



Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC)
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 16, 2017

TO: The Honorable Members of the Delaware General Assembly

FROM: Dafne A. Carnright, Chairperson
GACEC

RE: **House Bill No. 24 (School Attendance)**

The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC) has reviewed **House Bill No. 24** which promotes earlier intervention in relation to student attendance in an effort to prevent students from disengaging from the school community and dropping out of school. The GACEC **endorses** the proposed legislation and would like to share the following observations.

Current school attendance law contemplates parental notice and a home visit by school staff following the tenth day of a student's unexcused absence (lines 10-11). After the fifteenth day of a student's unexcused absence, a parent must appear at school for a mandatory conference (lines 12-14). This bill promotes earlier intervention, i.e., after the fifth day of a student's unexcused absence, a conference would be scheduled at school or the student's home to conduct an informal needs assessment and determine what available resources would improve the student's attendance.

Public schools typically have policies which disallow credit or authorize retention for students who do not attend a certain number or percentage of school days. Districts vary in their attendance thresholds. The Brandywine School District only requires 85% attendance (allowing 27 absences in the 180 day school year) while the Indian River School District authorizes no credit and retention for as little as 17 absences. If parental notice is not issued until 10 or 15 days of unexcused absences have occurred, it may be too late to save the school year. Once a student is advised that he/she may not receive credit even if he attends the balance of classes, he will not be motivated to renew attendance. Concomitantly, once a student is retained, the potential for eventually dropping out of school is statistically heightened.

Early intervention facilitates linking the student to resources before the student falls too far behind academically. Students can be referred to Wellness Centers for mental or physical health concerns. If a student is feeling overwhelmed by academics, tutoring or transfer to another class could be considered. If bullying is prompting the lack of attendance, the school can intervene. Early intervention is clearly in the best interest of the student.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our endorsement. Please feel free to contact me or Wendy Strauss at the GACEC office should you have any questions.