



## Data Sharing Agreement is Framework for Partnership

In Allegheny County, a first-of-its-kind data-sharing agreement is closing a knowledge gap that had long denied the Pittsburgh Public Schools and county Department of Human Services (DHS) the opportunity to gain a comprehensive understanding of a fragile population of children who are involved in both systems.

After more than a year of research and negotiation, an agreement was reached in late 2009 that allows student data from the district to be integrated with data found in the DHS Data Warehouse, which includes information from the network of county human services agencies, juvenile justice system, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and other sources.

The agreement has created a powerful new tool for understanding and monitoring students involved in human services and for guiding a collaborative effort to develop specific strategies for improving their academic performance and overall well being.

Such a tool, for example, offers school officials far greater insight into circumstances outside of school that influence the performance and behavior of students in school. Child welfare caseworkers are able to reliably monitor the academic progress of young clients and whether they are attending school regularly. And the integrated data provides the basis for richer analyses to identify areas of need, the impact of interventions and new approaches.

Key provisions of the data-sharing agreement include the following:

- The integration, analysis and distribution of student data is done in full compliance with state and federal regulations, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).
- DHS performs the actual integration and analysis of student data.
- The data provided by the school district includes directory information and educational records of students for whom DHS has legal custody, as well as certain data for other students, including personal identifiers, such as names and home addresses; achievement data, such as grade point averages; attendance; and data related to special programming, such as the district's Student Assistance Program, and special and gifted education.
- All reports prepared from the data that contain personally identifiable information are considered to be confidential.
- DHS obtains parental consent to release student records when the data suggest students might benefit from interventions and direct collaboration between DHS and the schools.
- The agreement authorizes the use of the data for conducting an "action research" project, a problem-solving process in which DHS and the school district work toward improving the way they address certain issues involving students of mutual interest.

The promise of this new tool was quickly demonstrated. In 2010, the first full year under the agreement, preliminary analysis of the integrated data led to the most complete statistical portrait of city public school students with DHS involvement to date. Among its findings were some 170 students involved in DHS services who perform well on state achievement tests, but poorly in the classroom. Identification of those students led to the first joint "action research" project that has the school district and DHS exploring new approaches to helping them realize their full potential.