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Thursday, February 21, 2013

## Truancy nipped in the bud

### It's a Project Rebuild Christmas for Gary families



Filled with the spirit of the Christmas season, Judge Inga Lewis-Shannon ordered up a tree decorating party with pizza and other goodies for the families of the Gary City Court's Project Rebuild, an intervention program for middle and high school students heading toward becoming dropouts.

Nineteen students and their families completed the 3-month pilot program that was held May through July, 2012.

Project Rebuild was scheduled to start in October but had to be delayed to November when the Gary Community School Corporation's new bus routing system created havoc delivering students to and from school.

Multiple unexcused absences by a student will trigger an inquiry to the parents.

After a student's fourth unexcused absence, Gary schools have been asked to send the attendance record to Project Rebuild. When a student reaches nine unexcused absences, by law (IC 20-33-2) a report is forwarded to Child Protective Services.

But it was still a good start because all the families volunteered to participate in the program. If a parent refuses to participate, the parent can be prosecuted for violating Indiana's failure to educate law.

Project Rebuild has a volunteer cadre of social workers to counsel the families. Parents attend weekly classes at the Indiana Parenting Institute to find causes and solutions for their child's truancy. And students are required to attend tutoring sessions. Each week, the families attend a court session to report their progress to Judge Shannon.

Judge Shannon said she hopes to build a larger network of service providers.

Julia Williams, a program social worker said, "Although it's a numbers game, if we can help one child, it will be worth it."

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