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- NEWS
- VITALS ▾
- BUSINESS ▾
- LAW & ORDER ▾
- OPINION ▾
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- SPORTS ▾
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- PUBLIC NOTICES ▾
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News

# Plumas County Truancy Prevention Team is on a mission

📅 October 23, 2019 👤 Davis Hollister, Plumas County District Attorney, Special to Feather Publishing



## TPT mission

It is my sincere goal to never prosecute a Plumas County parent or student for the crime of truancy. This is a nice thought but as Antoine de Saint-Exupery once said, "[A] goal without a plan is just a wish." To reach the goal of eliminating truancy in Plumas County, the DA's office has partnered with our schools, Sheriff's Office, Social Services and Probation to form the Plumas County Truancy Prevention Team (TPT). The TPT supplements school truancy programs by offering early intervention designed to identify and correct a student's root cause of truancy.

## Truancy and chronic absence defined



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In California mandatory education is the law. Children 6 to 18 must attend school regularly, arrive on time and remain in school until dismissed. Students who are absent from school three nonconsecutive days or are late more than 30 minutes for three days in a school year (without accepted excuse) are considered truant. Students who miss more than 10 percent or more enrolled days in school are considered chronically absent.



The Plumas County Truancy Prevention Team — from left, Joe Lee (probation assistant), Ana Marmolejo (social worker III), Wynae Hagwood (probation assistant) and Shawn Adams (DA investigations assistant) —supplements local school truancy programs by offering early intervention designed to identify and correct a student's root cause of truancy. Photo submitted

For purposes of this discussion, truancy and chronic absence will be referred to under the generic term of "truancy." Should absences or tardiness continue after warnings from the school, the student may be considered habitually truant and be required to attend a School Attendance Review Board (SARB). Should SARB intervention fail, the student and his/her parent or guardian may be criminally prosecuted.

A parent convicted under California's truancy laws (see Sections 270, 270.1 and 272 of the Penal Code) can be sentenced to up to one year in county jail and ordered to pay a fine of up to \$2,000 plus penalty assessment. Students (if a minor) who are found to be truant can be declared a ward of court, be fined, ordered to attend school on the weekend, have to do community service work and have their driver's license suspended for up to one year (see Section 48264.5 of the Education Code).

### The importance of ending truancy

While education is the key to success, truancy has been demonstrated to be a gateway to economic hardship, and worse.

Truancy has been linked to school dropout and poor academic performance, increases the likelihood youth will engage in drug and alcohol use, fighting, theft and more serious forms of delinquency. A California study found among chronically absent students in both kindergarten and first grade, only 17 percent were proficient in reading in third grade. By sixth grade, high truancy rates become a distinct predictor of whether or not a student will graduate from high school.

Over the long term, adults who were truant as adolescents are more likely to have poorer health outcomes, lower paying jobs, and a greater chance of being incarcerated during their lifetimes. The San Bernardino DA's Office reports 78 percent of their defendants sent to prison had truancy as their first entry on their arrest record.

Truancy also impacts the truant's classmates. A 2001-2008 study in New York found even students who have a high attendance rate suffer academically if attending a school with high absenteeism. In sum, encouraging school attendance has everything to do with bettering the health and welfare of our children, individually, and our community, collectively.

### Team members

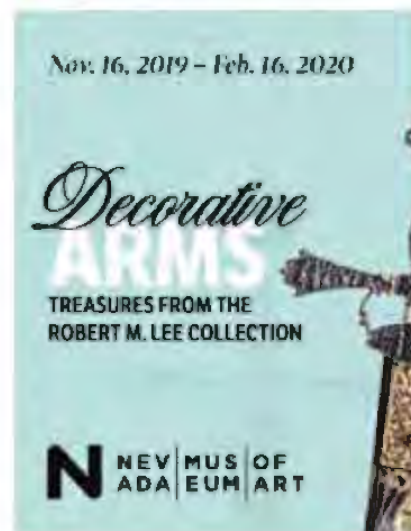
The Truancy Prevention Team is comprised of Shawn Adams (DA investigations assistant), Joe Lee (probation assistant), Wynae Hagwood (probation assistant) and Ana Marmolejo (social worker III). Having team members from a variety of departments increases the resources that can be dedicated to identify and correct the root causes of truancy.

In addition, the TPT works closely with administrators and site supervisors at schools throughout Plumas County as well as our local law enforcement community who provide support when appropriate.

### TPT involvement

Upon a student becoming truant, and contemporaneous with a notification letter sent by the school, the TPT will be alerted and arrange a meeting with the truant and truant's parent or guardian that school week.

The goal of the meeting will be threefold: 1) educate the truant and parent/guardian as to legal responsibilities of education; 2) identify the root cause for the truancy; 3) provide resource options to the truant and parent/guardian to address the root cause of truancy.



Again, the goal is not prosecution but in correcting the problem giving rise to truancy in an effort to help the student and his/her classmates.

Should absences continue after the initial meeting efforts will be made to have an in-person contact the same morning of any subsequent absence from school and, again, provide resources to alleviate the cause of student absenteeism.

### “You’re not in trouble”

It is understandable the TPT often receives a less than positive reaction from the parent of a truant student. What is important for our parents to remember is the intervention by the school and TPT member does not mean anyone is in trouble with the school or law enforcement.

In fact, the opposite is true. The TPT contact is designed to try and help identify and solve the problem – whether it be transportation, parenting skills, health issues, etc.

### TPT success

Last year marked a terrific start for our Truancy Prevention Team. DA Investigations Assistant Gary McFarland and Social Worker III Cynthia Roper did a tremendous job getting the program up and running and on the right track. Efforts were made to identify and correct root problems.

One creative solution involved the TPT advocating to have a new bus stop added for a student thereby solving a transportation issue. The success was widespread last year with the Plumas Unified School District finding some school sites realized a 10 percent reduction in truancy.

This year we have expanded the Truancy Prevention Team and its program. Each school in Plumas County has been contacted directly and the TPT is hard at work supplementing our schools’ efforts to assure attendance.

Thank you all, in advance, for your help and cooperation with this worthwhile program. While we strive for perfect attendance, if the TPT can help even one family avoid the dismal future associated with truancy the program will be a success.

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**Ownership:**

Feather Publishing Co., Inc., publishes four weekly papers in Plumas County: the Feather River Bulletin, Chester Progressive, Indian Valley Record, and Portola Reporter and two weekly papers in Lassen County: the Lassen County Times and the Westwood Pine Press.

**Frequency:**

All papers are published on Wednesday except the Lassen County Times which is published on Tuesday.

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