



## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 29, 2010

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### **Detroit Public Schools and the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office announce new Teen Courts and Safe Schools Project**

Detroit Public Schools and the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office have teamed up to launch the first two DPS **Teen Courts**, where students will serve as jurors, at Denby and Southeastern High Schools. The agencies are also partnering on the new **Safe Schools Project** pilot program, where five assistant prosecutors are assigned to work collaboratively at Detroit and out-county high schools to address issues of safety, truancy and school violence.

The Teen Court program is a juvenile diversion program created for juveniles who have no previous juvenile court record and who become involved in minor violations of the law. Classrooms at Denby and Southeastern have been transformed to resemble real courtrooms, where offenders, between the ages of 11 and 16, who commit certain specified minor misdemeanors, and who are willing to admit responsibility at the outset, will appear before a jury of high school teenager peers.

The new Safe Schools Project is a collaboration between the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, DPS and out-county schools to address issues related to school violence. Some components of the program include working with schools to establish anti-bullying hotlines, determining if there are unregistered sex offenders within the safe school zone and following up with police, identifying abandoned and neglected houses near schools and notifying municipalities, creating teen courts and more.

“Parents too often tell me that their top concern – even above improving academics – is improving safety in our schools. The new Safe Schools Program and the collaboration with the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office will be additional strong support for our \$41.7 million safety and security initiative to help improve the safety in our schools,” said Robert Bobb, Emergency Financial Manager of Detroit Public Schools. “The teen courts also offer an excellent opportunity for our students to gain experience in the legal system as they deliberate on real cases, while encouraging them to take an active role in their community.”

"School violence is an issue that has plagued America for years," said Wayne County Prosecutor Kym L. Worthy. "We have to step out of our comfort zone and work earnestly to address it. Since May, 2010 school prosecutors have been working in this pilot program with Wayne County school administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and the faith based community in 17 identified schools. We are trying to get at the root problem of what is troubling our schools and I commend these partners for taking this bold step."

“I have to recognize former Inspector General John Bell who months ago saw the value of the Teen Court concept in DPS high schools and helped to make it a reality in just a short period of time,” said DPS Inspector General Wilbert Van Marsh. “I stopped in and saw Southeastern teacher John Mayberry during the second day of school during his Teen Court class. The students were engaged. Not only will our students have the opportunity to learn about our system of criminal justice and hand down actual sentences to their peers in a responsible way, their exposure to the process may inspire some to seek careers as lawyers, court reporters, judges, bailiffs, and law enforcement officers.”

The Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office Safe Schools Project is led by Chief James Gonzales of the Special Operations Division. Principal Attorney Bradley Cobb oversees the operations of this special unit. The programs included in the Safe Schools Program are:

- Non-compliant sex offenders – Determining if there are unregistered sex offenders that are located within the safe school zone and forwarding them to Michigan State Police for verification and possible arrest.
- Truancy – Attending school on time and everyday increases a student’s earning potential and positive opportunities through life. It is also the law. The Safe Schools Project prosecutors will work with school administrators to help make sure all of our children are in school to receive the benefits of education. Truancy intervention is an effort by the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office to improve school attendance by working with students, parents, schools and the community to ensure a faster, more effective response to truancy. The Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office will work with business owners to discourage them from allowing students to use their establishments during hours when they should be attending school.
- Teen Court - a juvenile diversion program created for juveniles who have no previous juvenile court record and who become involved in minor violations of the law. Any high school student in grades 9 through 12 can serve as a Teen Court juror. After questioning the youth offender and his/her parent(s) or guardian, the “Teen Jury” determines an appropriate disposition, which

cannot involve any form of detention. Dispositions typically include community service, oral and/or written apologies, restitution if applicable, maintenance of acceptable school attendance and grades, and counseling. The program uses students who are taking classes in law or Advanced Placement Government. Teen Court jurors participate in a responsible and meaningful role as they deliberate over real cases. Through Teen Court presentations, youths also learn about how the criminal justice system works, differences between the adult system and the juvenile system, and the difference between real life criminal justice systems and those portrayed on television. Moreover, it has been demonstrated across the country that juveniles whose cases are heard in Teen Court have a lower recidivism rate than youths who go through the formal court system, in large part due to that fact that the offender's sentence is being fashioned and justified by his/her true peer group. The Teen Jury's ability to relate to the youth offender also encourages a more meaningful determination of consequences for the youth.

- Anti-bullying Hotline - Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys will encourage all schools to establish and monitor hotlines to report instances of bullying and to prevent other crimes from occurring.
- Abandoned and Neglected Houses in the Safe School Zone – Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys have requested a list of these houses and have forwarded them to the City of Detroit for investigation and demolition.
- Gang Violence – Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys will assist administration in identifying issues related to gangs as well as bullying and cyber bullying issues. They will work on an action plan to address social networking issues that present problems in schools.
- Community Meetings – Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys will establish community partners and stakeholders interested in working on school issues. The Council of Baptist Pastors of Detroit and Vicinity committed to help with non-academic issues surrounding why children are truant from school.
- Criminal Justice Education Program – A four-week course taught at each of the Safe Schools partner school locations. The course of study includes: American System of Justice, Juvenile Justice Process, Crime and Consequences, Constitutional amendments (as it relates to law enforcement) and Street Gangs. Two schools, Canton-Plymouth and Henry Ford High School, will also have a two-week Teen Citizen's Academy.
- Cases - Assistant Prosecutors will try cases that originate in the designated schools.

The five assistant prosecuting attorneys are assigned to 17 schools.

DPS' participating schools in the Safe Schools Program are University of Central Preparatory High School, Mumford High School, Frederick Douglass College Preparatory Academy for Young Men, Pershing High School, Denby High School, Crockett High School, Kettering High School, Henry Ford High School, Southeastern High School, Martin Luther King, Jr. Senior High School.

Out-county schools include: Harper Woods High School, 20225 Beaconsfield, Harper Woods; Plymouth-Canton Educational Park (3 schools: Plymouth High School; Salem High School and Canton High School), 46181 Joy Road, Canton; Edsel Ford High School, 20601 Rotunda Drive, Dearborn; John F. Kennedy High School, 13505 J.F. Kennedy Drive, Taylor; Crestwood High School, 1501 N. Beech Daly Road, Dearborn Heights

The initial DPS teen court sessions will be Tuesday, October 12, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. at Southeastern, and Thursday, October 14, 2010 at 10:10 a.m. at Denby.