

Truancy Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

October 11, 2011

Attendees:

Courts: Michael Nash, Donna Groman, Margaret Henry, Jack Furay, Sherri Sobel, Terri Johnson

Law Enforcement: Steven Zipperman, Lydia Bodin, Kristen Byrdsong, John Gutierrez, Perry Griffith, Christine Chally

Legal: Lisa Greer, Carol Richardson, Deborah Cromer, Patrick Hirsch

LA County Chief Executive Office: Trish Ploehn, Vincent Holmes

LA County Youth Departments: Jennifer Hottenroth, Patty Armani

City of Los Angeles: Michael de la Rocha

Schools: Ray Vincent, Laurel Bear, Teresa Garcia, Rick Tebbano, Maria Espinoza, Belinda Walker

Community/Advocacy: Eugenia Wilson, Michelle Newell, Zoe Rawson

Education Coordinating Council: Sharon Watson

Welcome and Introductions:

Judge Nash welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for self-introductions.

Workgroup Preliminary Report:

Sharon Watson reviewed the goals, process and timeline for the Workgroup that was established after last month's meeting to prepare a draft report of the task force's findings during 2011 and a set of recommendations for 2012. She then facilitated a discussion of the first piece of that report—a suggested list of components for an “ideal” school-based approach to increasing school attendance. The major elements include:

- A strong attendance data collection and dissemination system that helps target interventions early and often
- Reducing school-initiated exclusions
- Partnering with families early on and often
- An ongoing communication/media campaign regarding the importance of attendance
- A uniform system at each school site for prevention and intervention
- Focusing on high need populations, schools, grades and times of the year
- Utilizing rewards and attendance incentives
- Providing training to all school staff
- Focusing on proven universal strategies for improving attendance
- Addressing transportation and safety barriers to make it easier, safer and quicker for students to get to school
- Increasing the role of the youth voice in schools and learning from youth how to improve attendance

Task force members suggested adding opportunity transfers to the school expulsion section, which sparked a discussion about the limitations of this mechanism and the process for informing county departments, advocates and the court when these transfers occur, especially when foster or probation youth are involved. A part of the problem for foster youth information is the school's lack of knowledge about who the student's Holder of Education Rights is. Although these Holders are supposed to be identified in the youth's minute orders (both initial and subsequent), this does not happen consistently. Although the name of the Holder is on the top line of the new disposition form, it would be helpful if this information would populate other forms/orders so that the Holder's name doesn't have to be manually entered each time. The court will address this situation but, in the meantime, children's attorneys and caseworkers should raise this issue as well.

All agreed that communication among our organizations, in general, is the key to achieving our goal of improving school attendance and reducing truancy.

Los Angeles City Council Motion to Amend the Municipal Code Section on Truancy:

Michael de la Rocha presented the motion introduced by Councilman Cardenas and seconded by Councilman Parks on September 16. This motion is needed to promote consistent practice by those addressing daytime curfew violations. Fines are not proving to be a disincentive as, due to the high fees, the parent has to pay instead of the student so the youth is not experiencing the direct consequence. Although driver's license suspensions (or delays in their being issued) are a more powerful consequence for truant youth, many youth will drive anyway. The task force considered some promising alternatives to current practice, such as assessment or attendance improvement centers. According to Rick Tebbano, 30% of youth attending Long Beach USD centers do not recidivize. Steve Zipperman, LASPD Chief, reported that LAUSD's centers were, unfortunately, shut down after 3 months due to a lack of funding. He stated that we must address the social issues that allow students to stay in school and graduate and must work with parents to address these.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the task force will be on **Tuesday, December 13, 2011 at 12 noon** in the Judges Conference Room at the Children's Court.