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**LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU**

State of Hawaii  
State Capitol, Room 446  
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Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Written Comments

**SCR14/SR8**  
**REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU TO CONDUCT A**  
**STUDY EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STATE'S SINGLE,**  
**STATEWIDE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM AND THE FEASIBILITY OF**  
**CONVERSION TO AN ALTERNATE SYSTEM**

Testimony by the Legislative Reference Bureau  
Charlotte A. Carter-Yamauchi, Director

Presented to the Senate Committee on Education

Friday, March 18, 2022, 3:15 p.m.  
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon Chair Kidani and members of the Committee, my name is Charlotte Carter-Yamauchi and I am the Director of the Legislative Reference Bureau. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit written comments on S.C.R. No. 14/S.R. No. 8, Requesting the Legislative Reference Bureau to Conduct a Study Examining the Effectiveness of the State's Single, Statewide Public School System and the Feasibility of Conversion to an Alternative System.

The purpose of this measure is to request that the Legislative Reference Bureau conduct a study examining the effectiveness of the State's single, statewide public school system under the Board of Education. As part of the study, the measure requests that the Bureau:

- (1) Identify educational disparities between school complex areas;
- (2) Examine proposed solutions to address the identified disparities between school complex areas;
- (3) Evaluate the feasibility of the development of county-level school districts; and

- (4) Seek input from the Department of Education, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and to the fullest extent practicable, nonprofit organizations whose mission includes addressing educational disparities in the State, such as HawaiiKidsCAN and Hawai'i Children's Action Network.

The measure also requests that the Legislative Reference Bureau submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2023.

The Bureau takes no position on this measure but submits the following comments for your consideration.

As a general matter, the Bureau notes that it does not possess any specific expertise in educational system governance, curriculum development, execution, and evaluation, or education financing. Consequently, if tasked with completing such a broad ranging study on this specialized subject matter within the timeframe provided, the Bureau would most likely need to contract the services of an entity with expertise in such matters in order to produce any research product that would be of any probative value to the Legislature. Unfortunately, the Bureau's operating budget does not contain any excess funds to contract these services nor does it have an exemption from the State Procurement Code to expedite the contracting of services so that the study could possibly be completed prior to the commencement of the 2023 Regular Session.

Furthermore, even if funding was made available and a Procurement Code exemption was provided to expeditiously procure the services of a suitable contractor, the parameters of the study would still need to be more narrowly focused in order to obtain the requested information in the time allotted. For example, the study requests that the Bureau, ". . . examin[e] the effectiveness of the State's single, statewide public school system under the Board of Education." However, the measure does not provide any parameters by which the Bureau is to determine the "effectiveness" of the existing educational system (i.e., is effectiveness measured by equitable statewide distribution of monetary and other resources, graduation rates, test scores, college track curriculum, college acceptance rates, etc.).

The Bureau believes that unless it is provided with adequate funding and either an exemption from the State Procurement Code or additional time is provided to procure the services of a suitable contractor and complete the study, and the parameters of the study are more narrowly focused, the Bureau will be unable to provide the services requested under this measure.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written comments.

Chair Kidani, Vice-Chair Mercado Kim, and distinguished committee members:

I am testifying in strong support of this resolution. Hawaii's education system has undergone considerable improvement over the past several years, but I believe many of these advancements are focused on short-term results and do not consider the long-term benefits students receive from a quality education.

Hawaii is the only state to have a state-wide school district and a single Board of Education. This system was initially developed in the mid-19th century under Kamehameha III to ensure that all Hawaii students received an education with a quality equal to that of their peers living in different parts of the kingdom. The system exists today for similar reasons, with the reason being that a centralized school district allows the Board of Education to distribute resources and funding in an equitable manner.

Unfortunately, however, the quality of education children receive is determined by many other factors beyond funding, such as socioeconomic status and demographics. For instance, even in Hawaii, there exists a correlation between higher household income areas and higher average academic performance in schools within those areas. Schools in lower-income areas also have significantly higher rates of chronic absence, which also contributes to poorer academic performance. This contrast is most powerfully demonstrated by the Nanakuli-Waianae Complex Area and the Farrington-Kaiser-Kalani Complex Area, where test scores and rates of chronic absence are significantly lower in the latter.

Some have called for the establishment of community-level school districts so that communities are better able to allocate funds to address community-level education-related issues. The largest challenge the State faces before it can take this massive step, however, is the lack of data. Because Hawaii is the only state with one school district and one Board of Education, there is no data as to which system, a single or multi-district educational system, is best for the State of Hawaii.

This study would ensure that the discussion surrounding the long-term future of Hawaii's students is sustained in full. It would also be one of the first studies ever to compare the strengths and weaknesses of single and multi-district school systems.

Considering the potential impact of this resolution on future generations of Hawaii's students, I strongly urge you to pass this resolution.

Ryden Iwamoto