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Agency Critique  
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Agency: Hamilton County Department of Education, School Social Work

The Mission Statement:

The Hamilton County Department of Education School Social Workers value all children as individual and future contributors to our multicultural society. Because of this, the mission of the School Social Workers, as an integral part of the Hamilton county Schools, is to enhance and facilitate the academic and societal development of all children to their maximum potential.

HCDE's main purpose is to educate students to their highest potential. School Social Workers are hired by HCDE to "enhance the system's ability to meet its academic mission..." (HCDE, 1997). School Social Workers provide intervention services to students who are truant and therefore, endangering their ability to learn. Sheryl Randolph was recently appointed as Director of Student Services. She is charged with supervising the school social workers, among other duties. In the internship, students will report to their respective field instructors.

HCDE is a public agency that was created when Chattanooga city residents approved a referendum in 1996 to discontinue its separate school system. State law required the county school system to "absorb" the city schools into their system. Many residents of the county, who had no vote, were angered by the merger. The reorganization became official July 1, 1997.

HCDE's approximate operating budget for 2007 is \$312,844,885.00 of which \$1,117, 720.00 are allocated for the Student Services Department. The agency's budget is derived from allocations by federal (10.3%), state (44.2%), and local (44.9%) revenues which are uncertain and unpredictable (<http://www.hcde.org/media/pdf/items/357.pdf>). In a recent staff meeting, Sheryl

Randolph stated that only \$2,000.00 is budgeted toward continuing education for the sixteen HCDE social workers.

HCDE is one of the largest employers in Hamilton County with sixty-seven hundred staff that serve forty-thousand students in seventy-eight schools. Currently, HCDE employs fifteen social workers and one lead social worker. Each social worker is responsible for four to six schools and may be responsible for over four hundred students. Four of the sixteen social workers are Caucasian women; there is one African American male, and eleven African American females. The Director of Student Services has a degree in a field other than social work. Of the sixteen employed under her guidance approximately 5% have Master's degrees in Social Work and 95% have Bachelor's degrees in Social Work. School Social Workers keep detailed records of Attendance Referrals, Juvenile Court petitions, and Home Visits and must turn in monthly numbers and yearly status reports to the Director of Student Services. HCDE School Social Workers refer clients to Hamilton County Juvenile Court for chronic truancy issues.

HCDE determines it's effectiveness through yearly TCAP Testing and the NCLB Report Card. These report cards determine accountability and can affect funding for programs within the schools system. HCDE schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) which requires annual reports and a site visit every five years to present evidence of compliance with SACS standards ([http://www.sacscasi.org/region/selfstudy/Steps\\_to\\_Initial\\_and\\_Continued\\_Accreditation.pdf](http://www.sacscasi.org/region/selfstudy/Steps_to_Initial_and_Continued_Accreditation.pdf)). Not all schools in HCDE are fully accredited at this time.

Among the School Social Workers, moral is low. The major complaint is the incongruity of the different schools in procedural matters that make it difficult to carry out the mission of the

program. The recent appointment of the new Director of Student Services is seen by many as a step in the right direction, but they know through experience that changing a bureaucracy is a long process and have low expectations that their job will improve in the near future. Other issues involve the number of students they are to serve and the negative relationship they currently have with the juvenile court. HCDE conducts monthly staff meetings and offers time off for continuing education but doesn't have the funds to fully pay for these required education credits. HCDE generally pays a higher salary than those of similar agencies but most of the School Social Workers do not have a dedicated office and must divide their time between the four to six schools they are assigned. The School Social Workers do not believe they are fulfilling their mission when they are required to focus only on attendance and not on the underlying issues the student is facing that prevent them from good attendance habits.

## Works Cited

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