

By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

• Leader & Times

Liberal City Commission met Tuesday night and in taking care of business, approved all of the items on the agenda, including the benefit consulting memorandum of understanding, which was presented by Adolescent Support Services director Ivanhoe Love.

Earlier this year, the truancy program brought in several adolescents to testify about the program to the city commission. The program has been active for more than 10 months.

The Adolescent Truancy Program is an attendance policy, six-month program.



Truancy was an issue to the school beforehand. There were a total of 161 students reported truant last year, according to USD 480, one month after school started.

“What it meant to us is that we, as the truancy agency for the county, had to investigate all 161 cases to determine if, in fact, those students were truant,” Love said. “When a student becomes truant, the law says that the school must report back to the county attorney.

“Through the truancy process, we were allowed to become the county attorney's designee,” he added. “Therefore, the school filed with us. We figured out a way collectively to touch these kids.”

In 32 of those cases, it was found that those were children under the age of 13. There were 44 cases resolved – 85 accepted truancy.

Twelve out of the 161 were reported to the county attorney's office. Either they didn't accept the truancy course or they failed the process. There were three students who flat out failed the truancy program.

Thirty-eight of those students graduated the truancy program this past year – 27 of that 38 actually graduated high school. Those 27 students, at the beginning of the year, had dismissed themselves from school – 16 attended summer school, and 14 completed the process. Two of those did not.

“Unfortunately, there were some issues, and those students could not comply,” Love said.

The program has a 14:2 success rate.

There is a great need to keep kids off the street and with the truancy program, “kids are not only monitored during school hours, but they are also monitored during the night,” Love said. “Most criminals that got involved in the early ages had a truant problem.”

Therefore, this coming year, it is planned to once again address those students who are under the age of 13.

Another thing the truancy program is able to do is a child can be moved from Phase 1 to Phase

3 or bring them back to Phase 1, depending on their progress and how well they do at school.

“Our standards are very high and we require passing grades,” Love said.

The motion to approve \$52,666 toward the truancy program, out of 1-cent sales tax was approved with four votes in favor and one vote against. Joe Denoyer was the only member of the commission who was not on board for the truancy program.

“I struggle with the city paying for it,” Denoyer said. “I wish the program success, and it’s good that parents are stepping up, but I have to do the best with the money that is entrusted to me.”

The funding for the program will come from city, county and USD 480. And two officers dropped from the program so they are also looking for a budget increase to give salary raises to recruit new officers and keep officers.

Overall, there will be some changes implemented, but Love said he believes “the program is a success.”

Vice Mayor Janet Willimon, who has been part of the program for almost a decade, said that it has had “a huge impact” and that “it's positive for the city.”

Mayor Dave Harrison said he hasn’t “had anyone who isn't in favor of the program.”

Commissioner Dean Aragon said that he was also impressed.