

TO: CITY COUNCIL
BOARD OF EDUCATION

DATE: November 18, 2008

FROM: CITY ATTORNEY/CITY PROSECUTOR
SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON STATUS OF JOINT TRUANCY PROJECT

RECOMMENDATION

This report is being provided for information only.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On May 12, 2008, as part of the formation of a Joint City/PUSD staff committee, City Council and the Board of Education established the reduction of truancy as one of the priorities in the opportunities for partnership within the committee. The City Prosecutor's office took the lead on behalf of the City. The Chief of Staff took the lead on behalf of the District. A pilot program has been implemented focusing on one high school and one middle school with limited assistance at other schools as requested and as resources allow.

BACKGROUND

Following the direction of the Special Joint Meeting, the City Attorney and Chief Prosecutor met with the District Staff on May 21st regarding the truancy program. At that meeting, it was decided to include the Middle Schools in the program. In quick succession, meetings were held with the Child Welfare, Attendance and Safety director and the Chief Academic Officer to begin to identify roles and milestones for the City and District in order to have a viable program by September. Prosecution staff also met separately with the Deputy-in-charge of the Pasadena Juvenile division of the District Attorneys' office to discern present procedures for and difficulties with prosecution for truancy.

At the July meeting of the joint City/PUSD staff committee a report was presented on the status of the program. A letter describing the consequences of truancy was sent to parents of all 20,000 students in the District prior to the start of school. Additionally, the City Prosecutor staff brought together administrators from PUSD and Deputies from the District Attorney's office to outline what the truancy program should do. The purpose of the meeting was to emphasize the necessity of re-establishing a SARB (Student

Attendance Review Board) meeting at least monthly and to outline the steps required by the DA to prosecute minors for chronic truancy.

In August, the Chief Prosecutor met with the principals and assistant principals of John Muir High School and Wilson Middle School and the District's Child Welfare, Attendance and Safety Director to finalize preparations for September. These two schools were chosen to be the pilot schools for implementation of the program. Both schools began compiling lists of students who were chronic truants in the last academic year. Although two schools were selected for the pilot program, the Prosecutor's office has offered to assist other schools upon request to the extent that resources will allow.

A SARB training was held on September 18th at the Donald Wright Auditorium to train school administrators and staff, the Safe Schools Team from the Pasadena Police Department, City Prosecution staff and affected City staff on the purpose of SARB and the importance of community expertise at the hearings. The program was well-attended and resulted in an assemblage of experts who may attend the hearings. PUSD staff sketched out the way attendance would be tracked at each school given the limitations of their current software. A Deputy District Attorney specializing in truancy and the Chief Prosecutor spoke on legal issues and District personnel emphasized the importance of getting and keeping students in school.

Muir High School:

On September 8th the Chief Prosecutor spoke to the teaching staff at Muir High School. In that presentation the teachers were urged to identify and track truants in order to ensure the success of the program. Commitments were made to take roll in each classroom during each class period so that students who "ditched" one or more periods would also be identified.

Students who are identified as "chronic truants" are those who missed twenty or more days in the 2007-2008 academic year. As this program deals with high school students who attend multiple classrooms during the day, administrators are also targeting students who habitually miss certain class "periods" as well. Those identified students will receive individual attention: only written excuses for absences will be accepted, the "student welfare and attendance" worker supplied to the District from the police department or other school personnel will make home visits or phone calls to verify illnesses and counselors and interns will track these students every week so as to intervene early and often with these children's academic careers.

In September the first Parent meeting was held at Muir to explain the program and the Education Code to the affected students and their parents. More than half of the sixty targeted students and their parents attended. Administrative staff from the District including the Child Welfare, Attendance and Safety director spoke to the students and their parents about the District's resources for children in need of tutoring, family counseling, health and psychological services and other primary needs. Muir's principal and her staff of counselors and vice-principals as well as assigned graduate interns offered their help in resolving the needs of the tardy and the truant. City Prosecution staff listed the steps toward prosecution and discussed the consequences of truancy:

involvement in the juvenile justice system, adult prosecution for parents who allow truant behavior and the corollary results of absenteeism: delinquency, drug use and other malefaction. The information was well-received and individual parents' questions and concerns addressed.

Wilson Middle School:

In September the Chief Prosecutor spoke to the teaching staff at Wilson Middle School. Topics identical to those directed at the Muir staff were discussed at Wilson.

In October city staff and administrative staff at Wilson Middle School prepared for a parent meeting addressing the chronically tardy and absent students there. The staff at Wilson has compiled a list of 50 students who are chronically tardy and another 20 students who were identified as chronic truants in the last school year and have continued this behavior since September. The issue at middle schools is often complicated by parental acquiescence to students arriving tardy for school or their complete absence. To address these issues, two Parent Information Meetings were scheduled for the morning and evening of November 17th.

SUMMATION:

The work of this program is an arduous one, filled with paperwork, parent meetings, administrative sessions, counseling conferences and ultimately, if necessary, criminal filings. Staff from the schools, the District and City work well together in a common goal but the bulk of the labor falls on the shoulders of the teachers, counselors and principals at each school. It is their tenacity that will make the program work and get students back on track: in school, on time, every day.

FISCAL IMPACT

The City Prosecutor's office has dedicated 10% of a Deputy City Prosecutor's time to this program as well as 10% of the Chief Prosecutor's availability. Additionally, the City paid for the preparation and printing of the summer letters distributed to families in the school district for \$800.

Respectfully submitted:


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