

## STUDY OF TRUANCY & SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION

### 2008 STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED

Disciplinary laws allow students to be “on the street” when suspended or expelled.

*Suspension is frequently utilized for students with attendance problems. In 2006-2007, there were over 18,530 instances of attendance suspensions of Virginia students.<sup>1</sup> Students who are suspended or expelled and do not receive educational services fall behind and become disengaged from school. Time out of school increases antisocial acts, school vandalism, chronic truancy and the school dropout rate.*

#### Recommendations

- 1. The Commission on Youth will request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) offer guidance in the *Student Conduct Policy Guidelines* to school divisions regarding options other than suspension or expulsion for instances of tardiness or attendance.**

*Status: The Chairman for the Commission on Youth sent a letter to VDOE. The Commission will receive an update from the VDOE during the summer of 2009.*

- 2. Introduce legislation to amend the *Code of Virginia* to prohibit the use of suspension in instances of tardiness or attendance.**

*Status: The Commission on Youth introduced legislation during the 2009 General Assembly Session (HB1794, Brink) that provides that a school may not suspend a student solely on the instances of tardiness or attendance. The bill was amended to remove tardiness. The bill passed the General Assembly and was signed by the Governor.*

*Judicial Involvement may be Inconsistent among localities.*

*Disagreement exists as to whether truancy belongs in the courts. In some jurisdictions, there is close involvement with the courts – judges exhaust every remedy and frequently include school attendance in the Court Order. In other jurisdictions, schools are discouraged from filing petitions for attendance issues. Docket space was identified as a problem by participants interviewed on the site visits, as well as by members of the Advisory Group. Accordingly, not all truant students are actually referred to the court for truancy.*

#### Recommendations

- 1. Request that the Chairman of the Commission on Youth write a letter to the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia to request assistance in the review of truancy matters, specifically the role of the judiciary, consistency of court practices, and judicial education, including the court’s ability to order services for the family prior to the imposition of jail or fines.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Department of Education. (2008). *Annual Report on Discipline, Crime and Violence*.

*Status: The Chairman for the Commission on Youth sent a letter to the Supreme Court of Virginia. A representative from the Supreme Court has agreed to serve on the Advisory Group to assist the Commission with this study.*

- 2. Monitor the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2008 which includes an amendment to strengthen the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) requirement by eliminating the Valid Court Order exception.**

*Status: Commission on Youth currently monitoring.*

Punitive measures may be imposed prior to referral of services.

*When proceedings are instituted against a parent pursuant to § 22.1-258 of the Code of Virginia, the parent may be found guilty of a Class 2 or Class 3 misdemeanor (§ 22.1-263 of the Code). While some judges may order the parent or family to receive services (counseling, substance abuse treatment) or to the Department of Social Services, others may not prior to imposition of jail or fines. Service referral is frequently appropriate because truancy is usually a symptom of other serious problems.*

### **Recommendation**

- 1. The Commission carried over this recommendation to the second year of the study.**

*Status: The Commission on Youth has drafted a study plan to be presented to the Commission at its first 2009 study year meeting.*

Career and technical education is an overlooked component in dropout prevention.

*Students do not always understand the link between education and career development. Career and technical educational options can help students remain in and be successful in high school. High-risk students are 8 to 10 times less likely to dropout in the 11th and 12th grades if they enroll in career and technical programs instead of a general education program.<sup>2</sup> A quality career and technical program can reduce a school's dropout rate by as much as 6 percent.<sup>3</sup>*

### **Recommendation**

- 1. Request the Commission on Youth conduct a study of career and technical educational options available in the Commonwealth. Such a study will also include when it is most effective to identify career and technical options. Potential linkages with the Tobacco Commission, the Virginia Manufacturers Association, the Community College system and the Virginia Workforce Council for workforce training will also be explored, along with the *Jobs for Virginia Graduates* program. Commission staff will apply for relevant funding opportunities.**

*Status: The Commission on Youth has drafted a study plan to be presented to the Commission at its first 2009 study year meeting.*

School divisions' attendance policies may have unintended consequences.

*School divisions' attendance policies may create unintended consequences. Passing a class is typically tied to attendance. Attendance policies may dictate that students can pass a class only if they do not exceed a certain number of unexcused absences. The grade earned would have*

---

<sup>2</sup> Association for Career and Technical Education. (2007). *Career and Technical Education's Role in Dropout Prevention.*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

*no impact, so a student who exceeds the limit has no hope of catching up or passing. For example, if the student had six or more unexcused absences in the first grading period, they may have already failed the class, regardless what happens during the remainder of the school year. If there is no hope for passing the class, the student may stop attending school altogether.*

**Recommendation**

- 1. Request the BOE to issue guidance to school divisions regarding the unintended consequences of attendance policies which may keep students from returning to school.**

*Status: The Chairman of the Commission on Youth sent the Chairman of Board of Education a letter. The Commission will receive an update on this progress during the summer of 2009.*

**There needs to be greater understand of family challenges.**

*A recurring issue associated with school dropout is family involvement. A family's participation in their child's education is viewed as one of the most important factors that influences the success or failure of the child in the classroom. Other family factors may also impact a student's decision to dropout. Students may have to work to help support their family, have young children of their own to support or must care for a family member. Understanding of these variables is needed in order to develop effective dropout prevention strategies.*

**Recommendation**

- 1. The Commission will meet with both students and parents to request their input in this study effort. These meetings will take place in the second year of the study.**

*Status: The Commission on Youth will complete these meetings during the summer of 2009. Any recommendations from these meetings will be shared with the Advisory Group and the Commission prior to the completion of the study.*