



## COUNTY OF FRESNO

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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **DISTRICT ATTORNEY LAUNCHES ATTENDANCE MATTERS TRUANCY PREVENTION PROGRAM WITH FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

This week the Fresno County District Attorney's Office, in partnership with the Fresno Unified School District, launched the "Attendance Matters Truancy Prevention Program" in an effort to combat chronic truancy in elementary schools in the Fresno Unified School District.

The Attendance Matters Truancy Prevention Program aims to educate parents about the legal aspects of truancy and how truancy may negatively impact a child's ability to succeed in life by involving accountability as well as support for families whose child has chronic or habitual truancy issues. The program includes conferences at school sites to educate parents about truancy, the legal consequences of not sending their child to school, and the negative impact on a child's future when that child is not given a complete educational foundation. The program will also aim to unite parents and caregivers with resources and services in an effort to aid them in improving the attendance of their child.

The California Attorney General reports that an estimated 230,000 California elementary students missed 18 or more days of school in the 2014-2015 school year. In addition, 83% of students chronically absent in Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade are unable to read on-level by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Students who cannot read on-level in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are four times more likely to drop out of school than kids who can.

The ultimate goal of the Attendance Matter Truancy Prevention Program is to have children in the classroom, and to give parents the tools to make school attendance matter as much as providing food, clothing, and shelter.

The Program will be staffed by Deputy District Attorney Jennifer Smith, a 25 year veteran of the Fresno County D.A.'s Office, who has previous experience in the area of truancy by working on the award winning multi-agency Keep Kids In School (K.K.I.S.) Truancy Prevention Program from 1998-2002. Ms. Smith's years of experience and knowledge as a prosecutor will be used to help children and parents resolve the issue of truancy, and steer children away from the perils of the criminal justice system.

The Media may contact Administrative Secretary Geri Benavides at (559) 600-4441 with any questions.

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