



WICOMICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DIVISION OF STUDENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

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My name is Clay Belgie and I am the Truancy Reduction Program Coordinator for Wicomico County Public Schools. I have held this position for over 8 years and have seen the many positive outcomes for our students and families. It is an honor to be able to share my thoughts on this valuable program in support of SB220- Juveniles Truancy Reduction Pilot Program – Expansion.

The Truancy Reduction Court Program has adapted to changing times by meeting students and families where they are. Ours is a holistic approach to positive growth by offering incentives for improved attendance. Over the years I have seen students enter into positive behavior contracts and rewarded with gym memberships and Driver's Education Training at no cost to the family. This strength-based approach elicits more positive outcomes and lasting behavior change than the alternatives of criminal prosecution of the parent or referral to the Department of Juvenile Services for habitual truancy.

The Program and regular court hearings also give the school system an opportunity to interact with families that were less than responsive to school-based interventions. It also highlights the importance of regular school attendance, which we know is so crucial to the learning process. Mental health, substance use, and other services may be ordered through the Program, which provide added opportunities for families to find success.

In my position, I am often asked by colleagues around the state how they may access a Truancy Reduction Court Program to support their students and families and I must explain the limitations of the statute preventing them from easily attaining this problem-solving court. Visitors from other counties have observed our court proceedings and find value in the approach and interaction with the participants.

The Truancy Reduction Court Program in Wicomico County has assisted numerous families over the years find success with not only attendance, but with grades, family life and social skills. In our county, the Program affords room for only 40 student participants, out of the more than 15,000 enrolled, at any one time. An expansion of this program, not only in our county but across the state, would give us the opportunity to provide services for many more who are in need of such intervention.

Thank you for your consideration to this very worthwhile bill.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clay Belgie".

Clay Belgie