



HAWAI'I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER

Informing the Education Community

Weighted Student Formula

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Act 51, the Reinventing Education Act of 2004, mandates that public schools in Hawai'i (with the possible exception of charter schools) will receive funding via a new method called Weighted Student Funding (WSF) by 2006-07. Let's look at some frequently asked questions about WSF.

How Does WSF Differ from Current System?

Currently schools receive funding as staffing positions based on enrollment. Under WSF schools will receive funding in dollars based on characteristics that effect learning exhibited by each student attending the school.

What Are These Characteristics and How Were They Identified?

The Committee on Weights (made up of teachers, principals, parents, etc.) identified three characteristics: economic disadvantage (as evidenced by a student's eligibility for free or reduced lunch program), lack of English proficiency, and special education. Since educating students with these characteristics requires more resources, these characteristics are "weighted" over and above the base per-pupil funding for all students. The Committee's recommendation is a .10 weight in addition to the base amount for an economically disadvantaged student, a .23 weight for limited English speakers, and a 0 weight for special education students since special education money is already distributed to schools using a federal court approved weighted staffing formula.

Adjustments in funding will also be made for small schools and possibly for particular types of schools, i.e. elementary, middle or high school.

Are There Other Characteristics That Should Be Considered?

The Committee identified 3 other characteristics for study: gifted and talented, at-risk, and mobility/transition (students such as military children who must often change schools). Characteristics to be weighted and the specific weight attached to the characteristic will be reviewed yearly.

Are Other School Districts Using WSF?

School districts such as San Francisco, Seattle, Houston, and Cincinnati use WSF. In Houston, for instance, an additional .20 weighting is given to economically disadvantaged students, .10 to bilingual students, and .12 to gifted students.

Will There Be An Increase In Education Funding With WSF?

No, WSF is a system for distributing funding. It does not increase the amount of funds approved by the legislature and released by the governor.

What Happens Next?

The Committee on Weights reported its recommendations to the Board of Education last month, but acknowledged more work needs to be done. Early test models of WSF show an elementary school in Honolulu with 58% economically disadvantaged students gaining only 3% in funding under WSF, while an elementary school with just 6% economically disadvantaged students gaining 8% in funding

What Problems Does WSF Solve?

WSF is an instrument for minimizing inequities in funding within and among school districts. Since Hawai'i is a unitary school district with statewide funding, schools in wealthier areas in Hawai'i have no more funding because of their location than schools in poorer areas. Often WSF is coupled with school choice as a way of promoting school improvement. In other words, a child whose family is dissatisfied with a school can transfer the child, and the child's funding, based on weights, moves with the child to the new school. In Hawai'i, however, school choice is not a component of WSF. Supporters of WSF say it often brings greater transparency to school funding.

Let's begin with the assumption that the more education dollars principals control, the greater likelihood money will get into the classroom. What would bottom-up management look like in Hawai'i's public schools? Principals would receive funding in a lump sum and then be able to make spending decisions that make the most sense for their particular group of students.

Will WSF Solve Education Problems In Hawai'i?

To answer this, we need to look at another Act 51 mandate that gives principals control over 70% of the DOE's operating budget. WSF funding monies will be part of this 70%. Is this "smoke and mirrors," as some critics describe it, or are these Act 51 provisions vital components of true educational reform in Hawai'i?