School District visits homes to fight truancy

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HIGHLAND COMMUNITY NEWS

On Thursday morning, Jan. 9, the San Bernardino City Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Dale Marsden and members of his cabinet joined with community members to visit the homes of students who have significant numbers of unexcused absences as part of Operation Student Recovery, an effort to return students to school created in 2007.

Teams of District administrators and community volunteers visited homes to speak with parents and guardians about getting their students back to school. The teams tried to learn why the students are missing school and give information on programs that might be helpful in getting the students back on track in their academics.

Operation Student Recovery, part of the District's strategic plan to raise student attendance, has been stepped up for the 2013-14 school year with more events. Previous years had two events while this was the third of five planned operations for this school year. Thursday's operation focused on the Del Rosa area including students from Hunt and Del Rosa elementary schools, Del Vallejo Middle School and Pacific High School.

"We used to cover the whole district visiting anybody who had so many days absent, but this year the plan was adjusted to target geographical areas where there is a lot more activity, like gang activity, that would cause attendance to go down," said Ray Culberson, director of youth services. "We're trying to get out there and let them know they're part of the community and we care about them and we want them to be successful."

Marsden said one reason for increasing the number of operations in the school year is the program's high rate of success.

According to Culberson, previous operations saw 60 percent of students contacted return to school for extended periods of time and 40 percent returned to school for the next few days. Following the November 2013 Operation Student Recovery about 95 percent of students contacted returned to school the next day.

Thanks partially to the programs success, the District has been able to raise the average daily attendance from 93.6 percent in the 2000-01 school year to the current 96 percent.

Marsden said he likes that the program provides the District and the community groups, including many faith-based organizations, a great opportunity for direct contact with families. That contact helps the District and community groups see what students' needs are and work together to develop independent solutions. In some cases they have found that students were missing school due to lack of transportation, chronic illness such as asthma and more.

Thursday's operation visited the home of a student who went to school that morning but was sent home because he was wearing sandals. The student's mother informed the student recovery team that the student's shoes were torn and she could not afford new shoes at the moment and they offered to go get him shoes and take him to school, which they did.