



# DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County  
Department of Human Services



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## **DHS celebrates data-sharing anniversary**

2019 marks 10 years since DHS began partnering with local school districts to improve education outcomes.

The data sharing agreement started when a community stakeholder group chaired by the Buhl Foundation and including representatives from the Heinz Endowment, KidsVoice, RK Mellon Foundation, Pittsburgh Promise, City of Pittsburgh, Education Law Center and other DHS advisors began brainstorming ways to improve education results for the nearly 30% of students in Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) that were served by DHS, monitored by Juvenile Probation or supported by public benefits. Since its beginnings with Pittsburgh Public Schools, the data-sharing agreement has expanded to include almost half of the public school districts in Allegheny County.

The data from the school districts is integrated with data on DHS clients. The Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning (ATP) has used this information to conduct "action research." Over the years, DHS has used this integrated data to examine disparities in achievement for human services involved youth, to work with community partners to rethink how attendance is reported, to reduce school moves associated with a child welfare placement, to inform a more efficient transportation system and to understand youth experiencing homelessness in a more complete way. The purpose of this "action research" is to create, implement and evaluate strategies to help improve the outcomes of the students we serve.

Reflecting on the past decade, Samantha Murphy, resource services manager/education liaison in Integrated Program Services (IPS), emphasizes the tremendous impact the data gathered through these partnerships has had on DHS's ability to better serve youth.

"Before the data-sharing agreement, caseworkers were not able to track their youth's school attendance in real-time. But now, if a child is enrolled in a school participating in the data-sharing agreement and if the caseworker has consent from a parent or if a child is in child welfare custody, caseworkers can immediately see attendance, standardized test scores, and disciplinary information, as well as general information such as where the child is enrolled in school and which buildings house their classes. Early and frequent access to school records helps caseworkers reinforce positive school outcomes for kids," Samantha said. "The data we collect is also used by Independent

Living (IL) staff to verify high school credits or past education information for youth who were previously involved in foster care. Access to that information can make the difference between whether a youth can pursue higher education or not.”

In addition to everyday use, information gathered through the data-sharing agreement has been instrumental in establishing initiatives like Focus on Attendance, a truancy prevention program ([read a 2016 DHS News article on the program](#)).

“Children spend a third of their day in school, and how they perform in school will play a huge role in determining their future success. Children involved in DHS services typically struggle in school. The relationships we’ve made and the data we’ve gathered over the last decade have helped us to find solutions and opportunities to address education-related concerns. We are excited to continue expanding our partnerships and creating even better outcomes for local youth,” Samantha concluded.