LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SUBJECT: Requesting Department of Education to convene a working group to develop guidelines to reduce the truancy rate in the public school system.

REFERENCE: SCR 74, SD1

ACTION REQUESTED: Interim report on guidelines regarding truancy reduction and increase academic success including student support system, quality assurance processes and school attendance program.

DOE REPORT: Introduction:
Truancy is both a symptom and a warning sign. In fact, it is one of the earliest indicators of struggling students and the best predictor of students dropping out of school. Students who miss school also begin to be involved in a range of high risk behaviors which lead to choices that are harmful to the youth and to society as well. Behaviors such as alcohol and substance abuse, delinquent behavior and crime, bullying, participation in gangs, suicide, teen pregnancy, mental health issues, and unemployable youth are associated with this issue. The solution includes reviewing our laws and policies and developing guidelines to reduce truancy and improve attendance in our public schools.

The Student Support Section (SSS) of the Department of Education (DOE) was requested to convene a Truancy Reduction Work Group to develop guidelines regarding truancy that delineate how schools can lower the truancy rate and increase academic success. The guidelines should:

1. Use existing systems such as the Student Support System, the peer review and quality assurance processes, and the school attendance program.
2. Delineate programs that are presently available, such as the Positive Behavior Support (PBS); and
3. Focus initially on the middle, intermediate and high schools.

The work group is requested to include, but limited to, representatives of the SSS of the DOE, the Office of Youth Services (OYS), the Family Court of the Judiciary, the County Police Departments, other related state agencies, the business community, high school and postsecondary students, and parents. The lead agency shall be the SSS of the DOE.

A Truancy Reduction Work Group was convened in June 2008 and includes representatives from: the OYS, Family Court, County Police Departments, high and intermediate schools, complex social workers, Department of Parks and Recreation,
City and County of Honolulu, Susannah Wesley Community Center (SWCC), Parents and Children Together (PACT), and the Student Support Section. The Truancy Reduction Work Group has met monthly and will continue to meet to complete the guidelines and related tasks.

The working group will submit a final report to the Legislature no later than 20 days prior to the Regular Session of 2010 that includes the guidelines, a timeline for the implementation of the guidelines, and information on what data will be collected to determine if the truancy and dropout prevention activities have been effective.

The following activities were conducted by the group from June 2008. The working group will continue to work on the guidelines and submit the completed guidelines to the 2010 Legislature.

**FINDINGS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>Organize the Truancy Reduction Work Group. The group includes representatives from: OYS, Family Court, County Police Departments, high and intermediate schools, Complex Social Workers, Parks and Recreation, City and County of Honolulu, SWCC, PACT, and SSS.</td>
<td>Completed</td>
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<td>July 2008</td>
<td>Conducted research regarding improving attendance and programs and strategies implemented by schools and school systems.</td>
<td>Completed</td>
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<td>August 2008</td>
<td>Conducted research on national and local best practices currently implemented by schools. Reviewed school reports and relevant data on truancy. Discussed the following truancy reduction programs previously implemented: 2005 Truancy Reduction Project and the School Attendance Program (SAP) which focused on truancy reduction and prevention. SAP terminated in May 31, 2008 since the grant from the OYS ended. Organized the focus groups to determine involvement of community agencies and organizations and parents and students in addressing reducing truancy. Surveyed the County Police Departments regarding the involvement of police in truancy reduction and prevention.</td>
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<td>September 2008</td>
<td>Gathered information on programs/projects currently implemented by secondary schools involving community organizations.</td>
<td>On-going</td>
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<td>October 2008</td>
<td>Developing a resource section in the guidelines to cite programs/projects. Submit 2009 Legislative Report to the Board of Education.</td>
<td>On-going</td>
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<td>December 2009</td>
<td>Submit Interim Report to the 2009 Legislature</td>
<td>On-going</td>
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<tr>
<td>January - September 2009</td>
<td>Continue to work on guidelines and submit to the Regular Legislative Session in 2010.</td>
<td>On-going</td>
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The following truancy reductions programs were previously implemented:

- During school year 2005, the DOE and the OYS developed and implemented a Truancy Reduction Project. The project was funded by the OYS. It presented research for truancy reduction, best practices for truancy reduction, national and local programs addressing truancy reduction, and developed and provided a toolkit to all grades K-12 schools statewide to improve attendance and reduce truancy. The research, best practices, and toolkit were presented through trainings in all of the complexes.

- A statewide truancy conference, “Truancy - It’s Everyone’s Kuleana” was conducted in the Fall of 2006 as a follow-up to the 2005 Truancy Reduction Project. Schools, community agencies, organizations, and service providers were brought together to understand the issues related to truancy and become aware of the support services available in their communities. The schools were requested to develop their school attendance policy and encouraged to seek assistance from the agencies, organizations, and service providers in their community.

- The School Attendance Program (SAP) was implemented from 1990 to 2008. It was terminated on May 31, 2008 since the grant from the OYS ended. The program involved the Honolulu Police Department and the DOE to conduct sessions on designated Saturdays to students identified as truants and their parents. It was offered to all secondary schools on Oahu. The sessions provided information and discussion on juvenile and school attendance laws, gang involvement, and encouraged the parents and students to work together to improve attendance to school. An average of 500-600 students along with their parents or guardians attended the program each year.

These are some of the key findings based on the research on the national best practices and strategies to improve attendance and reduce truancy.

The following are identified as critical components of truancy prevention:

- School systems must have a clear and effective attendance policy that will be communicated to parents, teachers, and the school community.
- Schools must provide the context of a safe and supportive learning environment and be continuously proactive in dealing with students who are truant and for all students. This is in consonant with the DOE “Student Priorities” (reference: Department of Education Strategic Plan, July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2011).
- Involvement of parents immediately is vital as it has positive effects on engaging them “as part of the solution” and being proactive.
- Use of incentives is encouraged as students improve their attendance. Recognize students who have improved their attendance. On the other hand, sanctions (e.g., detention and in-school suspension) should be imposed and coupled with counseling and guidance activities to improve student behavior and attitudes.
- Involvement and assistance of community agencies should be sought when the needs of the students, parents, and families go beyond what is provided by the school system. This aligns with the DOE’s Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS) to provide a system of support to students.

Broad-based collaboration involves community agencies, law enforcement, and the courts and includes:

1. Specialized programs (e.g., substance abuse treatment, personal counseling and therapy).
2. Law enforcement through the local police department (e.g., students are returned to school and the school imposes sanctions).
3. Involvement of the court is sought after exhausting all other preventative measures and interventions.

The results of a survey conducted in August 2008 by the County Police Departments and their involvement with truancy reduction indicated that:

- All county police departments may arrest students who are caught truant off campus during the school hours and their parents are notified, especially if the student has other law violations or has a history of chronic truancy.
- Students generally are returned to their respective school and the students are subject to sanctions imposed by the school.
- All county police departments work collaboratively with the local schools within their jurisdiction to address truancy.

The involvement of community agencies is an integral component of a school’s truancy reduction efforts. The following truancy reduction programs are currently being implemented at designated schools. The source of funding is a grant from the OYS.

- The Department Parks and Recreation of the City and County of Honolulu implemented a School Attendance Program (SAP) at Waipahu Intermediate School during the Spring of 2008. The program is being continued during the 2008-2009 school year. It involves parents and students participating in a session on designated Saturdays, and emphasizes the importance of school, making better choices, and the impact of truancy on the students, their parents, and family.
• PACT and SWCC teamed together to develop a truancy reduction program at Kalakaua Intermediate School during the Spring semester the 2007 - 2008 school year, and is being implemented during the 2008 - 2009 school year. The emphasis is on involving parents, addressing the issues related to non-attendance, providing specialized counseling services, and providing an on-site case manager to work with the students and parents.

• PACT provides a care coordinator at Dole Intermediate School. The program offers activities to develop positive student behaviors and attitudes towards self, others, and school.

The impact of the local programs will be presented with the guidelines prior to the regular Legislative Session in 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

None for now. Recommendations will be generated when the guidelines are completed on October 31, 2009.