THE SENATE
TWENTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE, 2008
STATE OF HAWAII

S.C.R. NO. 74 S.D. 1

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO CONVENE A WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP GUIDELINES TO REDUCE THE TRUANCY RATE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

WHEREAS, "truancy" is the absence from school that is not excused by the parent or guardian or the school and creates a risk factor for a student becoming a school and workforce dropout; and

WHEREAS, some states have passed laws to increase the penalties for being truant, in Hawaii the focus is on understanding the causes of truancy and supporting students so that the students can succeed academically; and

WHEREAS, school factors that correlate with truancy include overall school climate issues, such as safety issues (e.g., bullying or gangs), school size, and attitudes of administrators, teachers, and other students, as well as the degree to which schools are flexible in meeting students' diverse cultural and learning styles; and

WHEREAS, family factors that correlate with truancy include lack of parent supervision and guidance, poverty, substance abuse in the home, domestic violence or other familial conflicts, lack of familiarity with school attendance laws, and varied educational priorities; and

WHEREAS, economic factors that correlate with truancy include employment among students as well as students who live in homes where funds are scarce for basic necessities such as food, clothing, childcare, and transportation; and

WHEREAS, student factors that correlate with truancy include substance use, limited social and emotional competence, mental health problems, poor physical health, lack of

familiarity with school attendance laws, teen pregnancy, and friends who engage in truant or other problem behavior; and

WHEREAS, students who are truant are more likely to drop out of school, have fewer job prospects, have lower salaries, and are more likely to be unemployed; and

WHEREAS, in 1999, dropouts accounted for fourteen per cent of workers in the United States who live in poverty, while only six per cent of workers who completed high school lived in poverty; and

WHEREAS, students who are truant cost society through needed action in schools and courts, academic failure, and juvenile delinquency often leading to adult criminal behavior; and

WHEREAS, data from the 2000 United States census shows that high school dropouts had only a fifty-two per cent employment rate in 1999, compared to seventy-one per cent for high school graduates, and eighty-three per cent for college graduates; and

WHEREAS, of those who worked full-time year-round in 1999, high school dropouts earned only sixty-five per cent of the median earnings; and

WHEREAS, about five per cent of students across the nation drop out of school each year, and most of these students start with being truant; and

WHEREAS, in Hawaii the average truancy rate in 2005-2006 was 1.7 per cent or two hundred and eighty-two students, but in 2006-2007 the rate increased to 2.4 per cent or three hundred and ninety-five students due to the increased school and economic demands; and

WHEREAS, nationally between 1989 and 1999, the rate of petitioned truancy status offense cases handled by juvenile courts increased by eighty-five per cent from 22,200 to 41,000; and

WHEREAS, in Hawaii there were twenty-seven truancy cases handled by the juvenile courts in 2006 and thirty-one cases in 2007; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Education has a nationally recognized comprehensive student support system that is designed to identify and assist children who experience difficulty; and

WHEREAS, the student issues in preventing truancy and increasing attendance include making students and parents or guardians feel welcomed, creating an environment that enables students to feel successful, providing student support services, and assuring that students feel safe; and

WHEREAS, the family and school issues in preventing truancy and increasing attendance include assuring that parents or guardians are notified immediately if a child misses a class or a day of schooling, providing assistance from student support specialists in developing plans that the school and parents agree to follow, and rewarding students when attendance goals are met; and

WHEREAS, the community must be involved in preventing truancy and increasing attendance by forging relationships with local businesses where youth can build positive working relationships, and defining the collaborative relationships among the schools, law enforcement, and other governmental agencies; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Twenty-fourth Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2008, the House of Representatives concurring, that the Department of Education is requested to convene a working group or incorporate a working group into an existing group to focus on the truancy problem and to review and develop guidelines for lowering the truancy rate and increasing academic success in the public school system; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Working Group on Truancy Rate Reduction is requested to include, but not be limited to, representatives of the Student Support Section of the Department of Education, the Office of Youth Services of the Department of Human Services, the Family Court of the Judiciary, the County Police Departments, other related state agencies, the business community, high school and postsecondary students, and parents; provided that the lead agency shall be the Student Support Section of the Department of Education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the working group shall develop guidelines regarding truancy that delineate how schools can lower the truancy rate and increase academic success; provided that, where possible, 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 positive behavior support; and

(3) Initially focus on middle/intermediate and high school levels; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Working Group on Truancy Rate Reduction is requested to submit an interim report to the Legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2009 and a final report to the Legislature no later than twenty days prior to the Regular Session of 2010 that includes the guidelines, a timeline for implementation of the guidelines, and information on what data are or will be collected to determine if the truancy and dropout prevention activities have been effective; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Chairperson of the Board of Education, the Superintendent of Education, and the Chief Justice.