

◆ *NASD*

# Last truancy hearing nears

Authorities strive  
to keep students  
in class throughout  
the school year

By **KEITH PHUCAS**  
Times Herald Staff

**NORRISTOWN** — A local program is making significant strides curbing truancy in Norristown Area School District, but officials are struggling to keep a few dozen families from falling through the cracks.

Chronic school absence is unlawful and increases the likelihood students will drop out of school, turn to illegal drugs or other criminal activity, according to the Norristown Police Department.

Give us your  
two cents  
about this topic  
| 610-272-3522



Two years ago, the school district, social services agencies and police formed a partnership, Norristown Truancy Abatement Initiative, to aggressively attack the problem.

“Our goal is not to arrest people but to get kids in school,” said Norristown police Chief Russell Bono.

Once a student reaches a third unexcused absence, the school district notifies District Court 38-1-01 in East Norriton.

The court then sends letters to both parents and truant students asking them to appear at a monthly hearing. If the court receives no response, it issues a truancy citation, according to District Judge Ester Casillo.

“We’re not about collecting fines; we want them to come in (for help),” she said.

Once students and parents come to

# TRUANCY

From Page A1

Judge Casillo's East Norriton court, a counselor there can help address chronic truancy and other circumstances that may contribute to the problem.

The last truancy hearing for this school year is June 5 at 9 a.m.

Currently 40 families have been notified in writing of this final court date. If the families don't appear, arrest warrants will be issued. The judge could already have issued bench warrants, but wanted to avoid that.

"As a last ditch effort, we were going to do warrant detail, but we're giving (truants) one last chance," Casillo said.

Police have truancy patrols and enforcement efforts

include door-to-door pickup of truant youth as well as patrols of neighborhood locations frequented by teenagers during school hours, according to police.

"But enforcement alone is not the answer," said Norristown Detective Lt. Kevin McKeon.

Keeping teenagers in school and out of trouble is crucial for their and Norristown's future success.

"If you want to revitalize Norristown, you have to educate your youth," McKeon said.

The William Penn Foundation and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency through Norristown Weed and Seed provide funding for the truancy initiative.

The funding has prevented thousands of trancies this school year compared to the previous year, according to the police chief.

"There has been a significant drop in unexcused absences," Bono said.

Besides police and the local school district, other truancy partners include Norristown Area Communities That Care for Youth, Norristown Weed and Seed, Police Athletic League, Audubon YMCA, Montgomery County Youth and Family Services, Montgomery County Mental Health / Mental Retardation/Drug and Alcohol/Behavioral Health Department and other agencies.

For more information on the truancy reduction effort, call Norristown police Criminal Investigation Division commander Lt. Kevin McKeon, or program coordinator Meaghan Kerper at 610-270-0977.

To discuss truancy and related concerns, call the school district's Truancy Hotline at 610-630-5048.