

OVERVIEW

THE AUDITOR
STATE OF HAWAII

Audit of the Comprehensive School Alienation Program and the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program of the Department of Education

Summary

House Concurrent Resolution 234, House Draft 2, Senate Draft 1, of the 1995 legislative session directs the State Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the Department of Education's Comprehensive School Alienation Program, Alternative Learning Programs and Teen Pregnancy Programs. The audit was requested in response to legislative concern about how well the department's at-risk programs address the needs of at-risk students.

We found the Department of Education's management of the Comprehensive School Alienation Program (which includes alternative learning centers) and the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program is weakened by the lack of a clear department mission. More specifically, we found the Office of Instructional Services has failed to provide districts and schools with clear objectives for these programs. As a result, program goals varied among sites and at times violated the department's and Board of Education's policies on graduation and equal access to education.

For example, one Leeward District high school used its Alternative Learning Center component of the Comprehensive School Alienation Program to award graduation diplomas to students with as few as six course credits. The Board of Education requires that 20 credits be earned. Other schools used the Comprehensive School Alienation Program to prepare high school students for adult education rather than high school graduation requirements. In 1994, one-third of the 2,262 individuals tested for the General Education Exam (GED)—an adult education exam used to measure high school diploma equivalency—were of high school age although the developer of the GED has reaffirmed the exam is intended for adult education and not for use with at-risk students. The Competency Based Program, another adult education program, continues to be used by various high schools despite recommendations of the Office of Instructional Services and principals of adult community schools that it be discontinued at the high schools.

Unclear program goals for the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program resulted in the program ignoring the Board of Education policy encouraging the participation of teen fathers in the program. However, most schools in our sample that limited program access to females in 1994-95 informed us that male students would be included in these programs in 1995-96.

The department has also not sufficiently planned and budgeted for the Comprehensive School Alienation Program and Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program by properly identifying either the target population for these programs or the programs' effectiveness. The department is unable to evaluate effectiveness because schools do not consistently identify all students eligible for at-risk services and what services are needed. This is further complicated by the lack of standardized reporting requirements and the schools' lack of consistent definitions of "mainstreaming," "attendance," "graduation," and "dropout." The department is unable to be accountable for the \$10 million expended for these programs in FY1994-95.

We also found on-site program monitoring for the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program was limited to those receiving federal funds. Standards of accountability should not be lowered for programs receiving only state funds.

The department's allocation of positions for both programs is arbitrary. This results in unequal access to these programs. For example in FY1992-93, two districts did not receive the positions their student eligibility counts justified while the remaining five districts received more positions than justified by the eligibility counts. One district received twice the number of positions for which it was eligible.

We found that the Office of Instructional Services' current formula for allocating Comprehensive School Alienation Program funds creates perverse incentives because schools that are ineffective in decreasing the number of at-risk students are entitled to more funds. The Office of Instructional Services affirmed that it has not adhered to the formula; it has chosen to allocate funds among the districts on a status quo basis. The Office of Instructional Services should revise rather than ignore an allocation formula which is faulty, reactive, and inefficient over the long term.

Recommendations and Response

We recommend the department clearly state the mission of public education and that this mission drive the implementation of the Comprehensive School Alienation Program and the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program. We also recommend the superintendent direct schools to discontinue the use of adult education programs at the high schools and to include males in the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program. To address the need for better program planning and review, we recommend the Office of Instructional Services revise the programs' eligibility forms and evaluate programs annually. We also recommend the Office of Instructional Services work with the Office of Telecommunications and Technology to identify program information that should be maintained in the School Information System (SIS) to assist it in program planning and review. Finally, we recommend the Office of Instructional Services work with the Budget Branch to revise the allocation formula for the Comprehensive School Alienation Program.

The Board of Education and the Department of Education elected not to respond to our audit.

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