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Officials discuss effective methods to get kids in school

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A group of school truancy personnel from five counties gathered this week at the Ross-Pike Educational Service Center to discuss methods of getting students in school.

While the threat of court -- or actual court action -- can be effective, those attending the meeting indicated personal contact at the homes of truant students and attendance incentive programs can head off potential problems.

ESD Superintendent Phil Satterfield emphasized the importance of regular school attendance and its ties to later success in life.

"You're actually setting yourself up for later failure if you don't attend school," Satterfield said.

Ross County truant officer Glenn Chester indicated he has talked with employers of those he knew had attendance issues in school and found most continue to have attendance problems in the work world. Students who fail to attend school regularly also tend to fall behind in school, which can lead to problems with retention.

Richard Stevens, who works with truancy through Pickaway County Education Service District, said while districts are permitted to retain students at a grade level after they have missed 20 to 27 days of school, most do not because retention often leads to the students dropping out in high school.

"If you aggressively pursue that, you aren't getting through to the kid except making them a non-graduate, which isn't the mission of the school," Stevens said.

Although some schools, including Chillicothe High School and Circleville High School, have implemented credit recovery programs or accelerated credit programs to get older students to graduation, the idea is to get students on track and attending school regularly at the elementary level.

Chester spoke highly of attendance incentive programs implemented at schools, specifically at Mt. Logan Elementary.

"(Principal) Matt (Thornsberry) is really moving that school forward down there with motivation techniques," Chester said. "I think it's great trying to motivate the kids."

Thornsberry and staff have implemented several programs, including a traveling attendance trophy. The trophy is awarded to the classroom that has the best attendance for the week. Tardies also count against attendance for classrooms.

If a classroom wins the trophy four weeks in a grading period, students get a treat, and for five weeks, the class gets a pizza party with Thornsberry. Students also have been charting attendance and setting attendance goals.

The truancy officials plan to meet again at the end of the year. Counties represented at the meeting included Ross, Pike, Hocking, Perry and Pickaway.
