

Meeting held for truancy

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Thayer County schools, including superintendents and principals, county probation officer, commissioners, Region V and county attorney Dan Werner, gathered for a meeting May to discuss a truancy program that will help secure funding from the federal crime commission. Werner said the truancy problem is growing.

"I prosecuted one parent for not getting children to school," Werner said. "That resident did time in jail."

Two years ago, Werner had about 40 juvenile cases with many of them related to truancy.

"We need to begin a process and be proactive with a number of agencies," he said.

The discussion is in its early stages, but officials are already looking at the program in Seward and Butler counties, and plan to hear more about it.

Superintendent Drew Harris said Thayer Central's truancy is a huge problem — about five percent of the students have missed 15 days or more.

"Some are valid reasons, like illnesses, that would be excused," he said.

He said they are trying to address the issue before it manifests into 20 absences, which is the maximum number of days before cases are turned over to the county attorney.

He noted that last year, Jefferson County entered into the three-year services plan for juveniles and has had success.

"Our numbers are less than half of Jefferson's," Harris said. "We've got to help these kids learn good skills because we want them to be successful. A big part of employment is just showing up for work."

There are other components to the three-year plan, such as mental health and delinquency issues.

Harris mentioned part of the plan may involve following up with students and families when they reach five absences. Someone would work with the families to ensure they understand truancy laws and mandatory attendance at school.

About 20 to 24 people were at the meeting, and truancy was not the only issue talked about, Harris said.

Harris said a program could be introduced for the 2018-2019 school year.