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## Greene County taking high-tech approach to truancy problem

By Amanda Harris

PARAGOULD -- Greene County truants could soon have one more reason to go to school.

Members of the Greene County Quorum Court's Public Service-Jail Committee met with school officials and Juvenile Intake officer Lynn Morris Thursday to discuss the use of electronic monitoring devices to force youngsters to attend classes.

Educators agreed to try the bracelets on a trial basis. Five students from each high school will be sentenced to a monitoring device. Educators and county officials agreed the devices will be used on repeat offenders.

Educators and county officials alike believe the youngster who knows what it is like there won't want to go back.

"I don't see what we have to lose," Greene County Tech Superintendent Sheila Ford said of giving the bracelets a try.

Once a student sentenced to the monitoring device racks up 10 violations, he or she will then go before a judge again and most likely will be sentenced to jail time.

The bracelet is equipped with GPS capabilities which allow those monitoring the truant child to pinpoint where the youngster is at any given time.

Ford said she would be interested in looking into the successes and failures of other communities that have used the bracelets.

Ultimately it will be up to juvenile judges to determine who would be sentenced to a monitoring bracelet, County Judge Jesse Dollars pointed out.

The county would use an electronic monitoring firm called E-Cell for the bracelets.

The next step is to set up a meeting with Juvenile Judge David Goodson, Public Service-Jail Committee members, an E-Cell representative and school officials to iron out details.

During the discussion educators raised some concerns about the bracelets.

Would the bracelets become a conversation piece or a "trophy" rather than a way to get students to attend school? Would they make a difference at all?

Paragould School District Superintendent Dr. Aaron Hosman wondered: "How is a bracelet going to get (a child's) attention," if a judge's stern language doesn't phase the youngster?

Public Service-Jail Committee Chairman Jerry Cunningham explained he is aware the bracelets won't work for all students, but added that if the monitoring devices could help some children and save the county some money, they would be worth it.

Educators were also concerned about fees associated with monitoring devices, noting many parents do not have the financial means to pay for such a sentence.

The parents or guardians of those sentenced to a bracelet would be responsible for a \$15-a-day fee charged by the monitoring firm, the committee chairman noted.

"The county is not out any money," he added.

Money and concern for making sure Greene County students get an education is why the meeting of educators and county officials was called.

Cunningham explained the county is severely over budget for juvenile inmate boarding fees.

The county budgeted \$50,000 for the year; however, fees have already exceeded the \$50,000 mark and are expected to balloon to \$100,000 by the end of the year.