

People

Hooper is the attendance cop of SDSS

BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

Jay Hooper is a man with a mission — an educator dedicated to keeping kids in the classroom and not on the streets or home watching the soaps.

Hooper, in his fourth year as vice-principal at Stouffville District Secondary School (SDSS,) is responsible for implementing the day-to-day policies passed down by principal Alan Dickson.

Hooper's role as 'attendance cop' has earned him the repu-

tation as a hitman of sorts. As the school's dispenser of discipline, it is his task to keep track of students who skip classes, to warn the culprits, phone parents, and occasionally hand out suspensions.

He would be the first to admit that his job, along with his sometimes corny manner, has made him the target of digs, grumblings and even the occasional groundless threat from students.

But Hooper insists he's out to win the war, even if he loses a few battles along the way.

"I'm a teacher, my job in life is to deal with kids," he told *The Tribune* during a recent interview.

"I get a real sense of satisfaction out of eventually seeing results as you finally get a student to focus on what he or she is supposed to be doing. The best part of the job is that I've always got so many more days or even years to draw the kid back on side."

Despite his spoil-sport image, Hooper said he thinks that, deep down inside, the students accept that he is performing an essential task.

"For students to learn, they have to be in school. I think most of the kids understand that the job is necessary."

He also knows he has the support of the school staff and the majority of the parents.

"There's a structure in place, the rules are there, so I can stand my ground. That's why it

works so well."

Hooper said the fact attendance has become such a big issue is a sad reflection on the times in which we live.

"It's an indictment against our society in general that we have to go to this extent to keep kids in school. There's just not the same concern for attendance among students as there once was."

Hooper points to the success of the school's attendance policy, which he put into effect in his second year at SDSS.

The rules call for a three-day suspension for students who skip three classes, with credits being lost in any course in which a student misses 20 classes for any reason except chronic illness.

"It works. The policy has reduced absences significantly," he said.

Hooper goes to great lengths to learn at least a little about every student at SDSS. While

admitting he is always more familiar with roughly 10 per cent of the student body — the chronic attendance offenders — he makes it his business to familiarize himself with all 750 teens at the school.

"I get a feeling for each of my kids, either from talking with the kids, the principal, or the staff."

Hooper, who was born in Montreal and raised in Sarnia, spent four years at the University of British Columbia, a year at the University of Toronto, and another year at the University of Oregon.

He majored in physical education, and served as boys' gym teacher at Thornlea Secondary School in Thornhill for 14 years.

Hooper came to SDSS in 1989 after a stint as vice-principal at Dr. G. W. Williams S.S. in Aurora.

Hooper's own philosophy of education evolved around the need to acquire proper study habits.

"The kids have to know the discipline of study. In education, so much of what is taught can be irrelevant to a student. It's the discipline of learning, not the content, that counts."

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