



Office of the Los Angeles City Attorney Truancy Prevention Program

In 2002, the Office of the Los Angeles City Attorney created a Truancy Prevention Program to address the problems of truant students. The program teaches parents of their legal responsibility to ensure that their children attend school through letters, brochures and general assemblies. Truancy Prevention staff also support the efforts of LAUSD at School Attendance Review Teams and School Attendance Review Boards. Similarly, Truancy Prevention staff work with LAPD and LASPD to conduct community outreach forums, individual family outreach and to conduct the legal education component of truancy sweeps. As a last resort, after all other efforts have failed; the City Attorney's Office will prosecute parents who do not send their children to school.

The City Attorney's Truancy Prevention Program has educated nearly **250,000** families about the importance of attending school. The program's letters have directed over **70,000** families to general assemblies. Subsequently, almost **4,000** families were referred for further City Attorney intervention. From these families, PSA counselors have taken over **200** families to SARB and they have referred **75** families for prosecution. To date **75** families have been prosecuted under the Education and Penal Codes. The goal of the program is to keep children in school, not to prosecute parents.

Chronic absenteeism from school is a powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior and future gang membership. A youth is three times more likely to join a gang when the youth has low school attachment, low academic achievement or learning disabilities. Forty-four percent of juvenile crime takes place during school hours. Veteran gang prosecutors have stated that they have never seen a gang member who wasn't truant first.

Truancy affects our communities as a whole because:

- Truancy is a precursor to gang membership.
- Truancy is a stepping stone to delinquent and criminal activity.
- Truancy impacts a child's success at school.
- Truancy leads to the victimization of youth.
- Truancy has fiscal ramifications.

The goal of the Truancy Prevention program is to keep children in school, not to prosecute parents. Prosecution will be a tool of last resort when the efforts made to educate and assist the family have failed. If you have any questions concerning the City Attorney's Truancy Prevention Program please contact Kristen Byrdsong, Deputy City Attorney-in-Charge of Truancy Prosecution and Prevention, at (213)216-1936 or Kristen.Byrdsong@lacity.org.