



# MidWeek

This column by Senator Michelle Kidani was published in the MidWeek **CENTRAL VOICE** section on Wednesday, September 28, 2016.

## Focus on Education

It's hard to believe that we are just a couple of weeks away from the fall break for most of our public schools. Public and private school calendars vary, of course, but the point is that 2016 is flying by. In the time between legislative sessions, we lawmakers continue to address the concerns of residents in our respective districts. My focus over the last several months has clearly been on education issues, with exciting opportunities for campus leaders and community representatives to propose ways to improve Hawaii's public education system.

As Chair of the Senate Committee on Education, I am a member of Governor Ige's team of 19 dedicated volunteers whose goal is to recommend ways in which Hawaii's schools can most effectively implement new Federal education guidelines. The *Every Student Succeeds Act – ESSA* – is a response to educators and members of the public who believe that more local control over the campuses in their communities will better meet education goals and nurture student success.

Since late April, through the summer and into the new school year, the ESSA Team has been meeting pretty much every other Saturday in all day sessions and at nearly a dozen town hall community meetings across the state. We are listening to policy experts, school principals who share their success stories, teachers and students, and involved members of the public who care deeply about our schools and the best ways we can invest in their effectiveness. During August and September, the Board of Education has also conducted nearly a dozen public meetings on five islands, and community input from these sessions will be considered when the proposed ESSA plan is drafted.



Our interest here, of course, is closer to home. Mililani High, Mililani Middle and the five elementary schools that serve our community's families are part of the larger Department of Education's Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua complex. We are fortunate to benefit from the inspired leadership of Complex Area Superintendent **Dr. John Brummel** – a former principal at Mililani High School. Our ESSA Team includes Mililani High School government and history teacher **Amy Perruso** and **Brennan Lee**, Mililani Class of 2016, who was the Student Representative on the Board of Education last year.



*Continued next page . . .*

The task of developing the ESSA plan is enormously complex. Aside from meeting the needs of the “everyday” student population, schools must be prepared to educate those with special needs, students from families who have no permanent homes, students in foster care, those with parents who are in the military, and those for whom English is not the primary language at home. As the State develops more support for critical early education programs, pre-K youngsters will need to be a part of the equation as well.

The Department of Education anticipates that a draft plan will be ready in a few weeks for presentation to the Board of Education in December. The State’s ESSA plan for federal funding by the U.S. Department of Education is due in March, 2017, and the law requires full implementation beginning in the 2017-18 school year. I am especially interested in developing legislative support for the ESSA blueprint and will focus on this during the legislative session that begins in January. I urge you to take some time to learn more about our Team’s discussions of these critical issues. Check online for our meeting notes and the valuable resource materials that we have been reviewing: <http://governor.hawaii.gov/essa-team/> .