

**NEWS****Officials hope to reduce student dropout rate, thereby lowering crime rate as well**[Print Page](#)**By ALEJANDRO CANO**

Published: Thursday, October 1, 2009 1:10 AM CDT

Reducing dropout rates could save the state of California hundreds of millions of dollars while also reducing crime rates, said local law enforcement leaders who urge Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign a bill that targets this goal.

Nine Inland Empire law enforcements leaders, among them Chief Rodney Jones from the Fontana Police Department, in addition to 130 leaders statewide, are pushing Schwarzenegger to sign SB 651, which was approved recently by the Senate 37-1 with strong bipartisanship.

If approved, SB 651, co-authored by State Senator Gloria Romero, chair of the Senate Committee on Education, and Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, would require the California Department of Education (CDE) to produce an annual report on dropout rates that would highlight dropout trends and help identify early warning signs, like truancy and grade repetition.

"Kids don't just suddenly drop out of school, they often start off as truants and show other signs," said Fontana's Jones, who serves as an advisor on the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids committee. "If we can reach them early enough and encourage them to stay in school, we can prevent future crime."

The bill would also implement legislation that prevents schools from pushing struggling students to drop out in order to boost school-wide test scores, and would remove unnecessary barriers to incorporating dropout rates and test scores of students who transfer to alternative schools into school Academic Performance Index rankings.

In Fontana, the dropout rate during the 2007-08 school year was 15.4 percent, and although this is below the state average of 18.9 percent, it is still considered a huge problem.

According to CDE, 416 out of the 12,795 students enrolled in grades 9-12th dropped out during the same year, with Latino students being the most affected with 343 of them dropping out. To make matters worse, 301 students dropped out while attending the 12th grade.

The Education Department also reported that during the 2008-09 school year the truancy rate in Fontana was 26.39 percent — a factor that led to 5,156 suspensions and 121 expulsions.

According to a recent study entitled "High School Dropouts and the Economic Losses from Juvenile Crime in California," the issue costs the state about \$1.1 billion annually in juvenile crime costs alone. The study indicates that in 2007, there were more than 30,000 juvenile arrests in the Inland Empire region.

"This study demonstrates the immediate impact dropouts have on both public safety and the economy," said Russell Rumberger, director for the California Dropout Research Project. "If California

could reduce the dropout rate, it could subsequently reduce the juvenile crime rate and its staggering impact on the state budget.”

In San Bernardino County, the dropout rate during the 2007-08 school year was reported to be 22.5 percent, indicated CDE.

One of the main factors as to why truancy and dropouts are alarming issues is the lack of help and attention to students at some schools statewide, said Barbara Chavez, a Fontana Unified School District board member.

EdSource, an independent non-profit organization, corroborated her beliefs. According to EdSource, California has just one counselor for every 1,000 students, while the national average is that of one counselor per 500 students — making it harder for students to receive the right direction and thus increasing desperation and frustration. Some help is available, but only for those who can afford sessions that run as much as \$100 per hour, leaving out the majority of students.

With that in mind, a group of experienced former college admissions officers from Stanford, Harvard, Brown and other major universities, designed the www.iadmissions.com website.

“Every student deserves an equal chance to tell their story. Expensive private counselors and essay writers give some an unfair advantage,” said former Stanford University Senior Associate Director of Admission Jon Reider. “iAdmissions is making that privilege available to everyone.”

Marielena Ayala, director of Sistema Educativo para Padres Activos (SEPPA), said that the dropout rate exists partially because students are in the wrong classes and become unmotivated.

“Parents need to go to the schools and demand that their kids be placed in the right classes. If schools don’t comply, then parents need to go see the superintendent. If the school says there is no room to change the student to a different class, demand they do it,” said Ayala. “A motivated student doesn’t drop out.”

Copyright © 2009 - Fontana Herald News

[\[x\] Close Window](#)