

# Schools starting to take truancy cases to court

Posted by Ken Grabowski on September 19th, 2014



MANISTEE — Parents of truant children in Manistee County Schools may soon find themselves appearing in court before a judge.

Board of Education members from the Manistee Intermediate School District were given that information by ISD superintendent Jeff Jennette this week. Jennette also serves as the county truancy officer, and he informed the board they are starting to put some teeth into the prosecution of truancy violations.

Jennette said it will be the parents of truant children who will be paying the consequences for not having their child in school.

“The parent of one of our truancy cases from last year will be going to court in October,” he said. “We had all these meetings about the truancy problems and everyone wonders how far it will go, but the prosecutor (Ford Stone) wants to hear it.”

The superintendent said he expects that it will get the attention of parents with truant children.

"Word on this will travel fast, but when parents are called to court for truancy that word travels even faster," he said.

Another item the ISD Board of Education addressed was the loss of two speech pathologists last month. It left the district with a big problem in that area at the start of a new school year.

Both speech therapists left because their spouses had accepted employment opportunities elsewhere. Manistee ISD director of special education Jim Scranton was happy to report to the board of education this week that half of that problem has been fixed.

Scranton recommended to the board hiring Lauren Hill to fill one of those positions. The board approved that hiring on a unanimous vote, but also accepted with regret the resignation of Leah DeWees who was in the other speech pathologist position. DeWees will be leaving in October.

"We were lucky to find Lauren, and she started this week," said Scranton.

Jennette said her husband works at the Oaks Correctional Facility, and she was looking to find employment in the area.

Other items from that meeting came from Jennette who, reported on concerns about the Early Warning Legislation that is being debated in Lansing.

"The state wants to have legislation in place where the ISD become the policemen for their local school budgets. If they are in financial trouble, we have to sound the early warning system," he said.

Jennette pointed out the ISD-run business consortium that handles the business office activities for the Onkama Consolidated, Bear Lake, Kaleva Norman Dickson and CASMAN school districts it gives them that insight on a daily basis. He said director of finance Kris Mauntler already works and monitors those district budgets.

"She is the point person for districts right now, but the way they are wording the legislation, she would have to be the watchdog for those districts. What concerns me is these districts have built a heck of a trust with Kris and her staff," he said. "Now if she has to turn around and be the watchdog, we are going to lose the trust from our local districts."

He said all the data they want a business manager to track on the schools in an ISD can be done by the state.

"What it amounts to is the treasury doesn't want to be the bad guy, and they would rather let the ISD be the bad guy," said Jennette.

Board president Mary Becker-Witt inquired "Isn't that the treasury's job to do that?"

"It is, but they are going to say, like the Michigan Department of Education, that they don't have enough people to do it and it falls on the ISD," said Jennette.

Becker-Witt said there are other components from the ISD's side.

"Is there money to follow this request, because that would be extra time and effort?" she said. "They are setting up a state mandate, but yet they are wanting it to be done locally, so there should be money to follow it."

Jennette commented that "should" is the operative word.

The superintendent also informed the board that many districts that were awarded an additional \$53 in per pupil funding are trying to get the \$83 that was originally promised them by the state. It would roughly cost the state an additional \$20 million.