



# news

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## **Denver Juvenile Court to hold truancy proceedings at Lake Middle School**

DENVER – Denver Juvenile Court is going back to school! On November 1, 2012, Denver Juvenile Court Magistrates Melanie A. Gilbert and Howard V. Bartlett will preside over an all-day truancy docket at Lake Middle School, 1820 Lowell Boulevard, in Denver. The media is invited to attend.

Students and their families from several metro-area schools will attend the on-site docket, and extra time will be devoted to court, school and family interaction after the hearings. Lake Middle School's library essentially becomes the courtroom. It will be business as usual with attorneys, school social workers and court staff present. Each of the participating schools was given discretion to identify the families whose cases will be heard at Lake Middle School.

After the legal proceedings, the court will host a round-table discussion with the legal professionals, school staff, Denver Department of Human Services, Safe City and, most importantly, the students and families to strategize ways to re-engage the children in school not only for the included families but also for the Denver Public Schools community as a whole.

The Court is frequently seen as the last line of defense when it comes to re-engaging families and students to work together to ensure students remain in school. It becomes involved only when a child has not met attendance thresholds set by statute. Families of most such children become involved in numerous school-level interventions such as attendance mediation workshops, meetings with school social workers and following subsequent recommendations, and a host of other mitigation programs.

Because the truancy courtroom is viewed as a remedy of last resort, and truancy can often be a gateway leading to other court involvement such as delinquency and dependency and neglect

cases, special care has to be taken to ensure the services provided by the Court are appropriate and effective.

To that end, the Denver Juvenile Court has been reviewing and retooling its truancy dockets. Changes include but are not limited to additional docket time for younger truants; more frequent court reviews to ensure greater levels of supervision and accountability; and the addition of a case management component. The client Case manager oversees coordination of services for truant youth and their families.

Thursday's truancy docket at Lake Middle School will mark the first "in-school" truancy docket held with a re-focused and re-energized truancy team. The regular weekly truancy docket will still be held at the Lindsey-Flanigan Courthouse.

"The response from DPS and the individual schools has been tremendous and every member of the truancy team has been excited about getting into the schools and connecting with the families there," Magistrate Gilbert said.

Though on-site hearings will happen only occasionally, the Denver Juvenile Court hopes that engaging families in schools will effect positive changes with the families who participate, enhance school and family engagement and foster a stronger working relationship between the individual schools and the court that serves them.