



Transforming Educational Neglect: Advocating for a Family Centered Approach Through Community-Based Response

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Value Proposition Statement

Addressing educational neglect cases through the child welfare system does more harm than good. [SF 4747](#) proposes to amend the state statute, allowing for an alternative response to reports of educational neglect. This change will help address the needs of children and families that face systemic challenges that lead to educational neglect. Currently, counties are required to open a child protection case for all educational neglect reports. Amending the statute will allow counties to develop their own response to educational neglect. This more collaborative approach will help reduce the negative effects a one-size-fits-all solution can have on students and their families. This change will also help reduce the racial disparities within the child welfare system.

Issue Statement:

Educational neglect is rarely the result of intentional caregiver negligence and frequently a symptom of a deeper problem related to poverty, limited resources, and a lack of support. Mandating child protection involvement for educational neglect when there is no safety concern present is an inefficient policy response. The intrusive nature of the child protection system creates a penalizing response to a problem that would be better served through support & collaboration with families. By providing families with [partnership](#), school and community connections, and access to tangible resources there is increased success in improving school attendance. Additionally, this type of approach would ensure families have access to more culturally appropriate, family-centered [services](#) to best meet their specific needs.

Educational neglect is [defined](#) as seven or more unexcused absences per state statute and the [Minnesota Child Maltreatment Screening Guidelines](#). Educational neglect reports fall within the broader category of neglect for child welfare reporting. Under current statute, counties do not have the flexibility to consider the barriers families often face that lead to attendance issues when screening these reports. The opening of a child protection case for educational neglect is an ineffective way to truly partner with families and work to address barriers. Allowing counties the flexibility to use a collaborative, community-based response will more effectively address the underlying issues that lead to chronic absenteeism and educational neglect.

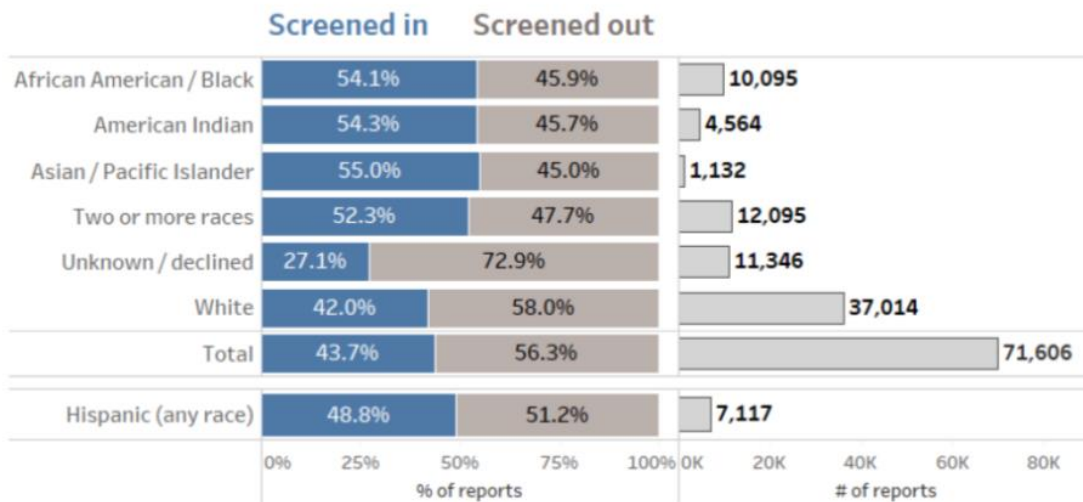
Explanation of Need

Meeting the educational needs of school-age youth is an important priority; however, using the child welfare system to do so is not an effective way to address the underlying problem. According to the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) (2023) “Children from families with low

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socioeconomic status were seven times more likely to be neglected than children in households with more resources.” Too often, poverty or the lack of resources is what leads families into the child welfare system.

Figure 1. Screening decisions of child maltreatment reports received in 2020



The Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators ([MACSSA](#)) position statement on educational neglect highlights how the current response pathway contributes to the overwhelmingly high disproportionality of minority families involved in the child welfare system. According to [MACSSA](#), “In Minnesota in 2020, roughly 70% of educational neglect reports involved children of color, whereas they represent only 36% of the enrolled student population. American Indian children represented 11% of children referred for educational neglect despite representing less than 2% of enrolled student population. Similarly, multi-racial children represented 21% of children reported for educational neglect; they represented only 6% of the enrolled student population.” These disproportionalities are a result of the excessive monitoring of families living in poverty.

Chronic school absences are a concern for school-aged youth. [Negative outcomes](#) for children that result from chronic school absenteeism include:

- Increased risk of experimenting with substance use
- Increased risk of violence
- Increased risk of suicide attempts
- Increased risk of sexual behaviors and pregnancy
- Increased risk of delinquency-related behaviors
- Increased risk of injuries and illness

Addressing educational neglect requires a shift in approach; one that moves away from a zero-tolerance approach and instead allows for a more individualized approach that addresses barriers and provides support and interventions that meet the needs of the child and their family.

Current Policy Approach:

Current policy for educational neglect reports requires a child protection response through the opening of a family assessment case. The family assessment timeline is forty-five days to resolve the concerns. If the concerns are still present, the case can be referred for ongoing case

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management meaning further child protection involvement for a family. Case workers assigned to these cases are managing a variety of other cases, often ones with high level safety concerns present. Case workers are frequently unable to dedicate the time and effort required to give the tangible support families need to address poverty or resource related challenges.

Additionally, current policy furthers the disproportionality present within the child welfare system. [Children of color](#) and families in poverty are consistently overrepresented in neglect reports. This ties into the impact of the "[Labeling Effect](#)". The Labeling Effect explains how "system involved" youth and families experience difficulties in establishing positive relationships in their schools and communities when carrying the label of system involvement. Further, system involvement for youth does not correlate with improved school [attendance](#).

Alternative Response:

Alternative community-based response pathways to educational neglect have been implemented in a handful of counties within Minnesota and have shown positive outcomes.

Promoting Attendance and School Success (PASS)-Scott County:

- Pilot program started in [Scott County](#) in 2022/2023 focused on both preventative services and a voluntary service response to reports of educational neglect.
- The prevention part of this program allows students to be referred for services at the first sign of attendance-related concerns with the goal of reducing the number of families entering the system.
- When a report is made for educational neglect, the family is first offered voluntary services (supportive case management, resources, tangible assistance) through a community agency before a family assessment case is opened.

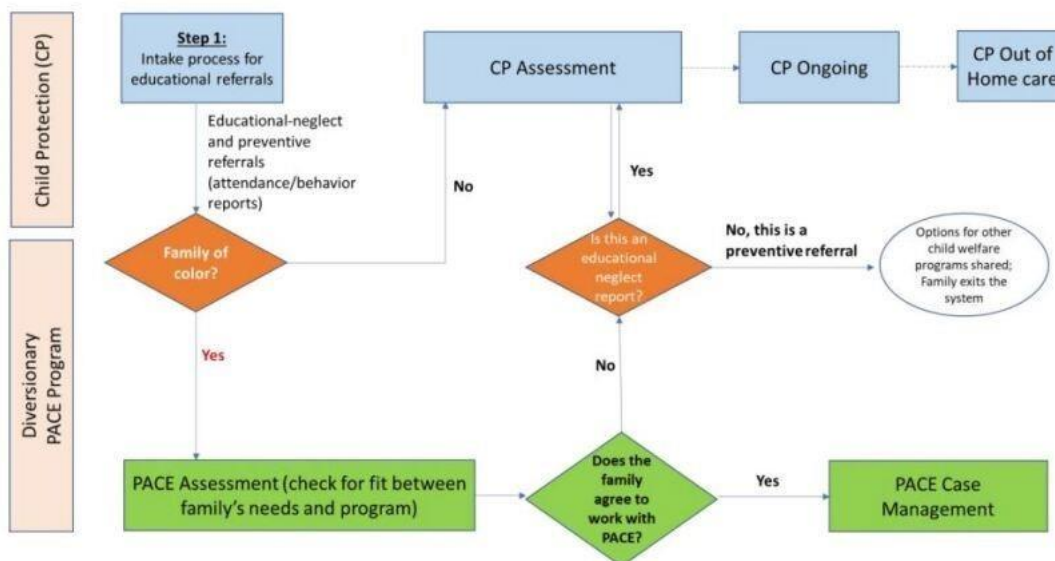
Saint Paul Public Schools & Lutheran Social Services:

- St. Paul Public School District partnership with Lutheran Social Services (LSS) started in 2017 with the focus of family partnership to improve attendance.
- LSS identified housing insecurity, transportation issues, and a lack of resources as precursors to poor attendance. The program provides case management, resources including laptops, transportation help, and other concrete assistance specific to the barriers causing attendance concerns.
- LSS prevents families from being brought into the child protection system with this supportive approach that focuses on the specific needs within the family.

Parents and Children Excel Program (PACE)-Olmsted County:

- Initiated in 2011 with a focus on reducing the re-entry rates for children of color by offering voluntary support services in response to educational neglect reports.
- [PACE](#) offers case management services that seek to address the needs of the youth and their families through a voluntary service model.
- The program focuses on prevention and partnership with families. A child protection response is initiated only if the family is not engaging, or the problem continues.

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[PACE Service Model Diagram](#)

Policy Position Statement

We encourage the MN Legislature to enact legislation that provides an alternative or community-based response to reports of educational neglect ([SF 4747/HF 4911](#)). This legislation amends Minnesota Statutes 2023 Supplement, section 260E.17, subdivision 1 to allow for a discretionary child welfare response.

In addition, we recommend:

- Local child welfare agencies be required to offer services to address school attendance concerns. Services may be provided through an outside community organization or through voluntary child welfare case management.
- Services be culturally and linguistically appropriate and tailored to the needs of the child(ren) and their family.
- Child welfare staff or community agency providers have specific training for effectively responding to educational neglect reports.
- The community organization or child welfare agency must engage in multiple attempts to engage with the family before determining a service refusal. If a family is refusing services and attendance concerns persist, a family assessment case may be opened with the child welfare agency.
- Grant funding be provided to local child welfare agencies for program costs specific to implementing an alternative response plan including prevention services.

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