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## **Santa Clara County Superior Court Announces CARE COURT: *Court for Achieving Re-engagement with Education***

The Santa Clara County Superior Court is pleased to announce its newest collaborative court calendar called the CARE COURT: Court for Achieving Re-engagement with Education. This Court hears cases involving parents charged with the crime of not ensuring their child's regular school attendance.

The CARE calendar began on January 30, 2020, at the Family Justice Center Courthouse (FJCC) in San Jose. It is heard on the first and third Thursdays of each month in Department 63.

In the past, parents charged with the crime of not ensuring their child's regular school attendance were required to attend hearings at the Hall of Justice on the general misdemeanor criminal calendar. This meant their cases were heard at the same time as other general criminal matters.

However, at the request of the District Attorney's Office, and with authorization from Presiding Judge Deborah Ryan, the Court has now set aside a dedicated calendar on the first and third Thursday of each month at the Family Justice Center Courthouse.

"Behind every truant child is a family in crisis," explains Collaborative Court Judge L. Michael Clark. "The issues may include substance abuse, mental health, major illness, disability, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, poverty, lack of appropriate child care for siblings, or a breakdown in communication between the family and the school. Our goal is to connect the parents with appropriate supportive services so that the family heals and the child's school attendance improves."

Deputy District Attorney Alisha Schoen, who oversees truancy prosecutions, has arranged for schools or districts to send representatives to court to meet with parents before the hearings. The DA offers every parent the opportunity to get their case dismissed without a conviction by attending a parenting program and working with school officials to improve their child's school attendance. Instructors from a parenting class called the Parent Project are present in the courtroom to help connect parents to classes. Also present in court are a mental health counselor and public health nurse to help connect parents to other needed services.

CARE court has continued in operation during the pandemic by permitting parents and school officials to participate remotely using video technology.

"These are traumatized families," notes Judge Clark. "They need support and encouragement, not fines or jail."



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