

OFFICE OF THE  
**DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

**JOYCE E. DUDLEY**  
District Attorney



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Chief Deputy District Attorney

**DAVID M. SAUNDERS**  
Chief Investigator

July 16, 2012

The Honorable Judge Brian Hill  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
of Santa Barbara County  
1100 Anacapa Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

**Re: Signed Response to the 2011-12 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report Entitled  
"Reducing Truancy Throughout The County – A Prudent Investment"**

Dear Judge Hill:

The Santa Barbara County District Attorney is in receipt of the 2011-12 Grand Jury report entitled *Reducing Truancy Throughout The County – A Prudent Investment*. Please find attached my response to the findings and recommendations of that report.

I extend my appreciation to the Grand Jury for its efforts to reestablish a truancy prevention program for Santa Barbara County. Please do not hesitate to contact me for assistance if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Joyce E. Dudley  
District Attorney  
County of Santa Barbara

cc: Ted Sten, Foreman, 2011-12 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury  
1100 Anacapa Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
Chandra Wallar, Santa Barbara County Executive Officer  
105 East Anapamu Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Attachment

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**Santa Barbara County District Attorney Response**

**2011-12 Grand Jury**

**“Reducing Truancy Throughout the County – A Prudent Investment”**

The Santa Barbara County District Attorney applauds the Grand Jury for its continuing support to establish a comprehensive and sustainable truancy program for Santa Barbara County. The District Attorney wholeheartedly agrees with the Grand Jury’s assessment that reducing truancy throughout the county is a *prudent investment*. Clearly, a truancy program for Santa Barbara County *is a matter of investing a little to get a lot*.

Since the publication of the Grand Jury report, *Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara*, our office has worked assiduously with a distinguished group of like-minded community leaders and organizations who agree that compulsory education is an essential component to the well-being of our community and the children in it. Schools not only provide a place where kids can acquire a valuable education, they provide a structured and safe environment where kids can learn positive social interaction and civility in a way that not only enriches the child’s life but enriches our communities and makes our county safer.

The connection between truancy and crime is undeniable. According to one nationwide study, 68 percent of state prison inmates have not received a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup> Another California study revealed that a mere 10 percent increase in graduation rates would reduce murder and assault rates by 20 percent.<sup>2</sup> Our office has a unique perspective to understand the importance of early intervention in preventing kids from becoming criminal statistics. Daily, we deal with the problem of truants who have become juvenile delinquents while prosecuting many adult offenders who began a life of criminal recidivism in the juvenile courts. As such, we have first-hand experience observing the direct correlation between truancy and crime in our community.

Since the formation of the County Subcommittee on Truancy in November of last year, the District Attorney’s Office has attended dozens of meetings with a variety of stakeholders including County Supervisors; School Superintendents; School Boards; Law Enforcement; Non-Profits and Community Services to explore ways to bring a sustainable truancy program back to Santa Barbara County. These efforts have not gone unrewarded. On June 6, 2012, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, unanimously approved funding for one full-time Deputy District Attorney I and one part-time Legal Office Professional to work exclusively on a new county-wide truancy program. Additionally, the County will provide funds for this Deputy District Attorney to travel to schools throughout our county.

Now, the hard work begins. The District Attorney’s Office is actively involved with County School Superintendents and other stakeholders to obtain final signatures on the Truancy Memorandum of Understanding. This important step will specify and articulate each participant’s commitment to our new Truancy Program. We have engaged the hiring process and found an outstanding young attorney to run the new truancy program who is scheduled to begin work for our office in early August. At that time, our new Truancy Deputy District Attorney will begin the ambitious task of visiting every School District in the county to help them design their individual truancy programs that comports with the requirements

<sup>1</sup> Harlow, C.W.(2003). *Education and Correctional Populations*.

<sup>2</sup> Criminal Justice Statistics Center, Office of the Attorney General. (2005) *California Criminal Justice Profile*

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of the State of California Education Code. Progress reports on this step will be provided to the Truancy Subcommittee which will provide continuing guidance and assistance to all program participants. We will also begin collaborating with schools to draft new truancy letters that will be mailed in September to all parents with school-aged children. Finally, we will work with the Truancy Subcommittee to identify reliable methods for data collection and metrics for success so that our efforts can be directed toward solutions that produce positive, proven results.

We anticipate that the first year of our new program will be both challenging and rewarding. The limitations in funding for this program will need to be supplemented by the desire, hard work and persistence of each and every participant. If the early efforts of the Truancy Subcommittee, School Superintendents and other stakeholders are any indication, we should have more than adequate resources.

I firmly believe that the best way to prevent crime in the future is to invest in kids today. Therefore, I am deeply grateful to the 2011-12 Grand Jury for its efforts to reestablish a truancy prevention program for Santa Barbara County.

Here are our responses to your findings and recommendations.

**Finding 1:** *There is a direct correlation between truancy and delinquency.*

**Response:** We agree.

**Finding 2:** *Between 2000 and 2008, Santa Barbara County had an effective truancy program under the direction of the Santa Barbara County District Attorney. During that time the truancy rate averaged 20 percent.*

**Response:** We agree.

**Finding 3:** *After the termination of the program, truancy rates increased to a high of 30.76 percent in Santa Barbara County in 2010-11 and exceeded the truancy rate for the State of California for three years in a row.*

**Response:** We agree.

**Finding 4:** *All agencies consulted agree that the involvement of the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney is necessary for an effective truancy reduction program.*

**Response:** We agree.

**Finding 5:** *Reducing truancy rates at the secondary school level would result in significantly increased revenues for school districts.*

**Response:** We agree that those school districts that receive funding for average daily attendance should realize increased revenues with reduced truancy rates.

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

JOYCE U. DUDLEY  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**Recommendation 1:** *That each secondary school district be responsible for establishing and operating its own truancy reduction program that conforms to the legal requirements of the State of California's Education Code by the beginning of the 2012-13 school year.*

**Response:** The Santa Barbara District Attorney's Office agrees that an essential component of the new Santa Barbara County Truancy Program is that each school district must be responsible for establishing and operating its own truancy reduction program that complies with all state legal requirements. It is hoped that each district will collaborate with other districts to obtain efficiencies by working together to avoid costly and unnecessary redundancy. The District Attorney's Office will provide ongoing guidance and assistance to schools in establishing these new programs through a new Truancy Deputy District Attorney so that each district's program comports with both the letter and spirit of the truancy statutes.

**Recommendation 2:** *That the Office of the District Attorney request and that the Board of Supervisors approve the appropriate amount in the Office of the District Attorney's budget to support its participation in truancy reduction programs.*

**Response:** The Santa Barbara District Attorney has requested and obtained funding from the Board of Supervisors for one full time Deputy District Attorney I position and one half-time legal office professional along with travel expenses for the fiscal year 2012-13. These new resources will allow us to participate in a county-wide truancy reduction program.

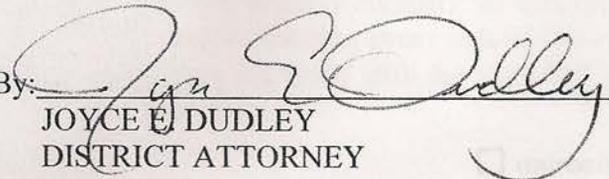
**Recommendation 3:** *That the Office of the District Attorney assign staff to support the truancy reduction program.*

**Response:** The Santa Barbara District Attorney will assign one full-time prosecutor and one half-time legal office professional to work exclusively on truancy reduction programs. In addition, the District Attorney will supplement these resources with administrative assistance, infrastructure expenses, training and volunteer assistance as available.

**Recommendation 4:** *That all secondary school districts document their efforts to address truancy in a manner that can be used by the Office of the District Attorney, if and when legal proceedings are initiated.*

**Response:** An essential element to the prosecution of any truancy case is documentation of the schools conscientious efforts to obviate the cause of truancy before resorting to legal action. The District Attorney will work with schools to establish reliable procedures to document every effort the school districts make to reduce truancy in individual cases.

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

By:   
JOYCE E. DUDLEY  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY