

# Commentary

SUNDAY, JULY 30, 2006

The Washington Times

## Don't punish truants

Perhaps John M. Bridgeland should have addressed his commentary "Looking out for dropouts" to the D.C. Board of Education instead of The Washington Times (Op-Ed, Wednesday). The recent adoption of harsher penalties by the D.C. School Board for secondary students who amass five or more unexcused absences in a single class serves only one purpose — to punish. As Mr. Bridgeland emphasizes, what students need to be successful in school is motivation. The insistence of the

school board on utilizing "crack the whip" policies does nothing to address the most significant issue: why students would have any unexcused absences in the first place.

Mr. Bridgeland is on the right track in declaring that students need more structured time and greater challenges in school to lower the dropout rate. We must be sure, however, that structured time means safe places to do interesting things, not after-school lockdowns. Instead of focusing

on the dangers of too much freedom, we need to focus on the freedoms that all youth deserve without restriction: freedom to dream, grow and achieve success. It's time for the D.C. School Board to change the conversation and realize that youth are at promise, not at risk.

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