Looking at the Big Picture

Texas Reach Conference

June 3, 2011
Presenter

• *Lori Duke*

• Clinical Professor, Children’s Rights Clinic, the University of Texas School of Law

• Member, Education Committee, Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families

• Co-Chair, Post-Secondary Education Sub-Committee of the Education Committee
The Children’s Commission

– Established by Supreme Court of Texas order in November 2007
– Mission: To strengthen courts for children, youth and families in the Texas child-protection system and thereby improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children
– Chaired by Eva Guzman, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas
– 24 members, including judges, legislators, agency leaders, private foundations, family and corporate lawyers
– 40+ members on multi-disciplinary Collaborative Council that serves in advisory role
– Federally funded and supported by dedicated staff

• What the Commission does:
  – Administer the federal Court Improvement Program grant
  – Serve as a facilitator of collaboration for state leaders in the executive, judicial and legislative branches
Education Committee

• Idea developed by Texas team during National Judicial Leadership Summit on Child Protection, October 2009
• Created by order of Supreme Court of Texas in May 2010
• 3 meetings held to date
• 2 reports due to the Children’s Commission in next 9 months
Children’s Commission
Education Committee

- Focused on improving educational outcomes of foster children and youth
- Commitment of statewide resources to examine issue and make recommendations for improvement
- Coordinated effort of numerous agencies and systems involved with child protection and education
- Includes focus on older youth – how do we encourage more to seek post-secondary education and when they do, how can we better support them?
## Children’s Commission Education Committee Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Texas Education Agency (TEA)</th>
<th>Texas Association of School Boards (TASB)</th>
<th>Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Judges</td>
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<td>State Bar of Texas School Law Section</td>
<td>Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)</td>
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<td>Texas CASA</td>
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<td>Parent and Children’s Attorneys</td>
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<td>Former Foster Youth</td>
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<td>Casey Family Programs</td>
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• **Charge to Education Committee:**
  
  – Look at **challenges** to educational success of Texas foster kids
  
  – Identify **judicial practices** to help achieve better educational outcomes
  
  – Improve **collaboration** between child protection and education systems
  
  – Identify **cross-disciplinary training** needs
  
  – Make recommendations regarding exchange and sharing of education-related **data**
  
  – Provide **reports** to the Children's Commission, including final report with recommendations for long-term progress
8 Guiding Principles

• **#1:** Children and Youth in Care are Entitled to Remain in the Same School When Feasible

• **#2:** Children and Youth in Care Experience Seamless Transitions between Schools

• **#3:** Young Children in Care Receive Services and Interventions to Be Ready to Learn (0-5)

• **#4:** Children and Youth in Care Have the Opportunity and Support to Fully Participate in All Developmentally Appropriate Activities and All Aspects of the Education Experience
• **# 5**: Children and Youth in Care Have Supports to Prevent School Dropout, Truancy, and Disciplinary Actions and Reengage in the Education Experience

• **# 6**: Children and Youth in Care Are Involved and empowered and prepared to self-advocate in all aspects of their education

• **# 7**: Children and Youth in Care have Consistent Adult Support to advocate for and make education decisions

• **# 8**: Children and Youth in Care Have Support to Enter into and Complete Postsecondary Education
4 Sub-Committees

• School Readiness (GP # 3)
• School Stability and Transitions (GP # 1 and 2)
• School Experience, Supports and Advocacy (GP # 4, 5, 6, and 7)
• **Post-Secondary Education (GP # 8)**
• Co-chairs from education, child protection, judiciary
• Geographic diversity
Charge to Sub-Committees

- Use guiding principles to develop short and long-term goals
- Review applicable federal and state law
- Identify challenges and existing resources
- Prioritize issues
- Develop written and oral reports to update Education Committee
- Develop recommendations at end of work period (March 2012)
Final Report – March 2012

• Assessment of challenges and resources and federal and state law, policy and practice

• Recommendations for:
  – Judicial practice
  – Data exchange
  – Cross-disciplinary training
  – Long-term collaboration
Timeline

• Meet monthly between now and March 2012
• Sub-committee co-chairs report to committee at each quarterly committee meeting
  – Next scheduled = June 24, 2011
• Interim report submitted August 31, 2011
• Final report submitted March 31, 2012
Post-Secondary Education Sub-Committee

- 3 judges
- Youth and parents’ attorneys
- TEA
- DFPS
- CASA
- Foster and adoptive parents
- THECB
- Casey
- High school counselors
- 4-year universities
- Workforce Board
- Former foster youth
- Youth services
Some Challenges Identified

• Not always academically prepared for post-secondary course work
• Lack of emphasis put on the benefits of completing post-secondary education (by those involved with the youth such as foster parents and courts)
• Financial challenges
• Lack of support when enrolled
• Advocates (attorneys, guardians, etc.) insufficiently trained on educational issues, including benefits such as education/training vouchers and tuition fee waivers
• Education community (high school counselors) unaware of benefits some foster and former foster youth are eligible for
Some Existing Resources

- Texas Reach Convening
- Education/Training Voucher program
- Extended Foster Care program
- Texas Youth Connection website – list of resources for transitioning youth
- College and career readiness programs that work with at risk youth
- College supports, for example, Austin Community College foster care advisory council
So far...

- Collaborative meetings – attitude that these are “our” kids and need to work together to improve outcomes; not finger-pointing
- Regular exchange of information between child protective and education systems
- Created action plan and brainstorming about recommendations as touch on issues in charge to sub-committee
Quick “Wins”

• Recognized that relatives who get long-term custody of children may not know of eligibility for tuition fee waiver. Suggestion: Attach letter/form regarding benefit to final decree appointing relative as PMC – permanently part of court file

• Use of Texas Reach website to consolidate post-secondary resources in one location

• With secondary school personnel on sub-committee, help with outreach to new set of partners to assist youth to become better prepared to enter post-secondary
Long-Term Recommendations

• Youth exposure to and preparation for post-secondary education opportunities
• Help with financial aid and application materials
• Access to additional supports throughout post-secondary education, such as mentors, housing (including during school breaks), financial support, health care
• Continued support after leave care
• How extended jurisdiction/care can support
• Data (aggregate)
• Judicial oversight and practices
• Cross-system training
For more information

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