

Testimony To The Board of Education
Submitted by Jim Shon, Former Director, Hawaii Educational Policy Center

June 2, 2022

Special Meeting

RE: Action Item IV B. Relating to Systemic Approaches for School Improvements.

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

Action Item IV. B. can provide important first steps for data collection, sharing of Best Practices, support (not compliance) from districts and the state office, and ways to connect these to a new Strategic Plan.

Based on many years of participating in innovations, curricula design, and analysis of goals, objectives and benchmarks, perhaps some or all of the following may ensure the best success for the proposal.

1. **Grade Level Data Strategies.** That data collection be distinguished and refined based on grade levels: i.e. Pre school/ kindergarten/ early elementary; later elementary; middle school; grades 9 & 10; grades 11 & 12.

The reasons for this are (1) the best research on child & adolescent development; (2) the need to transition and prepare students for the next level or graduation as young adults; and (3) the reality that both professional development and appropriate class and school level innovations or reforms may be significantly different at these levels.

2. **Assistance Not Compliance.** It is not uncommon for any type of state or district oversight to be carried out with additional administrative burdens on the schools rather than removing red tape and report requirements. Even if the district and state leaders chosen operate in the spirit of “How Can I Help?” schools may feel that this is just another danger or that they may somehow *fail* if not in obedience. It used to be that district offices were most known for having specialists in various areas of the curricula. However, today many see this as having shifted to a greater emphasis on compliance. Schools may need bodies and efforts in gathering, entering, and interpreting data, as well as knowing what other schools have observed and how they have adopted changes based on data. For this to happen it could be emphasized (in writing) that part of the function of the new team be to inform school level leaders how other schools are achieving more or less success.

3. **Connect the Development of a Strategic Plan with the data collection and analysis.** Data can be meaningless without context, or pointless without a direction or set of potential future actions. To ensure that the master strategic plan for the HIDOE takes into account the best and most relevant school level data, perhaps some of the data could and should related to potential and realistic systemic pilot project and reforms.

One interesting example from the world of health care. For many years hospitals and other health facilities have fed their confidential data into a stand alone nonprofit corporation. The organization then compares data among facilities and then provides each with a confidential report. “Did you know your C section rate is twice the state average?” or, “You are paying 15% more for computers and telephones than your counterparts.” Or “Your on-site infection rates are better than the average.” This is useful information that facilities would never know. It takes their raw data and gives it meaning.

Perhaps a more recent way of applying this perspective would be to ask: Is \$10 million too little? Too much? Just about right based on the following financial calculations?

The point is that without a context or comparison, it is hard to know the meaning of data.

4. **Use Charters to Test New Reforms.** When charters were first established in Hawaii, one of the hopes was that the DOE would contract and collaborate with them to test new strategies, reforms, or innovations. This never really took off. Yet many charters are willing to begin that dialogue anew. Perhaps reaching out to not only seeing them as laboratories, but also to find out what innovations they have tried and found success.
5. **Focus on Time: A Day in the Life. A Week in the Life.** Most schools probably will never consider the negative impacts of limiting daily learning time to 42 minutes in Middle and High School. And every day is the same routine. Is it possible that some subjects need more chunks of on task time than others? Or that the dream of project based learning (STEM, STEAM) is not beyond reach. Our school days and weeks are structured like mini factories. Consider your professional days as adults. Is every day, every task, every program crammed into the same unforgiving time slots? No. We would go crazy if it were. Perhaps additional incentives could be generated to encourage experiments in time.

If any of these comments make sense, perhaps some or all could be incorporated into the job descriptions and communications to each school.

Mahalo for your attention to these suggestions.

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