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Evaluating school responses to notifications of student criminal offenses

Background

This is the second of two audits reviewing consistency of notifications to schools and districts of student criminal offenses. The first audit examined whether state agencies, courts and sheriffs notified K-12 schools and school districts of offenses committed by students as required by law. It published in May 2018. The second audit will evaluate what happens to notifications after principals and district officials receive them.

When principals and district officials receive student criminal history information, they must notify teachers and subsequent schools while protecting student privacy. They may need to establish supports to ensure student safety and success, ranging from schedule adjustments to continual supervision. They must also meet legal requirements to share information with teachers and schools the student subsequently attends. At the same time, federal law requires educators to protect student privacy, and inappropriate disclosure of criminal history information could lead to stigmatization and limit a student's access to education. Principals, staff and district officials want easily accessible guidance to help them make the right decisions for their schools and students.

Failure to appropriately notify teachers and subsequent schools might expose students and staff to harm, and could expose school districts to litigation. Washington's media has reported several instances of serious consequences when notification processes failed, including students harmed by other students with known criminal histories and lawsuits brought against school districts.

Preliminary scope and objectives

This audit will evaluate existing notification processes within and between schools and districts. It includes review of policies, procedures and guidance at districts within ten counties, and site visits to two dozen school districts representing a range of sizes and geographic locations.

This performance audit will seek to answer the following question:

- How can principals and school district officials better share information about student criminal offenses so that legal requirements are met and teachers and subsequent schools can more effectively manage risk?

Timing

We expect to publish the results of this audit in early 2019.

May 2018