

Governor Linda Lingle's State-of-the-State Address – Excerpts Relating to Public Education

January 26, 2004

Quality education is the most valuable gift one generation can give to the next. Every culture values education because it holds the key to success, not only for individuals and families but for society as a whole. That is why I have made education my highest priority.

Education gives us the tools we need to reach our full potential as individuals. Education imparts the knowledge we need to pursue a career and earn a good living. Education enables us to understand and participate in our great American democracy and appreciate the cultures and systems in other countries. And a quality education system provides both the entrepreneurs and workers needed to build new businesses and create jobs that will sustain our economy and a high standard of living for years to come.

While my major focus will be on K-12 education, I, like you, am fully aware of the role the University of Hawaii plays in our economic and social life.

My supplemental budget includes major commitments for the new medical school and library, the innovative Academy for Creative Media, previously called the UH Film School, and for the construction-related apprenticeship programs offered through the community colleges. In addition, I have asked for an additional \$25 million for repair and maintenance of buildings throughout the UH system. Again, it is important that we protect the investment taxpayers have already made in the university.

In order for Hawaii's people to gain admission to UH or another college or university here at home or on the Mainland, we must have a public school system that properly prepares students to compete.

Everyone agrees that students have a better chance of excelling in a subject if their teacher is highly qualified. My budget requests \$480,000 to pay teachers \$5,000 more per year when they achieve certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Hawaii's school facilities have suffered from years of neglect, despite citizen-led efforts to improve them. Leaking roofs, falling walkways, inoperable restrooms and faulty fire alarm systems are a few examples. That is why I am asking the Legislature for \$90 million to

fund basic repairs and maintenance at campuses around the state. We need this \$90 million in order to keep pace with the ever-growing list of repair and maintenance requests from elementary, middle and high schools on all islands.

Emotions are running high about how best to raise student achievement and reform our education system. Let's lower the volume and look at the facts.

The problem is not our students. They are capable of excellence. The problem is not our teachers. They are among the most committed in the nation. The problem is not money. Hawaii allocates \$1.9 billion a year supporting our public school system, ranking us 14th in the nation. That figure represents one-half of the General Fund budget. And over the last 30 years, the Department of Education has hired 96% more people while student enrollment has remained level at about 180,000 students.

So, what is the problem? Why don't our children do better? After reviewing past reports, consulting experts, and listening to people across the state, we have concluded that our school system is structured in a way that just doesn't work for the children. It didn't work last year or five years ago or ten years ago. And, although you have made attempts to fix it in the past, it still doesn't work as evidenced by both state and national test scores.

Numerous reports have been published on Hawaii's public school system. All point to the same problem – the way decisions get made.

The Department of Education decides how all resources are spent, resulting in only 50 cents of each dollar reaching the schools. The centralized Department of Education is too far removed from the schools to see and respond to actual teacher and student needs.

Last September I appointed 25 people to a committee to help me prepare education reform recommendations. The committee is called CARE, Citizens Achieving Reform in Education, and is made up of traditional and charter school principals, teachers, business leaders, a former DOE official, a teacher's union official, a member of the State Board of Education and parents. CARE conducted a series of community meetings across the state. Committee members and expert consultants

examined prior reports on our educational system. CARE concluded that the structure of public education in Hawaii is ineffective.

It is important to note that we are the only state in the nation where all decisions are made by a single, statewide board of education. And, as you know, test scores have consistently ranked our students at or near the bottom of the nation.

These facts, coupled with past failures to fix the system, point to the obvious conclusion that it is time to stop tinkering and instead restructure our school system.

It is important to remember that in 2002 both the House and Senate voted to place a Constitutional Amendment on the ballot to create local school boards. Unfortunately, this proposed amendment never made it onto the ballot. I call upon every Legislator to again enthusiastically support placing a Constitutional Amendment on November's ballot to allow the voters of Hawaii to decide if they want to establish local school boards or if they want to allow our current failing system to continue.

Along with local control, our education reforms call for putting more money into the classroom. This can be done through a weighted student formula assigning a specific amount of money to each student based on his or her specific education needs. My education bill mandates that 90% of operating funds would go directly to the schools instead of being swallowed up by a vast bureaucracy.

The third component of our education reform package is empowering principals to function as true leaders. Principals would be expected to maintain the confidence of teachers, parents and staff and be held accountable for student success – much as CEOs are held accountable for the success of their companies.

Fourth, we are proposing legislation to establish a Statewide Education Standards and Accountability Commission as many other states have. This commission would be tasked with maintaining rigorous standards and fairly allocating funds to all schools in the state. Members would be appointed by the Legislature and confirmed by the governor.

Under our fifth proposal, public charter schools would finally receive fair and adequate funding, both for operations and facilities. And the cap on new start-up charter schools would be lifted.

Our final initiative is to ensure students, teachers and staff have safe schools. We are proposing increased funding for additional security attendants. I am also asking the Legislature to give teachers more

authority to remove disruptive students from their classrooms.

My goal is to begin implementing these initiatives by the fall of 2005, with final transition occurring by the fall of 2006. Some have suggested that our school reform plan is moving too fast. Thirty years of studies and reports and increased spending and minor adjustments to the system prove otherwise. I believe the people of Hawaii have waited too long for the schools to improve.

Now is the time to move forward with great determination because each year of further delay means thousands more students will lack the basic education they need to succeed in life. The good news is, we have universal consensus that improved student achievement and education reform is the most critical issue for this legislative session.

However, some question the value of breaking up our statewide Department of Education into separate districts governed by locally elected school boards. They say this approach would not be effective and would only add to the bureaucracy. Those claims are simply not true! National studies consistently find that smaller school districts perform better than larger ones. In a small district, decision-making is simpler, faster, and more in tune with the community.

The problem of a single statewide board of education is highlighted by the experience of Lahianaluna High School on Maui. The school wanted to change the date of its graduation ceremony by a couple of days. The State Department of Education said NO! It was only after a protracted community outcry, including a major letter writing and telephone campaign, as well stories and editorials in the local newspaper, that the statewide Board of Education acquiesced to the desires of the students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community.

With local autonomy and a local community school board, the decision to change graduation day could have been made in a day! This example clearly illustrates why local boards should be voted on in November!

“Let the people decide” is my way of summarizing the public's role in this issue. But only you can make it happen by approving a Constitutional Amendment on this crucial local school board issue.

This is not about politics or my idea versus yours; this is about the kids! Involving voters in this issue will show respect for the people of Hawaii. It is the kind of respect we show for neighbors, friends and ohana. It is the kind of respect that makes Hawaii such a special place.

— Complete text: <http://www.hawaii.gov/gov/speeches>