes for students. As noted by school counselors, the positive effect of their presence is already being observed, particularly in promoting follow-through. In one study of a similar intervention, case managers moderated the effectiveness of services provided by outside agencies:

The effectiveness of the external services depended upon the case manager's commitment to the family (persistence and trust), the case manager's ability to help the family develop a collaborative support network (interagency collaboration and building support systems), and the case manager's ability to help the family overcome treatment barriers (family distress, adverse events, and family value placed on education). As such, for this study population, the case manager represented the agent of change for TASC [Truancy Assessment and Service Centers] effectiveness. (Blackmon & Cain, 2015, p. 13)

Another study of a truancy board in Spokane, Washington found that “a dedicated agent of social support, is critical in understanding and handling the individualized nature of truancy. (Johnson, Wright, & Strand, 2012, p. 10)”. This information points to the importance of the quality of case management in affecting attendance outcomes and it is therefore vital to ensure case managers are adequately resourced and provided with necessary tools (e.g., training and support).

Case management approaches are often less effective for non-white student populations. Many researchers stress the importance of including culturally-responsive treatment approaches within truancy intervention programs (e.g. Thomas, et. al. 2011). It is necessary to confirm the case management approach used within the SARB utilizes culturally competent practices.

System response to chronic absenteeism. In school year 2016-17, the Nevada Department of Education adopted a measure for chronic absenteeism within the Nevada School Performance Framework for elementary, middle, and high schools. The adoption of this measure is likely to reinvigorate the conversation within schools and the district about how to best address this challenge.

A challenge within the WCSD noted by school counselors is a lack of alternative education options. Although there are several charter schools in the region, they do not offer transportation and their success serving students with truancy issues is not known. The lack of alternative education options in the WCSD as noted by school counselors has merit: Klima, Miller, and Nunlist (2009) found in their review of dropout and truancy interventions that alternative education programs, behavioral programs, and school-based mentoring programs were the modalities found to be most effective for attendance and enrollment outcomes. Career Academies—an alternative program model that offers a strong career and technical focus—positively impact both outcomes, as well as high school graduation.

Consistent application of attendance policy. The approach to truancy is met with debate among school counselors, where some argue for more consequential approaches while others advocate for increased access to intensive supports. Researchers largely advocate for increased supports to affect underlying issues that contribute truant behavior. For example, Staudt (2014, p. 51) notes that “some states have passed laws that provide for penalties for truant youth and their parents, including fines and jail time. In light of the personal and environmental issues that some parents may be coping with, stringent or punitive approaches are not likely to be effective.”

Regardless of the approach adopted by SARB, it is imperative that enforcement of attendance policy be consistently adhered to. Most researchers and practitioners agree that student respect for the consequences for truancy can be a strong motivator for improved attendance. In one study, ten youths were presented with legal consequences - the threat of either themselves or their parents having to go to jail - if they did not reduce their truancy. For

most, this resulted in behavior change because they were afraid; however, the change was temporary and most began skipping and ditching once they were no longer being actively monitored (Gase, DeFosset, Perry & Kuo, 2016). Another study found that consistent enforcement of existing policy, regardless of the policy, moderates the effectiveness of those policies on absenteeism (Bye, Alvarez, Haynes, & Sweigart, 2010).

A stubborn challenge. Truancy is a stubborn problem that is difficult to remedy: In their meta-analysis of 16 studies on truancy interventions, Maynard, McCrea, Pigott and Kelly (2013, p. 16) found that “although students who received an intervention did better on average than their control-group peers, students’ attendance did not improve to the point that they were achieving acceptable levels of attendance [assuming 90% average daily attendance or higher is acceptable].”

WCSD’s SARB also struggles to achieve sustained, long-term improved attendance among its students; however, there is strong institutional commitment to tackle this problem. This commitment is exemplified by the dedication of the school counselors who participated in these focus groups.

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