

ANDERSON COUNTY SCHOOLS
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Media Release



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Juvenile Judge Appointment ‘Critical’

*By Leisa Fair
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Appointing someone to complete the unexpired term of Juvenile Court Judge April Meldrum is a critical task for Anderson County Commissioners.

In August 2006, the citizens of Anderson County decided a change was necessary for our community. Judge Meldrum was elected to the Juvenile Court position, and as she promised in her campaign, she made addressing truancy a priority.

While Tennessee State Law defines truancy as five unlawful absences, each school system must set the policies that determine whether an absence is excused or unlawful. This same law requires that school systems across the state ensure that their attendance policies are firm but fair.

As the Anderson County school system has learned, firm and fair policies without judicial support are useless. Local policy is driven by the standards a community believes are necessary for success, and our community suffers the consequences when standards are low.

But, what happens when the standards and expectations in our community are high? Our children rise to the occasion.

Since 2006, our school system has cooperated with the Attorney General’s office to bring truancy cases before Judge Meldrum. The message is simple: Students are expected to be in school, on time, every day.

Our combined efforts continue to show improvement each year. At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, 1,636 students were truant. In 2007-2008 the number dropped to 1,517. Last year, the number of truant students dropped again to 1,355.



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That means more children are in school, working toward successful futures and greater opportunities. It means more dollars are flowing into our school system for ALL our students, based on higher attendance percentages and greater per-pupil funding from the state.

Working In the attendance office for Anderson County Schools has allowed me to see firsthand the importance of a juvenile judge who supports school policy and understands the impact such support has on the community.

As an educator I have learned to make every decision based on what is best for the child – not the parents, educators, or lawmakers. And, even though putting the best interests of the child first should please everyone, it can be unpopular with those who are held accountable for their actions.

The next judge in our Juvenile Court must be willing to stand firm on behalf of our most vulnerable citizens.

Our children can indeed “soar in a global society” if our expectations elevate them to do so – and they deserve every opportunity to try!

Leisa Fair is Anderson County Schools’ deputy director for school and student affairs. She has served the school system as a teacher, principal, and administrator since 1980.