



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 22, 2011

Anaheim Using GPS to Track Truant Students

The Anaheim Union High School District has a message for students who skip school too often: From now on, Big Brother will be watching you.



[The Orange County Register](#) reports that the district “is the first in California to test Global Positioning System technology as part of a six-week pilot program that began last week, officials said.” Any student in grade seven or eight who has four or more unexcused absences in the current school year will be saddled with a handheld GPS device that he must carry with him at all times.



According to the paper, the students will interact with the device as follows:

Each morning on schooldays, they get an automated phone call reminding them that they need to get to school on time.

Then, five times a day, they are required to enter a code that tracks their locations — as they leave for school, when they arrive at school, at lunchtime, when they leave school and at 8 p.m.

The students are also assigned an adult coach who calls them at least three times a week to see how they are doing and help them find effective ways to make sure they get to class on time.

The district, therefore, will be monitoring students’ locations not just during school hours but also before and well after them. What, one wonders, will befall students who happen to be in unapproved locations at 8 p.m. or simply forget to check in with the school?

The school district, naturally, hastens to remind those with concerns about the intrusiveness of the program that participation is voluntary — at least for now. However, as the *Register* notes, the alternative to participation is likely to be “continuation school or prosecution with a potential stay in juvenile hall.” Given those options, most students and parents are going to “volunteer” for the GPS program. Furthermore, if the program is successful in getting kids to attend school, it will probably become mandatory in short order.

Although district spokespersons would surely say that their sole concern is getting students to show up so they can be educated (“Anything that can help these kids get to class is a good thing,” said Kristen Levin, principal at Dale Junior High in west Anaheim), there are at least two other reasons for putting the GPS program in place.

The first is the universal motivator of filthy lucre. The state is paying for the program, which costs about \$18,000, making it free for the district. On top of that, writes the *Register*, “schools lose about \$35 per day for each absent student,” according to Miller Sylvan, regional director for Aim Truancy Solutions, which manufactures the GPS devices and sells them for \$300 to \$400 apiece. Aim explicitly markets the devices as a way to increase school district revenue. (Needless to say, all of this money comes out of the



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pockets of taxpayers.)

The second — and perhaps even more important — reason for the program is to drive home the message that children belong to the government, not to their parents. Parents and students, says the *Register*, “came to the Anaheim Family Justice Center to get the devices and talk to police and counselors.” “Chronically truant students in grades 4 - 6, and their parents, also were also required to attend,” so that they, too, could be “warned about what they could face if they continue to skip school,” the newspaper adds.

At least one parent, Raphael Garcia, objected to this approach, astutely remarking, “This makes us seem like common criminals.” A police officer, the *Register* writes, “reminded parents that letting kids skip school without a valid reason is, in fact, a crime” with a potential penalty of time in juvenile hall and a fine of up to \$2,000. In other words, the state knows better than parents what their children should be doing and where they should be going, and parents who think differently had better get with the program or be prepared to pay up and lose their kids temporarily, if not permanently.

Anaheim is not the first city to employ Aim’s technology. Similar programs are already under way in Maryland and Texas. With federal and state governments providing the funding for them, the lure will be almost irresistible to local school districts.

The only sure way to avoid this eventuality is to repeal compulsory school attendance laws. With no power to force children to attend school, the state would be in no position to monitor children’s whereabouts. Besides, as Dr. Sam Blumenfeld recently pointed out in [an excellent column for *The New American*](#), compulsory attendance laws “are not only not needed in a free society, but ultimately lead to its demise.”



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