

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
TRUANCY INTERVENTION AND PARENT ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAM

**The Purpose**

The purpose of this memorandum of understanding is to reestablish a county-wide truancy program for Santa Barbara County that will reduce truancy rates while identifying and ameliorating the root causes of truancy in individual truants. The twofold goal of this program is truancy prevention and enforcement of compulsory education laws. First, we seek to prevent truancy by identifying the cause of truancy and treating the problem individually through the use counseling, school programs and community-based programs. Next, we seek to ensure the present and future well-being of school-aged children in our community enforcing state truancy laws.

**Introduction**

The 2010-11 Santa Barbara County Civil 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 budgetary constraints. The report recommended that the county reinstate an enforceable truancy program for all Santa Barbara County Schools.

In response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury's Report, the Board of Supervisors for the County of Santa Barbara formed a subcommittee to investigate the re-creation of a county-wide truancy program that would effectively address the growing problem of truancy in Santa Barbara County. This committee grew over time and presently includes Santa Barbara Supervisors Salud Carbajal and Steve Lavignino; District Attorney Joyce Dudley; Sheriff Bill Brown; Chief Probation Officer Bev Taylor; Superintendent Kathy Boomer (Goleta USD); Superintendent Ed Cora (Gualdalupe USD); Superintendent Phil Alvarado (Santa Maria USD) and Superintendent Paul Turnbull (Santa Ynez Valley UHSD). Jan Clevenger (Santa Barbara County Education) Chief Deputy District Attorney Gordon Auchincloss, Deputy Probation Officer Steve Delira and County Administrator Dennis Bozanich.

The subcommittee agreed with the grand jury's report that there is an urgent need to reinstate a truancy program in Santa Barbara County and that budgetary 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
- A continuum of supports, including meaningful incentives for good attendance 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.

The grand jury recommended that the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisor fund at least one full-time position in the Santa Barbara County office of the District Attorney to help administer a new truancy program. It was further recommended that each Santa Barbara County School district provide in its a budget a proportional share, based upon the 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 subcommittee agreed with the grand jury that the county should provide funding for one full time 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. It was agreed by the subcommittee that the present contribution school districts would make to the program would be in the form of resources rather than money.

The subcommittee devised a new paradigm for a truancy program that gives school districts autonomy and responsibility for organizing and operating individual truancy 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 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. As such, the District Attorney will provide school districts with guidance on unified minimum standards for designing individual truancy programs. The District Attorney would also provide schools with continuing support whenever possible in the form of a District Attorney presence at school meetings and participation in that school district's truancy program.<sup>1</sup>

### **The County of Santa Barbara**

The County of Santa Barbara will allocate funding for one Deputy District Attorney along with the expenses associated for all necessary travel and a half-time office support staff member to enforce truancy laws countywide and, when necessary, prosecute truancy cases. This deputy will provide additional support to schools in their efforts to design and operate effective truancy programs that are enforceable under the law.

### **The Schools**

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

School districts will be responsible for establishing and operating their own truancy 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. The District Attorney will provide advice and assistance to school districts in designing and maintaining their programs. Each district's truancy program will 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 for meaningful intervention and, when these efforts fail, seek the assistance of the District Attorney and the courts to enforce truancy laws. School districts will also be responsible for collecting and maintaining data regarding students' unexcused absences and the success of intervention to establish concrete and reliable measures for success.

### **The DA**

The newly funded Deputy District Attorney and half-time office support staff member will be assigned to work exclusively on truancy programs, truancy enforcement and other truancy related issues. The District Attorney will provide this new position with administrative support, training, infrastructure, and available volunteer support to enforce truancy laws countywide. The District Attorney will also assist schools with the design and maintenance of their truancy programs.

The District Attorney will 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. The District Attorney will also 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. Finally, the District Attorney will 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.

### **Probation**

The Probation Department will 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. The use of community diversion options that may mitigate truancy issues will be explored and accessed. Successful completion of such options will negate the need for further processing of the case. In cases where community diversion options may not be appropriate or prove to be ineffective, the matter may be referred to the District Attorney's Office for the filing of a petition. The Probation Department will obtain and provide any relevant information regarding a particular case in such circumstances. Due to a lack of fiscal resources, Probation may supervise a limited number of high risk cases where there is a sustained petition for truancy.

### **Sheriff**

The School Resource Deputy, SRD assigned to a High School will continue to work with both the High School and Elementary School administrations in identifying students that are habitual truants. The SRD with consultation from school administrators will determine the appropriate course of action. This may include phone calls to the parents and/or home checks to check the welfare of the truant student. The SRD will also work with the assigned Deputy District Attorney on the Santa Barbara County Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program (TIPAP). The SRD will work with both the school and DA to 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.

### **County and Community Social Services**

The County of Santa Barbara provides a variety of public assistance, protective, mental health and substance abuse treatment services to qualified members of the public. Truancy is often a symptom of family or individual learning, safety, neglect, financial, mental health, physical health or substance abuse challenges. A key component of the restored truancy prevention program will be the inclusion of coordinated delivery of needed support services to increase the likelihood of successful school attendance.

Staff from Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services, Social Service and/or Public Health Departments can be available to provide appropriate support to individual young people or to families to aid in promoting consistent school attendance. Caseworkers already involved with truant young people or their families would be asked to be present at Truancy Mediation Team and School Attendance Resource Board meetings. General consultations by county or community-based caseworkers may also be valuable to address mental health and substance abuse challenges to the Truancy Mediation Team and School Attendance Resource Board meetings. Finally, California Welfare Reform Law requires verification of “regular attendance” of school-aged children of public assistance recipients as a condition for receiving some types of public assistance. Santa Barbara County defines regular attendance as not being or having been truant.