



## FAMILY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Location: Washington State Penitentiary Date: 10/01/2022 Time: 8:30-10:00

Teleconference details: MS Teams Meeting – Local Family Council

**/Meeting Attendees**

Department/facility co-chair: Steve Barker Family co-chair: Tina Wright

Facility/council secretary: Debra Gilbreth Family secretary: Gail Molina

Members present: Tina Wright, Connie Hollis, Carrie Montoya, Gail Molina, Megan Miller, Wendy Dubinsky, Dean Dubinsky, Ashley Holbrook,

Non-council member attendees: Steve Barker, Assoc. Superintendent; Zachary Kinneman, Ombuds; Debra Gilbreth, CPPC; Sgt. Chase Harvey; Katrina Suckow, HSM3; Bruce Wood, Family Services CS4; Harj Aulakh; Jordan Kisling CRT, Scribe

**Agenda**

Old business

Topic	Discussion/Key Points	Next Steps
Welcome & Introduction (Steven Barker)	Introduction of all those in attendance. Agenda Management: Steve Barker Timekeeper: Dean Dubinsky	
CPPC Report Action item	Debra Gilbreth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Read to Me Daddy               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No updates at this time</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Powwows and other gatherings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lisa Flynn &amp; Dawn Taylor met with HQ Clinical team and Assistant Secretaries and have asked for formal correspondence indicating that there will be no family friendly or cultural events involving families until the new year. Have not received that yet.</li> <li>○ Powwows are religious based which is why they may have been allowed to have guests.</li> <li>○ API (Asian Pacific Islander) event is a cultural event and was done in the visiting room without visitors.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Laminated card update               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Laminated cards have been placed in both visiting rooms and public access areas.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Posting of minutes and upkeep of the bulletin boards               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I don't manage this. I send out the LFC notes via email to all units, managers and that includes Sgt. Harvey.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Budget               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Budget - officially approved and sent out on 9/21</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Back to school backpack event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Completed. 111 backpacks sent out to students ages 5 to 24. Balance of \$5700. Working on getting approval for Coats for Kids.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Winter Event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Putting together activity bags for visiting room for Oct/Nov/Dec since we are unable to have families on site for the event.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ August: 22 volunteers came in and gave 95.65 hours of time</li> <li>○ Non-religious services: Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and cultural events 29.18 hours</li> <li>○ Religious services: Latter-Day Saints, Seventh Day Adventists, Protestant and Jehovah's Witness 66.47 hours.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Online visiting? Video visits maybe like a group video visit/chat feature. We are not sure if JPAY has the capacity</li> <li>● Each group has different cultural event timings from quarterly, to yearly (like Powwows). These are usually run with a combination of Unit Managers.</li> </ul>	<p>LFC group requesting D. Gilbreth to put Parent Teacher conference info in visiting room activity bags.</p>
IIBF	<p>Steve Barker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerning the IIBF report from Mr. Cerna:</li> <li>● Jim Cerna went to headquarters. He is not with WSP anymore.</li> <li>● Melanie Perkins has taken over for him.</li> </ul> <p>There is a new local business advisor starting soon (Mr. Anderson). He has written up a IIBF report that will be attached to these minutes.</p>	
Statewide Family Council Updates	<p>Megan Miller (Statewide Family Council Representative):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No updates as she was not able to attend the Statewide Family Council meeting last weekend</li> <li>● Could we get an update from Mr. Cerna on the IIBF budget that he never presented in the last meeting?</li> <li>● The SFC had a meeting about EFV;'s, an email was sent out, providing a link to submit your own questions and feedback before the 15th of this month.</li> <li>● Lisa Flynn held a meeting about EFV and policy.</li> </ul>	
Family Services Report	<p>Bruce Wood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction: He worked in child welfare for 23 years and has been dealing with the negative effects of incarceration on children for over 30 years.</li> <li>● Parent/teacher (PT) conferences.</li> <li>● Parenting programs to assist with those children that have incarcerated parents. There are usually one or two, but they can schedule more if it is needed to help the child.</li> <li>● Negative impacts to children's education and mental wellbeing.</li> <li>● House bill 84 and RCW's (28A.300.500) about parent</li> </ul>	

	<p>teacher conferences and other initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Once or twice a year at progress reporting periods. Gives the incarcerated parent to support their children as far as celebrating their successes and giving expectations for future educational goals. This is also available for Head start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).</li> <li>● Helps with getting parents involved with their children. These can be run either through the phone or over teams.</li> <li>● In the Fall or Spring, CC's will hang flyers, those that want to know more can get a hold of the counselors. The caregiver of the child must give approval, and the application is given by the counselor. The Counselor makes sure that there are no issues such as no contact orders, Department of Children, Youth &amp; Families, or making sure the child is theirs.</li> <li>● Family Services gets a hold of the Department and the teachers to get them set up.</li> <li>● If children are not included in CEPrison, or if the school has no record of the incarcerated parent, it can cause issues.</li> <li>● Debra will see about getting information into the visiting room bags for visiting family members.</li> </ul>	
LFC Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incarcerated Individuals being able to attend LFC meetings remotely either by phone or web (Zoom)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Who would we have come? Just Offender Communication Liaison (OCL)</li> <li>○ Even having one from each section, we would have to have an officer or unit manager sit with them, which for some would mean coming in on their day off.</li> <li>○ Possible to look into having the OCL's get in contact with our SFC member to have her bring their most pressing issues forward</li> <li>○ OCL's used to be run in each unit but we are short on unit managers, OCL's change due to movement between facilities and releasing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

**New business**

Topic	Discussion/Key Points	Next Steps
Action Item – Visiting – Check in, holding, and Visiting room areas, updates from vendors	<p>Sgt. Harvey/Gail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Up-to-date minutes are still not being posted in visiting area. How do we make this happen? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SGT Harvey was out a good bit over the summer. He has made sure that all four of the bulletin boards have been updated.</li> <li>○ They have one inside the visiting room and one outside in the processing area on both the EC and WC sides of the facility.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Have laminated cards for the tables been completed and delivered? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ They have been put out in both WC and EC</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Sgt. Harvey to talk to new vending company to see what families do about money on old cards. Also, update us on the vending machines and when they will be able to be used.

visiting rooms on the tables.

- New visitors have no clue where to look for information. The current system is NOT working because the bulletin boards in current holding areas are not visible, nor updated. Could whoever is responsible for this board try to pretend to be a new visitor and walk in their shoes when placing info on the board? Or in more conspicuous areas.
  - Sgt. Harvey Would be more than happy to get together with Gail next time he sees her when she comes for visiting that she and he could go over what they can do to improve.
- Could the pictures in the holding area be rehung?
  - Would like to get new pictures taken and updated.
  - Sgt. Harvey also wants to look into some decorations for the hallway to make visitors more comfortable.
  - Covid has decreased visiting numbers and changed how things operate, we are hoping that soon we can hopefully get things kind of back to normal.
- When will family be able to at least keep a cup of water at the table while visiting?
  - We had one week where WSP and the County were in the green, that they could have water at the table and be without masks.
  - Unfortunately, the County and the facility have gone back to yellow status at this time.
  - Upland birds of Florida are posted in one spot, would like to get other posters maybe about local Washington items that can be put up.
  - Sgt. Harvey has asked one of the officers in the visiting area help out with ideas about things that can be put up.
- It seems meals are being saved for the I/I's. Is this being done consistently now?
  - An email was sent out to make sure that the units are keeping meals for those that are leaving the units for visiting.
  - This is happening more consistently but if for some reason it doesn't happen the I/I needs to contact the Unit Sergeant/Manager.
  - In contact with vendors about the vending machines. When they pulled all the vending away from the prisons, they forgot that we used the cards with money on them.
  - Unfortunately, as family is not able to bring in debit/credit cards it won't work. They may have to go back to cash only machines

	<p>(allowing only a max of \$20 instead of the \$40 that was allowed with the cards)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sgt. Chase is checking on it every week. Swire is no longer vendor, the contract was changed, and the new company does not use the cards, so we are hoping to get it fixed.</li> <li>● LFC is requesting that visitation staff know what the LFC is, and how to refer friends and family, particularly because they are first line contact for visitors, and the Family Service Department seems to be in the process of being dismantled. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ LFC notices are hung up in public areas that explain how to participate.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p>Food Services</p>	<p>Steve Barker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Valid reason for not providing pictures of the food being served to our loved ones. Is this “policy”</li> <li>● It’s not a policy that we don’t provide pictures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We are not hiding anything, we just do not have the capacity or time to do this for every single meal.</li> <li>○ Is there more specific details on what exactly is being looked for in the form of the pictures.</li> <li>○ Are we looking for a picture of every single meal, or all the meals from the previous month?</li> <li>○ West complex meals are different from East Complex but based on the same menu.</li> <li>○ Wanting to know what the food looks like compared to what the menu item is. How well it correlates.</li> <li>○ We have different systems based on what area of the facility.</li> <li>○ Keep in mind WSP serves almost 6000 meals each day.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Incarcerated are reporting a lot of food waste. Is this because the food is inedible? If there is extra food, why can’t it be given to incarcerated instead of the garbage? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dieticians set food menu based on 2500 calories a day.</li> <li>○ Survey would have to be done to find out if it’s that the food isn’t good or if it’s just that the items offered aren’t necessarily to the incarcerated tastes (like some people just don’t like yams so if they are served, they might not be eaten by everyone)</li> <li>○ Garden food is given to the population but after a while it can get old if it is the same type of vegetable, so a lot of the fresh</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

	<p>produce ends up being given to the food bank here in Walla Walla.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The institution gardens are also used to supplement the kitchens to a small extent.</li> <li>○ They produce a couple hundred thousand pounds of food, but it is not big enough to consistently feed everyone.</li> <li>○ We could have an extensive garden, but the 500 acres is on rotation, it's sitting fallow this year.</li> <li>○ Personal gardens are used to supplement the food to a small extent as well.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Where can families find the food menu that is made up for the year? Where can they see how the food is rotated so that they are not being served the same things over and over? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Will put a link to the menu in the notes.</li> <li>○ Assoc. Supt. Barker followed up with HQ CI about access to the menu and learned that it is not published. This should be brought up at the Statewide Family Council</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p>Televisions</p> <p>Action items</p>	<p>Steve Barker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Updates on new tablets? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ They will not be able to keep their old tablets</li> <li>○ Not sure how long the calls will be able to last will have to test it out when the system is in place.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Updates on the TV issues? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ BAR and Visiting are still waiting for everything to be completed. We are waiting for a component that had to be ordered.</li> <li>○ It should be put in next week, but the Bufford Technician and facility TVs should be all back up and running</li> <li>○ There was a glitch in Delta and the facility electrical manager was able to get it fixed and it should be back up now.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● The incarcerated are also asking, "Could we please get the channels we voted on?" and "Could we please get the SWANK channel back" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There was no 'vote' per-say but a survey, the facility has a contract and can only get so much stuff and can't get every channel that is requested. They must go with the most popular options among the population as a whole.</li> <li>○ SWANK channel was a paid channel dedicated to running movies. This question will have to be taken to Statewide family</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<p>JPAY Action item</p>	<p>council to see about getting it back.</p> <p>Steve Barker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How are the upgrades going? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Arc electric started out in Golf unit, they were given two weeks in each unit and so far, they have only been taking about a week in each unit.</li> <li>○ The kiosk machines will be upgraded once the Wi-Fi has been upgraded through the whole facility.</li> <li>○ They are anticipating being completely done sometime between January and February.</li> <li>○ It will not increase the number of kiosks, but we may be able to ask for more. They are thinking about putting a kiosk machine in the Health Services Building (HSB).</li> <li>○ They are currently in the Baker, Adams, Rainier (BAR) units.</li> <li>○ We can request to see if they could put an updated kiosk machine in one unit to see if they work properly.</li> <li>○ The Wi-Fi is being put in in the yards, gym, just about everywhere.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● The incarcerated are worried about losing apps and music etc. that they have purchased. They are also worried that they won't be able to make phone calls to family if their tablets are broken or taken away for one reason or another. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Everything will transfer over to the new tablets. They should not lose any funds, music or apps that have been purchased.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Families want to know what is going to happen to the money on phone accounts when the phone switches to Jpay. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The funds will transfer over to the new accounts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Could we continue to put the Jpay contact person information in the minutes indefinitely? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We can continue to place the JPAY contact person in the notes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Did they confirm if there will be a trouble/help app placed on the new tablets? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We are not sure on what is on the tablets.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● How many more areas need to be updated with Kiosks? Couldn't they "try it" with a Kiosk to see if it works before they update all of them? Could you request it be done that way? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ They should be all done and it's contracted to be done by January.</li> <li>○ The infrastructure for the Wifi is done first.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We've had zero feedback as to whether it's working better at other facilities</li> <li>○ No, we have not tried it on one Kiosk first, but we could ask.</li> </ul> <p>Keith DeFlitch (JPAY):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not being able to print off the bi-monthly food packages. Updates? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reached out to Mr. DeFlitch and he said "I don't know anything about printing of bimonthly food packages. I am not sure why that would even be brought up through Jpay, it doesn't have anything to do with food packages."</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p>Action Item – Medical/Mental Health</p>	<p>Dr. Pezo/Crystal/Katrina</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Update on backlog of TB testing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 475 TB tests/contacts between 8/1-9/29</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Inmate and families are reporting that abnormal labs are NOT being followed up on, in a timely manner. Response? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is the process/time frame?</li> <li>○ We have some that are done here, stat labs that go down to PSMC and we just have to wait for the results, some labs go out to another lab. That lab will call us if there is something major. If not the labs are sent to us, printed, and placed in the providers box so that they can follow up.</li> <li>○ If you find there is an issue, please let Health Services know so that they can find out if it's a lab/clinic issue or if it's a provider issue</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Limitations on medications that can be approved even for chronic pain. Usually, can be seen during sick call if it is not urgent. During the beginning with Covid quarantines medical responses were slower. Now that restrictions are being changed those that are on quarantine can now be seen, dental is also changing to this to help with pain management. Update?</li> <li>● CPAP machines on back order. Update? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We have not had a major back log at this point, we had someone looking for them.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Dr. Pezo to check into other options for sleep other than antidepressants. Melatonin or other sleep medications. Updates? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mr. Barker found out it is allowed for prescriptions. It depends on the levels in the health care plans.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Crystal will look into sending out messages about mental health month/screenings in the future to bring</li> </ul>	<p>Katrina Suckow, Health Services Manager 3. kasuckow@doc1.wa.gov</p>



	<p>awareness to it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mental health awareness, Cancer awareness, Heart Healthy awareness... could the incarcerated population participate and or organize events regarding these?</li> <li>● For instance, AFSP sponsors suicide prevention walks and has had events inside prisons in Oregon which would not only benefit the incarcerated but their families and the staff at the facilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This has been sent to Lisa Flynn and SFC with the new cultural programs that are being launched or upgraded.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Recreation	<p>Rec. Specialist 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Some benches need repaired. There are various benches that should be replaced. Horse mats for the weight piles in the WCF mostly need to be replaced. All the large weight bars and curl bars need to be replaced. EC and WC need new foam roller pads for leg extension machines. What is being done to replace this failing equipment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I am aware of the weight pile issues. I just received some new vinyl to cover the benches, so I plan to start on that this week. I have one new leg press weight machines on order, and it should arrive soon. Lastly, I plan on purchasing some new leg rollers for benches as well as some new bars. Please let the I/T's now this is a work in progress so it may take a while.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Mattresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Update on Mattresses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CI is not producing mattresses right now. New material has been ordered set to arrive approximately in late December. That is the last information we received regarding mattresses. This question should be addressed to CI.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
LFC/SFC Nominations	<p>Tina:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Elections are in October for next year 2023</li> <li>● Megan nominated to continue her position at SFC for 2023, seconded.</li> <li>● Tina nominated to continue her position at co-chair for 2023, seconded</li> <li>● Gail nominated to continue her position for 2023, seconded</li> </ul>	
Round Table Action items	<p>LFC Members/Unit questions</p> <p>Still not getting Union Supply catalogs in the units, they said there are but if they are taken into cells and not brought back out then not everyone can use them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mr. Barker will make sure to check on Monday to see</li> </ul>	

that this is possible.

We switched to battery power lawn mowers; we were storing them in a pump house near Victor/William. We didn't realize that they had to be kept in a temp controlled area. The pump for Well 5 was damaged in the fire after a battery exploded. Well 5 irrigates most of the facility, no water in WC during the hottest part of summer. We are just getting back to where we have water in those areas. We were not able to plant pumpkins due to the inability to irrigate them.

Education is happening, classes can be run in EC if there is staffing, if we have holes in the roster we have to pull and unfortunately oftentimes Rec, Education, and religious services are affected. In Victor/William right now they are giving out books and packets for several weeks in ways of homework, they will get credits for the class and won't have to make up if they complete the homework they have been assigned.

This month we received 71 applications instead of the 20 some we usually get. We won't get all of them but a portion at least. We have a core class starting next week that has 15 employees that are for WSP. We hope to have similar numbers in future classes.

Delta:

- Moves need to be done at a time that doesn't interrupt dayroom and unit recreation periods.
  - Response: CUS stated she would talk to the SGT.

Update: CUS spoke with SGT. Please understand that moves happen when transfers are received from the transfer desk. We try to accommodate however, it isn't always going to be perfect, there are a lot of moving parts, and we just can't make everyone happy 100% of the time. Sometimes there will have to be a little give and take to try and get everything done."

Adams:

- Discussed: Starting a beading group. Curio items currently not allowed in dayroom.
- Response: Discussion will need to be had with custody about possibilities
- Update: Curio is not allowed to be brought to the dayroom. No group sponsor has been identified. Currently this program is not moving forward, but we will continue to try to get something going.
- Discussed: Legal calls. Currently being made in dayroom, which is loud, phones cut off at 20 mins necessitating having to redial lawyers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Response: Working on a legal area for calls and court hearings</li> <li>● Update: Policy requires that all calls placed to an attorney will be done by the I/I. The only place this can happen is in the dayroom. We don't have payphones anywhere else. Not sure if the JPAY calling (on tablets) will rectify this situation.</li> <li>● Discussion: Jpay access is limited by video visiting. Kiosk doesn't allow access 20 minutes before or after video visits. If there is more than one in a day some MODS have no access to kiosk for that day.</li> <li>● Response: still working on getting video visiting hours extended</li> <li>● Update: Adams unit has not had any reported issues with this recently.</li> </ul> <p>Baker/Rainier: New CUS since Mid-August and he hasn't heard of any complaints or concerns about the food or laundry. Nor has he received any reports of leaking windows. An I/I can report a leaky window and a work order will be put in for that specific window.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussion: Concerns over perceived idea that rags and mop heads are being washed in the same loads as clothing</li> <li>● Response: An email was sent to CI laundry inquiring as to the process</li> <li>● Update: See note above</li> <li>● Discussion: There are concerns over the food service</li> <li>● Response: Will arrange for CI Rep to be at next meeting</li> <li>● Update: see note above</li> <li>● Discussion: Outside windows need sealed/cleaned reports that some are leaking</li> <li>● Response: Sgt. Lancaster will check during security inspections and put work orders in for any repairs needed.</li> <li>● Update: Work orders have been submitted to fix any windows and clean windows.</li> </ul>	
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Next meeting location: WSP MS Teams Date: 12/3/2022 Time: 8:30-10:00

Comments: Please send your Agenda requests with questions to Gail Molina (LFC Secretary) or Debra Gilbreth at least two weeks prior to the next LFC meeting.

The contents of this document may be eligible for public disclosure. Social Security Numbers are considered confidential information and will be redacted in the event of such a request. This form is governed by Executive Order 00-03, RCW 42.56, and RCW 40.14. Upon completion, the data classification category may change.

Distribution: **ORIGINAL** - Family council co-chairs



# Getting the most out of parent-teacher conferences with incarcerated parents

BY SUSAN RADCLIFFE, MINDY BLACK-KELLY AND DANIEL POLLACK



**A**s of July 2021, there were 2.1 million people in U.S. prisons. According to a 2016 U.S. Department of Justice survey of inmates, 47% of state prisoners and 57% of federal prisoners reported having at least one minor child, with the average number being two children. The average age of those minor children in state prisons was 9 years old; in federal prisons it was 10 years old. With 2.7 million children in the United States impacted by incarceration, this yields an extraordinary number of school aged children who are lacking a parental figure as they navigate through the school system.

Parental incarceration is one of the “top 10” Adverse Childhood Experiences which, according to Kristin Turney (2019), “can produce isolation and shame that impedes social support systems, interactions with peers and teachers, and children’s educational opportunities and outcomes.” In looking at supporting children who have an incarcerated parent, is an obvious untapped resource being overlooked when it comes to school support?

It is well established that “[v]isitation with a noncustodial parent, even one who is incarcerated, is presumed to be in the best interests of the child” (Matter of Tamara T. v Brandon U., 180 AD3d 1286, 1286, 118 N.Y.S.3d 321 [2020]). Not surprisingly, parents have long been noted as a key figure in a child’s academic success. Active parental involvement can help improve a student’s attitude, morale, academic achievement and social adjustment. Additionally, parental involvement helps children grow to be responsible members of the community. Kristin Turney (2021) notes there is a positive relationship between poor mental health and having an incarcerated family member. Davis and Shlafer (2017) found “adolescents with incarcerated parents are at elevated risk for mental health problems ...” Research conducted by Rosa M. Cho (2011) revealed “adolescents are indeed at greater risk of school dropout during the year(s) their mothers are incarcerated.” A study of children of incarcerated mothers aged 13-20 years found “... adolescents were more than four times as likely to be out of school than a sample of their best friends; four times more likely to be suspended; three times more likely to be significantly absent from school and nearly four times as likely to be failing classes. More than half of these children required school visits for disciplinary reasons during the previous 12 months, and more than a quarter of them had been arrested.”

Children of incarcerated parents struggle. They don’t have the extra support at home because the caregiving parent is often trying to compensate financially for the loss of the incarcerated parent. Additionally, children often struggle with the stigma of incarceration and grieve in silence.

## Orchestrating a conference

Incarcerated parents have a lot of “time” on their hands to think about their lives and the impact their absence is having on their children. Like most parents, they also want their children to have better lives than what they have. Incarcerated parents want to be involved and are willing to participate in academic activities if given the opportunity and felt of value. Schools can help with this. Indeed, some states are implementing policy changes to make sure incarcerated parents are involved in their children’s education. Washington State legislators have implemented laws and policies to support children of incarcerated parents. An incarcerated parent in the State of Washington is offered two parent conferences a year with their child(ren)’s educators. Correctional facilities post flyers for parents to sign up, and facility staff coordinate the visits with the educational systems. Even in states where such laws do not yet exist, advocates can facilitate parent/teacher conferences from inside the facility. It just takes a bit of planning.

Here are a few tips for orchestrating a conference:

- Plan with the school system. Each school district has a counselor or social worker who can help inform you of the designated parent-teacher conference day, or a specific time to talk with the incarcerated parent. Starting with a phone call to the school and explaining you would like to organize a phone call between the teacher and parent is the best place to start.
- Ask the teacher to send the incarcerated parents any educational work, progress reports, and/or photos. Please note, most school staff may need education on the facility mail rules for those who are incarcerated.
- Ask teachers to explain the educational school programs. Most schools are using some form of online technology and the terms may be new to the parent.
- Encourage the teacher to start thinking about ways the parent could help support schoolwork from a phone call.

- Prepare the parent. These conferences may be new to some parents. Discussions about what will be discussed and suggestions of potential questions they can ask the teacher may help the conference go smoother.
- Afterwards, encourage the incarcerated parent to send a thank-you note to the teacher for their time. It never hurts to share some gratitude.

Barbara Ross, an elementary educator in Maryland with 34 years of experience, notes: “It was one of the best parent-teacher conferences I have ever had,” referring to her first conference with an incarcerated father. “He came to the conference with prepared questions about his son’s status in my class. He asked about his son’s strengths, areas needing improvement and if I had any ideas to help his son academically. He took notes and wanted to know how he could help support me and his son through the educational process. He was fully engaged in the conference.”

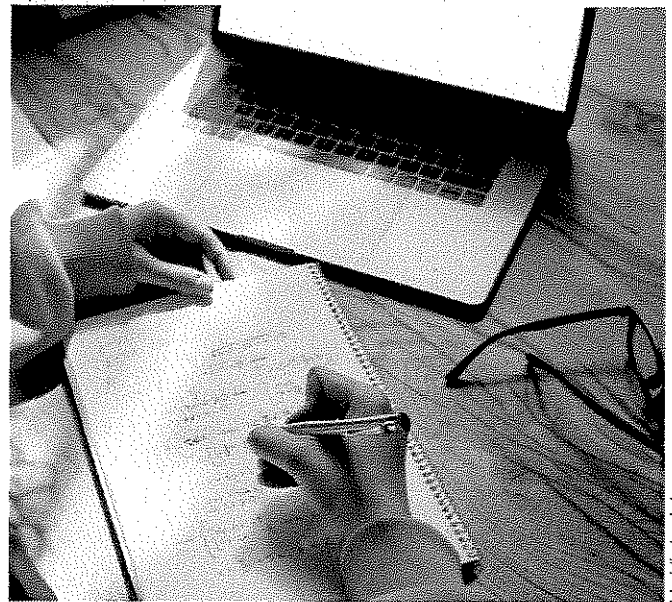
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**Incarcerated parents can help support teachers by providing reminders of expected behaviors in class, reinforcing homework and study habit expectations, and having conversations with their child(ren) about the value of education.**

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### **Expectations for incarcerated parents**

Incarcerated parents can help support teachers by providing reminders of expected behaviors in class, reinforcing homework and study habit expectations, and having conversations with their child(ren) about the value of education. The particular father mentioned above,



discovered that as a child, he read the same books as his son was reading now. A plan was devised to send those books to the father in prison so he and his son could read together during visits/calls.

Here are a few tips incarcerated parents can use during phone calls to supplement their child’s academics:

- Practice arithmetic problems.
- Read a book. Since books can be sent to most prisons via third party, the parent and child can have the same book. Parents can help their child with sounding out words.
- Take an interest in school academic programs by asking about tests, concepts and what skills their child is working on. Ask children “what was the most interesting thing you learned today?” or “what is one new fact that you learned this week?” Even better, ask children to teach something to the parent.
- Adapt learning games to the telephone, such as storytelling with vocabulary words or creating categories of words that follow the alphabet, i.e. “A is for Apple” “B is for Banana”. Race the clock to make it more fun,
- Discuss how to handle “sticky situations” with peers. Talk about being teased or left out and feelings associated with these situations. Talk about what happened, the child’s reaction, how others responded and what can be done differently in the future.

- Encourage support of the teacher and not discord with the educational system.
- Talk about how “knowledge is power.” Getting a high school diploma is important. Education is the key to getting out of poverty and succeeding in life.
- Discuss future goals and the possibilities of continuing formal education after high school.

Ann Adalist-Estrin, Director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (NRCCFI) at Rutgers University-Camden, sums up the needs nicely. “Advocates and policymakers around the U.S. are aligning around goals to improve child wellbeing with incarcerated parents. They are honoring the significance of the incarcerated parent as a buffer from the trauma and stress caused by parental incarceration leading to policy recommendations that would offer incarcerated parents opportunities to take part in school and homework helping programs by phone or video conferencing.”

Educators and policy-makers concur that promoting the active involvement of parents in their child’s

education is essential. Toward that end, correctional officials should encourage parents to become involved in decision-making processes.



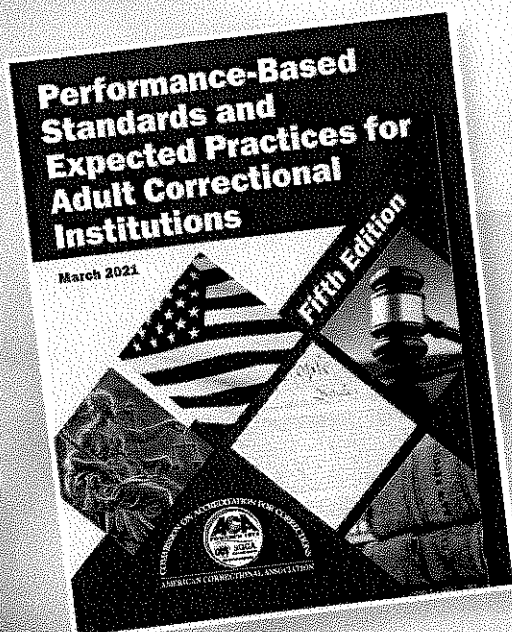
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