

TRUANCY PREVENTION—A CLASS ACT

Off to a Good Start

In 2011, the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) issued a report asking, “Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County”? From 2008, when a successful truancy prevention program was cancelled as the funding expired, the truancy rate in the County increased by 47%. The Jury recommended the Santa Barbara County Office of Education (SBCOE), in partnership with the District Attorney’s office and all school districts, immediately reinstate a countywide program to reduce truancy and include funding for such a program. The overall response to the recommendation was categorized as “unreasonable”. The responses explained that school budgets had been cut to the bone and no additional money was available. The District Attorney requested the Board of Supervisors (BOS) fund one full-time position dedicated to truancy enforcement. The request was denied.

However, the BOS organized an ad hoc committee made up of two supervisors and representatives from the District Attorney’s office, the SBCOE, Probation, the Sheriff’s Department and several school districts to develop a program to reduce truancy countywide. This committee worked diligently throughout the year and finalized a flexible program that could be implemented in each district using in-place systems and personnel. The District Attorney committed to funding for one attorney and a half-time legal assistant to support the program. A Memorandum of Understanding was developed and signed by all school districts as well as the offices above and Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services, the Public Health Department, the Department of Social Services and the Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. The 2011-2012 Jury monitored these meetings throughout the year and was gratified when the Board of Supervisors, in June, 2012, approved funding for the requested positions to oversee the implementation of the new program.

The new truancy program became known as Community Leadership in Achieving Student Success (CLASS). Appendix A outlines the five main components of CLASS which conforms to the California Education Code requirements.¹ Everyone involved with CLASS is enthusiastic about its focus: to identify and help address the problems of the children who do not come to school. This is the heart of CLASS.

The 2012-2013 Jury has continued to monitor the implementation of the CLASS program in its start-up year. It conferred with the new program personnel in the District Attorney’s office, with district representatives, and with school attendance personnel. Although the Jury found it has taken the better part of the year to put all the components in place, the District Attorney’s office reports that all five School Attendance Review Boards (SARB) are operational and meeting as needed. However, the Santa Ynez Valley SARB has yet to receive a referral. During interviews with the Jury, all school personnel stated the program appears to be working as designed.

Some schools are experiencing difficulties, but these are unique to specific schools and not a systemic problem. Individual administrators are well aware of these problems and are actively finding ways to address them. The only negative common factor identified by the Jury is the

¹ Education Codes §§ 48260-48273.

time-consuming paperwork which is required by law if the District Attorney is to prosecute any chronic truants and/or their parents.²

To address the recordkeeping challenge, the Lompoc Unified School District entered into a two-year contract with School Innovations and Achievement (SIA) to implement a letter-generating program called Attention to Attendance (A2A). After the letters are reviewed by the schools, SIA sends them to the families of truant children as required by law. SIA maintains the data base and is in close communication with the schools. This leaves the attendance personnel free to work directly with students and their families. After one year, using the A2A, the program has contributed to 9,957 increased learning days over the previous year, or the equivalent of 55 more students in class every day. Because state funding for Lompoc is based on attendance, the original \$45,000 investment resulted in a funding increase to this District from the State of California of \$242,374.

Countywide truancy figures for the 2012-2013 school year are not yet complete. With nine of 21 districts in the County reporting, an estimated 665 letters were sent informing parents of their child's three days of truancy, only 167 students and their parents have been referred to SARBs. Of these, 25 were referred to Probation for review and 14 parents were cited for truancy law infractions.

The Board of Supervisors, the District Attorney's Office, the school districts and the various support agencies are to be commended for their dedication in developing and implementing the CLASS program and for their ongoing efforts to support the educational success of all students.

This is a status report and no response is required.

² Ibid.

Appendix A
Santa Barbara County
CLASS Program
 Community Leadership in Achieving Student Success

	Description of Intervention	Number of Unexcused Absences
Beginning of the School Year	<u>District Attorney Informational Letter</u> A letter sent to welcome all families into the new school year, reminding them of the importance of education and informing them that school attendance is required by law.	0
Step 1	<u>Notification Letter #1</u> A letter informing parents of their child's unexcused absences and the relevant laws regarding school attendance.	3 days Or 18 periods (*12 periods block schedule)
Step 2	<u>After School Meeting (ASM)</u> A group meeting focusing on parent and student accountability, social and legal consequences of truancy, and information regarding county and community resources.	6 days Or 36 periods (*24 periods block schedule)
Step 3	<u>Administrator Meeting (AM)</u> A meeting with an administrator focusing on addressing individual attendance needs, and where a contract may be signed.	9 days Or 54 periods (*36 periods block schedule)
Step 4	<u>Truancy Mediation Team (TMT)</u> A meeting with a team comprising of representatives from the school, the District Attorney's Office, Law Enforcement, Probation, Mental Health, Public Health and various community organizations.	12 days Or 72 periods (*48 periods block schedule)
Step 5	<u>School Attendance Review Board (SARB)</u> A meeting with an independent panel of district, county and community participants with possible referral to Probation or the District Attorney.	14 days Or 84 periods (*56 periods block schedule)

Referral to Probation or the District Attorney