

**Truancy Task Force Meeting Summary**  
Children's Court  
September 20, 2010

**Attendees:**

Juvenile Court: Michael Nash, Donna Groman, Margaret Henry, Jack Furay  
Law Enforcement: Lydia Bodin  
Legal: Jane Newman, Carol Richardson, David Sapp  
County Youth Departments: Michael Gray, Jeremy Nichols  
City of LA: Liz Trawick, Irvin Fragoso  
Schools: Elmer Roldan, Maria Espinoza, Doris Baker, Andy Bogen, Javier Guzman  
Community: Manuel Criollo, Zoe Rawson, Keith Gibbs, Miller Sylvan, Eugenia Wilson  
ECC: Carrie Miller, Sharon Watson

**Welcome and Opening Remarks:**

Chair Judge Nash welcomed members to the first meeting of the Truancy Task Force (TTF), gave an overview of the County's juvenile court system, and introduced the Supervising Judges of the Delinquency and Dependency Courts as well as the Supervising Referee of the Informal Juvenile and Traffic Courts.

Of the approximate 180,000 citations issued to youth each year, about 30% are for truancy. The Informal Juvenile and Traffic Courts handle the highest number of truancy cases--about 30,000 youth annually. There is no overall or consistent approach used by judges in the 28 delinquency courts or any specific approach getting good results, but high on the list of least effective approaches are fines. As there is a high correlation between truancy and crime rates, preventing/reducing truancy is a big issue. Judge Nash would like the Task Force to look at—in particular—approaches to truancy that keep youth out of the court system and that provide tools for judges in the dependency and delinquency courts.

**Discussion of Current Local Efforts—What's Working and What's Not:**

- It needs to be recognized that truancy is “the tip of the iceberg” that results from other problems. Therefore, a comprehensive approach with different components is needed to properly address it. Also, different approaches are needed for different communities, for different causes of truancy, and for different age groups (elementary, middle and high school).
- School engagement is key and there are some promising practices in place in some communities: LAUSD's Washington Prep, the Pomona Project, school personnel mentoring youth, family support units, training parents as volunteer parent advocates that understand how to navigate the school system, teen courts.

- Civilian responses are also important—for example, community task forces, interns working on the streets of Philadelphia, safe passage programs, businesses opening their doors later in the morning (after school starts).
- Schools must tap into and collaborate with community resources, especially in dealing with special populations such as foster and probation youth.
- All of us must communicate with each other more effectively.
- While the Task Force is coming up with strategies for reducing truancy in the near future, we need to pay attention to what’s not working now, as these approaches are compounding the problem. Resources must be shifted and there must be increased accountability for interventions used.
- What’s not working well now: criminalizing truancy with citations, fines, etc., which results in youth missing even more school, parents missing work, and puts a financial burden on families which leads to more trouble (e.g., driver’s license suspensions) for not paying fines. Further, some neighborhoods (e.g., South LA, Boyle Heights, East SFV) are being targeted disproportionately with high numbers of citations. In some cases, youth are even being cited when walking TO school. Current approaches are generally “blunt instruments” that don’t differentiate well among different groups of truants and, therefore, don’t link truant youth to the right services.

**Next Steps:**

1. Invitations will be extended to the LAPD, Sheriff’s Department, LA School Police Department and the City of LA Attorney’s Office to increase law enforcement participation on the Task Force. A LACOE representative will also be included.
2. The TTF will begin by focusing on what approaches its members think are the most effective in LA County and that have high rates of success. It will then look at truancy reduction efforts in other parts of California and the U.S. to see what is working well and what might also work here. Individuals from successful programs will be invited to present their approaches to the Task Force over the next few meetings to inform our planning process.
3. School district numbers that relate to truancy will be gathered, and schools will be asked to report on positive approaches that have a positive impact on those numbers.