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Mary Eastman, president of the Seward County Employee Committee, left, presents two \$400 scholarships to Shannon Maxwell, mother of Elizabeth Maxwell, and Roger Keene, father of Rachelle Keene. Elizabeth will be attending Seward County Community College and majoring in chemical engineering. Rachelle is currently attending Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Alva continuing a degree in biology. The scholarships are the eighth annual for the employee committee, and eligible applicants must maintain a 3.0 grade point average or be enrolled as a freshman, sophomore or junior in college and complete a minimum of 12 credit hours during the fall semester. L&T photo/Robert Pierce

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times In 2012, as a way to help the community get a grip on its truancy problem, the Seward County Commission, the Liberal City Commission and the USD No. 480 Board of Education each voted to approve funding of a new program from Adolescent Support Services. That action came near the beginning of the current school year, and with graduation day nearing for most area schools, Ivanhoe Love Jr. of Adolescent Support said students in the truancy program are having a graduation of their own.

Love was at the county commission's Monday meeting to bring the board up to speed on what has happened since the implementation of the program. He said his agency has put together "a product that the town and the state can be proud of."

"Since it began, we have investigated 148 truancy cases through today," he said. "Of that, we have 72 active. We're going to graduate from high school through the program at least 23, maybe 26 students."

Love called those numbers mind boggling.

“We had no idea it would be that successful in our first year,” he said. “We are funded by the three entities, and each one of those entities has a member that sits on our panel.”

Adolescent Support employs truant officers to help with the program, and Love said the success of the program would not be possible without those officers.

“The bulk of the work in getting our students in school and making passing grades and being decent students rest in the hands of our truant officers, and they’ve done an outstanding job,” he said.

Love discussed some of the specifics of the success the truancy program has made for the students in it.

“When we get them, they’re not attending school,” he said. “For the most part, grades are bad. I’m just proud to say we’ve got them in school making good grades, and that’s what we told you we would do when we came.”

Love said as of Monday, 148 cases had been investigated by Adolescent Support since the truancy program started, and 12 of those have been filed with the Seward County Attorney’s office, down from the previous year.

“I think that alone has helped ease the burden on the court system,” he said. “By this time last year, I think there had been over 100 and some cases filed in the county attorney’s office.”

County commission chairman Ada Linenbroker said the public has cheered the progress of the truancy program.

“I have heard such good things about this from people that are involved in it, some of the teachers,” she said. “I have two parents whose kids are into truancy, and they said they have never seen such a change in their kids since they got involved. I am really glad we’ve got this going.”

Commissioner C.J. Wettstein agreed with Love, saying the officers have a great deal to do with the success of the program.

“Ivanhoe’s done a good job, but he’s not the one that’s really making it work,” he said. “Ivanhoe’s holding it together, but the three ISO kids have been doing a fantastic job. Judge (Vernon) Butt has been doing a very fine job.”

Wettstein said students who enter the program are initially “rebellious,” but they soon discover what Adolescent Support can do for them.

“You could just see them within a week or two, they would start turning around,” he said. “You’d see them going to school. You find out their grades are improving. We’ve got a bunch of kids in that program that have really excelled and have done excellent jobs.”

Wettstein also commended the students' parents for a portion of the program's success.

"The parents have been showing up," he said. "We've had parents come in. The parents are making a concerted effort to make it to the truancy court. It's a fantastic program. The kids and the truant officers are the ones that make it work."

Love said Adolescent Support is achieving the goals it set out to do when the truancy program was first implemented.

"What we're doing is what we said we were going to do, and that is to keep kids in school and make them have passing grades and be successful," he said. "You rub people the wrong way sometimes in getting there, but that's our overall goal, and I think we're doing it."

County administrator April Warden, who has sat in on some of the truancy court sessions, also likes what she has been seeing.

"I just have to say that Ivanhoe does hold it together, and I am amazed at the truant officers and the time and effort that they put into it," she said. "They've bonded with these students. They've given them the confidence to know what it's like to have somebody who supports them. The students that are graduating from this program are amazing, and I think they deserve a round of applause for what they did."

Commissioner Jim Rice likes seeing young people taking responsibility just as the students in the truancy program have.

"I congratulate you for that, and you have a very bright future ahead of yourself," he said to the students who were in Monday's audience. "It's mostly due to yourself taking on that responsibility to get it done. I thank you for that, and keep up the good work."

Commission vice chairman Doug LaFreniere likewise praised the work of Adolescent Support.

"You do what you said you were gonna do, and I commend your truant officers," he said. "It is a tough job. You rub people the wrong way. I've got experience at that too, but you've done a great job."

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