

**FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEADS IN
BUILDING COURT-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS**

By David Barrett Gough

Lexington, Kentucky –Something has been missing from the relationship between courts and schools. A middleman... a liaison that serves as the communication link. One district in Kentucky is making strides to fill this void. Fayette County Public Schools decided to create a Court-School Liaison to help ease the burden on both court officials and on school administrators.

Using funds allocated from the Kentucky Center for School Safety, officials established the liaison position in May, 2001 and hired Michelle Garrett, who is both an attorney and school psychologist. “I think my training will allow me to bridge both systems,” said Garrett.

Ms. Garrett’s job is unique as the first Court-School Liaison in Kentucky. As an officer of the court, she attends all court hearings for juveniles to be the voice of the schools in those proceedings and bring back to the schools the outcomes of these hearings.

According to Garrett, “The goals of the Court-School Liaison program are to increase successful outcomes for juveniles involved in court, to increase safety and security of those in the school setting, and to provide a district resource to school personnel as a ‘point of contact’ between schools and juvenile court representatives.”

Prior to each court session, she receives a copy of the docket, identifies juvenile who are students, and obtains school-based information on each student. She attends the

student's court hearing and shares attendance and discipline records with the judges, increasing their understanding of the issues facing the youth.

Once the court process is finalized, she forwards the information to the school district's Director of Law Enforcement, and that office then delivers it to the appropriate principal. State law mandates that principals share the information with the students' teachers and other school officials charged with classroom instruction. Information remains completely confidential with all parties involved.

In Fayette County, Garrett works closely with Mark Sellers, the Director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Academy for Excellence, an alternative school for students who may not thrive in a traditional school setting. "She is a great help," says Sellers. "Now the school is kept completely aware of a student's status in the court. Having Michelle in this position really helps expedite the process."

Her duties as a "point-of-contact" between court and school officials have led to a close relationship with workers in Community Based Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and the County's Juvenile Probation office. KCSS recognizes the importance of the liaison and applauds Fayette County's innovative approach. The Center emphasizes wraparound service as vital to prevention. "It is imperative that we get multi-agency involvement and improve communication in order to better serve at-risk students," says KCSS Executive Director Jon Akers. Garrett agrees, "Without the cooperation from local agencies, my job would not be possible. I appreciate everyone I work with every day."

Garrett also serves as a resource to court-involved youth and their parents to link them to the appropriate school and community service. "Getting the parents involved is

key,” says Sellers. “Much of the time, they don’t know where to turn, so they can go to Ms. Garrett for help.”

Currently, Garrett is working on an educational brochure for school administrators, parents, and students entitled *An Introduction to Fayette County’s Juvenile Justice System*. The brochure explains to court process and the roles of the agencies involved and will be used to train school personnel and increase their understanding of the juvenile justice system and its impact on their students.

Fayette County’s Court-School liaison is the only position of its kind in the state. KCSS encourages other districts to look at it as a model for a more effective relationship between courts and schools, and as a prevention tool to reduce school violence.