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September 23, 2010

Memorandum

TO: Speaker, 30th Guam Legislature
FROM: Education Suruhanu
SUBJECT: GDOE classroom air conditioning issues

Office of the Speaker
Judith T. Won Pat, Ed. D.
Date: 9/23/10
Time: 12:10 PM
Received by: [Signature]
30-10-0831

Håfa Adai Speaker:

After inspecting some of the schools this school year, I would like to inform you of a concern that may require your immediate attention. During the various school inspections, several classrooms have been observed without a working air conditioning unit and/or the classroom was improperly ventilated such that temperatures in the affected classrooms exceeded 78 °F (the standard under the 14 Points) and also exceeded 84 °F (the standard adopted by Public Health). As a result, students who occupy such classrooms are being subjected to a warm, humid, and uncomfortable learning environment each and every day the air conditioning unit remains in disrepair. The teachers at the various schools often inform me that the conditions of their respective classrooms becomes much worse in the afternoon and on hotter days and that such conditions are not conducive for an effective learning environment. Warm/hot and humid classrooms may present various health and safety concerns for the students subjected to such conditions and as such, the affected classrooms must be addressed and rectified immediately.

In addition, the length of time that some of the affected classrooms have been without working air conditioning varies anywhere from two weeks to a month. However, even a shorter period of time without an air conditioned or properly ventilated classroom is unacceptable especially considering Guam's extremely warm and humid environment and the rationale which led to the requirement that classroom temperatures be no greater than 78 °F. See P.L. 28-45 § 4 (12) (f). Furthermore, many school officials indicate that GDOE's response time to address and rectify reports of air conditioning problems is rather slow. As an example, room 29 at the Untalan Middle School has been without a working air conditioning unit since August 31. The teacher indicated that such problem was reported immediately. As of September 21, the problem in room 29 has not yet been corrected. During my visit to such room on September 8, 2010, using an environmental meter, the temperature measured approximately 88 °F with a relative humidity of 70% with no students present at that time. Please be advised that similar conditions exist in the various other affected classrooms. Reports and/or correspondences identifying the various classroom air conditioning problems at various schools have been provided to the Superintendent, the GEPB, and others. Although air conditioning problems can occur at any given moment, GDOE and/or others must be properly equipped to timely and adequately respond to any reports of classrooms without air conditioning or classrooms that may be inadequately ventilated. Based on my reports, observations, and discussions with various school officials of the affected classrooms, it appears that GDOE may be struggling to timely address and rectify the various classroom air conditioning problems and as such, I believe that GDOE may need additional air conditioning assistance and support immediately.

Similar to the recent school bus transportation issues where members of the legislature and others met to discuss the problems surrounding school bus transportation and to identify possible solutions to improve the bus pick-up and drop-off times, I would strongly recommend that your office consider meeting with

GDOE and others in an effort to identify the problems GDOE may be experiencing in their inability to timely address and rectify the many reported classroom air conditioning problems and to identify possible solutions for GDOE to ensure that each and every classroom has a properly working air conditioning unit or that each and every classroom is adequately ventilated at all times. After all, we should all strive to ensure that public school students are provided a comfortable classroom learning environment each and every day not only because the law requires it, but because public school students deserve such an environment.

I would recommend that GDOE consider providing one or more qualified air conditioning vendors to each of the school districts. In addition, I would recommend that in situations where GDOE may not be able to make repairs for lack of the necessary parts, supplies, and/or any other necessary item on Island, that GDOE be authorized to expedite the procurement process as necessary in order to make immediate repairs. Of course, school officials always have the option to re-locate the students of the affected classroom to a more suitable room but that may not always be an available option. Some schools have additional classrooms that may be able to accommodate the re-location of students. However, some schools such as Untalan do not have any extra classrooms to accommodate students who may need to be re-located as a result of poor classroom conditions. As a result, Untalan teachers of the affected classrooms are required to rotate to other classrooms where the assigned teacher is on prep period. Thus, the need to repair and/or replace an air conditioning unit in a timely manner is critical in order to minimize the disruption in the learning process as much as possible.

Moreover, I would recommend that your office consider legislation requiring other Government of Guam agencies including but not limited to the Department of Public Works to provide assistance to GDOE on various maintenance issues including but not limited to addressing and rectifying classroom air conditioning problems.

I am confident that your office will take the necessary steps to address this most important concern. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Si Yu'os Ma'åse',



Dominic Terlaje

cc:
Superintendent of Education
GEPB