



County of Santa Barbara

Board of Supervisors Subcommittee on Truancy

Final Report

Supervisor Salud Carbajal, First District

Supervisor Steve Lavagnino, Fifth District

May 22, 2012

Subcommittee Participants

District Attorney Joyce Dudley

J. Gordon Auchincloss, Chief Deputy District Attorney

Sheriff Bill Brown, Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department

Chief Beverly Taylor, Santa Barbara County Probation Department

Steve DeLira, Deputy Probation Chief

Superintendent Kathy Boomer, Goleta Unified School District

Superintendent Ed Cora, Guadalupe Unified School District

Superintendent Phil Alvarado, Santa Maria Unified School District

Superintendent David Cash, Santa Barbara Unified School District

Superintendent Paul Turnbull, Santa Ynez Valley Union High School District

Assistant Superintendent Jan Clevenger, Santa Barbara County Office of Education

Staff Support

Jeremy Tittle, First District Staff Assistant

Cory Bantilan, Fifth District Staff Assistant

Dennis Bozanich, Assistant to the County Executive Officer

Additional Support and Thanks

Superintendent Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Office of Education for support and time at administrator meetings

School District Superintendents from across the County of Santa Barbara for their candid suggestions and support for a truancy intervention program

Grand Jury members for their commitment to the issue of truancy prevention and presence at meetings throughout the process

Board of Supervisors Subcommittee on Truancy Final Report Outline

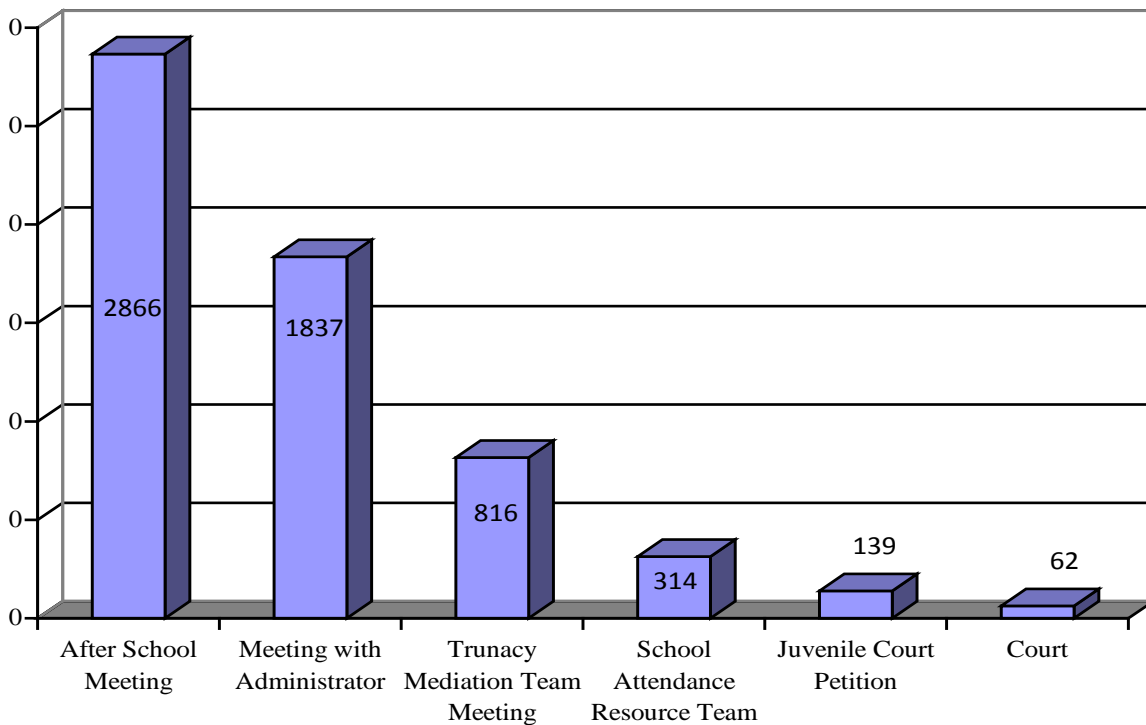
Background

The 2010-11 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) published a report entitled *Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County? (Truancy is Troubling ... for Everyone)*. This report recognized the success of the Santa Barbara County District Attorney’s Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program and noted that truancy rates increased by 48% when the program ended in 2008 due to funding constraints. The report recommended that the county reinstate an enforceable truancy prevention program for all Santa Barbara County Schools.

Finding #1 – Education achievement is essential

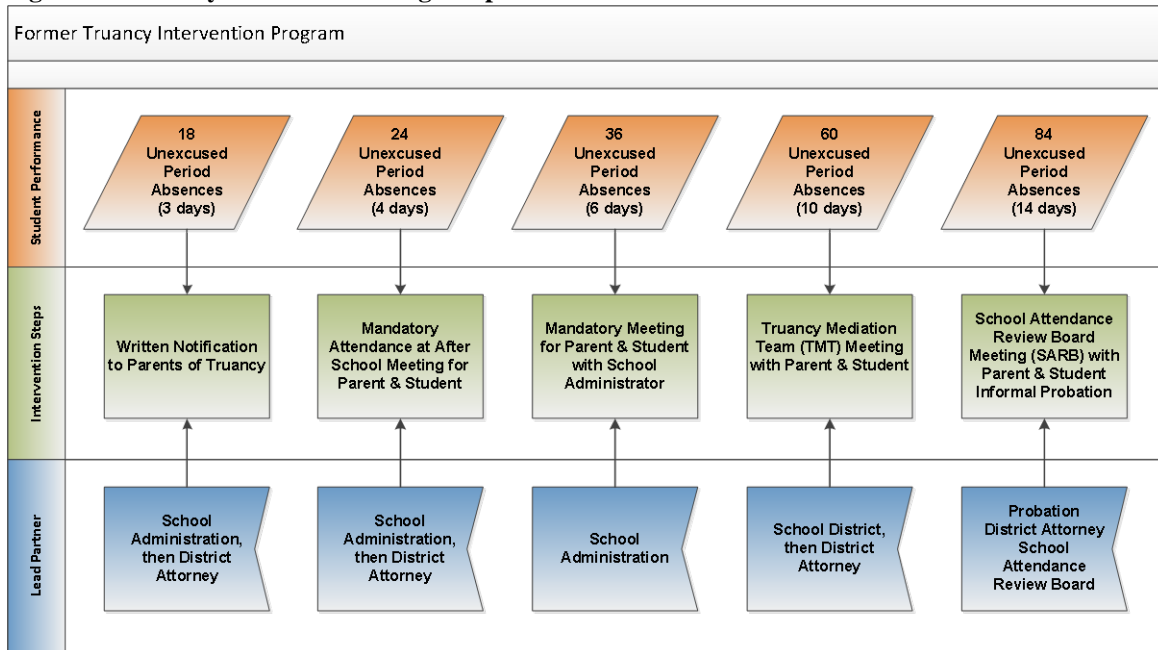
Finding #2 – Truancy is a symptom of family or educational challenges

Figure 1 - Total Truancy Interventions by Type from 2004- 2008



The Grand Jury recommended that the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors fund at least one full-time position in the Santa Barbara County District Attorney’s Office to help administer a new truancy prevention program. It was further recommended that each Santa Barbara County school district budget a proportional share, based upon the

Figure 2 - Truancy Intervention Program prior to 2008



number of students, to the Santa Barbara County District Attorney to assist funding an enforceable program. In addition, the Grand Jury recommended that the Santa Barbara County Education Office match the schools districts' contribution to the Santa Barbara County District Attorney.

The Board of Supervisors considered and adopted a response to the Grand Jury on October 18, 2011. A portion of their response to the Grand Jury's Report included the formation of a Board of Supervisors Subcommittee (Subcommittee) to investigate the re-creation of a county-wide truancy prevention program that would effectively address the growing problem of truancy in Santa Barbara County. The Subcommittee was identified as Supervisors Salud Carbajal and Steve Lavagnino.

Work of the Subcommittee

The first meeting of the Subcommittee was held on November 17, 2011. The Subcommittee requested the participation of District Attorney Joyce Dudley; Sheriff Bill Brown; Chief Probation Officer Bev Taylor; Chief Deputy District Attorney Gordon Auchincloss, Deputy Probation Officer Steve DeLira and Assistant to the County Executive Dennis Bozanich. In addition to identifying the broader list of participants, the meeting focused on setting a timetable to complete the work during the spring of 2012 and the goal of contributing to a partnership between the County and schools to prevent truancy.

Finding #3 – Reducing truancy will require many public service agencies to work with schools

On December 5, 2011 the Board Subcommittee was invited to attend a regularly scheduled meeting of the County Office of Education and School Superintendents to

listen to their challenges and ideas for addressing the truancy problem. Two important facts emerged from the meeting between the Subcommittee and the Superintendents:

- School districts would benefit from being able to customize the truancy prevention programs to meet the needs of the specific communities they serve, and
- County services, particularly the involvement of the District Attorney's Office, was required for the success of all truancy prevention efforts.

Finding #4 – School districts have a variety of truancy policies

During the same meeting, Superintendent Kathy Boomer (Goleta USD), Superintendent Ed Cora (Guadalupe USD), Superintendent Phil Alvarado (Santa Maria USD), Superintendent David Cash (Santa Barbara USD) and Superintendent Paul Turnbull (Santa Ynez Valley UHSD) and Assistant Superintendent Jan Clevenger (Santa Barbara County Education) were identified as additional participants in the Subcommittee.

On January 19 and 23, 2012, staff level meetings were held to identify possible framework options for a Truancy Prevention Program for the Subcommittee to discuss and consider. The framework options were based on findings and recommendations from the Grand Jury's report, discussion between the Superintendents and Subcommittee at the December meeting and known available resources. Attending this meeting were staff members from each Supervisor, County Executive Office, District Attorney and County Office of Education.

Finding #5 – District Attorney achieves the best results when partnering with others

On February 13, 2012, the entire subcommittee met at the Santa Ynez Unified High School District and agreed with the Grand Jury's report that there is an urgent need to reinstate a truancy prevention program in Santa Barbara County and that funding issues at the state and county levels present a major obstacle to this goal. The subcommittee also agreed with the Grand Jury's assessment that the components of an effective truancy reduction program include:

- Parent/guardian involvement, or whole family involvement
- Continuum of supports, including meaningful incentives for good attendance, educational support services and consequences for poor attendance
- Collaboration among community actors such as law enforcement, mental health workers, mentors, and social service providers in addition to educators
- Concrete and measurable goals for program performance and student performance. Good record keeping and on-going evaluation of progress toward those goals.

Finding #6 – Continuous process improvement will be needed to improve educational outcomes

The program framework presented by staff was a formal partnership between school districts and the County to share responsibility for a truancy prevention program. The schools would be responsible for providing a start of the school year letter to parents from the District Attorney reminding parents of the legal responsibility for school attendance. The schools would also be responsible for warning and concern letters up through a formal meeting with the school administrator. The exact number of absences that initiate the warnings and administrator meetings would be determined by each school district.

If these and other school-based intervention processes fail and truancy continues, the schools would contact the District Attorney's Office for their participation in Truancy Mediation Team (TMT) or School Attendance Review Board (SARB) meetings. It was thought that one attorney in the District Attorney's Office with a part-time support staff would be able to support the legal interventions that would result from continued habitual truancy. Importantly, it was proposed that if the County contributed the staff in the District Attorney's Office and the schools contributed "in-kind contribution" of processing warning letter and facilitating school-based interventions in keeping with the requirements of the District Attorney's policies, no funding from schools would be required to support the truancy prevention partnership. Finally, it was recommended that the District's Boards of Education adopt by resolution a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) accepting the partnership's roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation #1 –
Allocate funding for one
Deputy District Attorney,
support staff and
countywide travel

The Subcommittee agreed that the County should provide funding for one full-time attorney and one half-time support position at the Santa Barbara County District Attorney but recognized that recent budget cuts to schools prohibit them from making a cash contribution to the program at this time. The Subcommittee requested staff to draft a sample MOU for School Boards to consider, checklist of specific items that schools would need to provide the District Attorney's Office if legal intervention is required and a final report of the Subcommittee's work to the entire Board of Supervisors, including findings and recommendations.

On April 23, 2012, the Subcommittee met again in Santa Ynez and reviewed report findings, recommendations and MOU. The meeting gathered suggestions for additional content and revisions to the Subcommittee's findings, recommendations and draft MOU. It was suggested that the changes be incorporated and that the same documents be presented to the next meeting of the County Office of Education and School Superintendents two weeks later.

On May 7, 2012, staff attended the meeting of the County Office of Education and School Superintendents to review the plan, findings and recommendations as well as the MOU. All elements received wide spread support with some additional details requested on the MOU. Superintendents were invited to participate in the Board Hearing on the Subcommittee's Final Report scheduled for May 22, 2012.

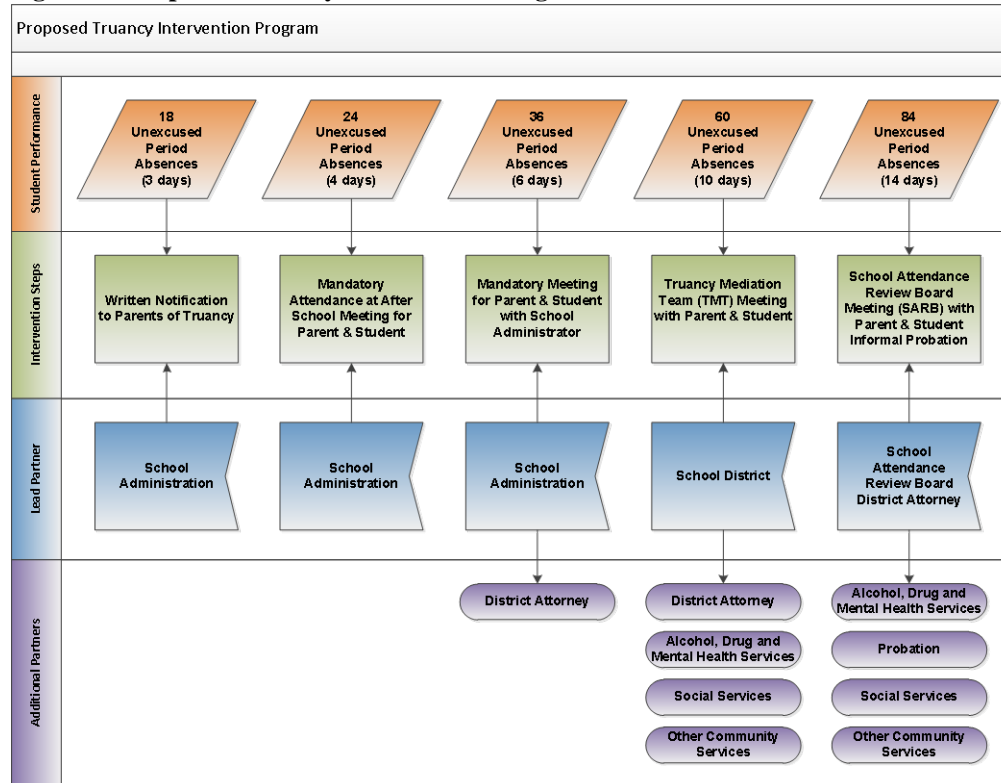
The Plan: Renewing Commitments to End Truancy

The Subcommittee devised a new paradigm for a truancy prevention program based on:

- School district autonomy and responsibility for organizing and operating individual truancy prevention programs that have common standards but are tailored to that individual district's problems. Schools, rather than the District Attorney, will now be responsible for running their own truancy prevention programs. Collaboration among school districts will be essential to gain efficiency, avoid redundancy and take into account the scope of each district's truancy problem.
- County support for limited staffing in the District Attorney's Office to provide school districts with guidance on unified minimum standards for designing individual truancy prevention programs. The staff would also provide schools with continuing support of a District Attorney presence and referrals to other needed County services at school meetings and participation in that school district's truancy prevention program.^[1] The goal will be to maximize the availability of County staff to school districts but the limited resources may cause temporary short delays.

Recommendation #2 –
District Attorney
responsible for prosecuting
cases when all other efforts
fail

Figure 3 - Proposed Truancy Intervention Program



^[1] As described below, District Attorney support for schools will be limited to the availability of one full-time Deputy District Attorney plus volunteer support when available.

Roles and Responsibilities

The success of the renewed truancy prevention programs will be the individual commitment of school districts and sites, County departments including District Attorney, Probation Sheriff, Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services, Social Services and others to fulfilling their unique role and responsibilities **and** the commitment of all parties to continue to work together to identify successes and failures to continuously improve the truancy prevention programs. Both schools and County departments have an equal stake in delivering the proper interventions to end truancy. Below are the Truancy Prevention Program participant's roles and responsibilities:

Schools Districts and Sites

- Establish and operate their own truancy prevention programs that conform to the legal requirements for such programs pursuant to Education Code 48260 et seq. School districts will have flexibility to network and collaborate with other school districts in designing programs that avoid unnecessary duplication of resources and address that district's individual needs.
- Incorporate the standards described in the attached Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program (TIPAP) Checklist. This checklist provides schools with standards for a graduated approach to:
 - Identify truants,
 - Provide meaningful learning and school environment interventions and, if all school efforts fail,
 - Seek the assistance of the District Attorney and the courts to enforce truancy laws.
- Collect and maintain data regarding students' unexcused absences and the success of intervention to establish concrete and reliable measures for success.

Recommendation #3 –
School districts reaffirm
attendance policies and
support for all truancy
prevention activities

Recommendation #4 –
School districts and County
will work together on
implementing the standards
in the *Checklist*.

County of Santa Barbara

- Identify funding for one Deputy District Attorney along with the expenses associated for all necessary travel and a half-time office support staff member within the District Attorney's Office to enforce truancy laws countywide and, when necessary, prosecute truancy cases. The District Attorney's Office will:
 - Work exclusively on truancy prevention programs, truancy enforcement and other truancy related issues.
 - Provide administrative support, training, infrastructure, and available volunteer support to enforce truancy laws countywide.

- Assist schools with the design, operation and maintenance of their truancy prevention programs that are enforceable under the law.
- Identify other County resources, such as mental health, child welfare services, juvenile probation services or others to increase the effectiveness of the intervention to end truancy.
- Provide school districts with District Attorney truancy information letters for parents of truants that school districts will send to all families of school aged children located in Santa Barbara County at the beginning of the school year.
- Provide letters to school districts that they may send to families of truants at each stage of the truancy intervention process as outlined in the Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Checklist.
- Prosecute truancy cases referred by the schools provided schools have adequately fulfilled the standards for such cases set by the District Attorney as described in the Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Checklist.
- Provide applicable support services for young people and their families through other County departments, such as Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services, Probation, Public Defender, Sheriff and Social Services, to reduce the causes of truancy.
- Convene the Santa Barbara County Truancy Prevention Working Group every six months for the first two years and then annually to assess progress, refine and analyze truancy prevention data and recommend additional improvements to the truancy prevention programs.

Recommendation #5 –
Truancy Working Group
will continue to meet to
assess effectiveness and
recommend improvements

Probation Department

- Process truancy referrals from school districts in the same general manner as law enforcement referrals for law violations. Truancy referrals will be received in cases where school interventions have proven to be ineffective or inadequate.
- Explore and access community diversion options that may mitigate truancy issues. Successful completion of such options will negate the need for further processing of the case.
- Refer to the District Attorney's Office for the filing of a petition in cases where community diversion options may not be appropriate or prove to be ineffective.
- Obtain and provide any relevant information regarding a particular case in such circumstances.

- Supervise a limited number of high risk cases where there is a sustained petition for truancy within resource limits.

Sheriff's Department

- Utilize the assigned School Resource Deputy (SRD) to work with both the high school and elementary school administrations to identify students that are habitual truants.
- Consult with school administrators to consider the appropriate intervention. This may include the School Resource Deputy making phone calls to the parents and/or home checks to check the welfare of the truant student.
- Coordinate with the assigned Deputy District Attorney on the Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program (TIPAP).
- Ensure that those cases submitted for prosecution have adequately fulfilled the standards set by the DA as described in the Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Checklist

Human Service Departments and Agencies

- Provide caseworkers presence at Truancy Mediation Team and School Attendance Resource Board meetings for children involved in the child welfare system.
- Provide, when appropriate, mental health and substance abuse consultations to the Truancy Mediation Team and School Attendance Resource Board meetings.
- Verify that school-aged children of public assistance recipients maintain “regular attendance” as required by Section 54 of the California Welfare Reform Law. Santa Barbara County defines regular attendance as not being or having been truant.
- Explore additional mental health and substance abuse treatment options if case conditions warrant.

Complete Subcommittee Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 – Education achievement is essential to economic vitality, civic engagement, health, safety and crime prevention.

Finding 2 – Truancy is a symptom of family and/or educational challenges including bullying, abuse, neglect, learning disabilities, substance abuse, language challenges, mental health needs and many more. Any legal recourse should be sought only after all other interventions strategies have been tried and failed.

Finding 3 – Reducing truancy will require many public-service agencies, including law enforcement, District Attorney, Probation, Social Services and Alcohol, Drug and Mental

Health Services, to work in cooperation with school district and site personnel to provide incentives to attend and consequences for not attending school.

Finding 4 – School districts have a variety of truancy prevention policies that have developed over the years to respond to the unique needs of the communities they serve.

Finding 5 – The District Attorney has determined that their role in enforcing school attendance policies achieves the best results when done in partnership with other needed public service agencies and multiple school-based efforts to encourage attendance.

Finding 6 – Continuous improvement of attendance standards and processes within schools will be needed to prevent truancy. These improvements will result in better coordination of educational services, child/family serving agencies and law enforcement truancy interventions.

Recommendation 1 – In partnership with school district efforts, the County of Santa Barbara allocates funding one Deputy District Attorney, along with the expenses associated for all necessary travel and a half-time office support staff to support schools in their efforts to design and operate effective truancy prevention programs.

Recommendation 2 – The District Attorney is responsible for prosecuting truancy cases that have been referred by schools provided the schools have met the standards for prosecuting such cases as described in the *Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program Checklist* that identify specific steps and information required to begin legal processes.

Recommendation 3 – In partnership with the County, each School District will review and re-affirm their school attendance policies, including the definition of truancy up to, and including, resolutions of support for the attendance-truancy prevention and intervention policy from the District Board of Education.

Recommendation 4 – School sites and district, along with the assigned Deputy District Attorney, are responsible for establishing truancy prevention programs that incorporate the standards described in *Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program Checklist*. Schools districts are encouraged to network and collaborate with other school districts in designing a program that fits with that district's needs.

Recommendation 5 – The Santa Barbara County Truancy Prevention Working Group will meet every six months for the first two years and then annually to assess progress, refine and discuss truancy prevention data collected and recommend further steps to improve the effectiveness of the truancy prevention program.