



HAROLD K.L. CASTLE
FOUNDATION

To: Hawaii State Board of Education Chairperson Bruce Voss
Members of the State Board of Education

From: Terry George, President/CEO and Alex Harris, Vice President for Programs

Date: January 19, 2023

Re: Discussion item III Discussion of the draft Strategic Plan

As you know, the Harold K.L. Castle Foundation was asked by former Board of Education chair Catherine Payne to provide financial support so the Board could retain the services of the National Association of State Boards of Education for a superintendent search, strategic plan and evaluation. We gladly provided this support and have remained silent throughout both the search and planning process.

We applaud the Board for the strong goals articulated in the draft plan and for all the hard work by the Board to listen to a variety of constituents. However, we feel compelled to speak up now because your work is at a critical juncture and it is imperative that this strategic plan go beyond mere words on a page to set real direction for the public education system that leads to concrete action and ultimately results.

We offer four critiques for your consideration:

- 1) It is often said “a goal without a plan is just a wish”. The plan lacks mention for how we will get from where we are now to where we want to be. In our view, that set of hard strategic choices and improvement themes should not simply be delegated to the DOE for inclusion in a separate implementation plan but rather incorporated at a high level in the strategic plan itself.

The good news is that work has already begun and just needs to be codified, from strategies undertaken through a \$50M state literacy grant in the early grades to the dramatic recent expansion of early college opportunities and career academies in high schools across the state.

- 2) There is no acknowledgment in the current plan draft that our public school students, teachers, and administrators have just lived through three of the hardest years for teaching and learning in our history. A key priority must be to explicitly encourage a laser-like focus across the entire system on those students who need the most help to catch up in their learning. Metrics for such a priority should focus first on whether the system is effectively prioritizing this learning acceleration work, then on whether student learning achievement is accelerating.
- 3) We just completed student focus groups with 11th and 12th grade public school students across the state, and have learned some sobering truths. Our high cost low wage state economy leads

many students to believe they must leave the islands to “make something of themselves”. But many are also driven to improve their community and determined to remain close to family. The Goal 1.3 post-high school outcomes need to explicitly help young people see a future for themselves in Hawaii.

Low-income students that don’t intend to indefinitely live at home have several real options for upward mobility - to obtain a college degree or certificate, complete an apprenticeship in the skilled trades, or enter the military. We urge you to be far bolder in the plan – make sure that young people learn about where the good jobs are early in high school, experience a collegiate environment through a college course or campus visit, develop academic habits and employability skills, and graduate with a clear plan that prepares them for a hopeful future along with a supportive transition to the next stage of life.

- 4) By choosing to draft this plan with limited input from senior Department of Education leaders, the Board lost an opportunity to rebuild trust that has frayed in recent years. We understand that you may have been told that it is the Board’s job to write the strategic plan and it is the Department’s job to implement it. We simply disagree. Among all highly effective public education systems, we haven’t seen a single plan in any state or large school district that wasn’t co-developed in partnership between the superintendent’s team and the school board.

Moreover, school principals must also see their priorities reflected in the plan otherwise the chances for successful implementation are low. Early involvement would have better positioned key state offices and complex area superintendents to host critical conversations with school-level leaders focused on strategic goals and outcomes.

Again, we applaud the Board for working so hard to listen to constituents, for being so focused on student achievement and equity, and for working on a set of outcomes that will help indicate whether our school system is on track. The Harold K.L. Castle Foundation remains committing with continued support for our students and schools.