

# Meeting Warns of Drug Cartels' Recruiting Tactics at High Schools

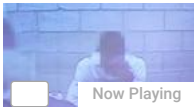
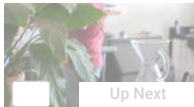


The Institute for Public Strategies will host a multi-agency meeting to help parents learn about the "disturbing trend"

By Andrew Johnson

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Federal officials are warning parents in the South Bay of a scheme, executed by drug cartel members, that targets high school students. NBC 7's Gaby Rodriguez reports from the meeting. (Published Friday, Nov. 16, 2018)






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A community meeting organized by local and federal officials on Thursday warned parents of an alarming cartel trend that targets South Bay high school students for drug smuggling.

As cartels look to get their product to the United States, they look to a vulnerable group: high school-aged children-- many who are easily influenced by cash and gifts, according to the [Institute for Public Strategies](#) (IPS), who hosted the multi-agency meeting at the Chula Vista Public Library.


More alarming is that cartels often use students to target their peers to be distributors, which can give students the impression they are not working for the

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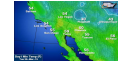
cartel directly, said Mary Loeb, a juvenile prosecutor in the San Diego County District Attorney's Office.



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### Parents Concerned Over Drug Cartels Recruiting Students

A program will be held at the Chula Vista Library Thursday to update parents on the drug recruitment trends. NBC 7's Megan Tevrizian has more. (Published Wednesday, Nov. 14, 2018)

"Just because you are not smuggling drugs does not mean you are not criminally responsible," Loeb said.

A lifestyle centered on "prestige, partying, and social status" may be a draw for teens, the experts at Thursday's meeting said.

During the presentation, the audience saw video of a tearful teen who had to call his mom and tell her that he had just been caught.

Law enforcement agencies hope that using powerful real-life moments will help kids realize the seriousness of the crime and it seemed to have an effect on at least one student at the meeting.

"I was feeling sad for him... Because his dreams went down," Cesar Santilla said after watching the video with his mom. "If I do this, I would be like him."

### US Official Warns Local Kids Being Targeted by Drug Cartel

Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri Hobson warns that drug traffickers are using South Bay high school students to transport drugs. (Published Thursday, Nov. 15, 2018)

Assistant U. S. Attorney Sherri Walker Hobson spoke with NBC 7 about this "disturbing trend" she's seen throughout the county.

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"These kids are 14, 15, 16, 17 years old. They just see the \$400 that they're making. They don't look at the big picture," said Hobson.

Some of the most common places for recruitment are schools, public transit stops, libraries, clubs, and near the border, IPS said. Social media and video game chatrooms may also be used to recruit teens, according to the organization.

IPS described the teens who are targeted for smuggling and recruitment as typically socioeconomically disadvantaged or often alone.

"Drug cartels are falsely promising easy money and protection, but there is nothing easy or safe about this lifestyle," said Loeb.

### 10 Pounds of Meth Found on Bus, in Teens' Luggage

In March, three teens were found with [hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of fentanyl](#), according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

In May, a former Chula Vista high school senior was [charged with recruiting other students to smuggle drugs](#) into the country from Mexico.

He was caught after he and four other teens were found with meth or fentanyl strapped to their bodies during the previous summer.

One of the teens told federal agents that he successfully crossed the border with drugs 15 or 20 times, sometimes twice in one day.

In July, [NBC 7 Investigates spoke with one teen](#) who, with two others, was caught smuggling \$150,000 worth of drugs.

"I just wanted to get it because I could go party with it," said the teen identified as David. "My parents, yeah, they gave me a roof, food, and everything, but they wouldn't give me money for party."

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### Cartels Recruiting Students to Traffick Drugs

It's a disturbing trend, the U.S. Attorney's Office said. NBC 7's anchor Omari Flemming has more. (Published Monday, Nov. 5, 2018)

It was reported that David made \$2,500 per trip. That was about 10 percent of the drugs' value.

David said he did it at least 30 times before he was caught.

In August, a teen was arrested after 11,490 fentanyl pills were [found in a car](#). The teen said he was asked to drive the car by a friend who walked across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Attorney's Office [highlighted South Bay school students](#) as prime recruits for drug cartels.

Many of these teens, if convicted, would face a decade or more of prison.

Anyone with information about teen recruitment is asked to call San Diego's Drug Enforcement Administration at (858) 616-4100.

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