



Riverside County District Attorney

# NEWS RELEASE

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## DA's OFFICE CO-HOSTS FIRST-EVER REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM SUMMIT

RIVERSIDE -- On Tuesday, May 13, 2014, the Riverside County District Attorney's Office co-hosted the first-ever Riverside County Reducing Chronic Absenteeism Summit. The event, held centrally at the Hemet Unified School District Board Room, was attended by members of about two dozen school districts and education-related agencies.

Chronic absenteeism is described by state Education Code section 48263.6 as missing 10 percent or more of the school year – calculated from the date of enrollment to the current date – due to unexcused absences.

"The purpose of putting this summit together is to bring all the school districts in the county together to talk about 'best practices' in helping prevent the chronic absenteeism of our youth," said Riverside County District Attorney Paul Zellerbach. "This summit is the first of its kind in Riverside County and we hope there will now be a continuing dialogue among all school districts in the prevention of chronic absenteeism."

Superintendents, assistant superintendents, school board members, Child Welfare and Attendance (CWA) staff, and School Attendance Review Board (SARB) staff came together to discuss truancy and the importance of paying early attention to chronic absenteeism. Presenters from Hemet Unified School District, Palm Springs School District, and Val Verde School District shared local best practices that are making a difference. Attendees engaged in a comprehensive comment, question, and answer dialogue. They candidly discussed strategies, ideas, and resources for effectively reducing chronic absenteeism. Organizers are already planning a follow-up summit for 2015.

According to state Attorney General Kamala Harris' *2013 Report on California's Elementary School Truancy and Absenteeism Crisis*, "California is facing an attendance crisis, with dire consequences for our economy, our safety, and our children." This report highlights what researchers and educators have long recognized; that "[s]tudents who miss school at an early age are more likely to struggle academically, and in later years, drop out entirely. ... Without a proper education, these children are more likely to end up unemployed and at risk of becoming involved in crime, both as victims and offenders."

Chronic absenteeism can also have a significant negative fiscal impact on a school district's ability to provide all students with academic and support services. According to the Attorney General Report, in 2010-2011, Riverside County school districts lost about \$112 million due to student absenteeism.

The summit was conceived by a steering committee comprised of attendance directors from Hemet Unified School District, Palm Springs School District, and Val Verde School District. The committee also included representatives from the Riverside County Office of Education and the District Attorney's Juvenile Division. Riverside County Superintendent of Schools Kenneth M. Young and District Attorney Paul Zellerbach co-hosted and encouraged superintendents and policy makers from every school district in the county to attend. The following school districts and related agencies attended the summit: Alvord Unified School District, Banning Unified School District, Beaumont Unified School District, Corona-Norco Unified School District, Desert Sands Unified School District, Hemet Unified School District, Jurupa Valley Unified School District, Lake Elsinore Unified School District, Menifee Union School District, Moreno Valley Unified School District, Murrieta Unified School District, Nuview Union School District, Palm Springs School District, Palo Verde Unified School District, Perris Elementary School District, Perris Union High School District, San Jacinto Unified School District, Val Verde Unified School District, Riverside Community College, Riverside County Juvenile Court, Riverside County Probation Department, Riverside County Public Defender's Office, and the Riverside County DA's Office.