

Truancy Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

March 7, 2011

Attendees:

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

Law Enforcement: Jorge Villegas, Lydia Bodin, Kerry White, Kristen Byrdsong

Legal: Carol Richardson

LA County Chief Executive Office: Trish Ploehn, Vincent Holmes

LA County Youth Departments: Larry Dodson, Greg McCovey, Jennifer Hottenroth

City of LA: Michael de la Rocha

Schools: Elmer Roldan, Rick Tebbano, Ray Vincent, Laurel Bear, Maria Espinoza,
Marynell Masciel, Belinda Walker

Community/Advocacy: Miller Sylvan, Eugenia Wilson, Michelle Newell, Salva Soto,
James Huettig, Daniel Oaxaca, Andrew Quinones

Education Coordinating Council: Sharon Watson

Welcome and Opening Remarks:

Chair Judge Nash welcomed Task Force members to the meeting and congratulated Lydia Bodin and the District Attorney's Office for a very successful *Countywide Chronic Truancy Symposium*.

Nash then provided some data on an alternative sentence program, which was implemented at the Central Branch of the Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court on 12/7/10 to assist youth cited for truancy for the first time. These target youth were ordered to return to court in 60 days with their school attendance records, and were told that—if they had no unexcused absences or tardies—their case would be dismissed and no fine would be assessed. They were also told that if they returned with less-than-perfect attendance, they would be given 20 hours of community service and, if they then returned in another 60 days with a perfect attendance record, their fine would be dismissed. A total of 205 youth participated: 31 returned to court with perfect attendance records; 22 returned with less-than-perfect records and, of these, 4 declined the community service option; and 148 never came back. This very high number of non-returnees shows the depth of the truancy problem the courts are dealing with. Bench officers estimate that the number of youth, in general, who do not comply in some manner with truancy citations is between 60 and 70%. Although this particular experiment didn't pan out, the court will keep trying to find solutions that work.

Follow-Up Reports from February Meeting:

- ⊗ Long Beach USD SB 1317 PACT Program: Rick Tebbano, District-Wide Administrator for Child Welfare and Attendance, highlighted the District's new PACT (Parent Accountability and Chronic Truancy) Program, a collaborative

effort between the Long Beach Police Department, City Prosecutor and School District. This two-pronged initiative focuses on the parents of chronically truant students from K-8th grades, although the Long Beach City Prosecutor is willing to extend this approach to 9th and 10th graders in some instances. Rick outlined the process, beginning with letters from the LBUSD Superintendent and City Prosecutor to all parents that explain SB 1317 and justified absences, to a series of progressive interventions to, finally, criminal prosecution and the issuance of penalties. A discussion followed, zeroing in on how the 10% definition for chronic truancy is being applied in Long Beach. Rick will keep the task force updated on the progress of PACT implementation and its results.

With respect to Judge Nash's question at the February meeting, Rick reported that the number of LBUSD foster youth who have been truant (have 3 or more unexcused/unverified absences) during this school year (between 9/8/10 and 1/28/11) is 311.

- ⊗ Probation Department: Responding to questions posed at the February meeting, Larry Dodson, Director, Juvenile Consultant, stated that, unless there is a warrant, police officers should not take probation youth who are violating the daytime curfew law to a police station but should, instead, take them directly to school. He reported that calls are not regularly received from police about truant probationers and that they usually occur only when there is special operation such as a truancy sweep. The Probation Department would prefer that their truant youth not be sent to Traffic Court, but that referrals come directly to the Department. Judge Groman pointed out that while the delinquency courts are getting printouts of traffic court citations for probation youth, they are not getting them for truanancies. This kind of data is needed from probation officers to support their conclusions. Dodson responded that this information should be provided when school-based DPOs are involved.

- ⊗ Alhambra USD Gateway to Success Program: In response to a question from Judge Nash regarding the Gateway Program Report Card sent to members following our last meeting, Laurel Bear, Director of Pupil Services for the Alhambra Unified School District, reported that, encouragingly, truancy in the AUSD was cut in half between the 08-09 and 09-10 school years. Chair Nash noted that he believes a key reason for this highly significant drop is the very important intensive work with families conducted by AUSD through its Gateway Program. (**Attached to this summary is a press release issued by California Schools Chief Tom Torklakson announcing the 2011 Model Dropout Prevention Programs designated by the State SARB. One of the 9 programs listed is the Alhambra USD*).

Community-Based Approaches:

- ⊗ San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps: Daniel Oaxaca, Executive Director and Founder of the SGVCC and staff member Andrew Quinones presented an

overview of their program, which serves adjudicated youth between the ages of 16 and 24. At the heart of this program is a YouthBuild Charter School for 150 students. While enrolled in this school, students can earn credits while doing construction work or project-based work that focuses on the environment, recycling, or the Earthworks Community Farm. Strong community partnerships have been developed with local cities and businesses to provide these project opportunities. All students have an individualized education plan, and those who are 18 or older work towards completing their high school diploma while participating in job training programs, “learning, working, and getting paid at the same time.” Currently, the student population is comprised of 70% young women and 30% young men, and the organization puts a heavy emphasis on involving their families in the school. As opposed to “regular” schools, youth say they really like coming to this school because “here there is someone who cares” about them. If a student is missing from school, staff go to their home and “knock on the door” to find out what is wrong. According to Quinones, this approach really works. Last year, 42 students (out of the 100 aged 16-18) passed the CAHSEE exams and graduated, and almost all will go on to two or four-year colleges.

- ⊗ Attendance Improvement Management: Regional Director Miller Sylvan presented an overview of the AIM program, which is helping students and their parents avoid court adjudication while recouping millions of dollars in attendance-related revenue. Currently in 14 school districts in 5 states, this program works to transform chronically truant youth by identifying the unique challenges that are the root cause of their truancy, providing intensive positive support, and making sure that every student is in school every day. Youth get wake-up calls every morning to remind them to go to school and are given hand-held monitors to receive and send text messages 5 times a day. Hired coaches contact their youth (1 for every 8 youth) 3-5 times weekly by phone, get involved in their lives and develop lasting relationships with their students. If a youth misses school, the coach knows immediately and talks with the youth that day. AIM began as a court-ordered program but has evolved into a broader program that provides a diversion from court and works closely with truancy sweep efforts and truancy centers. Its results are excellent, improving initial school attendance rates from 70 to 84% to 92-99% during the program, and to 88-95% afterwards. In the Anaheim school district, for example, 29 out of 32 participating youth in two junior high schools now have perfect attendance and, as a result, their F’s have become A’s.

Next Meeting Agenda:

The April meeting of the task force will highlight additional community-based approaches to reducing truancy, as well as focus on what DCFS and Probation are doing to address truancy with the youth they supervise.