



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE CAPITOL
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Top 10 Reasons to Keep Hawaii Kai Schools Open

By

Representative Gene Ward

- HAWAII KAI'S SCHOOLS SHOULD NOT BE PUNISHED FOR THEIR HIGH ACHIEVEMENTS:** Hawaii is 47th in the nation in terms of school rankings, why would the DOE and BOE which are under serious pressure to get better reading and math scores from our school system, want to close two of its best performing schools? Is the school closing guidelines being taken so seriously that we should punish rather than reward such things as Koko Head Elementary's performance as a 2011 Hawaii Distinguished School and as a Hawaii representative in the 2011 National No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools program? I think government needs to exercise more objective intelligence than this and school closings should also be in the purview of the legislature, not just the DOE or the BOE.
- OUR SCHOOLS SHOULD BE CLONED RATHER THAN CLOSED:** For example, both Kamiloiki and Koko Head Elementary Schools have met "Adequate Yearly Progress" every year since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. These are the strict national guidelines that most schools loathe because they are so hard to reach, yet our Hawaii Kai schools are serving as accomplished role models. Kamiloiki and Koko Head Elementary should be cloned rather than closed.
- DID DOE/BOE POLICIES PRECIPITATE – PREMEDITATE THIS SCHOOL CLOSING DEBATE?:** GE's or "geographic exceptions" are a normal part of the DOE system of allowing students who live outside of a school district to attend a particular school. The record shows that the Department of Education did not allow former Koko Head Elementary School Principal, Cecilia Lum to give out geographic exceptions. Why not? Was it because geographic exceptions would have boosted enrollment and the school closure issue would have been moot? Such an excellent school as this would generally be in

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very high demand for parents outside the district, yet none were allowed in. This also does not include the rising enrollments away from private schools to public schools that is happening in Hawaii which will also bump up the number of students at Koko Head and Kamiloiki in the near future.

4. **SCHOOL CLOSING COST SAVINGS ARE MOOT:** The purported savings for closing Wailupe Elementary School have never been proven and remain mere mathematical projections based on a DOE equation of costs and benefits. Wailupe as well as all of Hawaii Kai's elementary schools are owned by the City and County of Honolulu, not the State of Hawaii, and would be left in the lurch like Wailupe where no one really knows what to do with the school. In the meantime, it is deteriorating due to lack of use, and the costs to maintain the campus could soon out-weigh the purported school closing's savings. Saving money should not be left to guess work and without a follow-up plan.

5. **FAST TRACKING A SCHOOL CLOSING BY LAME DUCK BOE MEMBERS IS UNNECESSARY, UNFAIR AND UNCALLED FOR:** On November 2, 2010, the citizens of Hawaii voted overwhelmingly to allow the Governor of the State of Hawaii to appoint the members of the Board of Education. With the inauguration of the Abercrombie Administration on December 6, 2010, with an appointed board as one of its priority campaign items for prompt implementation, it would be entirely unfair, unorthodox, and borderline unethical for the BOE to ramrod a school closing decision as one of its last acts of business before they are overshadowed by the appointed members. The closing of Wailupe School took place over continuous dialogue with the Aina Haina-Niu Valley-Kuliouou communities for over 15 years. The Hawaii Kai community was just informed of the Koko Head and Kamiloiki closings just a few weeks ago in the final quarter of 2010. To close a school in its scheduled January 2011 BOE meeting would be entirely uncalled for and such a fast track decision should be avoided. My office is writing an appeal to the existing members of the Board of Education to do the right thing and forego any decision on this matter, thereby respecting the wishes of the over 30,000 residents of the Hawaii Kai community. On behalf of this district and the schools that I represent in the Hawaii State Legislature, I will ask the BOE to please remove this item from their scheduled school-closing meeting.

6. **SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL:** Countless national studies indicate that smaller schools are the more conducive to positive student achievement than larger schools. Larger schools tend to de-personalize learning and give little attention to individual student learning needs. Koko Head and Kamiloiki are both small schools with excellent student-teacher ratios and very personalized learning styles. Each fit exactly into the national norms. These are the type of schools we would like to reproduce throughout the DOE system that produce high

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achievers in a positive learning environment. Instead of closing these schools, these schools should be showcased as models for other schools in Hawaii. Yet I realize that the DOE is following, albeit rather strictly, rules that mandate a review of schools to be closed. Due to possible misinterpretations and misunderstanding of schools such as Koko Head Elementary and Kamiloiki Elementary, that current rules rake in by its broad brush strokes, my office is in the process of introducing a bill relating to school closures that will consider a broader level of performance not just demographic and other physical plant variables as reasons to initiate a closing. School closings have never been an issue in the decades that the people of Hawaii have sought change in Hawaii's public schools, - it is all about school performance that they want. In the 2011 my office will introduce legislation to change the school closing criteria and procedures to avoid this situation in other excellent schools in Hawaii.

7. **PEOPLE BUY PROPERTY IN HAWAII KAI BECAUSE OF KOKO HEAD AND KAMILOIKI SCHOOLS:** It was mentioned earlier that most of the schools in East Honolulu belong to the City and County of Honolulu and it does not know what to do with Wailupe Elementary school as a new asset in its portfolio that is costing it money to maintain. Regarding property ownership, it has been brought to my attention that many residents in Hawaii Kai have purchased property in our lovely community, not because it is a lovely community, but because of the school system in our community for the sake of their children. As realtors often tell me, young families have as much education of their children as real estate values on their mind when making a purchase. This is not to mention what every member of the military in Hawaii knows about how we cannot attract some of the best and brightest to Hawaii because we have not the schools to support their children's educations. Therefore homeowners chose to purchase residences in Hawaii Kai to be in the vicinity of the very successful Koko Head and Kamiloiki Elementary Schools, and many property owners are going to be very upset if their main reason for living in Hawaii Kai is cut out from under them by a capricious school closing.

8. **READING AND MATH SCORES ARE WEAKEST IN THE STATE, BUT STRONGEST IN HAWAII KAI:** While the consolidation report identifies research that shows elementary schools with 300 to 400 students are optimal for literacy learning, this is clearly substantiated by Kaiser Complex's high scores in reading and mathematics. Closing any one of our four elementary schools would result in immediate enrollment levels between 500 to 700 students and the assumption of a correlated decrease in Kaiser Complex's literacy learning rates. No one wants to dumb down our children. If our math and reading scores are some of the best in the state, why would we want to put a stop to this learning curve. If purported savings were divided by the number of students who are being enriched by these two schools remaining open, we're talking about a few hundred dollars per student. Is not maintaining existing excellence worth investing a couple of hundred dollars extra per student worth what Hawaii Kai schools are bringing to the community?

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9. **THE CONSOLIDATION OF KOKO HEAD AND KAMILO IKI WOULD EXCEED THE STATE RECOMMENDED CRITERIA FOR CLASSROOM SIZE:** This is a rather technical point, but the consolidation plan for the two schools would exceed the state recommended criteria for classroom size. For instance, closing Koko Head and consolidating to Kamiloiki would exceed the first set of criteria by .5 classrooms. Understandably, this population could easily be accommodated at Hahaione. However, it fails to account for the projected enrollment growth of 90 students over the next five years. Similarly, using the second criteria and consolidating the students to Koko Head would have a delta of 1.5 classrooms. Again, this is a number that could be accommodated by Hahaione, but which leaves no room for growth within the Kaiser Complex.
10. **SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS SHOULD BE REWARDED, NOT SHUT DOWN:** This is corollary to Reason #1 above, and is a serious suggestion to the Department of Education as well as the Board of Education who should be looking for ways to duplicate the success of Kamiloiki and Koko Head Elementary Schools, not looking for ways to shut them down. With the Kaiser complex becoming an International Baccalaureate hub, only good things are in store for our students in Hawaii Kai. Members of the Hawaii Kai community felt so strongly about this, they took to sign-waving on the highway (Kalaniana'ole Hwy) on December 6, 2010, and protested the possible school closures with signs reading such as "Save our Schools" etc. This is a strong community that believes strongly in education, and my office along with the community will do all we can to see that our schools stay open and the excellent educations for our keiki are continued.

There are many more reasons that could be listed for keeping Koko Head Elementary and Kamiloiki Elementary School open, but neither time nor space allows this. Suffice it to say, good policies lead to good results, and bad policies lead to bad results. Without equivocation, the proposed closure of one or both of these schools is clearly bad policy and one that everyone will live to regret. The DOE and BOE should cease and desist from any further action in this matter.

Aloha and Mahalo,



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