

BOARD AGENDA ITEM

JULY 18, 2017

SUBJECT:

Truancy Intervention Program and Court Update

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

This past school year a task force was formed to look into ways to improve compliance with compulsory attendance requirements and to seek reduction in court involvement with truancy, if possible. The task force included School District administrators, the District hearing officer, District legal counsel, and District Attendance staff employees. Other members were Solicitor J. Strom Thurmond, Jr., and employees from his office and its juvenile task force, with the Committee being chaired by Assistant Solicitor (and Juvenile prosecutor) Serena McDaniel. Rounding out the membership were several Department of Juvenile Justice representatives, a guidance specialist from the District, law enforcement representatives, the attorney specializing in juvenile defense from the Office of Public Defender, and the Clerk of Court – Hon. Robert Harte. The group met numerous times during this past school year and made site visits to other parts of the state where truancy court and/or truancy alternative programs have been implemented.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATION

Aiken County is one of the few jurisdictions in the State that has not had truancy cases being handled within the Solicitor's Office. Solicitor Thurmond and his Assistant Solicitor, Serena McDaniel (who handles Department of Juvenile Justice proceedings already) have agreed to assume the handling of truancy cases before the Family Court in concert with the District's Attendance personnel. Additionally, the Task Force has recommended the implementation of a Truancy Intervention Program ("TIP") similar to a program observed in the York County schools. Basically, it involves bringing in the offending students (those old enough to be placed under an order) and the student's parents and explaining their existing violation of the state compulsory attendance statutes and offering a final opportunity to avoid court intervention into their lives. The program gives them an opportunity to sign a contract agreeing to be compliant and to undergo certain conditions or prerequisites for a given period of time. If they cooperate and successfully comply with the attendance requirements going forward, then they will not be taken to court. This is a diversionary program. Our attendance officers employ significant intervention efforts already, but this will be a mandated "in person" intervention in a formal setting with various enforcement-related persons including the Assistant Solicitor, DJJ personnel, and school district representatives present who will attempt to impress upon the parents (and students) the advantages to avoiding court intervention by undergoing the diversionary program instead. The Clerk of Court has agreed to help with the facility needs in order to

have a place to conduct these meetings. The main cost will be a clerical assistant to process the paperwork needs at the Solicitor's Office.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve implementation of the Truancy Intervention Program initiative for our school district beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.

ATTACHMENTS:

None. (There will be a verbal presentation by Ms. McDaniel from the Solicitor's Office.)

PREPARED BY:

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