

## **Introduction**

The newly appointed Hawai'i State Board of Education ("Board") began its work on April 26, 2011. The Hawai'i State Department of Education ("Department") was facing a number of challenges including: financial cutbacks, public confidence issues in the aftermath of "furlough Fridays," low national performance rankings, protracted labor negotiations, and a lack of clarity of mission. The first task of the new Board and was to collaboratively work with the Department and all stakeholders to develop a comprehensive Strategic Plan that set a bold course for improvement and to bring everyone together around a shared vision. The resulting Strategic Plan centered first upon: Student Achievement, second, Staff Development and third, Systems of Support.

The Board's primary focus over the last four years has been about addressing these three critical objectives. We reorganized the Board's bylaws, committee structure, and reviewed every policy to ensure all were in alignment with these objectives and at the same time reduced the Board's expense budget by over seventy percent. Under the leadership of the Superintendent, the Department itself also went through a significant internal reorganization, including changes in reporting structure, job functions, and a major senior staff replacement. Again, these adjustments were made in alignment with the Strategic Plan's three primary objectives.

## **Student Achievement**

An important improvement initiated to reach our Student Achievement goals was the development of the Strive HI Performance System ("Strive HI"), which replaced the more narrowly focused and ineffective No Child Left Behind ("NCLB") Adequate Yearly Progress ("AYP") system. Under Strive HI, the Department expanded the NCLB requirements with critically important additional annual targets, known as Annual Measurable Objectives ("AMOs"). These included not only student academic proficiency, but also, student achievement growth goals; targets and focus were placed upon improvements in school attendance, graduation rates and college admittance targets. These expanded objectives reflected the belief and commitment that every student in Hawaii can achieve college and career readiness success. The annual results of the Strategic Plan are announced publicly and the detailed data behind the

numbers are online for any parent or taxpayer to review at a system, complex, and individual school level.

As a Board and Department, we have asked much from our professional staff and our students in terms of setting higher learning goals. We have outstanding teachers, educational leaders and students. We should be very proud of their remarkable achievements. As a result of their efforts, our State has seen unprecedented growth in national assessment scores, more students are entering college, fewer are in need of college remediation, more are taking and passing Advanced Placement tests, more schools are getting accredited, the achievement gap has narrowed, and our school attendance numbers have shown steady improvements. U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated upon his recent visit: “the only way you get better is to challenge the status quo. The only way to accelerate the rate of change is to do something different. The progress has been extraordinary. Hawai’i by any objective measure – is one of the fastest improving states in the nation – top five states, that’s top 10 percent in the nation.” Education Weekly, a professional publication that ranks all fifty states by using forty different educational indicators ranked Hawaii 37th in Student Achievement in 2010. Their most recent 2015 report ranked Hawaii an impressive 18th in Student Achievement and 23rd, overall.

The Board also tackled three other long-standing challenges that impact Student Achievement performance: charter schools, Hawaiian Immersion program and our State high school graduation requirements. In terms of charter schools, we participated in the Act 130 Charter School Task Force and worked diligently with all stakeholders to successfully implement the recommendations, which included the establishment of the Hawai’i State Public Charter School Commission.. Today, all public Hawaii charter schools have a specific signed agreement that clearly outlines their mission and accountabilities while still defining their uniqueness in purpose. Additionally, after a comprehensive 18-month review of the Department’s Hawaiian Immersion program, the Board passed two landmark policies (2104 and 2105) that specifically and clearly stated the mission, accountabilities, and acknowledged the importance of Hawaiian Immersion for our entire public school system. The policies more rigorous objectives and purpose were overwhelmingly supported by Hawaiian stakeholder groups. The Department has worked diligently with representatives from the University of Hawai’i at Manoa and Hilo to establish a new statewide testing tool for the program for the upcoming year. Also, after 12-months of weighting various stakeholder input, the Board unanimously passed Board Policy 4540 which set clear statewide graduation diploma upgraded standards that reflect the required skills to be prepared for 21st century career and college readiness.

## Staff Development

Staff development and empowerment are critical cornerstones for continued success. Early in the process, the Superintendent and Board addressed the reporting lines, compensation and job function of the state's fifteen Complex Area Superintendents ("CAS"). These are the individuals who, along with their principals, have direct accountability for staff and longitudinal student success. Important changes were made to give these educational leaders, not only the responsibility, but also the authority to make decisions at the school and community level. A large part of our overall systemic success is directly a result of the leadership of these community-based CASs and their principals. Over the last four years, the Board has had the privilege to appoint over two-thirds of the CASs to their current positions. Each of these individuals bring new energy, strong leadership, and a culture of caring to their respective communities statewide. As part of their accountability, each CAS provides the Department, the Board and the public a comprehensive annual report on their progress within their community schools in achieving their shared strategic plan goals. Other important staff development improvements included changes in teacher tenure and the rollout of new induction and mentoring programs, both of which have resulted in an important decline in our costly teacher turnover as well as improved teaching effectiveness.

We have outstanding teachers who too often go under appreciated. Continued development support is needed. A recent poll reflected that 64% of the teachers surveyed agreed that setting learning goals and monitoring progress are important for improving teaching practices. The keys are the reduction of their administrative burden and providing them with the tools, trust, and encouragement to be successful. Much work remains to be done in staff development and support. A critical project is currently underway, which is the development of a true and comprehensive leadership training program for our educational officers and leadership teachers.

The Department recently filled and the Board confirmed five key senior leadership positions in the following offices: Human Resources; Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Support; Strategy, Innovation and Performance; School Facilities and Support Services and the position of Deputy Superintendent, who serves as the Department's Chief Academic Officer. Each of these individuals is outstanding and is truly committed to staff development and empowerment. Overall, the Superintendent's senior management team today is a high caliber group of professionals that are dedicated to the success of the student and the support of the staff.

## **Systems of Support**

When the volunteer Board began its journey four years ago, one of the most surprising challenges was a lack of data to make informed decisions. Timely data was not only lacking in the boardroom, but also, within the administrative offices and the classroom. Our educational system is woefully behind in information management systems, and as a result our employees are burdened by excessive paperwork. One of the first significant support achievements for the Department was the development of a comprehensive Student Database. This system gives educators tools to better manage their most important responsibility, our students. Additionally, a Federal grant was used to install much needed 21st century fiber optic cabling capacities into each of our schools and libraries.

Another major milestone was the hiring of the current Chief Financial Officer in 2011. She and her team have done an outstanding job in making the Department's financial data more transparent and functional for making informed decisions. The tremendous effort of her team has been especially critical given our continued budget constraints. For fiscal year 2012, the Department's General Fund appropriation was \$1.366 billion, the 2015 fiscal year appropriation has remained flat at \$1.367 billion. However, during this period, the Department was able to reduce administrative costs and increase the amount going directly to schools by over \$16 million. Today over 90% of all state appropriations are spent at the school level and Hawaii's central administrative expense is one of the lowest in the country.

The Department and Board have also established a small but highly efficient and effective Department audit department that is accountable to the Superintendent and the newly formed Board Audit Committee. The audit team oversaw a comprehensive systemic risk assessment of the entire Department. This data has provided the Department direction to efficiently invest our limited technology budget. Additionally, they identified critical upgrades to procurement, food service and transportation costs, contracting, data integrity and other systemic improvements.

The Department has also worked diligently to improve stakeholder communications systems. New, more informative websites have been developed for parents, the public, and internal staff. Communications between the Board, Department and parent groups like the Hui for Excellence in Education ("HE'E") and our military communities has also been strengthened. School Quality Surveys of parents, students and teachers have been updated and their input incorporated into the planning process. A confidential complaint hotline has been established. Annually Board community meetings held throughout the State has more than doubled the number required by law. The Department has come a

long way in communications improvements, financial transparency as well as, accountability and expense management. However, more work remains especially in the area of internal communications.

Overall, a recent annual survey conducted by Ward Research, Inc. and published in the Star-Advertiser February 2015, stated that “only 4 percent of the poll’s respondents cited education/public schools as a most important issue.” Researcher Becky Ward stated that the results were a “huge surprise . . . education/public schools has perennially been one of the primary concerns.” Improvements in the public’s confidence should not be a surprise. Public education is indeed improving thanks to the remarkable individual educators and staff that have dedicated their lives to invest in children and therefore, Hawaii’s future.