

Speaker 1 ([00:00:04](#)):

Thank you for tuning in to the CASCW Podcast Channel. We wanted to give you a quick heads up about this episode. The audio for this episode is originally from a webinar series we hosted this past summer with our partners at the Hennepin County be@school program. We thought the content covered in this webinar series would be helpful for our podcast audience as well. So we repurposed the audio for you to listen here. We hope you enjoy the be@school series.

Traci LaLiberte ([00:00:33](#)):

Good morning, everyone. My name is Traci Laliberte and I am the executive director for the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. And we are located in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. And I'd like to welcome you to today's webinar. Uh, we would like to thank you for joining us, of course, and this is the third and final webinar in our 2020 summer series, the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare and the Hennepin County Attorney's Office have an ongoing partnership where we bring training opportunities to education and child welfare professionals who work with kids and families around issues of chronic absenteeism. Typically, we meet and we gather together in person, um, and it's a wonderful exchange of interdisciplinary, um, work and ideas and problem solving. And this year we get the opportunity to do things a little bit differently. Thanks to COVID. Um, so we have this 2020 summer series, which has been a three-part series, and we've been able to really reach actually a lot more people than we otherwise would have. We had over 200 people registered for each of the three webinars. And today we have over 270 people registered for today's session. So we're very excited about that and really hopeful that it's been helpful for people to be able to hear, um, how people are problem solving and doing some of their work. I'd like to thank the staff that have worked so hard to make this possible, especially in a quick turnaround and in a new venue. Um, really thank you, Linda Ritchie at the Hennepin County Attorney's Office and Korina Barry, and Nora Lee from the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. So at this time I'd like to ask Lori Whittier from the Hennepin County Attorney's Office to say a few words.

Lori Whittier ([00:02:33](#)):

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Traci. I'm Lori Whittier. I'm the Managing Attorney of the Child Protection Division in the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, which is where our be@school programs sits. On behalf of Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman, I would also like to welcome you all to the annual conference and certainly to thank the staff that have put together another great, uh, series of webinars every year I'm amazed at the topics and the discussions and how much information we're able to share and learn from each other. So thank you for that. Um, just a little background. Our be@school program is a program that is dedicated to addressing school engagement and attendance issues for kids. So, um, as everyone I'm sure has been, um, turned around with the spring and distance learning and the pandemic, uh, it seems we are moving into the, into fall with still a lot of uncertainties though. I hope you all are able to find today's discussion as an opportunity to think about ways of how you can partner, um, in your role in supporting students. And, uh, I hope you get a lot out of the discussion, so thank you again. Enjoy!

Traci LaLiberte ([00:03:52](#)):

Thank you, Lori. We've got, we have two speakers today. We've been very fortunate to connect with Commissioner Ricker's Office and the commissioner is planning to join us to say a few words to open today. And I'm not sure if she is online yet. I haven't seen her.

Commissioner Rickers ([00:04:10](#)):

I'm here.

Traci LaLiberte ([00:04:11](#)):

She's there. Great. Well, you know, I'm on multiple screens here, so I'm so glad you just popped up here as a speaker. So if I'm just going to turn it right over to you, and you can say a few words to open us up, commissioner.

Commissioner Rickers ([00:04:27](#)):

Sure thing! Thank you so much. I thank you, Traci, for pulling this together and the invitation for me to join all of you today, uh, to just be among all of you, and know that we share so many of our goals, our hopes and dreams for our students across Minnesota. And, and for me to also just be able to, um, hang out during the session to just hear some of the work you are doing. And, um, some of the, some of the work you've committed to, uh, as, as we've already stated, we've always known that keeping our students engaged in their lessons or their in-person or distance learning classrooms, uh, is the best way for them to learn that engagement is key. Uh, we know that for some students though, attendance is not always consistent. However, instead of punishing students for poor attendance or pursuing truancy actions, we also know we need to go deeper than that.

Commissioner Rickers ([00:05:28](#)):

We need to get to the root causes of why students are missing school, so that we as educators, supporting agencies, community members, families, we can all help them focus on their learning. So I, last year I asked or last spring, I asked lawmakers to eliminate truancy actions in the midst of the unprecedented challenges for our students and families and schools that they faced during emergency distance learning. And the legislation came to fruition. Legislators recognized what you and I know, and that is the causes of student attendance issues are often likely not in the student's control or even the family's control. Rather than punishing students and families, we need to ask what is causing students to miss school? Is it the school climate? Does a student not feel welcomed? Are they being bullied? Do they not feel safe? Is it a chronic health condition? Is there something else going on, is a family member sick?

Commissioner Rickers ([00:06:28](#)):

Does a student need to care for younger children while a parent is working? Is the student struggling with their own mental health? Do they need transportation or do they need the technology to go to school? These were questions educators were asking themselves last spring, over and over. Um, that they carried from their traditional settings into their distance learning setting. As again, they were trying to get to that engagement, which we know is key. So these barriers and challenges were not new to distance learning, but we certainly saw them amplified during distance learning. And so we need to address those root causes of student attendance issues because we know their future depends on it. Consistent attendance is an important indicator of student engagement and school climate and how well they do academically into the future. Students who attend school consistently are more likely to achieve academically. And, you know, the research. Graduate high school, succeed in a college experience if they've gone on to post-secondary. Um, and we know that last spring, the pandemic and other factors compounded the challenges our students already faced and whether coming to classrooms and physical school buildings connecting through distance learning or through a hybrid of both our Minnesota students will now enter a school year transformed and likely traumatized by their months of pandemic, isolation, surges, in unemployment in their community, or maybe in their homes, excuse me,

economic uncertainty, and the racial justice movement that was ignited by the murder of George Floyd while in police custody. So when students are absent, it's not that they are missing school because they don't care or they don't want to learn. Their absence is a signal. It's a message to us that tells our schools, our educators, and our school support staff that WE need to reach out to those students and find out what support they need to get back into a classroom, even in a distance learning setting.

Commissioner Rickers ([00:08:44](#)):

It's also a signal to all of us that we must reach out on a systemic level to find the root causes, to remove the barriers, to provide the services and supports all of our students need to attend school and to learn. There are actually promising practices across the state of Minnesota. And one of the, one of the commitments I have made is to sharing and expanding these practices when I find them. A few examples I can give you this morning, uh, that I have noticed, and that the research tells us the evidence that we've gathered tell us, um, are promising practices to increasing attendance and engagement, uh, include first full service community schools, where they organize the services and supports that, remove those barriers by con first, conducting a community needs survey, finding out what the students in their school community need, and then building out their wraparound supports, including those supports that address truancy for families and for students at the school.

Commissioner Rickers ([00:09:51](#)):

There are also, um, evidence-based relationship building programs across Minnesota, such as Building Assets, Reducing Risks, or the BARR Center work that, that the Building Assets Reducing Work Program works to improve student attendance and performance. It has been particularly successful in some of the high schools where I have learned about it, not just improving attendance, but in improving credit attainment and other measures that strengthen a student's path to a high school diploma. Um, I also in, in working with the Office of American Indian Education at the Minnesota Department of Education, the advice that comes from our director, Dr. Jane Harstad, uh, regularly, as we think through how to meet the needs of Native American students in our buildings. But the single most important practice schools can include is to utilize their Indian Education staff and building positive student and family relationships within the school or district. Building trust is an important foundation to provide any attendance program and building from that foundation into the programming that then we do. Finally, the strongest teaching and learning conditions meet the academic needs of students and the social-emotional needs of students and do so in a safe and welcoming environment. That is a key to preventing truancy as well, because it is a key to fostering engagement that yes, we have to meet the academic needs of students. And we have to meet the social-emotional needs of students. Those things rely on each other, and we have to do so in a safe and welcoming environment, creating that space where taking risks is okay, taking risks is safe and who a student is, is even safer. And I would be remiss if I did not address attendance and engagement specifically during the pandemic. It was critically important to me last spring, as we moved from brick and mortar to distance learning, to stress to our educators across the state, that attendance needs to go from its traditional role as accountability and efficiency, right where it's a very quick thing you do at the beginning of class. You very efficiently send it to the office. And then the office sort of takes it from there. At first, it needs to go from that traditional role of accountability and efficiency to connection and relationship building. Every zoom meeting I was in with educators, at least one teacher broke down crying when they discussed not being able to connect with a student.

Commissioner Rickers ([00:12:53](#)):

I found in listening to educators, listening to some of these promising programs, I talked about schools with the greatest success in connecting with students and engaging with students either had one of the above programs developed before COVID-19 and the pandemic hit, or they took an all hands on deck approach during distance learning, to connecting with students, tapping into the talent and relationships of teachers, paraprofessionals school-based, administrators, community groups, and even students themselves using social media. It was all hands on deck. Those schools had the most success, not just connecting, engaging with students. It's made me realize, and I think it's made a lot of educators realize that once we beat this pandemic, we should never let go of the all-out collaboration to look out for our students, our efforts, to connect with them, our efforts, to engage with them, meet their needs and teach them. So thank you so much for the time this morning. Um, I look forward to all the ways I can partner with all of you that we, and our expertise with my colleagues at the department of education can support the expertise you have in your work. And we can come together to again, connect and engage with students, meet their needs and teach them. Thank you so much.

Traci LaLiberte ([00:14:27](#)):

Thank you very much, Commissioner we really appreciate you being with us today and sharing all of that with us. Um, we're gonna move to, um, uh, our next presenter, uh, Lynn Penke, who is, uh, Hennepin County, leads Hennepin County's work in youth education within Health and Human Services and really bridges, um, between the County Attorney's Office and, um, Health and Human Services. And so I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to Lynn. Lynn, you can introduce yourself a little bit and then, um, we can move forward and I see you're setting up your presentation. So, Lynn.

Lynne Penke ([00:15:07](#)):

I'm Lynn Paeke thank you for having me. Thank you for inviting me super excited to be here this morning and talk about some of the fantastic work and partnerships that we have, uh, within and across Hennepin County and externally with our partners at the schools, nonprofits, foundations, community agencies, and the state. Um, I, I can't thank you enough. I see a lot of names of folks here who I've worked with, I actively work with, or we've partnered with, and it's, it's, um, it's a delight and a pleasure to be here. So, um, let's start with the agenda and this is super casual, conversational, please. I'll, I'll try to stay with my talking points and, and, um, not get too down in the weeds or excited about anything I'm passionate about the work, but jump in at any time with questions. Um, or if you want to hear more about something, um, the, the real, you know, simple agenda this morning is talking about youth education, which is our team and where we sit within Hennepin County. Um, what we do, what our role is. And then, uh, we'll talk about what the youth education teams and Hennepin County's response was to COVID-19 in the spring, this past the end of the school year, and then how it's going to look, um, different in the fall. Um, some of the things will stay the same and other areas, particularly in our disparities reduction efforts where we're really putting money and resources and focus and making sure that those disparities that we know are there do not get exacerbated as a result of COVID-19. So a little bit about me, um, as I, as, uh, as I talk about youth education. So I, I am a headstart kid. I was a headstart kid first, and then I got my education in the public school system in very rural Minnesota. I became a teacher myself. Um, I taught in South America for a number of years, and when I came back, um, and landed in social services, I really fell in love with that mission.

Lynne Penke ([00:17:33](#)):

Um, I have worked for Hennepin County for over 20 years now. And in those 20 years, I've worked across five different departments and I've built a lot of relationships. And those relationships really, um,

have come to serve me well in this work and leveraging those relationships as we try a network and an infrastructure in supporting youth involved in County systems when it comes to their education. So this picture, which is super high level, uh, we call this our framework, our youth education framework, and the age old question that many have asked, and we ask ourselves, uh, people who've been doing this work here at Hennepin County longer than I have. What is our role in education? Where do we fit? Um, and this framework really is that umbrella that encompasses all of the work that happens in education of youth, across the many departments in Hennepin County. And I think of it, uh, the metaphor of an accordion is one that I use frequently. It stretches and it folds. And when it contracts and folds inward, that that center of focus for us are the youth involved in non-voluntary services at Hennepin County, whether that is child welfare, juvenile probation, um, in some cases be@school truancy. Um, we, we include, you know, those non-voluntary services in that definition and on any given day in Hennepin County, that's somewhere between three thousand six hundred and three thousand eight hundred kids. Um, but my colleagues at the library or in public health, or in other departments at Hennepin County will say we serve all kids. So then that accordion really stretches. And within that model, we look at what programs and services and efforts do we have to support all kids in Hennepin County. So keeping that in mind and how our infrastructure and our processes and our supports that we have may stretch or fold, depending on what we're looking at and what we're focused on.

Lynne Penke ([00:20:03](#)):

We've got five buckets that we are focused on, and none of them are, are too surprising or will surprise anyone on this call. We want kids ready for kindergarten. We want educational stability and that K through 12 experience. And that is where the, every student succeeds act as we call it ESSA, really our work is grounded in that, that third, that blue bucket is, um, we want an integrated education community. And what does that mean? That means as we're playing our part, our role in supporting education for children involved in Hennepin counties services, we will want to make sure we are partnering with everyone else, including parents, families, community, and youth. Um, w we have, uh, folks on our team who work with transition age, youth, or youth who are exiting foster care. We want their voices as well. So we've got a lot of efforts in that blue box around building and, and really intentionally developing integrated education community through those partnershipsWe want our youth college and career ready. And then the last one that gray one, which we almost separated out a little bit in this visual, because it, it, it is an underpinning of all the work and it really spreads across all of those buckets is our, our, number one priority around reducing racial disparities, um, in education outcomes for all youth. And, um, I'll talk more about how we are focusing even more on that and really, um, uh, dedicating so many resources during COVID to making sure that those disparities don't get worse. Any questions at this point in the chat, Nora?

Lynne Penke ([00:22:03](#)):

Can we go back for just a moment, a couple more things I want to say about this framework, this, sorry, this framework.

Nora Lee ([00:22:11](#)):

I'm not seeing any questions.

Lynne Penke ([00:22:13](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. Um, so again, our overarching goal within this framework is that alignment. Internally across Hennepin County, many people working in an education related role in that work, um,

in partnership with schools, with families, communities, we want that alignment internally and then externally as well. How can we do better at coordinating at collaborating? This model was created by those of us at Hennepin County, who sit at what we call our education table, um, across all of those different departments, early childhood folks, um, workforce development folks our transitioning aged youth count, uh, coordinator, everyone coming together to say, how do we do this work together? So the two areas where the youth education team, uh, the team that I'm part of focuses really the most of our time is around what, what, what was that second bucket and the third one's educational stability and integrated education community. And what does that look like practically and tactically day to day? Um, I am, so these, that there are so many people on this call who are part of some of those groups and networks that we've set up and figured out how to build the structures and the infrastructures around relationships. Um, so that we've got them standing, um, with the ESSA work, which is around educational stability. We have what are called ESSA convenings a couple times a year, where we invite every single point of contact or ESSA for every school in Hennepin County, as well as surrounding, uh, school districts in other counties where our youth and out-of-home placement might be. We bring them to the table. Um, this fall it'll be a virtual table, but we bring them to the table.

Lynne Penke ([00:24:16](#)):

And then we've also got our colleagues in child welfare in be@school, in early childhood at the table as well. And we talk through what are the tools and templates that we need from each other? What is the documentation, what are the communication protocols that we need to ensure that we're making those best interest determination, that we are reducing the number of days of educational instability that can happen as a result of a change in placement for a child. That's one, um, where in all of these, it's been tremendously helpful, successful to bring people together and just talk about our work. The education system is huge and complex, whether it's special ed law, or, um, you know, the work that students support specialists do a 504's and IEP's, and so many other things, uh, school-based mental health. And then the work that we have at the County at Hennepin County and our system is just massive trying to navigate and figure out how to coordinate those services can be daunting and really frustrated. So in all of these groups, we figured out how to build intentionality and structure into relationships and, and learn more about each other's work, which I think, uh, I certainly hope many would agree. We've been quite successful at doing that. Another example of that is our County school consultation group with a couple of the bigger school districts we have, you know, there was, uh, a consensus that there are systemic barriers and barriers in our systems that it just becomes really difficult to coordinate service. And so once a month, we have different folks cross-functionally from those schools and different staff, cross-functionally from Hennepin County come together and protect, perhaps it is a deep dive consultation on one individual child. And using that, you know, figuring out where are we stuck? How can we get creative? What interventions have been tried and what could be tried, uh, to really help with the educational engagement and success for this kiddo.

Lynne Penke ([00:26:48](#)):

And then through that really looking at what are our systems barriers and where are we getting stuck? So that group meets monthly. And, uh, depending on, you know, who's at the table or who, um, what the nature of the consult is, we can bring in anyone from the County Attorney's office through juvenile probation, to children's mental health. Um, I've talked about our transition-aged youth coordinator. Um, we have services through contracted agencies. We'll bring them in as well. And then it can be a third grade teacher, a school social worker, guidance counselor, assistant principal, whoever the people are, who really are in the best position to coordinate and, um, and, and really partner with us in how can we, how can we work together on this? Our County School Communication Group works at a bit different

level, cause that's the other thing, all of these structures, um, and these partnerships we've really worked hard to make sure that they are at all levels of the organization. So, uh, on the one hand, we've got regular standing commissioners and superintendents meeting that happened a couple of times a year. And on the other end, we've got, Hey, we've got a, you know, get on a phone call and grab that school social worker and that caseworker at Hennepin County, along with that classroom teacher, and really coordinate and figure out what's going on with an individual kiddo and parents as well. Um, the County School Communication Group sits more at a middle level. Um, that is a group that we've pulled together. That includes a lot of communications director after school programming, special ed directors, and then our staff, those manager level at Hennepin County, where we come together and we've brainstormed historically, where are the issues where we really struggle with understanding each other's systems? Where can we build training opportunities together? Um, we want to know more about social emotional-learning, or we want to have, we want to offer more around, um, trauma-informed or trauma responsive, culturally responsive, um, service delivery. So whether it is planning that through that communication group and then executing it and really making sure that we've got blended participants there and we're sitting together in those trainings and learning from each other has been really valuable. Uh, surrogate parent is the one that I still feel so overwhelmed by trying to understand the intricacies of that. And so we pulled together those subject matter experts and really working coordination on that.

Traci LaLiberte ([00:29:52](#)):

Lynn this is Traci, Nancy put a question into the chat, just wanting to know about the, um, the makeup of these groups. And I think that you've, you addressed it kind of, as she was typing it but, Nancy, I want to give you a chance to unmute and jump in if just before, just before Lynn moves on, is there a follow-up or anything further you'd like to know in terms of who's part of these groups?

Nancy (participant) ([00:30:15](#)):

Um, yeah, I just, I've never heard of any of this. I've been a social worker for, I dunno, 15 years never heard of any of it. So I'm just wondering, you know, is if people want to be involved, is, is that appropriate? Uh, if so, how are you involved? Um, I'm trying to tie it to, um, my world a little bit more, I guess.

Lynne Penke ([00:30:40](#)):

Sure. Absolutely. And my contact information will be here and I would be delighted to have anyone and everyone reach out to get engaged in these. So first I'll talk a little bit about how things shifted during COVID. So a lot of these which were work groups, you know, there might be one formal representative from a school, or there might be one person who's a subject matter expert from another school to have 23 independent school districts and 50 charters at the table, um, doesn't necessarily make a work group, you know, so, so it's, again, that stretching and folding, depending on what it is, but as we moved into COVID and it was Whoa, we need to get more voices. We've got to be able to disseminate information faster and quicker. Um, things shifted. And I'll talk about that in just a moment. The last thing I want to talk about on here, our Partnership Consultations, and that is new territory, um, we're just figuring out, um, and, and working, and it's very exciting. We've got a lot of tools in our toolkit as, um, as a child welfare agency, whether it is family group conferencing or a tool called safe and connected different tools we use to really look at strengths-based approach, deep dive, uh, consultation, and, um, you know, figuring out what are the right interventions, not just for a child around education, but the whole family and Partnership Consultations is, our starting to work again with school partners and with families to

say, what if we do this together in coordination? Um, what would it look like for you parent to see us as your support team and, um, where there is, you know, opportunities with a child who might be struggling with educational stability or educational engagement, what can it look like where we come together? And, uh, and those we've done a few of those and it's been really successful and, um, has helped break down some of those barriers in terms of what services might be provided at school.

Lynne Penke ([00:33:04](#)):

What interventions is Hennepin County, um, trying, and how do we bridge those and really provide that, um, transparency and understanding, and clarity and partnership for, for parents and families and, and empower them in that coordination of services. So all of that, you know, chatting that rambling that I did about all these different groups and partnerships in ways that we have, have been able to stand up and, and build focused intentional structure around the partnerships. It all paid off when COVID hit, because we knew who the people were. We knew how we interacted with them. We knew what relationships we had, and we were able to really lean on those quickly. The first thing we did is we took all of those different distribution lists at all levels, all functions across all of our organizations, both County and school. And we said, let's just open up a zoom call on a how's Thursday, Thursday morning, 8:00 AM, everyone's at home, jump on, and let's just get our heads together. Let's talk about where we're at, if we've figured out any answers yet, what we're planning, what we know, what we don't know, the things we're most worried about. We did that once a week for the first few weeks, and it was just a very informal round robin of, Oh my gosh, we've got, you know, we need to know what the food supports are. We need to know what are like, figuring out what the gaps were. And then our team moving really fast to try and pull those together and pull it together and then spit it back out to folks, um, collecting resources across all of Hennepin County that we could then share with our staff at Hennepin County and school partners. Well, those partnership calls, um, which by the way, I think we're close to 500 people on the email list to those who can jump on the call at any time.

Lynne Penke ([00:35:13](#)):

Um, they started to evolve in ways that, um, were just so meaningful. We started to hear really what the needs were. W w we just, we don't know, uh, what we heard from so many of our school partners was we don't know what child welfare is doing right now, or how they're working with families during this pandemic. Are they going out to homes? Uh, how often are they checking in with families? Um, and the converse happened as well. Our staff wondering how our school, social workers finding families that they haven't been able to identify, or how are they engaging folks where connectivity might be an issue. They might be homeless and highly mobile. And so we started to, we started to build those calls based on what the themes were. And I would say that over the, um, over the course of eight weeks, we probably did eight. We turned those partnership calls into webinars. We had one that was all about housing, and we pulled in the different folks working with shelter. And, um, you know, what grant opportunities, what is, what is the housing landscape look like right now during COVID the one that I think had the best attendance and the most people call in for was "Ask a school social worker", um, and that one, I still get a smile and feel so good about the connections and relationships that were made there. We had five or six school social workers, a nice diversity across size of district and a geographic area, a couple who were elementary, a couple that were high school, a middle school. And we had them talk about how are, how are they working right now? What tips and tricks can they share? What's working in engaging kids and what was fast.

Lynne Penke ([00:37:17](#)):



We did one all about school-based mental health. And that one, I remember it was fascinating because one school-based mental health worker at one school had already started putting together a Google doc of different resources and links. And in another school-based mental health worker at another school said, Ooh, can you share that with us? Because we can just add to yours. And so those structures allowed for new, you know, new opportunities to really share resources and connect in ways that might not have been there before. And certainly, um, were a struggle when everyone was scrambling as the pandemic unfolded, uh, we had one called "Ask a probation officer". We did one that was about be@school. We had a few that were scheduled that had to canceled because of the way the spring unfolded. Um, and we intend to continue with those now in the fall, as school kicks off, we'll get those going. We sent out a survey to the folks who, who were on those calls last year saying what was helpful about them? What do you want us to focus on this year? And so we'll probably do every other one, we'll find the right frequency, right timing, the right subject. And some of them will just be open calls, jump on the call. Um, I happened to, um, have in my network of contacts, a teacher who was a teacher of the year, a few years ago, and has a huge social media presence. And I asked him if he would just tweet out to his network on Twitter, um, you know, what sorts of tips and tricks might people have, and if they want to jump on this call to share, and we got some new folks added to that distribution list, that would certainly not have been in our traditional networks.

Lynne Penke ([00:39:16](#)):

That was really fun as well. Um, all of those other standard meetings, those communication groups and the consultation groups that I talked about, those shifted, and we were able to shift them really quickly. What was a standing meeting at a physical location downtown on the first Monday of every month, turned into a, Hey, let's pick up Wednesday and Friday 8:00 AM. We'll jump on for a quick 15 minute call. Um, in some ways it was quite liberating because rather than finding a time when everyone could drive to a physical location and make the time virtual has, um, has enabled a lot of us to just very quickly jump on, see each other, um, talk through what we need, troubleshoot something and get those results. The resource sharing and information that happened during that time. Oh man. Uh, I think some of the folks on my team would, you know, probably still are reeling from the work that was involved with collecting and collating and trying to get a handle on those resources, keeping it live and up-to-date, and then trying to spit that back out to folks so that it was usable. Um, uh, it was a labor of love and we're still figuring out, we know that resources for the fall will have shifted and still figuring out what will be helpful to folks. What sort of resources do they have that they want to share? And we can be the hub amongst those spokes.

Lynne Penke ([00:41:01](#)):

Um, and then the last thing around devices we knew from, from everyone in this partnership, our folks across Hennepin County, internally to our agency and from our school partners, that there were kids who had gaps. We knew that the schools were moving as fast as they could, and frantically trying to get devices and hotspots into the hands of kids who could not access distance learning. And, um, we also, it's not lost on me. I'm probably not lost on any of us that the same kids that were the hardest to locate to get that device to them, um, are, are the ones who experienced the greatest disparities, right? Whether it's a language barrier or they are homeless and highly mobile or whatever the issue is that was prohibiting contact, um, and delivery of a device. And so we were able through our staff because our staff are interacting with these families regularly, we were able to pretty quickly coordinate and identify, you know, who are the kids involved in County services, who don't have a device and let's get hustling on that.

Lynne Penke ([00:42:16](#)):

And so we became a little mini I.T. Shop very quickly and started working really quickly in coordination with our school partners and families to get those devices out. Um, we also got a grant from, uh, one of our foundations here in the community, which allowed us to put devices into the shelters so that if a child has to spend time in shelter, um, they are able to access school right away, those days of waiting for transportation to get them back to their school of origin and all of that. I'm really excited about the potential, no matter what happens with back to school, um, no child should have to miss any school or that lack of, of connectivity. So now switching gears and looking towards the fall, what's going to change. So the work that I just talked about that the Youth Education Team supports internally and externally really won't change much, but what's really exciting is that, um, through the CARES money that Hennepin County is receiving, and some of the board action requests that we have appropriated some of that money to supporting distance learning and education that is going to look and hopefully feel different in the fall. Disparities reduction,

Lynne Penke ([00:43:39](#)):

I'll take a step back for those of you who are not in Hennepin County. Um, we have, the County has been, uh, focused a very concerted effort on reducing disparities, some of the worst racial disparities in the nation. Um, this has been a multi-year effort and this what we call the gears diagram really shows how the different domains of where, uh, our residents may experience disparities are connected. And, you know, just like in, um, in any sort of machinery, you turn one gear and the rest will turn as well. You get some gravel in the gears, they're all gonna get jammed up and nothing's going to turn, it's not a mistake, or it's not an accident that education is first. We know that education is that gear that turns the rest, um, and, and really impacts wellbeing for all of our residents. So within that, um, we have at Hennepin County created a disparity, uh, disparities reduction line of business.

Lynne Penke ([00:44:44](#)):

We have an assistant County administrator Chester Cooper who oversees that line of business with dedicated resources and, and dedicated resources focused on reducing disparities in education. What that means for the fall is that CARES dollars have been dedicated to the supportive distance learning. And, uh, that, that will show up in two different ways. One, the continuation of devices and connectivity for our families that are involved in County services and working in close coordination with the schools to fill those gaps wherever they may be. Um, and the other thing that is super exciting, uh, is we are actively my colleague, Christa Mims, whose name is on this slide. She is actively, she was not able to co-present with me today because she is actively hiring around 15 education support specialists. And, uh, they will work one-on-one with students involved in County services to really support that whole family in overcoming whatever challenges there may be to distance learning.

Lynne Penke ([00:46:02](#)):

Um, it's that support outside of school that can assess what the barriers are provide or connect to community services. I think in a lot of cases it's going to be, and we did a little mini pilot in the spring using some of our library staff. Um, and you know, what would it look like to support some of our students, a lot of it's with executive functioning stuff? So, Oh my gosh, I got an email from my teacher and I'm overwhelmed. I don't know how to schedule my distance learning day. So a lot of coaching and support on that, uh, and teaching some advocacy and other self skills so that kids and families really feel empowered during this time more to come on that it, um, we're super excited that the staff who are being hired into this have experience in education experience in social services, they are experienced in

their community. They know their communities. And, um, we've got some who speak another language and who are experts in, in cultural competency within their communities with that. I'll take questions.

Lori Whittier ([00:47:21](#)):

Hey Lynn, this is Lori Whittier.

Lynne Penke ([00:47:24](#)):

Hi, Lori.

Lori Whittier ([00:47:26](#)):

Hi. I had a quick question about the Education Support Specialists. Uh, is there a plan as far as what are they going to be working with certain school districts or certain areas within the County? Or how will, how would we know, you know, kind of how, who to reach out to, I guess,

Lynne Penke ([00:47:47](#)):

Yeah, a great question. And I think we are still figuring that out actively. Um, part of it depends on, you know, it's, I think of like the war boards that teachers are putting together right now to figure out which kids are going to go in which classroom and what criteria puts them. I think that Christa is going to be going through some of those same efforts, um, and, uh, really figuring out who connects where, so I, I can't share more than it's actively being figured out right now.

Nora Lee ([00:48:25](#)):

Lynn, we have a question from Jessica. Um, I'm I am a school social worker. If I would like to request assistance for a student through a support specialist. Do I email Christa?

Lynne Penke ([00:48:38](#)):

I think at this point you could email Christa to ask if that is going to be a way that the education support specialists can be accessed. Um, and she'll be able to answer that cause those details we're still figuring it out.

Nora Lee ([00:48:56](#)):

Um, and then another question, do you have a web link where these programs are described?

Lynne Penke ([00:49:01](#)):

Well, that's a great question. So it depends what program you're referring to. So the, all of the, um, all of the groups and networks and partnerships that I've been talking about, uh, are, are really organic and they are, they're not owned by anyone. So our team, the Youth Education team really provides that infrastructure and supports it, but we're not the ones who are actually administering the programs. In terms of the programs, those would sit within each of the different departments. I'm not sure if that's what your question was. When it comes to the webinars and the partnership calls and those things that we're going to be actively, um, you know, using to connect and partner, as we move into the fall. Anyone who is on that email list will get a flyer and a schedule and a coordination, uh, not a coordination of, uh, a calendar of, of when they are scheduled and what they will be. Does that answer your question?

Nora Lee ([00:50:18](#)):

We'll see if she circles back.

Traci LaLiberte ([00:50:20](#)):

Nicole, could you, um, just kind of introduce your question you're you, uh, Nicole was asking about impending evictions.

Nicole (participant) ([00:50:29](#)):

Yes. Can you hear me?

Lynne Penke ([00:50:31](#)):

Yep.

Nicole (participant) ([00:50:33](#)):

Um, I am greatly concerned about the impact of the impending evictions that are coming at the end of the eviction moratorium, particularly for families in urban areas where there's such a high concentration of renters. We know that as soon as the moratorium is up, our housing courts are going to be flooded with evictions and the consequent housing instability and homelessness is, is inevitably going to result in education instability as well. What are we doing in Hennepin County to address this wave of evictions that is right around the corner?

Lynn Penke ([00:51:15](#)):

Yeah, I know. Uh, I think you probably represent everyone on this call and their, their biggest concern. Um, something that we know going back to that picture of the gears is that without housing, it's hard to have educational stability. Um, that is a webinar topic that we are absolutely, it's going to be one of the first ones we do this fall because it's, it's on the minds of every school social worker. And, um, we will have some of the folks working in the housing area, coming to talk about what things look like for the fall. And, um, and I'll make sure that we get that information out. Okay, I'm looking at, how do we get on the email list to be notified about the upcoming webinars? You can email me, we'll get you added to the list. Absolutely. I'm looking at the comment from Amanda.

Lynne Penke ([00:52:15](#)):

I work for an online school. So school, as we know, it is not changing much, but our enrollment numbers have increased for this year. In the spring we stopped making this, something that is still on hold, or should we be making referrals since school hasn't necessarily changed much for us online? That's a be@school question, Lori, are you still on the phone?

Lori Whittier ([00:52:38](#)):

I am, we are going to be taking the COVID referrals as we were in the spring. So we want to try to do an early intervention as best we can. And the hope is that we can help identify what the issue is or the barrier is and grab it quickly and resolve the issue for the family. Um, if anyone else from the be@school team wants to jump in to give, um, a more complete response, please feel free to do so.

Traci LaLiberte ([00:53:09](#)):

You know, Lori, since you, since you're there,, there's also been a couple of comments in here in terms of, of asking for suggestions regarding court action. Um, Kelly was one person wondering about that, and I think earlier in the chat, somebody else had been asking about that as well. Um, so I'm not quite sure there's enough context in the question. Kelly, do you want to jump on and, and give some context so Lori can help answer your question.

Kelly (participant) ([00:53:40](#)):

Sure. So we currently have, um, a number of cases that remain in court prior to COVID-19. Um, and then our program is structured, um, to continue allowing petitions. I know some places aren't so, so I'm just wondering how we can better serve our families when they are engaged with court during this COVID-19 time.

Lori Whittier ([00:54:10](#)):

So that's a really hard question. Um, one of the things that we've struggled with in Hennepin County over the years is how to, um, find a way for a court intervention to be effective. And, uh, we've really tried to look at alternatives to court intervention for truancy kids because, um, we have struggled with it. So, you know, I think, um, it's really important for, uh, groups to think outside of the box when it comes to, um, engagement with older students and trying to, um, as best you can figure out what the needs are and, uh, figure out how to support the student and the family. Uh, but, you know, we will still be using court on a very limited way. Uh, we've really tried to avoid bringing any children or youth into court for any reason during the pandemic. Um, so I think that's something to consider too. Um, but I don't know again, if anyone else from the team wants to jump in, you know, please do so.

Kim Mammedaty ([00:55:23](#)):

Yeah, this is Kim Mammedaty. Um, I also work on the, be@school team, uh, for the County Attorney's office. And I just wanted to say that if you have, uh, students that are already in the juvenile court system and you have questions about those cases, um, you know, you can, you can reach out to us. Um, and you know, we can, we can look into it. I'm not sure what, um, you know, what stage, um, those cases are in without knowing, but we don't want to get into the specifics of the individuals here, but, um, you know, feel free to reach out to us and we can look into those individual cases and, um, you know, discuss with you what's going on if that's helpful.

Participant ([00:56:15](#)):

I just had a quick question, is it okay to ask

Lynne Penke ([00:56:18](#)):

Yes, please.

Participant ([00:56:20](#)):

Oh, okay. One is for Scholars who, um, you know, um, don't have proper transportation. I know they get transportation to and from school, but in those, um, emergency situations, as far as getting sick and things like that, is there any revisions, um, you know, like an emergency line, you know, so that there's some type of transportation, um, given to our scholars with that.

Lynne Penke ([00:56:56](#)):

So I think that is a question for me, you're asking, and that is a tricky one too. So if it is a child who is in out of home placement or foster care, that would absolutely be a conversation we would actively want to have and make sure that transportation is happening for that scholar. Um, if it is a child who is involved in County services, not in out of home placement, that would be more of that gray area and where I would love to hear more and see how we can put our heads together and solve for that. So give me, um, feel free to email me.

Participant ([00:57:43](#)):

Okay. Thank you. I just also had a quick question, um, as, as I'm trying to prepare for, um, like lunches and right now we're in a hybrid model AB and if they're on A day, just provisions about lunches for that next day, because they don't have that transportation. Um, I know transportation in our district is, uh, providing like, uh, uh, for just those who are, um, solely online, they're able to give them like a week's worth of food, but if they're doing the hybrid model, they don't have that provision. Um, they're still having students come to the building, uh, put in there code and all of that sort of thing is there do you know any more information about how we can ensure that they're getting nutrition?

Lynne Penke ([00:58:36](#)):

So that going back to all of the lists that we compiled last spring, and we'll be working on that and updating those now. I am hopeful that within a few weeks time, we'll have an initial draft of a list that we can send out and really disseminate to everyone to say, these are the food supports in your district or in your community that we know of. Uh, it certainly won't be an exhaustive list and those lists are only as comprehensive as they are the people who put into them. It's like, yeah, it's almost like a community of practice. As you are looking at the list, or as you are learning school, social workers have more resources in their quiver than anybody else.

Lynne Penke ([00:59:26](#)):

Um, let us know, uh, the amazing Casey Schmig on our, on our Youth Education team went to every website for every school district in Hennepin County and looked to see what what's the childcare situation, what's the afterschool care situation. What is the food support situation we start from there, and then we just add on and we'll make sure to get that out as quickly as we can, as people are getting ready for the first day of school.

Participant ([00:59:56](#)):

Thank you.

Traci LaLiberte ([00:59:58](#)):

Um, I want to take a chance to, again, just thank everybody for attending. I know people are, are, are logging off and going to other things, um, as they need to. Um, but a quick, thank you for all the attendees for participating Lynn for speaking. And the Commissioner, I think maybe has logged off at this point. Um, but also to our partners at Hennepin County attorney's office, um, it is a truly great partnership that we've been able to continue to do this year after year. And I know participants talk about it and really appreciate it. So thank you for that partnership. Um, and to Nora who supported our technology on all three of these webinars and really kind of kept us afloat. So thank you again, um, Lynn and everybody else and have a wonderful rest of your day.

New Speaker ([01:00:48](#)):

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