Parents, activists partner to fight dropout rate; Pleas bring promises of more aid for area

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To curb the dropout rate and deter gang activity, community activists in City Heights have called on educators and police to step up their efforts in the neighborhood.

Worried parents from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church began researching youth problems in the area about a year ago. Armed with daunting data, the parents -- along with activists from the San Diego Organizing Project -- recently made their case to San Diego’s police, the school district, city council and philanthropists.

Among their findings was that Hoover High School has one of the highest dropout rates in the region: 1 out of 4 students. They also found that, in September, there were 92 drug arrests, 42 assaults, 7 deadly weapon arrests, 45 burglaries, and 113 thefts, vehicle thefts or break-ins in the area surrounding Hoover High.

Even as they struggle with their own budgets, representatives from the city and the San Diego Unified School District have agreed to dedicate new resources to the urban area over the next year or so.

For example, the San Diego Police Department will place a juvenile diversion case manager in the Mid-City Police Station in the heart of City Heights. This non-uniformed case manager will conduct truancy sweeps and work to help first-time teenage offenders avoid incarceration through education and community service.

San Diego Unified and SDSU’s City Heights Educational Collaborative, a philanthropic effort to improve education in City Heights, will develop a sort of early-warning system for dropouts.

By tracking a student’s grades, attendance and behavior, educators often can predict -- and intervene -- when a student is at risk of dropping out.

San Diego Unified also will put a resource specialist at Hoover High and Clark Middle School. This person would work to help potential dropouts stay on course for graduation.

"In an era of budget cuts and fiscal constraints, we're really excited about the (San Diego Unified School) District, city and police department all being creative in collaborating to decrease the high dropout rate, gang violence and juvenile crime," said Joseph McKellar of the San Diego Organizing Project, a faith-based community group.
Community activists will continue to monitor crime and education rankings in City Heights. They also plan to study what effects the new reforms might have in the area.

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