



# Targeting Elementary School Truancy in Oildale, California

## School Resource Officers & School Attendance Review Boards



# Oildale Profile

- Population (2000) – 44,914
- Unincorporated community located just north of Bakersfield
- Originally populated by oilfield workers, dust bowl migrants
- Mostly low-income white (87% white, 12% Latino/a)
- 45% of adult population not employed; in some areas, over 40% of households have no employed individuals at all
- Over 22% of children live in poverty

# Oildale Profile

- Schools –  
Beardsley School District – 1705 students in  
3 elementary and 1 junior high school  
Standard School District – 2930 students in  
3 elementary schools and 1 middle school
- 69% white, 25% Latino/a
- Students feed into North High School (separate high school district)
- Truancy Rates – Beardsley 29.6%, Standard 37.3%,  
North High 60.2% (highest of 18 schools in the district)

# Truancy is Not a Minor Problem

- *California law requires that children from six to eighteen years of age attend school regularly.*
- *One out of ten grade school children is absent on any given day.*
- *Children who are absent two or more days each school month achieve 25 percent less than their fellow students.*
- *Truancy causes school revenue loss.*
- *Daylight juvenile crime is decreased by 50 percent when a concerted community effort keeps children in school.*
- *Ninety percent of serious juvenile offenders begin as truants.*

Source: CDE publication, *School Attendance Improvement Handbook*, 2000 page 13.  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/cw/>

# Outcomes of Chronic Truancy

## Research Shows

- Fewer opportunities to learn.
  - Interference with social development.
  - Increased risk of child abuse and neglect.
  - At risk of dropping out of school.
  - Substance abuse, including early onset of stress on the child and family.
- Higher rates of emotional problems later in life.
  - Later risk of joblessness and poverty.

*Source: Berg & Jackson 1985, King et al 1995, Kortering et al 1997*

# Challenges in Oildale

- Multigenerational absenteeism and substance abuse
- Chronic absences
- Distrust of authority
- Limits on enforcement
- Parents ignoring fines and citations
- Separate school districts

# Our SS/HS Approach

- Empower School Resource Officers to target habitual truants
- Give them the responsibility to run School Attendance Review Board (SARB) sessions

## Advantages:

- Uniformed officers can provide a little more leverage with parents
- Combines enforcement and service approach
- Allows SROs to build relationships

# Addressing Truancy through SARBs

## Definitions

- **Chronic Absences:** A student who is absent for any reason, whether excused or unexcused, on 10 percent or more of the days of the school year
- **Habitual Truant:** A student who has been reported as truant three or more times within the same school year
- **Chronic Truant:** A student who has been absent from school without a valid excuse for 10 percent or more of the school year, from the date of enrollment to the current date

*Source: California Education Code 60901, 48262, 48264.5, 48263.6*



# School Attendance Review Boards

- **What is a SARB?**
  - A School Attendance Review Board
- **What is the function of a SARB?**
  - It is a problem-solving group to address truancy and behavior problems that interfere with educational progress of students
- **Who serves on SARB?**
  - Required partners: School staff, parent, law enforcement, child serving agency representatives (DHS, CPS, Mental Health)
- **How can collaborative partners support SARB?**
  - Agency and collaborative partners can serve on SARB Board
  - Provide services to children and families who need support (mentoring, counseling, access to clothing, food, child care services, etc...)

# SARB Panel Member Responsibilities

- Intensive guidance and coordinated community services must be provided to meet the special needs of students with school attendance and/or school behavior problems.
- If alternatives have failed to produce needed changes in a student's problem attendance or behavior, a referral to SARB may be made.
- SARB screens student referrals to determine if appropriate guidance and community services have been utilized on behalf of the student prior to scheduling SARB hearing.
- The panel attempts to understand why students experience attendance problems and makes every effort to assist in correcting the problem(s).
- The SARB process is solution-focused
- SARB panel members must keep student records, information and details confidential.

# Typical SARB Participants

- School Site Vice-Principals
- School Nurse
- Family Advocate
- Department of Human Services
- CPS
- Differential Response
- Law Enforcement
- Probation
- Mental Health Service Provider

# Frequent Actions of SARB

- Requiring student to attend school every day.
- Directing the student and/or family to counseling.
- Arranging parenting classes for parents (e.g., Parent Project)
- Coordinating assistance from volunteers to help students get to school.
- Directing parents to escort student to school daily.
- Referral to community service volunteer programs.
- Assignment to independent study activities.
- Requiring that a doctor or school health aide verify the student's future absences.
- Arranging for tutoring when needed.
- Requesting assistance from other county agencies and programs when needed.

# SRO Roles

- Follow up with habitual truants (3<sup>rd</sup> unexcused absence)
- Contact with parents, up to and including delivering notice of SARB hearing
- Run SARB meetings
- Focus on specific targeted goals, such as increased ADA, decreased SARB cases, reduced recidivism in SARB
- Participate in annual truancy sweep

# Linkage to SS/HS and Other Services

- Probation
- Henrietta Weill Child Guidance Clinic
- Family Advocate
- Parent Project or Strengthening Families
- Differential Response
- Every Neighborhood Partnership, Club Live, NOR Recreation & Parks, etc.

# Results

# Truancy Reduction & Attendance Coalition of Kern (TRACK)

- Includes District Attorney's Office as well as law enforcement, school districts, Probation, etc.
- Truancy Sweeps coordinated among different agencies
- Jail time for chronic truants (for contempt)
- Media and legislative advocacy efforts



# The Gardener Metaphor

*“Rather than the hasty tinkering of the mechanic, the nurturing of life requires the patience of the **gardener**. The fast technological rush of society leads us to be mechanics. We must preserve the long patience of the gardener.”*

*McWhirter, At Risk Youth, p. 3*

