

Attachment 1:

District Attorney Meetings with School District Board of Trustees & Superintendents

Since the last appearance before the Board of Supervisors, the District Attorney administrative staff and staff members of the District Attorney's Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program (TIPA), commonly called the Truancy Program, met with nine (9) school district Boards of Trustees and with a group of district Superintendents from the various school districts. The goal of these meetings was to inform the school districts about the need for a financial partnership between the school districts and the county to fund the Truancy Program because the present grant funding for the Program has been reduced to one District Attorney Truancy staff member for the entire county. This staffing reduction would eliminate the program in two of the three service areas of the county and substantially reduce the service level provided to the third area. District Attorney staff made a PowerPoint presentation to the various Boards of Trustees giving an overview of the structure and function of the Truancy Program combined with statistics supporting the effectiveness of the program.

All presentations to the various School Boards were well received. Comments indicated the school boards recognized the need for the Truancy Program and acknowledged the viability of the core concepts of the present program. Likewise it was clear that the school boards strongly favored the continuation of the program.

It was also clear that the effort to enter into a financial partnership with the school districts occurred at a difficult time. The summer break was one impediment. In addition, school district budgets had already been finalized with most Districts having suffered serious budget reductions that resulted in cuts to their own ongoing programs and personnel. Moreover, the school districts had established restoration priorities. In spite of this, the school districts were none the less encouraging and enthusiastic about working together with the District Attorney's Office and other involved agencies in an effort to maintain a countywide program.

District Attorney Truancy and administrative staff, including District Attorney Christie Stanley, also met with a group of the superintendents which included those districts that have historically been the major participants in the program. This was a very productive meeting where it was established that all parties were strongly committed to engaging in a process to establish a truancy program that would meet the individual needs of various school districts. The consensus was that this process needed to be a collaborative effort given the differences in district size, demographics, funding source, available truancy resources, administrative staffing, truancy rates, ADA and other associated factors. A comprehensive program designed to satisfy the differing needs of districts and funded by the schools and the county would require a longer period of strategic planning than envisioned by the Board of Supervisors. It should involve the various components of the law enforcement and education community. There was enthusiastic support for this unique opportunity to mobilize interested parties to develop a truly community engineered vehicle for abating the truancy problem. To facilitate this process, the County Superintendent of Schools Bill Cirone authored a letter to the Board of Supervisors expressing the collective support of the Superintendents for a collaborative effort to study and redesign an improved county wide truancy program and requesting the

Board of Supervisors to fund the present program for the remainder of this year to allow this effort to occur. The District Attorney's Office joins in the request of Superintendent Cirone and the other Superintendents.

We can all agree that:

1. Truancy is an ongoing issue in Santa Barbara County, as it is around the state.
2. There is a direct correlation between truancy and juvenile delinquency. Keeping children off the streets and in school avoids exposure to the corrupting influence of the streets that too often leads to committing crimes and being lured into the criminal street gang subculture. It is common knowledge that street gangs recruit younger members to commit crimes because they are particularly vulnerable. Absent a truancy program, the higher truancy rates will inevitably lead to increased gang involvement and juvenile delinquency with its consequent adverse impact on the already strained resources of law enforcement, the courts and the county.
3. There is a direct correlation between truancy and the failure to graduate from high school which must be reexamined in light of new statistics. The drop out rate has been controversial in the past because of the lack of consistency resulting from each school district being allowed to collect and self report it's data. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act each student is now required to have an identification number. This has resulted in more accurate tracking data available to the State Department of Education which recently led to the Department announcing a state wide 2006-2007 dropout rate of nearly 25% or one quarter of the students, a startling increase from the 13.9% four year dropout rate for the prior year. This new method for collecting data demonstrates that the graduation rate needs to be given heightened emphasis by the schools in developing and implementing programs especially when considered in light of other available information. For example, a report entitled School or the Streets: Crime and California's Dropout Crisis, released by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a bipartisan organization comprised of hundreds of police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and violence survivors indicates that increasing graduation rates by 10 percentage points would lower homicide and assault rates by 20 percent and prevent 500 murders and more than 20,000 aggravated assaults each year in California.
4. Students who are habitually truant and/or who dropout of school are much more likely to be not only a present burden but also to create a future burden on the resources of society due to chronic unemployment and under-employment, homelessness, substance abuse, unplanned pregnancy and family dysfunction that may in turn become cyclical. In addition to the impact on the juvenile justice system, high school dropouts are over three times more likely than graduates to be arrested and eight times as likely to go to jail or prison. Nationwide, 68 percent of state prison inmates do not have a high school diploma.
5. Because of the enforcement power vested in the District Attorney, this Office is particularly well suited to spearhead the effort to abate truancy.

In conclusion, the benefits of a collaborative effort to abate truancy are immeasurable not only to the schools, the county and the criminal justice system, but also to the parents of children struggling with a truancy problem, to the general health, welfare and public safety of the community at large and, most of all, to the children whose lives it touches and changes.