



## California School District Uses GPS to Track Truant Students

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Not even Ferris Bueller himself could have gotten around this one: A six-week pilot program by California's Anaheim Union High School District is testing the use of technology to combat tardiness amongst the district's seventh- and eighth-grade population.

How it works is fairly simple. Students with four or more unexcused absences in a year—approximately 75 are enrolled in the Anaheim test—are given handheld GPS devices instead of detentions or prosecutions. To make sure that said students are in school when they should be, the students are required to check in using the devices during five preset intervals: When they leave for school in the morning, when they arrive at school, lunchtime, when they leave school, and at 8 p.m. each day.

And if that's not enough, students in the program also receive a phone call each and every day to tell them that it's time to get up and get to school. An adult coach also calls the students three times per week to check up and discuss different methods the students can employ to ensure that they're where they should be at any given point during the day.

"The idea is for this not to feel like a punishment, but an intervention to help them develop better habits and get to school," said Miller Sylvan, regional director for AIM Truancy Solutions, in an interview with The Orange County Register.

As one would expect, the GPS devices themselves don't come cheap. They cost around \$300 to \$400 per device, and the entire six-week program itself would set the district back \$18,000—or \$8 per day, per affected student. In this case, however, a state grant is paying for the program.

In addition, an absent student sets the district back approximately \$35 per day—meaning that the GPS program will save the school district money if it can achieve the same success rate that the program has seen in similar pilots for other districts. Attendance rates, in total, allegedly jumped from an average of 77 percent to 95 percent during these six-week trials in other districts, with only slight dips in attendance following the programs' conclusions.

Truant students in the Anaheim Union High School District can face time in juvenile hall if prosecuted, and their parents can face fines of up to \$2,000 for their children's absences.