

March 28, 2023

Dear Dr. Williams and Team,

We hope that this letter finds you well. At the March 21st Committee Meeting, we heard that the board had many questions about attendance in our schools, and we are sending this letter to both inform you of what we are doing and ask for your partnership to solve a complex issue. As School Leaders, we are very supportive of any work happening that brings all relevant stakeholders together to solve a complex problem. Unfortunately, we were unable to address this at the Committee meeting because it was a non-voting item and thought it important enough to address.

### **Truancy/Student Attendance**

**We are first proud to report that attendance is better in each and every school in NOLA-PS.** All schools represented by this letter have increased their attendance by 5% or more from the 21-22 school year. This is the result of the many interventions that schools are putting in place on a daily basis. However, attendance has not returned to pre-COVID levels, and we know we have much more work to do.

*School's Responsibility:* Monitor and report attendance daily; Submit truant students to the Office of Student Support and Attendance (OSSA) once the school has completed 3 of the 4 District recommended interventions and the truancy check request form. Our schools are completing a wide range of interventions including: phone calls home, attendance contracts, home visits, attendance incentives / campaigns, wrap-around support for families and more.

*District's Responsibility:* OSSA receives the school's information and communicates with the school the outcome after the following has happened:

- Truancy Office and SRO conduct a home visit;
- Truancy check-up is followed up by the Social Work Coordinator (SWC);
- SWC contacts families for follow up to offer brief supportive services;
- Director of School Attendance communicates outcomes with the school;
- If the family is responsive, the students return to school OR if the family is not responsive, Truancy/SRO will serve family with a municipal court summons;
- If the parent or guardian is served, the parent must appear in court;
- SWC works with family members to complete court orders and improve school attendance.

At the board meeting, it was reported that over 1,000 students have been referred to the Office of Student Support and Attendance (OSSA). To receive a referral, a student must have been absent more than 10 days, and the school must have completed interventions. **We have not received significant follow-up or case management on these 1,000 students.** We ask that members of OSSA please provide us with the truancy case outcomes as schools have stated that students have been referred without feedback from OSSA.

We are also concerned that the city is not fulfilling its responsibilities:

- Students are not being picked up by truancy officers if not in school.
- Very few chronically absent students are referred to Municipal Court. This is sometimes due to a lack of people resources for issuing summons or an issue of capacity within the courts themselves.

- If the case makes it to Municipal Court, there are rarely required supports for families. In the past, Families In Need of Support (FINS) was a mandatory intervention, not optional. FINS used to be one of the most effective interventions for families in need of help.

We also heard on Tuesday that the district had challenges getting data from schools about attendance. First, we think it important to mention that many schools have not routinely received communication from the district, as the district has not had an accurate listserv of all school leaders. We know that the district team is working to resolve this, but it is likely that this is the reason some schools did not respond. Second, it would be helpful for us to use the Charter School Accountability Framework (CSAF) as the umbrella for all data requests. The CSAF lays out a yearly process for the district to determine its data requests and communicate that to schools in the summer. This is then communicated via an accountability calendar, and we are held accountable for all requests in that calendar. We are happy to provide data requested. Doing this via an already established process makes it easier for us to set up systems to meet your requests.

Student achievement and student safety are our top priorities, and students need to be in school to achieve those ends. Our schools are using every tool at their disposal to improve attendance, and they are doing so successfully. But it is not enough, and we need your help through collaboration.

We have not been engaged by the district as a school leader community on many issues, and we believe this is a top issue for collaboration as it is the number one way we can collectively improve student achievement. We are open to any and all forms of collaborating so that we may solve this. We know there have been discussions of including absences in the accountability framework, and we see discussions about solving this challenge as a prerequisite to accountability measures.

#### **Family/Parent Concern Process:**

The School Leader Forum met with District representatives in early January to discuss and review the parent complaint process. The next step after we left the meeting was for NolaPS to finish putting together the "1-pager/slide deck" outlining the process for that communication and then host a meeting to share with school leaders. NolaPS has yet to have that meeting to discuss the process with school leaders. After several attempts to obtain the 1 pager/slide deck, the Forum was last informed it would be ready for the April school leader meeting. We request confirmation that this will in fact occur and if so, that we receive this information in advance.

#### **School Contact Information**

Many school leaders have reported that they were left off of invites for meetings and communications. We formally request that the district review its listserv to ensure that all leaders are always communicated with and invited to attend meetings. We also request that meetings are scheduled at least two weeks ahead of time with a clearly communicated purpose so we have time to alter our schedules to attend.

We hope that this communicates to you that we want to partner with you in the work. Please engage us so we may do that.

Sincerely,

The School Leaders