

Home > Local > Guam News

Local

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Anonymous tip points to \$8K in missing funds at Agueda Middle School

By **Rebecca Elmore** - July 7, 2017

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“Upon reviewing findings this week that there might be potential criminal misconduct, we immediately reported to police and referred the matter internally for further administrative investigation and action,” –Superintendent Jon Fernandez

Guam – Nearly \$8,000 in non-appropriated funds mysteriously vanished at Agueda I. Johnston Middle School.

Reports of the incident triggered allegations of theft which prompted a round table discussion from Education Oversight Chairman Senator Joe San Agustin.

“Probably 8,000 (was stolen) from one school, I’m hoping it’s not, but if it is, somebody needs to pay for that because those are student activity funds,” San Agustin remarked.

Unfortunately, San Agustin said that a similar incident occurred at Simon Sanchez about four or five years ago, and he’s worried that history might be repeating itself.

“You can’t just be stealing from children. You can’t be stealing from anybody –period. That’s got to stop, and they’re doing that at DOE, and whoever is responsible needs to be held fully accountable,” he said.

It’s still unclear if the incident involves theft or simple mismanagement of funds. Regardless, San Agustin says he’ll be cracking down on each school’s reports of non-appropriated funds.

“I am asking to look at every school now. I don’t want to look at one only, one is at the top of the food chain, but all 41 school chains need to be addressed,” he said.

The last OPA audit report stated that non-appropriated funds at GDOE “continue to be untimely and inaccurately performed. Bank statements identified under reporting of deposits to cash receipts, with six schools under reporting a total of \$44K.”

According to the audit, a bulk of under reporting actually comes from Simon Sanchez High School with a glaring \$30K followed closely by F.B.L.G. Middle School at \$8K, and Chief Brodie Elementary School at \$2.6K.

The OPA recommends that further action is needed to ensure timely reporting, and San Agustin says one of those actions entails updating a 12 year old board policy that handles the procedural process involving potential fraud.

“But that was in 2005,” quipped the Education Chairman. “My question is, has that been updated and is there a need to have changes? What role does the superintendent play in it, what are the penalties? What are the personnel actions that need to take place? What are the criminal actions? We gotta come to terms with this,” he asked.

The legislative round table discussion to look into the potential theft is set for July 20th, which inadvertently gives the Department of Education plenty of time to address any criminal misconduct, if any.

According to Superintendent Jon Fernandez, GDOE is preparing for that possible scenario.

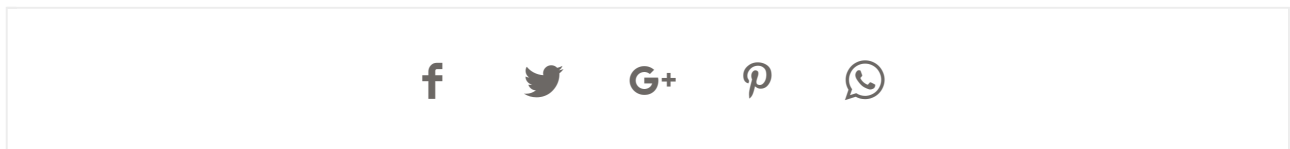
“Upon reviewing findings this week that there might be potential criminal misconduct, we immediately reported to police and referred the matter internally for further administrative investigation and action,” Fernandez said in a statement to PNC.

The superintendent also confirmed that GDOE became aware of the situation at Agueda near the end of the school year, after which he says they immediately assigned their Internal Audit Office to investigate.

“As I have discussed with Senator San Agustin, because the Agueda situation is under an ongoing investigation, we need to avoid any interference or undue influence on the investigation,” he noted, adding, “As superintendent and as a parent who knows how much our families work to raise funds for student activities, I’m not happy that funds may have been mishandled and we will get to the bottom of this is short order.”

Despite the incident, Fernandez says GDOE has made several improvements over the last few years in order to better safeguard student funds.

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