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Gary schools vie for attendance award

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Parents who drop out of program face neglect charges

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All the schools in Gary will take part in a friendly competition this year to determine which school wins the top attendance award.

The school with the best record will receive a trophy, technology and its own billboard.

Officials from the Project Rebuild Foundation and the city detailed the competition at a press conference Thursday at Gary City Hall.

The goal of the initiative is to reduce chronic absences that impact achievement.

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Project Rebuild, which began in 2012, is a collaborative effort to battle the city's truancy problem that includes the Gary City Court and police, the Indiana Parenting Institute, and Clark Road Genesis Family Center.

If children have 10 unexcused absences, parents have the option of paying a fine or participating in the 90-day program that includes parenting classes at the Indiana Parenting Institute.

Gary Police Commander Kerry Rice said schools refer parents to the truancy court. From there, police prepare citations for parents. Indiana law requires school principals to provide that information.

Earlier this month, police arrested 10 parents who failed to complete the program. They faces parental neglect charges and a fine of up to \$1,000. Police planned to serve 52 warrants on parents, but found 41 had moved out of the city and one had died.

Rice said the Roosevelt College and Career Center had the highest number of referrals to the program last year, while the Gary Community School Corp. had the lowest. "The Gary Community School Corp. needs to step up," Rice said. He said he just conducted a training session for social workers at the district.

"I fully support and stand arm-to-arm with them," Gary Superintendent Cheryl Pruitt said Thursday.

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Gary Superintendent Cheryl Pruitt discusses the district's support for the Project Rebuild Foundation's attendance project. (Carole Carlson, Post-Tribune)