

# NEWS RELEASE

March 11, 2008



## RESPONSE TO ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR REPORT

(Rockford, IL) The Board of Education was disappointed to read the remarks of the Mayor which were reported in the Rockford Register Star on March 11, 2008. The information, at least as presented in the paper, is misleading and reflects a lack of true understanding of the issues. At the same time, the Board would like to confirm its commitment to the Community Collaborative Truancy Eradication Partnership and its intent to continue to work with the community to address the truancy problem that exists in the Rockford School District. The essence of a partnership is the partners working collaboratively together, not one of the partners indicating its my way or the highway.

According to the article, the Mayor intends to direct City of Rockford police officers to start issuing tickets as of next week to students “who are roaming the halls of our schools that should be in class and they are not.” This is contrary to the assurances which the Mayor gave the school district officials during a meeting on February 27, 2008. During that meeting, it was explained to the Mayor that the truancy problem is not centered on students who are in the school building roaming the halls and that school administrators have been, and continue to address that issue. The school district has in place under its discipline code a progressive discipline policy relative to students who are in the buildings, but not in class. The district disagrees with the Mayor’s implication that the hallways of the district schools are filled with students who should be in class, but are not. That is simply a misrepresentation to the public. The truancy problems relate to children who are not in the school buildings. The district’s discipline policy and intervention programs are more than adequate to deal with students who are in the building, but not in the classroom where they are supposed to be. While students in the school buildings might technically fall within the definition of “truant” within the City’s truancy ordinance, it does not fall within the definition of truant as contained in the enabling state legislation, state law and the school district’s discipline code.

Furthermore, the school district has never taken the position that Rockford police officers in schools, who are paid for by the Rockford School District at a cost of over \$500,000 per year, can only intervene when there is a fight. In fact, at the meeting on February 27, 2008, it was made absolutely clear to the Mayor and other public officials from the City who were there, that Rockford police officials certainly have the right when students have been disrespectful or they believe something is wrong, to bring those students to school administration offices or to bring the students to administrators who may be in the hall. To suggest that Rockford School District officials have said officers in schools can only intervene when there is a fight is simply incorrect.

As to the issues relating to federal and state privacy laws, the City has requested that the school district merely turn over to it all of its attendance records so the City can issue mass citations pursuant to the City's truancy statute. The school district has repeatedly told the City that it cannot do that as those records are student records, and federal and state law would prohibit the turn-over of those records to the City in the format requested. If the school district were to comply with the City's request, the school district would place at risk substantial federal funding which the school district relies on for its day-to-day operations. Besides the practical financial aspect, the Board of Education does not believe that it should simply ignore state and federal law, regardless of what the Mayor may believe. The Board agrees with Alderman Thompson that it is a community problem. Schools are a reflection of the surrounding community. The school district would urge the City to address the rampant violence, gangs and drug problems which persist in large sections of our community. Eradication of those problems, which is clearly a City and community problem, would go a long way in relieving the truancy problem in the school district. All parties, including the Mayor and the city council, need to step up to the plate and take ownership of the community and all of its problems.