A POLICY HISTORY OF
STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION REFORM IN HAWAII

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Introduction

Hawaii appears to have engaged with the standards-based education reform model earlier than most states, certainly well in advance of the development of standards by national disciplinary groups and shortly after George H.W. Bush’s 1990 State of the Union address in which he set forth six educational goals for the nation. In the first Hawaii state legislative session after President Bush’s speech, 1991, the Hawaii State Legislature passed Act 334 creating the 11-member Hawaii Commission on Performance Standards, which was approved by Governor John Waihee on July 8, 1991. The findings section of the Act noted that “one of the unresolved issues in Hawaii’s educational system is accountability” (Hawaii State Legislature, 1991, p. 1045). Absent such accountability, it would be “difficult to determine the success or failure of the system in meeting the central goals of education as stated in the Hawaii Goals for Education dated September 29, 1990” (Hawaii State Commission on Performance Standards, 1994, p. 5).

The Act further asserted that standards could “insure that students in Hawaii’s public school system are able to master basic skills and essential competencies necessary to succeed in life” (Hawaii State Legislature, 1991, p. 1045). The charge to the newly-created commission was to “set the performance standards of achievement expected of students in public schools and the means to assess educational achievement.” The session law mandated an interim report to be generated by the commission by June 30, 1992, and a final report due shortly before the 1993 regular session (p. 1045).

The commission started out on its work by reviewing the local and national literature, with particular attention paid to the work done by Colorado, Kentucky, Idaho, and California, by the national professional organizations, and by the influential Secretary of Labor’s “Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills Report.” Then, over 100 local subject matter experts were consulted for their input on “what should students should know, be able to do and care about by the time they leave 12th grade” (Hawaii State Commission on Performance Standards, 1994, p. 4). This feedback was distilled into a draft document that was then taken to the people of Hawaii for their comments in “ten public forums . . . held on six different islands” (p. 4). This feedback was incorporated into a revision of the draft document, in conjunction with model standards documents, under the general guidance of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) staff.

Finally, PREL convened meetings of the commission to solicit their feedback and eventual approval of the draft standards. At this time, the commission also “decided to establish content standards” as a “prerequisite to performance standards” (p. 6). Although they clearly specified that they did not want to link the draft standards with “any specific assessment procedure,” they did discuss key criteria that should guide the state’s assessment efforts and recommended participation in both the development of the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing’s (CRESST) history assessment instrument and the New Standards Project (Hawaii State Commission on Performance Standards, 1993, p. 137). The bulk of the December 1993 “Preliminary Final Report” of the commission was composed of their draft standards (Hawaii State Commission on Performance Standards, 1993).
The commission’s June 1994 “Final Report” was far more voluminous and divided the more thoroughly elaborated “content and performance standards” into two sections: “by content area (i.e. in all grade levels in language arts, math, science, etc) [and] by grade level sections (i.e. all content areas sectioned K-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-12)” (Hawaii State Commission on Performance Standards, 1994, p. v). Another salient difference between the preliminary report and the final report was the latter’s more intensive focus on the establishment of an assessment system coordinated with the standards, guided by six criteria and three recommendations (pp. 364–367).

Furthermore, a model cited as a promising one for implementing standards-based education in Hawaii was the relationship between teaching and research inherent in the University of Hawaii’s Curriculum Research & Development Group’s partnership with the University Laboratory School (pp. 375–376).

**Hawaii Content and Performance Standards I, the “Blue Book”**

The work of the commission was published in 1994 as the “Hawaii Content and Performance Standards” (HCPS). Commonly known as the “Blue Book,” it provided “standards for students completing the final year in each of four sets of grades—K-3 (primary), 4-6 (elementary), 7-8 (middle school), and 9-12 (high school)” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission 1999, p. 7). These standards were adopted by the Board of Education (BOE) in October, 1994 (“Standards: setting,” 1995).

They were voluminous: 1,544 standards in all including “495 . . . in language arts, 119 in mathematics, 418 in science, 133 in social studies, 113 in health and fitness, 89 in fine arts, 101 in home and work skills, and 76 in world languages” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission 1999, p. 8).

During the 1994 session, the Hawaii State Legislature passed a law that would become Section 302A-201, Hawaii Revised Statutes. This statute called upon the BOE to appoint a “performance standards review commission, to be convened at the beginning of the 1997–1998 school year, and every four years thereafter” composed of various education stakeholders and professionals (Hawaii State Legislature, 1994). In addition to the representatives of the Hawaii State Parent Teacher Student Association, the Hawaii State Student Council, the State Superintendent of Education, the Dean of the University of Hawaii College of Education, and the professional education committee seats required by statute, the BOE also appointed “a principal, a School Renewal Specialist, an intermediate school teacher, a Title I teacher, a business community representative, and a representative of the community-at-large.” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 1999, p. 9–10). The commission was charged to “review the implementation of the performance standards by the board and the schools to determine whether or not the standards should be modified” (Hawaii State Legislature, 1994).

Hawaii’s momentum and pioneering role were maintained at the national level when Hawaii became the first state to receive federal money to develop standards under President Clinton’s Goals 2000 legislation in July 1994. (“A Goals,” 1998 ¶ 6)
The Performance Standards Review Commission (PSRC), created by Hawaii Revised Statutes 302A-201 in 1994, came together in 1998 to fulfill its duties. It convened public forums, received testimony, visited schools, gathered expert opinion, made presentations to key stakeholders, conducted an extensive review of “more than 50 standards documents,” and was briefed on “the significance of standards in regard to federally funded programs, particularly Goals 2000 and Title I” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission 1999, pp. 1, 10).

Perhaps the most crucial finding of its January 1999 final report was that “standards-based education is an extremely effective way to improve student learning”; other key findings were that the “Blue Book” lacked performance standards, didn’t cover some academic areas, and wasn’t “user-friendly” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission 1999, p. 2). The lack of an “overarching vision” and “systematic implementation plan” hampered utilization of standards as well (p. 2). Furthermore, the report stated that “a statewide assessment system is lacking” and should be developed, aligned with the standards (p. 2). The report also contextualized Hawaii’s efforts by noting that “as of 1995, 48 states were engaged in developing academic standards.” (p. 5).

In its discussion of the school community forums held by the commission, the report noted that public feedback indicated that there were too many standards, most of the performance standards are actually content-oriented, [and] many standards are duplicative and difficult to understand” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission 1999, p. 13). A tremendous need for additional time, resources, and guidance in understanding and using the standards came up again and again as well (p. 15).

The Curriculum Research & Development Group at the University of Hawaii at Manoa executed a Memorandum of Agreement to organize, analyze, and summarize each school’s review of the standards and to study instructional modules or standards applications that have been developed by individual schools or several schools grouped in a complex” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission 1999, p. 18). The ensuing report, “Hawaii Content and Performance Standards: Schools’ Review of Standards and Instructional Module Development” (Lai, 1998) was provided to the commission by principal investigator Dr. Morris Lai during a February 27, 1998 meeting. It proved to be “very useful to the Commission’s deliberations” and helped the commission to understand “that schools and complexes vary considerably both in their understanding of the assigned tasks and in the extent to which they tried to accomplish them” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 1999, p. 18).

In their literature review, the commission was especially interested in “criteria for judging standards,” which led them to give careful consideration to the work of “the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Council for Basic Education, Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL), Southern California Comprehensive Assessment Center, U.S. Department of Education, and the state of California Academic Standards Commission” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 1999, pp. 18–19). They examined model programs
for implementation as well, especially the National Center on Education and the Economy’s New Standards Project, which had already certified 15 trainers through the Department of Education’s (DOE) Office of Accountability and School Instructional Support. Model material from other states was examined, “particularly Vermont, Delaware, Kentucky, and Virginia—states regularly lauded for their progress by such organizations as the Educational Commission of the States and cited for their programs by the U.S. Department of Education” (pp. 18–19).

In 1999, the DOE drafted “a comprehensive needs assessment of the public schools system” which “found that the ‘Blue Book’ did not adequately reflect some important dispositions, attitudes, and skills that students should achieve” (Hawaii State Auditor, 2001, p. 3).

Hawaii Content and Performance Standards II, the “Rainbow Series”

In response to the 1999 Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission report and the DOE’s 1999 “comprehensive needs assessment,” the DOE promulgated the HCPS II, often referred to as the “rainbow series” after the differently colored booklets of standards for 10 academic subjects (Hawaii State Auditor, 2001, pp. 2–3) In August 1999, these were approved by the BOE (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 2003, p. 20). This second round of standards not only covered a more comprehensive array of subject matter areas, but it also included true performance standards and reduced the number of standards considerably from 1,544 to 139, although these performance standards were not entirely complete upon publication (Hawaii State Auditor, 2001, p. 3). It also grouped them “into grade clusters, rather than grade levels” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission 2003, p. 20). In addition, the DOE also drafted the booklet “Making Sense of Standards” in 1999 (OASIS/SRG, 1999) to enhance the user friendliness of the standards, as suggested by the commission’s January 1999 report. The report noted that “placing standards at the core of the system unified curriculum, instruction, assessment/accountability, and staff development” (p. 6). It also reiterated the importance of General Learner Outcomes as “the goals of standard-based learning.” These outcomes are as follows: “The ability to be responsible for one’s own learning; the understanding that it is essential for human beings to work together; the ability to be involved in complex thinking and problem solving; [and] the ability to recognize and produce quality performance and quality products” (p. 7).

An important national conference held in 1999 by the Council for Basic Education in collaboration with the Johnson Foundation with key stakeholders nationwide, the “Wingspread Conference,” helped Hawaii change agents “to identify the key issues related to the implementation of the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards in a standards-based system” (Hawaii Department of Education, 2005b, ¶ 7). Prominent among these key issues was a recognition of the need to enhance teacher support and improve alignment of assessments with standards.
In addition to participating in the conference, the DOE also consulted “guidelines developed for the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers” (Hawaii State Auditor, 2001, p. 3). All of this work culminated in the final drafting of revised content standards by June 1999, which were adopted by the BOE during August 1999. That same month, the DOE began writing performance standards (Hawaii State Auditor, 2001, p. 3).

During the 2000 session, the Hawaii State Legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 57, which requested the Legislative Auditor “to review and assess the Department of Education’s development of educational standards for public schools statewide to ensure that Hawaii’s standards for competency in the basic educational skills are on par with the standards of other states” (Hawaii State Legislature, 2000, ¶ 5). The resolution also mentioned that a primary motivation for requesting this study was that “a national study on the development of educational standards by states, indicat[ed] that Hawaii’s overall grade was D-minus and ranked 44 in its English, History, Geography, Science, and Math standards” (¶ 3). The study referred to appears to be the 1999 edition of the Education Week annual national review, “Quality Counts.” The 1999 Quality Counts assessment gave the state a D- for standards and assessments in large part because “the state got a failing grade for the clarity and specificity of its standards from the American Federation of Teachers” (Education Week, 1999, ¶ 1).

The Hawaii State Auditor has a policy of not responding to single body resolutions requesting reports from the state Senate or House alone. It does, however, respond to concurrent resolutions that have passed both the House and Senate, as Senate Concurrent Resolution 57 did during the 2000 session. To facilitate its analysis, the Auditor contracted with a firm nationally-known in the field of standards, McREL. McREL was tasked to assess “each content standard for coherence, clarity, and comprehensiveness” (Hawaii State Auditor, 2001, summary section ¶ 3). The report summary defined their use of the terms as follows:

Coherence refers to how well each standards document is organized so that the material will make sense to the reader and will be easy to use. Clarity refers to how clearly the standards describe the concepts and skills that students should learn and can demonstrate. Comprehensiveness refers to whether the concepts and skills address significant concepts and skills for each subject area, whether the concepts and skills are presented at the appropriate level of difficulty, and whether the content and skills described are specific enough to be meaningful. (summary section ¶ 3)

The standards were determined to be generally “coherent and well organized” in the core academic areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, although “the level of specificity of some benchmarks is inconsistent” (summary section ¶ 3). Improvement of the clarity of the standards was recommended. While the core subject matter area standards covered “significant concepts and skills,” it was noted that they could nevertheless “benefit from the inclusion of skills and concepts found in highly regarded state and national documents” (summary section ¶ 6). Other more concrete, specific revisions were urged as well. Mathematics received special praise; “the job is nearly complete” (p. 36).
The Auditor’s examination of the strategic plan of the DOE also noted that they field tested standards-based “student assessments in reading, writing, and math” on 51,000 students in May 2000 for a statewide rollout during Spring 2001 (p. 6). This instrument would be complemented “with a portion of the Stanford Achievement Tests, 9th edition” (p. 6). As assessment would be linked to standards, so, too, would professional development and curricular support, according to Superintendent Paul Le Mahieu’s address at the Annual Leadership Conference in August 2000. The audit noted that concrete steps were beginning to be taken in this area.

In 2002, the Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission convened again under the mandate of Hawaii Revised Statutes 302A-201, assisted by “ample logistical and technical support” from Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 2003, p. 6). They issued their final report in January 2003, which made a wide variety of findings and recommendations designed to support the ongoing improvement of the reform model. Among the most salient was that “the DOE had made appropriate revisions suggested in the state audit of the HCPS II’s core content areas (language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science), conducted by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.” The commission also noted that “performance standards are in the final stages of development” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Commission, 2003, p. 2). Furthermore, the BOE and DOE came under criticism for failing to establish a system “to attend or respond to the seven recommendations of 1998 PSRC report. This has made it difficult for the current Commissioners to evaluate the quality of the BOE’s and DOE’s responses to the PSRC’s first recommendations” (p. 3).

In spite of a variety of concrete criticisms, the report did cite the Standards Implementation Design System and the Strategic Implementation Plan as valuable tools for establishing standards on a firmer footing (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 2003, p. 49). Finally, the report issued in January 2003 continued to vigorously support the notion that standards-based education would “produce consistently high results for all children across Hawaii” (p. 5). While the report was generally positive, it stated that HCPS II was still “a ‘work in progress’ when it came to direct linkages to the General Learner Outcomes, clear criteria or rubrics, samples of student work, and strategies to meet diverse learner needs” (pp. 21–22).

Hawaii Content and Performance Standards III

After working with the Auditor to identify shortcomings in HCPS II, McREL was contracted by the DOE to implement their findings by revising the standards to create HCPS III. Over the course of 2003–2005, McREL once again supported standards development in Hawaii by working with the DOE to develop “recommendations for revision of Hawaii state standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, educational technology, health, physical education, career and life skills, and world languages” with particular attention given to the development of performance standards (Mid-continent Research for Education and
Learning, 2009, ¶ 6). In addition, “revisions included a consistent grain size for standards and benchmarks, the use of Marzano’s New Taxonomy to develop benchmarks, and alignment with instructional time available in the classroom” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 2006, p. 15).

During this period, the DOE also moved to address the commission’s concern from their 2003 report for enhanced standards-based teacher training by developing a train-the-trainer model in which “state level staff train district/complex area cadre who then work with schools” (OCISS, 2006, p. 15). DOE also developed a “professional development series of modules, entitled Transforming Our Teaching and Learning (TOTAL)” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 2006, p. 16), and DOE produced a video shown on Olelo public access television and the Internet (OCISS, 2006, p. 15).

External policy developments during this period also impacted standards-based education. Most notably this is included Act 51, Session Laws of Hawaii 2004, which “replaced the Standards Implementation Design (SID) school improvement plan with the Academic and Financial Plan which required closer alignment of funds with student achievement of the HCPS” (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 2006, p. 16). Recommendations for the ongoing improvement of the standards culminated in BOE approval between April and August 2005 of the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards III in nine content areas; these documents include K–12 content standards, grade level/course benchmarks, a sample performance assessment for each benchmark, and a rubric that enables teachers to judge the performance of students with respect to the expected level of rigor of the benchmark (p. 15).

Among the reasons for the transition from HCPS II to HCPS III were reports from teachers “that HCPS II lacked the specificity by grade level and courses, was unrealistic—due to the sheer number of standards—to teach and students to learn in one year, [and] lacked performance standards (measures of quality)” (OCISS, 2006, p. 2). Other key motivators for change included external reviews from nationally recognized experts, and the 2003 PSRC report.

Among the national experts whose opinions seemed to carry some weight were those of Dr. W. James Popham of the University of California at Los Angeles, who gave a presentation to Superintendent Patricia Hamamoto and staff in Honolulu on April 17, 2003. In this presentation, Dr. Popham (2003) urged adoption of what he termed “instructionally sensitive NCLB tests.” These would “(1) measure only a modest number of super-significant curricular aims, (2) supply lucid teacher-palatable descriptions of what’s to be assessed, and (3) provide instructionally informative results so that a student’s mastery of each assessed curricular aim can be determined” (Popham, 2003, ¶ 1). Absent achievement of these objectives, Popham argued, states risk “failure to make adequate yearly progress on tests whose very nature makes such progress essentially unattainable.” The solution he suggests is the division of existing standards into those that are desirable, very desirable, and essential and to “focus on only the essential standards” (Popham, 2000, pp. 30–36).
In response to the feedback from all of these sources, the DOE’s Office of Curriculum, Instruction & Student Support (OCISS) developed several criteria that would be used to guide the transition from HCPS II to HCPS III. Presented to the Board of Education on March 14, 2006, these were to

- Provide specificity of expectations by grade level and courses . . .
- Communicate expectations for ALL students . . .
- Identifying grade level and course standards . . . implementable . . . within the instructional time frame.
- Be comparable to national and highly regarded state standards.
- Provide rubrics to assess students’ learning which are based on the taxonomic levels of thinking (rigor.)

(OCISS, 2006, p. 7)

By 2006, it was again time for the Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission to reconvene, as per statute. As in 2003, they issued a thorough report (Hawaii State Performance Standards Review Commission, 2006) with numerous findings and recommendations. Perhaps the two most notable ones were that “the 2006 PSRC recommends that the Hawaii Content and Performance Standard III has undergone rigorous development and that it need not be modified at this time” (p. 5) and that “national organizations have found the HCPS to be valid and rigorous” (p. 4).

A Historical Overview of the Evaluation of Hawaii Standards-Based Education by National Organizations

In the course of its three successive versions, the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards have indeed undergone extensive review by nationally-respected external entities for well over a decade. In 1995, one of the leading proponents of standards-based education, the American Federation of Teachers led by then-president Albert Shanker, issued the first “comprehensive analysis of education standards in the states” (American Federation of Teachers, 1999, p. 2). This report, “Making Standards Matter,” would become an influential annual review of the state of standards in all of the states promulgating standards, one which continued through 2001. “Making Standards Matter” sought to evaluate whether or not state standards in four core academic subjects (English, math, science, and social studies) were clear and rigorous, and to briefly examine their relationship to assessments, student incentives, and academic intervention. The report suffers from an inconsistent reporting format that changed over time, making a longitudinal comparison somewhat difficult. See Table 1 for the reports for Hawaii from 1995 through 2001.
Table 1.
American Federation of Teachers’ Making Sense of Standards Report Card for Hawaii Standards

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Science</th>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>borderline</td>
<td>between borderline and exemplary</td>
<td>between borderline and exemplary</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>borderline</td>
<td>between borderline and exemplary</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>“no reading basics or writing conventions” in elementary and middle; no writing conventions in high school; “vague reading comprehension” all levels</td>
<td>“vague content” except for middle level, which was “clear, specific, and grounded in content”</td>
<td>“unclear and vague content”</td>
<td>“no world history; vague U.S. history”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>standards not “clear and specific enough to meet AFT criteria”; “has or will have an assessment system aligned with the standards”; standards not “given in the four core areas”; “standards not given in the four core areas at least once at each level”; no “documents describing the performance needed to meet the standards.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>data not available</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>“not clear or specific at any level”</td>
<td>“clear and specific at three levels”</td>
<td>“not clear or specific at any level”</td>
<td>“not clear or specific at any level”</td>
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Arguably the other most significant ongoing annual national review of the states’ educational standards has been that conducted by the national newspaper of record for K–12 education, Education Week. This review, called “Quality Counts,” began in 1997 and continues
to the present day. The initial 1997 edition mentioned that work on standards-based education began in Hawaii in 1994. It also quoted the chair of the state’s Goals 2000 Panel on Assessment, Teaching, and Learning, Lois-ellin Datta, that she felt “it is doubtful that many teachers know about the new standards, have copies of them, and have done much to link specific curriculum elements and assessments to the framework” (Trotter, 1997, p. 96). Instead, the report stated that “the school system considers its most important recent reform to be the movement to school- and community-based management” (p. 96). In 1998, it was noted that, while standards were in their third year, “there still is no funding to develop the accompanying assessment” and that the standardized test used in math and reading is not aligned to state standards” (Manzo, 1998, p. 138). In 1999, the state’s grade from Quality Counts dropped considerably to a D-: “the state got a failing grade for the clarity and specificity of its standards from the American Federation of Teachers.” (Education Week, 1999, p. 140)

While the state’s grade improved only marginally in 2000, that year’s report did mention Superintendent LeMahieu’s concerted effort “to make Hawaii’s content and performance standards the centerpiece of the education system” (Jacobson, 2000, p. 112). That year’s assessment also made reference to the criticisms of the PSRC 1999 report: vagueness, lack of standards for certain content areas, and an absence of performance standards. Further noted was LaMahieu’s call for a system-wide needs assessment. Delivered in February 1999, it cited the “need to improve standards-based learning” in addition to five other core needs (p. 112). In conjunction with the commission’s report, the two documents were “being used to point the department in the direction of standards-based reform” (p. 112). Steps to come included the development of performance standards and piloting that year of the Hawaii Assessment Program of Outcomes.

By the 2001 edition of Quality Counts, Superintendent LeMahieu was able to claim that “we’re starting to gain some serious momentum” (Jacobson, 2001, p. 130). “Standards alliance teams” from the DOE fanned out to provide training in standards implementation at nearly half of the DOE schools by the time of the report. Furthermore, that year each school was “expected to turn in its first ‘standards implementation design’, a standards-based document that replaces various other school-level planning activities” (p. 130). As had been the case since the inception of the Quality Counts review, Hawaii’s assessment practices remained an area in need of improvement, which was being addressed by “the development of a new program of criterion-referenced assessments aligned with the state standards” (p. 130).

Not until HCPS III was adopted by the BOE in 2005 did Hawaii’s score on the Quality Counts report rise above the C and D level, to a B+ for the years 2005 and 2006. However, since Quality Counts is typically issued in January of each year, and HCPS III was adopted by the BOE between April and August 2005, Hawaii’s much-improved grades from Education Week between 2003–2005 may have been an increasingly positive response to the performance standards that were released after HCPS II was approved by the BOE in August 1999. See Table 2 for Hawaii’s report card from 1997 through 2006.
Table 2. *Education Week* Quality Counts Hawaii Standards and Assessments Report Card

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<td>Grade</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B+</td>
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Other important external reviews of Hawaii’s standards over the years have come from the Thomas Fordham Foundation, the American Federation of Teachers (distinct from its previous “Making Standards Matter” review), Achieve, Inc., and the Hoover Institution.

Like the American Federation of Teachers and *Education Week*, the Thomas Fordham Foundation has a relatively long history of analyzing state standards. This takes the form of either analyzing specific subject matter areas across the country or examining a group of core academic subject matter areas across the country. For example, in 1997 Hawaii’s HCPS I English standards were reviewed. Their report was ambiguous. Fordham determined that the standards “do not express high academic standards” (Stotsky, 1997, p. 2) and yet elsewhere in the report called them “clear” and “demanding” (p. 5). In 1998, Fordham issued a number of reports on individual subject matter areas which were later consolidated into a single report that same year. The 1998 report of the states’ history standards found that in Hawaii “no standards were available for review” (Saxe, 1998, p. 29). Similarly, geography was graded “incomplete.” What they could find about geography was “embedded in Hawaii’s social studies framework” and judged “neither comprehensive nor rigorous” (Munroe & Smith, 1998, ¶ 1). Mathematics standards in 1998, graded on “clarity, content, reason, and negative qualities,” were called “vague” and given no points at all in the categories of clarity and reason (Raimi & Braden, 1998, p. 30).

The bright spot was science. Even though Hawaii science standards were criticized for suffering “from the limitation of lists” and failure to emphasize “the connectedness that is so essential to science,” they were still given an A grade and tied for second place in the nation (Lerner, 1998, pp. viii, 21). In the cumulative report issued later that year, Hawaii received a combined score of D+ for its F grades in English and Math and it’s A in Science (Finn, Petrilli, & Vanourek, 1998). In spite of having such a low grade, however, Hawaii’s score was still slightly above the median, coming in at 21st place.

In Fordham’s second multi-disciplinary nationwide review released in 2000, Hawaii did even worse, coming in 44th place on a review of HCPS II. The report card yielded an F in English, geography, and history, a C in Math, a D in science, and a D- cumulatively. A common complaint was vagueness, too much breadth, and a lack of specifics. The drop in the science grade from an A to a D was a dramatic change, although the analysis commented positively that
“a competent committee assigned to flesh out” the science standards might result in “one of the finest science standards in the nation” (Finn & Petrelli, 2000, pp. 49–50).

In 2003, U.S. history standards were examined by Fordham nationwide. As in 2000, Hawaii received an F. Fordham noted that Hawaii’s standards reflected “the outlook of ‘Meeting the Challenge: A Framework for Social Studies Restructuring’ published in 1992 by the National Council for the Social Studies,” a model that was apparently none too popular with Fordham. The report further criticized Hawaii’s U.S. history standards for an “ambivalent and almost anti-intellectual approach to historical knowledge” (Stern, Chesson, Klee & Spoehr, 2003, p. 36).

In 2005, Fordham’s analysts turned their attention to state math standards nationwide. Here, Hawaii’s math standards grade reverted from a C back to the F it had originally received in Fordham’s first national report on the subject in 1998. The 2005 Fordham math report blasted Hawaii’s standards saying, “There is little that can be salvaged in Hawaii’s mathematics standards” (Klein, Braams, Parker, Quirk, Schmid, Wilson, Finn, Torres, Braden & Raimi, 2005, p. 56). In math, as with U.S. history mentioned above, a portion of Fordham’s negative appraisal could stem from their dissatisfaction with the models promulgated by the national disciplinary organizations. In a response defending their HCPS II math standards, the DOE noted that they were “modeled after National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Principles and Standards for School Mathematics (PSSM) 2000” (Hawaii Department of Education, 2005a, ¶ 2). States that built on this organization’s work were criticized by Fordham for an “unfortunate embrace of the advice of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics” (Klein, Braams, Parker, Quirk, Schmid, Wilson, Finn, Torres, Braden & Raimi, 2005, p. 7). In its further defense, the DOE noted that “while California received the Fordham Institute’s highest rating and Hawaii received one of its lowest, both states scored equally well on the 2003 NAEP mathematics assessment for grades 4 and 8” (Hawaii Department of Education, 2005a, ¶ 4).

In 2005, Fordham also looked at English and science standards. In science, Fordham’s earlier optimism that Hawaii’s science standards could be “among the finest in the nation” with a little improvement had apparently fallen by the wayside. Hawaii’s science standards were called “bloated,” “poorly organized,” “with a quality of writing . . . so weak that one wonders if there has even been a single proofreading” (Gross, Goodenough, Lerner, Haack, Schwartz, Schwartz & Finn, 2005, p. 35). Hawaii’s grade in that subject dropped from a D in 2000 to an F in 2005 (p. 20). Unlike math, the grade for Hawaii’s English standards improved from 2000 to 2005, from a D to C. Furthermore, Fordham’s report said that, overall, the addition of performance standards to HCPS II “considerably strengthen[ed] understanding of the 1999 standards” (Stotsky & Finn, 2005, p. 39). Nevertheless, they were still judged in the main to be “vague, undemanding, and unmeasurable” (p. 39).

Fordham rated state world history standards in 2006. Hawaii did poorly yet again, earning an F for standards that were “truly weak” and presented in such a way so that “it is not clear that Hawaii’s students will learn anything about world history” (Mead, Finn & Davis, 2006, p. 43–44). Hawaii continued to rank poorly in Fordham’s 2006 nationwide assessment of standards in core academic subject areas, receiving an F and a ranking of 47, down from a grade
and ranking of D- and 44 in the previous report in 2000, and a D+ and 21st place finish in 1998. Hawaii was given a C in English and an F in all other remaining subjects: math, science, U.S. history, and world history, although the report held out hope that “more specificity would go a long way” (Finn, Julian, & Petrilli, 2006, p. 62).

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) quit publishing their annual Making Standards Matter series in 2001. In 2006, however, they revisited the issue of the alignment of state tests required under No Child Left Behind with state standards. AFT identified “strong” criteria for content standards in math and science but not reading. In Hawaii, however, they didn’t see assessment aligned with standards in any of these subjects, making Hawaii one of only nine states to earn a 0% in this category (American Federation of Teachers, 2006a, pp. 8, 13). This judgment, however, was probably because AFT found that “there are no test documents available online that identify the standards to be assessed by the states,” not because such instruments didn’t exist (American Federation of Teachers, 2006, p. 1). In fact, contrary to AFT’s claims, the DOE had already rolled out standards-aligned tests for grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 in 2002 (Jacobson, 2003, p. 125).

In any event, this perception has perhaps been laid to rest by “new, grade-level specific tests that are closely aligned with the latest Hawaii Content and Performance Standards III. The new tests, developed and administered by American Institutes for Research (AIR), provide a better measure of how well students are learning what they are expected to learn in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10” (McClelland, 2007, ¶ 1–2).

Achieve, Inc. is a business-oriented education reform organization that focuses on helping states’ graduate high school students who are “college and work ready.” In 2004, they conducted an examination comparing “the graduation exams in six states—Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas—” to assess the tests’ “content and rigor” and the appropriateness of their cut scores (Achieve, Inc., 2006, p. 1). The resulting report, “Do High School Graduation Exams Measure Up?” drew the attention of the DOE as a means of evaluating one of their primary assessment instruments. In 2005, the DOE asked Achieve, Inc. to utilize the same methodology to compare Hawaii’s “grade 10 Hawaii State Assessment in reading and mathematics with the six states’ exams” (p. 1). Their report on Hawaii concluded that “the reading test is generally less demanding than those of other states, [while] the mathematics test contains considerably more challenging content than tests from other states” although “neither assessment is overly rigorous” (p. 1).

More specific findings included the sense that “Hawaii’s reading test puts a premium on comprehension of informational text” over literature, which Achieve claims is preferred by colleges and business. However, the expository prose given emphasis in the testing instrument tended to be of “relatively low cognitive complexity,” making it “among the least rigorous” of the states tests’ they examined (p. 2). Cut scores for “meets proficiency” in reading were comparable to those of other states, although they opined that this was nevertheless a relatively low bar, more comparable to ACT’s test for 8th and 9th graders than ACT’s test for college admissions (p. 2).
In math, Hawaii’s test was considered “well balanced” and “rigorous”; in fact, “more rigorous than all but one of the states analyzed in Achieve’s earlier study” (p. 2). They gave special praise for Hawaii’s emphasis on advanced algebra, especially in light of their sense “that Algebra II is fast replacing Algebra I as the gatekeeper course for success in college and the high skills workplace” (p. 2–3). They also found “the content demand” to be “higher than those in other states,” while “the test items themselves are less cognitively demanding” (p. 3). On balance, this put the cut scores for “meets proficiency” in math slightly above those of the other states they looked at. As with reading, however, a caveat was added: meeting proficiency in this test was equivalent to 8th grade math “in most other countries” (p. 3).

Achieve recommended that “the overall rigor of the grade 10 reading test” be raised, the cut score of the reading test be raised over time, and “the level of performance demand of the mathematics items” be raised (p. 3).

In another important external review of Hawaii’s standards made by the Hoover Institution in 2005 comparing the “strength of state proficiency standards,” Hawaii ranked 6th out of 40 states, receiving a B grade (Peterson & Hess, 2005, p. 53). As study co-author Frederick M. Hess remarked, “We want to be sure that states that are really stepping up to the challenge like Hawai’i are being recognized” (Essoyan, 2005, ¶ 8).

**Conclusion**

“States such as California, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Texas had all begun to implement standards-based reform in the 1980s using their own funds” (Hamilton, Steecher & Yuan, 2008, p. 24). While not among these pioneers, Hawaii does appear to have been ahead of the curve on standards-based education in the United States. Passage of Act 334, Session Laws of Hawaii 1991, created the Hawaii Commission on Performance Standards and set the state on the road to implementing this reform model prior to the passage of the federal Goals 2000 legislation and well before most of the disciplinary organizations had even begun drafting model standards. Furthermore, Hawaii was the first state to receive Goals 2000 funding for work on standards (“A Goals,” 1998, ¶ 6). Under Superintendent Paul Le Mahieu’s leadership, the DOE made a concerted effort “to make Hawaii’s content and performance standards the centerpiece of the education system” (Jacobson, 2000, p. 112). Superintendent Patricia Hamamoto has continued this commitment during her tenure. In spite of this early start, however, Hawaii has never been among those states consistently lauded by external reviewers as having exemplary standards across the board. One early bright spot was the initial reception of HCPS I science standards by the Fordham Institute in 1998.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Hawaii’s efforts to continually refine the state standards documents have certainly born fruit. Since HCPS III was released in 2005, Hawaii has received consistent B+ ratings from the *Education Week* Quality Counts survey, with particular praise directed at English standards and middle and high school level social studies/history standards (“Quality counts,” 2005, ¶ 3).
In fairness to Hawaii, many external reviewers were harsh judges of many other states’ efforts in the early years of the movement. For example, Hawaii’s overall grade of D+ from Fordham in 1998 was still good enough for a 21st place ranking (Finn, Petrilli, & Vanourek, 1998).

In fact, even today many leading educational policy experts, such as Jane Hathaway, director of the Education Policy Center at the Urban Institute, consider many of the states’ standards “too voluminous, superficial, and repetitive,” offering “little coherent direction for instruction” (Viadero, 2008, p. 11). To help address these persistent shortcomings nationwide, the National Academy of Education has developed draft recommendations with a final report to be published soon. One of their key recommendations is to urge the “federal government, in coordination with partnerships among state, universities, groups of teachers, scholars, and the private sector” to “redesign . . . content standards—and the curricula, professional development that go with them—to present clear progressions for teaching and learning” (National Academy of Education, 2008, ¶ 7). It is precisely these kinds of stakeholders that the Curriculum Research & Development Group of the University of Hawaii at Manoa is working with now to review, essentialize, and clarify the benchmarks of HCPS III in a “mid-course correction” under a memorandum of agreement executed in July 2008. Now that the 2010 Performance Standards Review Commission has formally convened to fulfill its statutorily required duty to review the standards every four years, they may endorse these types of collaborative efforts called for by national policy experts. In this way, Hawaii can, as the National Academy of Education is encouraging, be part of a national renaissance designed to recover “the promise in standards-based education,” particularly by examining standards holistically in conjunction with assessments, professional development, and teacher training (Viadero, 2008, p. 11).
References


