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**EIGHT PARENTS ARRESTED FOR FAILING TO SEND THEIR
KIDS TO SCHOOL**

Eight parents were arrested last week and charged with failing to send their children to school, in the second countywide truancy sweep coordinated by the Merced County District Attorney's office and the Merced County Office of Education, announced Merced County District Attorney Larry D. Morse II.

The eight parents arrested yesterday were charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Esmeralda Saldana, 40, and Cesar Saldana, 46, both of Merced, and Ann Ornelas, 34, and Michael Perez, 33, both of Winton were taken directly to court by their arresting officer and arraigned before Merced County Superior Court Judge Carol Ash. Billie Breniak, 43, and Lonita Robertson, 47, of Merced, were arraigned in front of visiting Judge Donald Shaver.

Ruby Santos, 32, and Jose Rubio, 30, both of Los Banos were taken to the Merced County Superior Court in Los Banos and arraigned by Merced County Superior Court Judge David Moranda.

"We will continue to conduct these sweeps against parents who are impeding their children's futures by failing to send them to school," said Morse. "Kids who miss substantial periods of school are more likely to become high school dropouts, and high school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated. These kids deserve better," Morse added.

Steve Tietjen, Superintendent of the Merced County Office of Education, emphasized that the arrest warrants are sought "only after every other effort to get these kids to school has been exhausted." Many school districts have School Attendance Review Boards (SARB), he noted, and parents who are not sending their kids to school go through a SARB process in which meetings are held with the parents and school officials to try to determine why a child is missing school. It is only after the parent has failed to comply with the terms of attendance set forth by the school district that the case is referred to the District Attorney's office for prosecution.

"I am hopeful that our efforts to communicate to parents the tremendous importance of regular student attendance at school are making a difference. We want parents to know their important role in their children's success," Tietjen added.

Other agencies who participated in the sweep were the Merced Police Department's school resource officers, the Atwater Police Department's school resource officer, the Merced County Sheriff's Department's school resource officer and, the Los Banos Police Department's school resource officer.