

**Summer Study Committee
Juvenile Justice
June 16, 2022**

I want to thank Chairman Finck and the committee for allowing me to testify today:

- Juvenile justice is an issue that is important for schools**
- I am going to talk about what I have observed over the years in Avon**

First of all, I want to stress that I am not here to blame anyone for the problems we are facing:

- I believe our States' Attorney's are extremely busy and need to prioritize issues they deal with**
- Our school district covers two counties**
- We have had a States' Attorney tell us to send in the letter and go through the process, but they will not pursue truancy due to lack of time**
- Also, I want to stress that we DO NOT want to have kids locked up**
- We want to help kids so they can become healthy adults**

In August 1999 I started as the Secondary Principal in Avon. Looking back here are some things I observed pertaining to our troubled youth:

- In my 9 years of being the Principal we had Zero (0) cases of truancy**
- Our attendance was regularly 98% or above in both of the elementary and secondary levels**
- We did have a few students that were on probation for minor criminal offenses**
- We also had one student placed in a facility for drug/alcohol abuse and another student place at the STAR Academy in Custer**
- The probation officers that were assigned to our students worked hard to establish relationships with the students, but also had a set of consequences for the student if they violated probation**
- One student- violated probation for a positive drug test- taken out of school that day and spent weekend at the JDC in Sioux Falls**
- Often times this was a deterrent for the student to prevent future violations**

- All of our students at that time knew if they were on probation there were expectations and rules to follow

In 2008 I became Superintendent of the Avon School District. Here are some of the changes I have observed over the last few years:

- Over about the last 10 years we have seen a drastic increase in excessive absenteeism with our students
- At about that 10 year mark, our elementary students attendance was worse than our secondary students
- Those students are now in our high school
- The last 4 years our Principal has referred 14 students for truancy
- The average absences during the school year for those students was 30
- several avoided being reported truant due to a school policy to allow students to make up missed time
- Some of these students have been elementary students, so they rely on parents to get them to school:
 - no buses, so if family lives out of town, kids require a ride
- We had a student this school year that missed 67 days of school
 - student on probation for truancy
 - at semester time came off of probation at semester time
 - 2nd semester the student missed 57 days of school
 - probation office was contacted
 - parent would not answer phone or door when contacted
 - student received zero credits (0) for 2nd semester
- Student is behind and will have a hard time catching up with peers
- without a diploma we are all aware of negative consequences

My observation with the changes in the Juvenile Justice system over the last 23 years is that there appears to be a lack of consequences for students in the system. I want to stress that I don't think we should focus on punishment for the kids in our schools. We need to get them the help they need, along with consequences for bad acts and possibly help for parents.

I don't believe our school is the only one experiencing this problem. In many of the Superintendent meetings I attend, if they issue of Juvenile Justice arises, there is usually a long discussion about the frustrations we are experiencing.

I think this summer committee is a good start to the discussion of how we can improve on our current system. We don't need to throw out the current system, but we need to have the various entities come together and have the discussion on how we can improve the Juvenile Justice system. I believe we all want what is best for the kids in our State, we just need to figure out how to best achieve that.

Thank you for your time and I would stand by for any questions.