APPENDIX H: BATON ROUGE PRESS RELEASE

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EBR may get family center

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Efforts to open a truancy center in East Baton Rouge Parish are being coupled with the push to create a state-approved one-stop shop aimed at serving families from a single location.

The one-stop shop concept — called Louisiana Neighborhood Place — was created last year by legislation authored by Sen. Willie Mount, D-Lake Charles.

The legislation mandates that the departments of Social Services, Education, Health and Hospitals, the Louisiana Workforce Commission and the Office of Juvenile Justice work together with communities to serve families from single locations across the state.

The Sabine Parish School District has two Neighborhood Place locations, and another Neighborhood Place is being planned in New Orleans.

The Sabine Parish locations focus on improving educational outcomes while the location in New Orleans will work on early childhood and family development.

"No two Neighborhood Place locations look the same," said Lee Williams, who is with the Department of Social Services and helps create such locations. "Sabine will not look like Baton Rouge and New Orleans will not look like Sabine."

Williams spoke Wednesday to a group of community leaders gathered at the Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission headquarters on Florida Boulevard to discuss opening a truancy center in East Baton Rogue Parish.

District Attorney Hillar Moore III and Mayor-President Kip Holden started talking to community members in April about opening a center that would help consolidate a fragmented system that struggles to keep children in school.

A link between truancy and juvenile crime prompted the discussion, Holden and Moore have said, citing statistics that show 56 percent of the crimes committed by juveniles in the parish last year occurred during school hours. Nearly half those crimes were the work of children with high truancy rates.

No decisions have been made on what would be housed at the center, where it would be located, how

much the center would cost and where that money would come from. But officials at the Wednesday meeting said making the center a state-approved Neighborhood Place makes sense.

"Truancy is a symptom of a much bigger issue and needs to be addressed by focusing on the family, not just the child," said Roxson Welch, educational outreach coordinator with Mayor-President Kip Holden's Office. "The only way to do this is through a one-stop shop, which is a Neighborhood Place."

To obtain a Neighborhood Place-designation, Williams said, a community must have a five-year funding commitment, a location on or near a bus line and solid community support.

The Department of Social Services will help community leaders work toward their goal of opening a Neighborhood Place, she said, but the majority of the work will fall to those wanting to create it.

Moore said he is up to the task and that "this might be the last chance" East Baton Rouge Parish has to make a dent in the number of students who are skipping school.

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