

GDOE to enforce truancy policy but some parents want students home

By Jolene Toves

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Parents of students attending face-to-face classes in Guam Department of Education schools by law are required to send their kids to school. COVID-19 pandemic concerns do not provide an exemption to the truancy policy.

By law, parents are required to send their children to school until age 18. According to the policy, a compulsory-age student who has incurred 12 or more unexcused absences in a school year will be referred to the Superintendent of Education.

From there, the matter could be taken to family court.

GDOE Superintendent Jon Fernandez said they will be gathering data during the first weeks regarding enrollment and attendance.

How student attendance will be addressed this school year was raised following a parent's concern over the online program not being available to families who no longer feel safe sending their kids onto school campuses.

Although GDOE officials have reassured the community that the spread of the virus has not originated in the school setting, the increase in COVID-19 cases in the community and cases

reported by GDOE has caused some parents like Abigail Ogo to reconsider their decision to choose in-person instruction.

Ogo has five children enrolled in face-to-face classes at the elementary and secondary levels.

She told The Guam Daily Post that she has decided to keep her children home in light of the rise in COVID-19 cases on island.

Two of Ogo's children attend schools where positive cases of COVID-19 were reported in the first few days of the new school year. She said her high school daughter is now in quarantine as a result of contact tracing at George Washington High School identifying her as a close contact.

"As a parent it's like what do I do? I've compromised my kids' health with their education? Right now they are absent and I don't care, I am going to do whatever it takes and see if the teachers can work with me here," Ogo said.

Keeping her kids home is not ideal, but it's too late to make the switch to online learning.

"At this point, our online classes are full. Adding more students would require taking teachers out of the classroom, leaving students who are face-to-face without a teacher,"

Fernandez said.

Parents have been told that they would need to wait until second semester to switch between face-to-face and online models of instruction.

Although Ogo, chose in-person instruction for her kids this school year, she doesn't want to risk her children's health, now that the delta variant has been reported on the island.

But like many parents torn between health concerns and education, she was denied. Luckily, she was able to work with her children's teachers.

"So far most of their teachers are understanding, the little ones they were able to get the assignments for them. I said even if they are not excused or if they still have to go back, I am going to keep them home hoping that they take my consideration into light," Ogo said.

The Guam Daily Post asked GDOE how many parents like Ogo have requested to switch from face-to-face to online instruction in the first week of school, that data was not available.

Leading up to the new school year, GDOE implemented a layered approach to keep kids safe from COVID-19 in school settings. The measures included wearing face masks, checking body temperatures and maintaining physical

distancing guidelines.

But in the first few days of the new school year, reports were received that some schools were not enforcing the safety measures among students.

A picture of Tiyan High School students was taken Wednesday. It depicted students reportedly on their lunch break congregating in the halls without social distancing in place.

According to the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, all kindergarten to 12th-grade schools must maintain 3 feet of distance between students in the classroom setting, and 6-feet in outdoor areas.

The Guam Daily Post contacted GDOE for comment on the alleged infraction but no response was received as of press time.

In the week of Aug. 14 through Aug. 20, GDOE reported 15 cases of students testing positive for COVID-19 at 13 public schools.

"Remember this is only the first few days, but we are very confident that these cases have come from the community, they have come in from the home or outside social gatherings or somewhere outside the school facility. It wasn't the expectation that we would never see a case. The tasks for our schools is to take immediate action based upon notification to identify close contacts to have those individuals in close contact quarantine, test and be cleared before they return to school. Those are the protocols that are in place at all of our schools where there have been identified positive students and employees.



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INVITATION FOR BID GDOE IFB 038-2021

UNIFORM VOUCHERS FOR VARIOUS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SUBMISSION DATE: Monday, September 13, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. CHST

Note: It is solely the Bidder's responsibility to review the website on a daily basis for the issuance of Amendments/Clarifications for any possible changes to the IFB.

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/s/ CARMEN T. CHARFAUROS
SUPPLY MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATOR

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JON J.P. FERNANDEZ
Superintendent of Education

INVITATION FOR BID GDOE IFB 035-2021

WALKWAY CANOPY REPLACEMENT FOR JUAN M. GUERRERO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SUBMISSION DATE: Friday, September 17, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. CHST

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/s/ CARMEN T. CHARFAUROS
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