



HAWAI'I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER
Informing the Education Community

**Senate and House Education Committees of the Hawai'i State Legislature
Informational Briefing on Core Knowledge Program
Friday, August 5, 2005**

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Thank you for the invitation to provide input at this briefing. I will not comment directly on the merits of CORE Knowledge because, in my opinion, Core Knowledge is not the important issue that needs to be addressed. There are, however, two major questions from the policy perspective that the legislature needs to address before considering whether or how to promote the use of Core Knowledge or any other program in our public schools.

Question 1: Does the legislature want to promote a specific curriculum for all our schools?

For well over a decade the legislature has worked to establish a standards-based public school system. We now have well-regarded standards for students which provide clear direction for educators. Act 51 complements the standards movement by continuing to hold schools to the standards but giving them more flexibility in determining how to meet the standards. The primary goal of Act 51 as I understand it is to put decision making (how to meet the standards) at the school level. Decisions regarding how to meet the standards are to be made by school administrators, teachers, and the School Community Councils.

It appears to me that, if the legislature promotes any specific curriculum, it contradicts the major goal of Act 51. There is nothing now that prevents schools from adopting Core Knowledge and, indeed, some have done so.

Legislative involvement will only undermine the standards movement and the effort to get decision-making down to the school level. Such action sends mixed messages to educators contributing to the confusion already present in the changes that are taking place under Act 51 and reinforces the perception that the legislature does not really intend to empower principals to be curriculum leaders and decision makers.

Question 2: If the answer to question 1 is "yes" then, is the legislature prepared to thoroughly review the many other (at least 24) schoolwide reform models?

The U.S. Congress established The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, or CSRD, in 1997, provided funding for schools to implement reform programs that met nine components of comprehensiveness described in the law. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 authorizes the continuation of this program under Title I. Now called the Comprehensive School Reform program (CSR), several changes have been made. Most notably, there are 11

components of comprehensiveness, including a requirement that schools use strategies backed by scientifically based research.

Although schools themselves are responsible for developing plans that integrate these eleven components, the CSR legislation requires them to use external technical support from an entity with expertise in schoolwide reform. One avenue for obtaining such support is to adopt an externally developed school reform model.

There are at least 24 school reform programs that have been developed by external agencies and are widely promoted/distributed. A coalition of education organizations including the American Association of School Administrators, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Education Association, engaged the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in a project to review the many schoolwide reform models available across the nation. They reviewed 24 different approaches and rated each based on research evidence of positive effects on student achievement. The ratings categories were: strong, promising, marginal, weak, and no research. Seven had no research, two were rated weak, six marginal, five promising and four strong. Core knowledge was rated promising.

This AIR analysis also looked at other factors including relative costs and support the program developer provides to schools. Again, Core Knowledge was rated “promising” in the area of support to schools.

A more recent study of the 24 schoolwide reform models was conducted by the U.S. Department of Education and the results were nearly identical, though a couple programs improved their ratings slightly and one was ranked lower.

Similar reviews with similar results have been conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and Phi Delta Kappa. Of particular note across program reviews is the limited data available, the lack of rigorous evaluations, and the lack of data on effectiveness in a wide range of schools beyond Title I schools. Therefore, from an educational research point of view, we do not know under what circumstances specific programs do, or do not, work. This limits generalizations applying such programs to all schools. We have no evidence that one size fits all. In fact the evidence on learning from educational research argues for a variety of approaches in order to enable all students to achieve at high levels.

At the school community level, it comes down to what the school or community values and if those values align with the particular program under consideration.

Act 51 rightly asserts that these decisions are best left to schools and communities who are then held accountable for meeting high standards.