



January 25, 2024
General Business Meeting

Dear Chair Haruki and Members of the Board,

IV. Committee Reports

A. Finance and Infrastructure Committee report on January 11, 2024, meeting

We thank FIC Chair Kuraya and FIC members for their comments and efforts for good Board governance and directing DOE to have better communication and transparency. This will allow for clearer understanding by education stakeholders and the public so that we can all help support our education system to improve.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Cheri Nakamura
HE'E Coalition Director

HE'E Coalition Members and Participants

Academy 21
Alliance for Place Based Learning
American Civil Liberties Union
Atherton YMCA
Education Institute of Hawai'i
*Faith Action for Community Equity
Fresh Leadership LLC
Girl Scouts Hawai'i
*HawaiiKidsCAN
*Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance
*Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
*Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists
Hawai'i Athletic League of Scholars
*Hawai'i Children's Action Network
Hawai'i Education Association
Hawai'i Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition
* Hawai'i State PTSA
Hawai'i State Student Council
Hawai'i State Teachers Association
Head Start Collaboration Office
It's All About Kids
*INPEACE
Joint Venture Education Forum
Junior Achievement of Hawaii
Kamehameha Schools
Kanu Hawai'i
Kaua'i Ho'okele Council
Keiki to Career Kaua'i
Kupu A'e

*Leaders for the Next Generation
Learning First
McREL's Pacific Center for Changing the Odds
Native Hawaiian Education Council
Our Public School
*Pacific Resources for Education and Learning
*Parents and Children Together
*Parents for Public Schools Hawai'i
Special Education Provider Alliance
*Teach for America
The Learning Coalition
US PACOM
University of Hawai'i College of Education
* Youth Service Hawai'i

Voting Members () Voting member organizations vote on action items while individual and non-voting participants may collaborate on all efforts within the coalition.*

January 25, 2024 General Business Meeting.

Testimony RE: Agenda Item IV Committee Reports: A. Finance and Infrastructure Committee report on January 11, 2024, meeting

The January 11 Finance and Infrastructure Committee meeting was instructive and disturbing. The board should be commended for its efforts at oversight and assistance. Deputy Otaguro should also be commended for at least attempting to convey honest information, even when it was not going to be received well. Teamwork relies on honest, if difficult, communication. However, it is hard to see how the department and board can move forward coherently and cooperatively when the superintendent would only throw out verbal chaff as if to distract and confuse heat seeking missiles. Effective progress is difficult in the middle of a snow job. Hopefully the future will bring more and clearer communication.

Board Chair Haruki called out two tragedies, the first being the lapsing of \$400M. “The second tragedy is if we say ‘we are not going to lapse \$200M’ but come the end of this year ‘oh we couldn't do it.’” While a good warning, perhaps this misses the **real** and most probable tragedy: that, in the rush to appease the legislators the DoE recklessly encumbers funds with ill-conceived contracts. This could paper over the issue in the short term, but would likely lead to delays, cost overruns and dubious quality overall. As deputy Otaguro implied, it is not a matter of how much completion funds the department has now, it is how much they will need five years down the road.

It is possible to look at the lapsing of \$400M not as a tragedy, but an opportunity, as Member Moriarity suggested, to revamp and streamline the facilities office’s procedures top to bottom. It seems the lapsing of CIP line-item funds was standard practice along with the mitigating practice of legislators re-appropriating the lapses. The only “tragedy” this time was the Lahaina fires which drove the Governor’s desire to claw back the funds, revealing this broken system to all.

Perhaps there are institutional barriers to a system-wide revamp of the CIP line-item processes. Having been the status-quo for so long, this would be understandable, but as on the education side of the department, re-training and personal development can be strategically deployed. Also, the legislators are part of the process. It is not clear how much due diligence is expected on their part, before line-item projects are submitted. This aspect of the process should not be ignored. Hopefully the Department and Board can work with the legislators to work out reasonable criteria so all projects for our keiki and communities are well thought out and executed from conception to completion.



Hawaii State Board of Education
P.O. Box 2360
Honolulu, Hawaii 96804

Re: Agenda Item III.A. Report of the Superintendent: Maui wildfire impacts

Support for Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā to utilize an educational facility in Ka'anapali, Maui

Dear Chairman Haruki, Vice Chair Barcarse, and Board members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and ROOTS School, we are reaching out to implore your assistance in approving the usage of the Hawai'i Wildlife Discovery Center educational facility for students of Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā. During the Board of Education (BOE) meeting on Thursday, December 21, 2023, we heard/shared the call for innovative solutions and flexibility in considering alternatives for Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā, and we are hopeful that you can help address the immediate and long-term needs of the community.

Since late September, our non-profit organization, housing and operating the 5,000 sq. ft., multi-media Hawai'i Wildlife Discovery Center in Lahaina at Whalers Village in Ka'anapali, has been actively supporting Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā. This program has been conducting classes at several beach parks and online due to the damage caused by wildfires to the Princess Nahienaena campus. Many families are understandably hesitant to send their children to the edge of the burn zone to a campus lacking proper safety measures. The close proximity to toxic ash and debris, coupled with health concerns during upcoming, scheduled removal, has heightened anxiety for these already traumatized families.

We extend our offer to provide a safe and clean learning space at Hawai'i Wildlife Discovery Center as a temporary site until a more permanent solution is available, at least through May 2024. Recognizing the importance of face-to-face, in-person, hands-on learning, especially in the post-Covid era, we believe our space can be a valuable resource. Despite pleas from Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā educators to be allowed to utilize our facility, the Department of Education (DOE) has yet to take action, leaving teachers and students with the only option of online learning from "home." It is evident from the recent testimony that teachers and parents urgently need support from the BOE.

While the new school at Pulelehua is under construction, there seems to be a lack of a concrete plan for the Kula Kaiapuni's return. We find it perplexing that bureaucracy is keeping teachers and students apart during this critical time of recovery. We implore you to consider their unique circumstances in site plan designs, given the exceptional nature of this program.

The Hawai'i Wildlife Discovery Center, in collaboration with ROOTS School, is ready to provide support, including an ESL educator, to the Kaiapuni teachers pending DOE approval.

We appeal to your sense of compassion and understanding to consider exceptional measures for Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā. We support the DOE to honor its “commitment to in-person learning over online alternatives”. The current directive to conduct classes online was really only a stopgap measure, and is insensitive to the challenges faced by families living in temporary shelters with limited internet access.

We have proactively addressed the requirements for our space to be approved by the DOE, including additional insurance, family/non-binary restroom facilities, and a safe learning environment. Despite our efforts, we have not received a response from the DOE regarding the necessary steps to make this space available for Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā. The days and months passing without a resolution are disheartening, and the stress levels of the dedicated Kumu are palpable. We have consulted with our insurance provider to accommodate teachers and students working in our center daily through May 2024. We ask for your support in our efforts to better serve them and fulfill the mission of the state Department of Education.

We urgently request your intervention to allow Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā to use Hawai'i Wildlife Discovery Center as an alternative learning site until the DOE can provide a safer alternative. Common sense solutions are within reach, and we believe that with your support, we can provide our facility for DOE teachers and others to ensure the well-being and academic success of these students.

Please help our keiki thrive. We are committed to assisting these educational leaders in the Lāhainā community, and we seek your guidance and support. Your assistance in expediting this process is crucial to providing a conducive learning environment for Kula Kaiapuna o Lāhainā.

With sincere aloha for rebuilding and thriving,

Hannah Bernard
Executive Director
Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and Hawai'i Wildlife Discovery Center

Katie Waters Wilson
Education Coordinator
Hawai'i Wildlife Discovery Center

Melita Nasiah Charan
Head of School
ROOTS School
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