

NEWS



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Mayor Street Meets with Parents and Children to Discuss Truancy

*Family School Attendance Agreements Offered to
Truant Students and their Parents*

Philadelphia, PA – This evening Mayor John F. Street, Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson and Family Court Administrative Judge Kevin Dougherty held a meeting at the Liacouras Center in North Philadelphia to discuss truancy with children and their parents who were identified by the School District of Philadelphia for having eight or more unexcused absences during the 2005-2006 school year.

“Truancy will not be tolerated,” Mayor Street said. “Truancy is a feeder system to the streets and truant children are more likely to drop out of school and become involved in negative behavior.”

There are 175,886 children in Philadelphia public schools. On an average day during the 2005-2006 school year, 9.57 percent of students (16,837 children) were absent without an excuse.

Earlier this month Mayor Street and School District CEO Vallas announced an expanded anti-truancy effort that among other things included outreach to parents and students about the dangers and implications of truancy. Several weeks ago, an invitation letter was sent to approximately 6,000 students with eight or more unexcused absences last school year requesting their presence at this evening’s meeting. The letter asked parents to bring their truancy court citation and valid identification and stated that parents would be told what to do to guarantee that neither they nor their child would violate the truancy laws.

“Truancy and curfew violations are among the most powerful indicators for identifying children at risk for dependency, delinquency and violence,” said Mayor Street. “We are going to do everything within our powers to disrupt truant behavior and get our children back in school, where they belong, but we need the support of parents.”

Parents who brought their students to the truancy meeting had an opportunity to sign the Family School Attendance Agreement and take a pledge administered by Judge Dougherty. By signing the Agreement, the Judge indicated that parents and children would be bound to commitments in exchange for not being referred to court and subject to possible fines and/or imprisonment.

Truancy rates begin increasing in 6th grade and continue rising through the 10th grade, with the highest drop-out rates occurring in 9th and 10th grades. According to Philadelphia Safe and Sound’s Report Card 2006, dropouts attended school less than 60 percent of the time in the year before they dropped out.

The commitments signed by the children and parents bind parents to:

- Ensure their child gets to school every day on time.
- Not remove their child from school early without providing the school with a valid excuse.
- Ensure that any student absences are for legitimate, excused reasons only and that for all illness absences:
 - Provide school with written verification by doctor/medical advisor or
 - Send their child to school to be checked/released if ill.

According to the Pennsylvania School Code, parents whose children are chronically truant are subject to penalties, including fines (\$123.50), up to five days imprisonment and 180 days of community service.

School District representatives also urged parents to take advantage of the offer and avoid the severe consequences of violating the.

“Students, it’s time to take responsibility for your future,” said Dr. Edward Thornton, Chief Academic Officer for the District. “You can and must break the cycle of truancy. You must be vigilant about making sure that your child is in school every day, ready to learn.”

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