

**TO:** BOARD OF EDUCATION  
CITY COUNCIL

**DATE:** May 11, 2009

**FROM:** SUPERINTENDENT  
CITY ATTORNEY/CITY PROSECUTOR

**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 anti-truancy program has been implemented focusing on John Muir High School and Wilson Middle School with limited assistance at other schools as requested and as resources allow. Staff from the District and the City are working with the two pilot schools to determine the effects of the early meetings on targeted students' attendance. Some preliminary numbers are included in this report.

**BACKGROUND**

The City of Pasadena "City" and the Pasadena Unified School District "District" joint anti-truancy program seeks to hold parents and students accountable for excessive absenteeism. The District and the City Prosecutor's office work in partnership with John Muir High School (JMHS) and Wilson Middle School (WMS). The goal of the program is to change behavior rather than seek prosecutions. Thus, there are a series of meetings, interventions, and assistance to the parents and students to improve attendance. This process is also mandated by the Education Code. Attendance improvement is sought through parental and student accountability.

The first contact between the City Prosecutor's Office and the parents and students is at a School Attendance Meeting (SAM) for excessively absent students. The targeted schools identify chronically absent students and send letters to those parents inviting them to attend a SAM at the school. Present at the SAM are the District's Director of Child Welfare, Attendance & Safety, representatives from the City Prosecutor's office, Truant Officer, school administrators, school support staff, and community-based organization representatives. At this meeting, parents are advised on the compulsory education law and informed about consequences of its violation. In addition, they are offered support and resources to address the attendance problem. Those parents who do not attend receive a follow up letter informing them that their child's attendance will continue to be

tracked and further noncompliance may result in a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) referral and/or prosecution.

The following guidelines are followed by the school when identifying students and parents to invite to the School Attendance Meeting (SAM). The school is responsible for compiling the list of students who are to be invited to the SAM. Schools establish parameters based upon their schools specific needs. Many students identified have a minimum of 20 absences. Tardies are never counted. However, if the student has "lates" (which is 30 minutes or more late to school) those can be counted as an "absence". The school is responsible to check the list carefully to eliminate any students who missed for legitimate reasons (i.e. documented illness). Administrators also check with the student's teacher and the school nurse for this information.

Once the list is completed and any legitimate absences are identified, the school then sends the invitations to those students. The meetings are usually held in the school auditorium. The school provides a microphone and a Spanish interpreter. A table with sign-in sheets is also provided.

At WMS, during the months of November and December, 2008, a total of four SAMs were held. Both morning and evening times were made available to accommodate the particular needs of parents and/or guardians. A total of 436 families were invited to the WMS SAMs. At JMHS, a total of four SAMs were also held. A total of 348 families were invited to the JMHS SAMs.

Four to six weeks after the SAM, and every month or two thereafter, the school is responsible for checking the attendance of every student invited to the SAM. If the student's attendance improves, the attendance continues to be monitored at the school. However, if a student's attendance does not improve and chronic attendance persists, the parent and student are invited to meet with the school-site School Attendance Review Team (SART). These are individual meetings with each parent and student held at the school. The team includes a school administrator, school support staff, and any appropriate members of community based organizations.

The SART meetings focus on:

1. Attendance problems
2. Parents' and students' concerns
3. Students' strengths and weakness are evaluated
4. The legal consequences for truancy
5. Referrals to any appropriate assisting agencies
6. A SART contract is signed outlining the parent's and student's responsibilities

The attendance of post-SART students continues to be monitored by the school. To date, after either the SAM and/or SART interventions, 58% of WMS students originally invited to the SAM have responded well enough to not trigger further intervention. At JMHS, 54% of the students originally invited to the SAM have responded well enough to not trigger further intervention.

Those students who continue to have attendance problems are referred to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB). This group is similar to the SART but with a broader membership. The SARB Hearings for JMHS and WMS are currently being held at the Pasadena Police Department. The parent and student are issued directives from the SARB and sign a SARB Agreement.

Again, the post-SARB student's attendance is monitored at the school site. If a student continues to demonstrate chronic attendance after the SARB, the case is referred to the District Attorney's office for prosecution of the juvenile and/or the City Prosecutor's Office for a criminal case filing against the parent or guardian. The process, from beginning to end, may take up to 6-8 months. The goal is to get students in school, not to file criminal charges. Thus, court is a last result and is only to be utilized when all other measures have failed.

**Year-to-Date Statistics**

School	SAM Attendees	SARTs	SARBs*	Filings
JMHS	123	70	30*	0
WMS	147	48	11*	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>41*</b>	<b>0</b>

\*Estimated number of SARB cases pending referral.

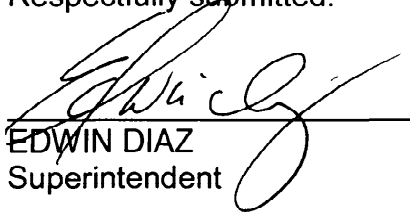
**SUMMATION:**

The work between school administrators, the District and City Staff has been cogent and cooperative. They are in the process of evaluating how the program has been perceived, where it has succeeded and where it might be improved. As the program closes out its first year, staff notes anecdotally that the community at large is now well aware of the need for students to attend school every day and on time and will refocus efforts to take the necessary next steps in the year to come.

**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.

Respectfully submitted:

  
 EDWIN DIAZ  
 Superintendent

  
 MICHELE BEAL BAGNERIS  
 City Attorney/City Prosecutor