



# HAWAI'I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER

*Informing the Education Community*

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*Perspectives #14*

## **Board of Education Focuses on Seven Priorities**

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The Hawai'i State Board of Education (BOE) is focusing on seven priorities in 2006. They are: (1) Weighted Student Formula (2) Teacher Recruitment and Retention (3) Repair and Maintenance (4) Bullying/Teasing/Violence (5) Current Initiatives (6) Charter School Administrative Rules, and (7) Library Staffing. Let's look at several of these.

For most education stakeholders, Weighted Student Formula (WSF) continues to be a major concern. Some support WSF because they hope it will bring greater transparency and fairness to school-level funding. Others worry it may be the death knell for small schools and will force all schools losing money to look at staff or program reductions.

The BOE is concerned about the unintended consequences and negative impact WSF may have on schools. What will happen to art and music classes and library services at schools losing funding?

The DOE says the WSF discussion should not be about gains and losses, but, rather, about how schools can do things differently with the budget they will have.

If the important discussion is about thinking outside the box, is the DOE doing enough to help principals find new ways of operating within a tight framework of union rules and DOE requirements? A "Frequently Asked Questions" handout about WSF given to principals last summer says, "Ultimately the Department will need to assist principals and school communities in reallocating resources, rather than seeking additional resources..."

A "losing school" simulation/demonstration project showing creative approaches to coping with reduced resources might be helpful as would a published list of principals' "worst case" best ideas and practices for when WSF is fully implemented. Rather than stifling creativity, these and similar "assists" might prime the pump as many principals struggle to learn how to do more with less.

A Principals' Academy is helping principals with the preparation of budgets and financial plans, but thinking outside the box should not be left to word of mouth between principals, but, rather, should be a formalized professional development opportunity provided by the state DOE.

### **What does the BOE mean by its fifth priority—“Current Initiatives”?**

Some board members are concerned that infrastructures must be in place before new initiatives are rolled-out by the DOE. Some would like to see a moratorium on new initiatives and better monitoring and assessment of roll-outs. They think resources should support existing initiatives and not be scattered among new initiatives. Others want to see implementation plans, time-lines and deadlines for achieving the initiatives. Are there overlaps? Do several initiatives fit together? What’s doable?

It’s true the DOE is beset by initiatives that are self-or-other imposed and the subsequent need to “roll-out” these initiatives. Recently, one such roll-out of standards-based report cards was fraught with difficulties. Why were these new cards rolled-out at the same time the DOE was grappling with WSF and other major issues?

When possible, prioritizing roll-outs across DOE offices with manageable time lines might ease the constant pressure to produce. A standard of excellence rather than a rush to get it done should be the bottom line, and it often is. But we also see past decisions producing present day consequences.

A newly adopted single school calendar is now making it difficult for students, teachers and schools to participate in summer school programs or professional development opportunities. Some say overly-high standards set a few years ago by the DOE in response to No Child Left Behind will now result in virtually all of our public schools being labeled “failing.” Now, the DOE is hoping the U.S. DOE will allow Hawai‘i to switch to a NCLB “Growth Model” to forestall this consequence.

We hear anecdotal stories of teachers moving here from other states or Hawai‘i born-and-raised young adults returning to teach, but unable to penetrate the DOE hiring practices. Yet, 1400-1600 new teachers are needed each year to replace those who leave or retire. The DOE must now petition the U.S. DOE in the hopes of receiving an exemption from the requirement that by year’s end all classroom teachers must be “highly qualified.”

All too often it seems the DOE is under siege. The legislature and the BOE must be aware of the heavy demands they place on the department for new initiative roll-outs and the preparation of dozens of reports and studies. It might be a good idea to just let the DOE catch its breath.