

Harrison Prosecutor tackles truancy

Written by George Browning
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On September 18, 2012, Harrison County Prosecutor J. Otto Schalk announced the 'Get 'Em in the Classroom' program. This initiative is geared toward ensuring that students in elementary and middle schools are attending school so they are able to learn and prepare for their future.

"Simply stated, a child needs to be in school to learn. Ultimately, we want every child to be successful in school and life.

Getting to school is the first step in ensuring the success of our children in the future. Poor attendance at school hinders a student's ability to succeed in the classroom and keep up with their peers," said Schalk.

The new county-wide program utilizes the educational neglect statute, which is a Class D Felony. "Basically, if you are depriving your child of an education, we are going to hold you accountable. To that extent, incarceration will certainly be an option," Schalk said.

Under the new program, when it becomes apparent that truancy is affecting a child, the school will notify the Harrison County

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Prosecutor's Office and a meeting will be scheduled between the parents and the prosecutor to discuss causes and solutions to the problem.

If the informal meeting does not solve the truancy issue, the Prosecutor's Office will then initiate criminal proceedings against the parent.

"Our mission is simple," Schalk continued, "every child deserves the brightest future possible and an education opens the door to that future."

For any questions or comments regarding the new program, please contact the Harrison County Prosecutor's Office at 812-738-4241.