



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 02/17/2026

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: EDN

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB1896, RELATING TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to support community schools.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) supports HB 1896, provided its passage does not adversely impact the priorities established in the Board of Education's approved budget.

The Department recognizes community schools as one of several effective strategies for fostering community and family engagement. Currently, these programs exist in approximately 22 Department schools. These models are established at the discretion of individual campuses, as school leaders are best positioned to identify the specific resources and partnerships necessary to support their unique student populations. Community schools adopt a "whole child" approach, integrating high-quality educational opportunities with robust community partnerships. Successful implementation relies on the synergy between school staff, families, and local stakeholders. These relationships not only enrich the academic experience but also strengthen the surrounding community.

Should the Legislature be inclined to pass this measure, we respectfully request that it supplement, rather than displace, existing departmental priorities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Education
Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Nathan Murata, Dean
College of Education

and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 1896 – RELATING TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony offering comments on HB1896 related to community schools. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa believes community schools can be a vital extension of the typical school day. We also believe that community schools can support families and students by enriching learning opportunities, extending classroom instruction, and providing an integrated system of support for students.

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa College of Education remains committed to working in strong partnership with the Hawai'i State Department of Education to support educators, strengthen student success, and advance collaborative initiatives that benefit our public school communities statewide.

Thank you for allowing us to provide our testimony on HB 1896.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELawe KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 16, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
House Committee on Education

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1896 – RELATING TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS.**

Hearing: February 17, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the measure, defers to the Department of Education, and provides comments. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace priorities identified in the executive budget.

DHS shares the same vision through school-based family resource centers, a component of community schools. Community schools build trusted relationships with students and families that improve student achievement, and well-resourced family resource centers have been shown to reduce reports of child abuse and neglect.

Family resource centers use a multigenerational, strengths-based, and family-centered approach. Families may access services in a place they are comfortable in that reflects and is responsive to the community's needs and interests. Services are generally at no or low cost and aim to build communities of peer support and increase social connections. Schools, families, and communities benefit from these models that support student learning, reduce chronic absenteeism, and strengthen communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

**TO: The Honorable Justin H. Woodson, Chair The Honorable Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education** Hawaii State Capitol 415 S. Beretania St. Honolulu, HI 96813

BILL: HB 1896 – Relating to Community Schools

TESTIFIER: Michelle Barber

POSITION: SUPPORT AND COMMENTS

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today as the Principal of Waikoloa Elementary and Middle School to express my strong support for HB 1896, which seeks to appropriate funds to the Department of Education for the implementation and sustainability of community schools in Hawaii, provided its passage does not adversely impact the priorities established in the Board of Education's approved budget.

At Waikoloa, we see firsthand that a student's success is inextricably linked to their health, well-being, and sense of belonging within their community and 'aina. HB 1896 recognizes that schools are more than just academic centers; they are hubs where staff, families, and community partners work in reciprocity to help every child thrive.

The community schools strategy outlined in this bill is vital for several reasons:

- **Integrated Support Systems:** It moves us away from fragmented services and toward a coordinated effort that leverages existing community resources toward shared goals.
 - At Waikoloa this has meant coordinating many efforts to increase student attendance and overall success including: Food Basket distribution for our families in need, School Based Health Center mobile unit so that students can get the medical care that they need while at school to break down transportation barriers, weekly visits to our low income housing sites with our Bilingual School Home Assistant to engage with families and build a bridge between home and school, and so much more.
 - On the other side of the spectrum, our community coordinator has been vital is our ability to put on an Amazing Shake competition where community partners work with us to improve students' professional skills like poise under pressure, the ability to think on their feet, be problem solvers and so much more. This has provided opportunities for some of our students to compete on the global level in Atlanta, GA. For some of them, it was their first trip outside the state of Hawaii. This could not have been possible without the support and organization of our community coordinator.
- **Addressing Chronic Absenteeism:** By fostering stable relationships and meaningful family engagement, this approach creates the necessary conditions for learning and directly addresses the root causes of barriers to attendance. We began implementing the

community school strategy three years ago and it has helped us to reduce our chronic absenteeism rate from 41% to 32%.

- **Proven Return on Investment:** Research cited in this bill shows that for every dollar invested in a community school coordinator, there is a return of approximately \$7.11 in net benefits. I personally visited the New Mexico school district to learn more about how to make this successful in Waikoloa and came back with many ideas which have helped our school to make improvements and allowed us to engage with 90% of our families last school year.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** This bill empowers families and students as co-designers of solutions, ensuring that our school culture is built on trust and shared power.

The appropriation of **\$2,152,500** for fiscal year 2026-2027 will provide the technical assistance, evaluation, and administrative support necessary to make this vision a reality across our islands. This investment will yield long-term dividends in the form of higher graduation rates, increased teacher retention, and improved academic achievement.

I respectfully urge your committee to pass HB 1896 to ensure our schools have the tools to support the "whole child" and strengthen the fabric of our communities.

Mahalo for your dedication to the keiki of Hawaii and the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Michelle Barber

[Michelle Barber \(Feb 16, 2026 11:51:07 HST\)](#)

Michelle Barber - Principal

Cassandra Lambert

[Cassandra Lambert \(Feb 16, 2026 11:45:33 HST\)](#)

Cassandra Lambert - Vice Principal

Tonya Duncan

[Tonya Duncan \(Feb 16, 2026 08:49:27 HST\)](#)

Tonya Duncan - Vice Principal

Sarah Uehara

[Sarah Uehara \(Feb 16, 2026 11:46:38 HST\)](#)

Sarah Uehara - Vice Principal

Waikoloa Elementary and Middle School Administration Team

Letter in Support of HB 1896

Final Audit Report

2026-02-16

Created:	2026-02-16 (Hawaii-Aleutian Standard Time)
By:	Michelle Barber (10010913@k12.hi.us)
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Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAA-kbEWia1MhWTFtrKsvW27PIQr5_qCtEo

"Letter in Support of HB 1896" History

-  Document created by Michelle Barber (10010913@k12.hi.us)
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TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: HB 1896 – Relating to Community Schools

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, Room 309

Submitter: Osa Tui, Jr., President - Hawai'i State Teachers Association

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** H.B. 1896, which provides funding to support the implementation and sustainability of community schools across our islands. This strategy transforms schools into community hubs where educators, families, and partners collaborate to ensure every student can thrive.

Community schools address the root causes of learning barriers by integrating academic achievement with essential support for student health and well-being. By establishing key practices such as expanded learning opportunities and integrated systems of support, this model fosters a culture of belonging and safety for both students and staff.

Research highlights a significant return on investment for this approach, showing improved attendance, higher graduation rates, and increased teacher retention. The inclusion of dedicated community school coordinators is essential for aligning resources and translating community needs into effective action.

We urge the committee to pass this measure to provide the funding necessary to strengthen our school communities and support the "whole child" through these vital partnerships.

Mahalo.

Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance
1776 University Avenue, WA1-102
Honolulu, HI 96822



House Committee on Education
Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

February 17, 2026
Conference Room 309

RE: Support of HB1896

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee,

The Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance supports HB1896, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

In Hawai'i, a community school is a place where school staff, families, students, and the community work together to help every child thrive.

Community schools are a proven, time-tested strategy that can bring forth short-term results like improving family engagement and attendance and decreasing behavioral referrals. It is also proven to show long-term results like closing the achievement gap, improving academic scores, and graduation rates.¹

There are currently 22 community schools in Hawai'i across three islands that are mobilizing their community partners, families, students, and school staff to ensure that all students thrive in their school community. Each school has a Community School Coordinator who facilitates the co-creation of innovative strategies and is building a system of support to address the barriers students and families face. These innovative strategies fall under the following key practices:

- Collaborative leadership, shared power, and voice;
- Expanded, enriched learning opportunities;
- Rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction;
- Culture of belonging, safety, and care;
- Powerful family and student engagement; and
- Integrated systems of support.²

The needs and assets assessments completed by our current Community School Coordinators reveal the deep need to have more resources and support organized to address our students'

¹ Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J. & Lam, L. (2017, December). *Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence*. Learning Policy Institute.
https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/137/download?inline&file=Community_Schools_Effective_REPO_RT.pdf

² Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance. (n.d.). *Hawai'i Community Schools Framework*.
https://www.hawaiiafterschoolalliance.org/uploads/2/8/4/2/28427169/hawai%E2%80%98i_cs_framework_24.pdf

whole child and academic needs, family engagement, and the root causes of chronic absenteeism.

Schools should not be tackling these challenges alone. This is why community schools are needed more than ever, as Community School Coordinators can help to leverage the already existing assets and resources available within their school community to remove barriers to learning and accelerate equitable outcomes in health, education, and employment.

We urge you to support this bill that would ensure our current schools can continue to support their students and families and create the necessary support within the DOE to lead the state's community school efforts.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Masutani
Program Director
Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance
hawaiiafterschool@gmail.com
www.hawaiiafterschoolalliance.org



To: Rep. Justin Woodson, Chair, Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair, and members of the House Committee on Education
From: Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i, Deborah Bond-Upson, President
Re: Support for HB 1896
Date: February 16, 2026

My name is Deborah Bond-Upson and I am the president of **Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i**, a nonprofit organization of parents, guardians, community members, and educators committed to ensuring high-quality public education for every child in our state. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 1896, supporting funding for Community Schools.

We know that we are facing absentee rates that are dangerously high, gaps in educational achievement, and difficulty engaging families with schools. Our Hawai'i families are stressed, with parents often working two or three jobs to manage their families given our cost of living. We need to create support for families in our schools, so that the families can support the schools.

Community schools are designed to help every child thrive, with support for families and integration with the community. Community schools are a proven, time-tested strategy that can bring forth short-term results like improving family engagement and attendance and decreasing behavioral referrals.

Community schools have proven over decades that they can close the achievement gap, improving academic scores, and graduation rates. Hawaii has been late to introduce community schools compared with other states.

Now we have 22 community schools in Hawai'i across three islands working with community partners, families, students, and school staff to ensure that all students thrive in their school community. We need more community schools and we must not reduce support for your continuing community schools.

We respectfully urge you to pass HB 1896 and to ensure robust funding so that community schools can grow and thrive here. On behalf of families across the state, we ask you to move this measure forward so that more Hawai'i families, communities and schools can rely on schools designed to integrate families and communities in learning. Mahalo for your consideration of this testimony and for your commitment to Hawai'i's keiki, families, and public schools.



HAWAII APPLESEED
CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for HB 1896 – Relating to Community Schools
House Committee on Education
Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 2:00PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee:

Hawai‘i Appleseed supports HB 1896, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools and a program manager position.

Public schools are one of the most critical community-oriented institutions we have as a society. The community schools movement seeks to intentionally integrate schools into their surrounding communities, giving parents, families, and other members of the community a place to learn and connect with one another. This is absolutely critical in a time where so many are socially isolated, and political differences have driven wedges into nearly every corner of society.

Community Schools partner with community organizations, families, and other agencies to advance student outcomes by integrating student supports, active family and community engagement, collaborative leadership practices, and expanded learning time. Educators may work with partners such as local companies, nonprofits, and higher education institutions to offer students real-world projects that make learning more relevant and engaging. They build connections that can open the door to future opportunities.

Furthermore, this strategy is crucial for building community disaster resilience, as seen during the global COVID pandemic. Community Schools are able to mobilize their community in times of uncertainty or hardship, through well-established partnerships built on trust. These partnerships can often ensure that basic needs, and other necessities are still available to those who need them.

Please support this bill to sustain the community schools movement in Hawai‘i and organize our resources towards the success of students, families, and communities.

Date: February 17, 2026

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: House Bill 1896, Relating to Community Schools

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

ECAS supports House Bill 1896 which would appropriate funds to support community schools.

Our organization recognizes the impacts that are possible when a school focuses on the development of the whole child. When a student's academic experience is tailored to support not only their academic performance, but also their health, well-being, cultural identity, and more, they thrive.

Community schools achieve these outcomes through a variety of school characteristics including strong family support as well as close relationships between the school, its students, their families, and the greater community. Working closely with their respective communities and community coordinators, these schools are able to effectively identify the critical needs of their student bodies.

This is a proven approach that consistently results in improved academic performance, increased family engagement, and higher graduation rates.

For these reasons, ECAS supports House Bill 1896.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

To: House Committee on Education
Re: **HB 1896– Relating to Community Schools**
Hawai'i State Capitol room 309 & Via Videoconference
February 17, 2026, 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Respected Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! (HCAN), I am providing testimony in **SUPPORT of HB 1896**, which appropriates funding to expand and strengthen community schools across Hawai'i. This investment represents a strategic approach to improving student outcomes, supporting families, and strengthening communities statewide.

Community schools integrate academics, health and social services, youth development, and family engagement into a single, coordinated framework. When schools are equipped to partner with families and community organizations, students are better positioned to attend regularly, engage meaningfully in learning, and thrive academically and socially. For many of Hawai'i's keiki, barriers to learning are not confined to the classroom. Housing instability, unmet health needs, food insecurity, and limited access to enrichment opportunities all influence educational outcomes. Community schools help address these barriers holistically so educators can focus on teaching and students can focus on learning.

Importantly, community school models strengthen family engagement and create trusted relationships between schools and the communities they serve. These partnerships are particularly critical in Hawai'i, where culturally responsive and place-based approaches are essential to meeting the diverse needs of students and families across islands and communities. Expanding community schools is an investment in educational equity and long-term student success.

This bill also represents a smart fiscal investment. Coordinated school-community partnerships reduce duplication of services, improve efficiency, and maximize the impact of existing public and private resources. By supporting dedicated coordination and infrastructure, the Legislature can help ensure that schools have the capacity to sustain partnerships that produce measurable outcomes.

HCAN believes that every child deserves access to a school environment that supports their full development. Community schools move Hawai'i closer to that vision by aligning education, health, and family supports in a way that reflects the realities facing students today.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please **PASS HB 1896**.



PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT
FOUNDATION

February 17, 2026

The Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
The Honorable Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Hearing on Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.,
Via VideoConference, Conference Room #309

Regarding HB No. 1896, "Relating to Community Schools"

Dear Chair Woodson and Vice Chair La Chica and Members of the House Committee on Education,

We ask that you **strongly support HB 1896** to appropriate funds to the Department of Education to support community schools.

Partners in Development Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that inspires and equips families and communities for success and service, using timeless Native Hawaiian values and traditions. Since 1997, PIDF has served more than 171,000 people in over 75 communities across the state (www.pidf.org). PIDF has a strong record of managing complex, multi-year federal and state grants with measurable results in early childhood education, family engagement, and youth justice. PIDF continues to step to the frontline to meet the ever-changing needs of our low-income, remote, and rural families and communities, including operating a COVID quarantine hotel to keep families safe and healthy during the pandemic, to supporting families displaced by the Maui wildfires to heal and rebuild, to continuing to support and strengthen our most vulnerable children, youth and families as they navigate increasing living costs, unemployment, and loss of federal resources.

It is vital that this critical work provided by not only Partners in Development Foundation but the many other nonprofit organizations in our state continue to be supported through sufficient resources to sustainably operate and HB 1896 will accomplish this by increasing the level of funding available to these nonprofit organizations who are stepping in the gap to meet the needs that government entities cannot fully address. **We ask that you support HB 1896 to equip nonprofit organizations to meet our rising expenses to enable us to continue serving the people of Hawai'i.**

On behalf of Partners in Development Foundation and our many nonprofit partners serving tirelessly in our state, mahalo nui loa for your consideration of this request.

Shawn M. Kana'iaupuni, PhD
President and Chief Executive Officer



HOUSE BILL 1896, RELATING TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

FEBRUARY 17, 2026 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 1896, relating to community schools, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to support community schools.

Policymakers should promote education programs that deliver wraparound care for students and deal with educational “inputs” that impact student success, like poverty and access to healthcare. An example of such a program is the community schools model of education, which as noted in Hawai'i's Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act, is a research-based strategy for school improvement that emphasizes high-quality teaching, culturally relevant curricula, wraparound student supports, positive disciplinary practices and restorative justice, parent and community engagement, and inclusive school leadership.

In prioritizing student wellness, community schools have been shown to increase learning growth and graduation rates, while decreasing behavioral referrals and chronic absenteeism. In New York City, for example, community schools that highlight mental health counseling and consistent family outreach have seen chronic absenteeism rates fall by 7.8 percent as of 2017, with graduation rates rising 4.8 percent. Engaged learners are more like to acquire the skills necessary to become active citizens and productive members of the workforce. Additionally, since even the

most affluent and well-adjusted children face challenges in their maturation processes, guaranteeing that schools have the resources to respond to childhood pressures and trauma with compassion and sensitivity may make the difference between sending a student to college or losing them to social threats, like substance abuse or our state’s prolific sex trade.

As the National Education Association states, “Community Schools transform traditional public schools into neighborhood hubs that mobilize students, staff, families and community members to reimagine education and co-construct a shared vision for their school and community. Community Schools are developed with the understanding that every community is different.” Community schools rely on integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning opportunities, active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership to strengthen educational outcomes. Currently, 25 community schools exist in our state.

25 Community Schools in Hawai'i

O'ahu <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Barbers Point El● Blanche Pope El● Dole Middle● Hawai'i School for the Deaf and Blind● Kaimukī High● Ke'elikolani Middle● Nānākuli High & Inter● Olomana School● Wai'anae El● Wai'anae High● Waimānalo School	Hawai'i Island <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Hōnaunau El● Ka'u High & Pahala El● Kealakehe El● Kealakehe Inter● Kohala El● Kohala High● Kohala Middle● Mountain View El● Na'alehu El● Pāhoa High & Inter● Waikōloa El● Waimea El	Moloka'i <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Maunaloa El Lāna'i <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lāna'i High & El
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Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com · 808-679-7454

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 2:37:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Scott Nishimoto	Ceeds of Peace	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 13, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB 1896. I serve as the Executive Director of Ceeds of Peace, the lead agency for seven community schools in Hawai‘i. This bill would appropriately fund the Department of Education to sustain and strengthen the community schools framework that is transforming outcomes for our keiki and their families.

Community schools matter deeply to me because I have seen firsthand how they change the trajectory of entire neighborhoods. In the communities we serve — many of which face high poverty rates, housing instability, and limited access to healthcare — schools are often the most trusted and consistent institutions. Through the community schools model, we coordinate academic supports, afterschool enrichment, family engagement, food access, mental health services, and health partnerships directly on campus.

Community schools are not an add-on program. They are an organizing strategy that aligns public and private resources around student success. Without sustained funding, schools lose coordinators, partnerships weaken, and momentum stalls. With sustained funding, we can deepen partnerships, expand mental health access, strengthen afterschool programming, and ensure that every child — regardless of zip code — has the conditions necessary to thrive.

Ceeds of Peace urges you to support HB 1896 to sustain the community schools movement in Hawai‘i and organize our collective resources toward the success of learners, families, and communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Scott Nishimoto

Executive Director

Seeds of Peace

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:44:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Luck	He'e Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The He'e Coalition supports this bill for community schools. The evidence base for the value of community schools is clear and He'e Coalition is supportive of dedicating resources for our community schools and the expansion of the effort to additional schools.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Testimony of YMCA of Honolulu
In Support of H.B. 1896 – Relating to Community Schools
House Committee on Education Hearing, Feb. 17, 2026**

TO: House Committee on Education
Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

FROM: Lisa Ontai, President & CEO, YMCA of Honolulu

POSITION: Strong Support

Aloha Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee,

The YMCA of Honolulu supports H.B. 1896, which appropriates funding to the Department of Education to strengthen and sustain community schools across Hawai'i.

Community schools are a proven strategy that aligns school leadership, families, and community partners to support the whole child. This approach expands learning opportunities, strengthens family engagement, and builds integrated support systems that address barriers to attendance and academic success. Coordinated partnerships and shared leadership help leverage existing resources more effectively and create stronger outcomes for students and families.

Through our partnerships at Governor Sanford B. Dole Middle School, Kaimuki High School and Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani Middle School, the YMCA has seen how the community school model improves student engagement and strengthens connections between schools and their surrounding communities. When supports are aligned and relationships are built on trust, students are more connected to school, and families are more engaged in their child's education.

Investment in community school coordination is a strategic step toward improving attendance, fostering a culture of belonging, and supporting long-term student success statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.B. 1896.

House Committee on Finance
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 16, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896 Relating to Community Schools

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

Kaimuki Middle School's Kīpuka Garden Hui supports HB 1896, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for the planning and implementation of community schools.

A Kīpuka of Aloha 'Āina in Urban Honolulu Kaimuki Middle's Kīpuka Garden is a living example of how the community schools model can transform traditional academics into meaningful contributions to our community. The challenges in our community include:

- Low levels of student school engagement (as measured by DOE Panorama data)
- Counselor and teacher reports of increases in peer relationship struggles
- Degradation of Maunalua Bay, Waikiki, and Ala Wai marine ecosystems
- Climate-enhanced storms, flooding, sea-level rise, and erosion in shoreline areas

This bill works to establish DOE funding to hire a **community school coordinator** to align the efforts of the school with those of our community. I envision this to be a dedicated district, complex, or school-level staff member who could serve as a bridge between community partners (like Mālama Maunalua, Aloha Tree Alliance, KCC, etc.), businesses (Keep It Kaimuki, businesses, etc), and families, so that we can stay in alignment and move together toward the shared goals of our community. My sincere hope is for all teachers to identify as 'Āina teachers—stewards of our ahupua'a. A dedicated DOE coordinator could help meet school staff where they are and navigate the complicated DOE system. The coordinator would leverage longstanding relationships with both the schools and community to move initiatives forward.

I believe in this model because it describes the type of work that has led to the success of our Voyager Center and Kīpuka Garden. Coordinators help facilitate listening sessions between the school and community to strategically identify and prioritize shared challenges. They build the "beloved community" (Aunty Puanani style!) by designing and hosting gatherings at the school. They mobilize resources (grants, donations, professionals, guest speakers) so teachers and students can engage in solving real-world challenges in their community.

What we've accomplished through the Community Schools Approach Kaimuki Middle School is a living example of a budding community school movement within a traditional DOE middle school. We brought the expertise of 38+ local practitioners to our school and wrote grants that funded the Kīpuka Garden, Voyager Center, Green Lab garden revival, Climate Conscious Inquiry, science fair investigations, and Learning Celebrations. We also used grant funds to coordinate school-wide professional development workshops in project-based learning

and culinary safety, while purchasing supplies for teachers to implement new curricula, thereby removing barriers that might otherwise prevent school improvement.

To us, "outstanding" education is measured by what students take with them beyond the classroom and into their lives, resulting in communities empowered by aloha 'āina. Here are some metrics that exemplify the meaningful experiences created by the community schools approach:

- **Core Mission and Leadership:** Rooted in Hawaiian culture and multicultural inclusion, the program fosters a sense of belonging for all students. Under the long-standing leadership of Principal Frank Fernandes, the program has expanded from serving 130 students to over 500, including significant participation from English Learner (EL) and Special Education (SPED) classes.
- **Facility and Learning Space Improvements:** The recent installation of a 20x20 shade tent has doubled the available shade for outdoor learning, significantly increasing the capacity for outdoor instruction and community gatherings.
- **Cultural Integration and Literacy:** Students engage in place-based learning through the Mo'olelo and Murals project, which integrates art and science to document the history of Kaimukī and Lē'ahi. Students also learn the Oli Kīpuka Kaimukī to stay rooted in the significant wahi pana (special places) of their community.
- **Environmental Impact and Sustainability:** KMS is currently in its fifth year as a NOAA Ocean Guardian School. The program has successfully diverted over 4,500 lbs of cafeteria waste through composting and processed 4,000 lbs of invasive limu from Maunalua Bay to support garden health.
- **Student-Led Initiatives:** The program hosts active after-school opportunities including the Aloha 'Āina Club (farm-to-table cooking), the Aloha Vibes Club (lei making and community gifting), and a Young Entrepreneurs Program where students develop and sell value-added garden products.
- **Community Engagement:** The garden serves as a hub for quarterly community workdays involving families, alumni, and local partners, with upcoming 2026 milestones including the construction of a dryland lo'i kalo and a community-wide Lei Celebration.

As the co-founder of Kaimuki Middle School's Voyager Center and Kīpuka Garden, I urge you to support this bill. It would allow more schools to adopt the community schools model and organize the resources in their community toward the success of learners, families, and communities. If you'd like to learn more about our program, we are happy to host site visits and provide student videos and evidence of the positive impacts of our community school efforts.

With gratitude,
Lianna Lam

EL Coordinator, Science Teacher, NCBT

[Kaimuki Middle Kīpuka Garden](#)

631 18th Avenue, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 96816

Email: lianna.lam@k12.hi.us

In Support of Bill HB 1896 - Regarding Community Schools

My name is Madeline McKinnon, and I am a former high school special education and biology teacher at Wai'anae High School and a current Community Schools Specialist for the state of Hawai'i. I wholeheartedly support HB 1896. This bill will allow the Community Schools strategy, a model of community and school integration, to continue empowering some of Hawai'i's most underserved and vulnerable communities and to improve the lives of students, families, school staff, and the broader community through collective action.

This bill matters more now than ever, given the increasing hardships facing so many of our communities here in Hawai'i. As someone with the privilege of working with all the Community Schools already established across the islands, I have had the honor of witnessing truly heartwarming and incredible results. From increasing teacher retention at Wai'anae Elementary to providing basic needs such as food, clothing, and mental and physical health care to more than 20 communities, to giving students, parents, and families a voice at the decision-making table of their schools and within their communities. This bill would allow vital support to continue flowing into and through our most deserving communities, and I hope we can continue supporting students, families, school staff, and whole communities through Community Schools.

Witnessing the impact of Community Schools on school staff, keiki, families, and community - I could not be in greater support of this bill. Mahalo for your time.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:47:50 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren Peiler	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 16, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Aloha Committee Members,

My name is Lauren Peiler & I am the Community Schools Coordinator at Princess Ruth Ke’elikolani Middle School. I am writing in strong support of HB 1896, which appropriates funding to the Department of Education for community schools.

The Community Schools framework has had an inspiring & transformative impact on the students, families & staff at Princess Ruth Ke’elikolani Middle School. I’ve had the amazing opportunity to see firsthand how systems of support have been created to have a positive, lasting impact on our students & families. Our free resource support services would not have been possible without the teamwork & pilina building of our amazing community partners. Our students & families are receiving a higher level of care/support by having access to a food pantry, clothing closet, hygiene station, and Hawai’i Keiki Nurse.

I kindly ask that you please support HB 1896 as this will help our school communities continue to nourish & grow, as well as create thriving haumana in Hawai’i.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to share my testimony with you.

Me ke aloha,

Lauren Peiler

House Committee on Finance
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 14, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

My name is Leialohamakamae Lum King, and I serve as the Community School Coordinator at Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School. Our lead agency partner is the Pacific American Foundation. I am writing in strong support of HB 1896, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

Community schools bridge education and the real-life challenges families face. In Waimānalo, we coordinate partnerships that bring food support, family engagement, culturally grounded programs, and essential services directly onto our campus so students can focus on learning.

This work is deeply personal to me. I grew up in a home impacted by substance abuse and instability. Both of my parents did their best to support our family. My mother worked tirelessly to provide for five children, and my father tried his best to care for us in the ways he knew how. As the eldest, I stepped into adult responsibilities early, helping to raise my siblings. We did not have access to coordinated school-based support. Looking back, I often wonder how differently my educational journey might have been if those resources had existed — if I could have focused more fully on school instead of survival.

Today, I see students who remind me of myself. The difference now is that we can wrap support around them and their families. When basic needs are met, students show up ready to learn and families feel valued.

HB 1896 is critical to sustaining this work. Continued funding ensures we can strengthen partnerships, remove barriers to learning, and support the whole child.

I respectfully urge you to support this measure for the success of Hawai'i's learners, families, and communities.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Leialohamakamae Lum King
Community School Coordinator
Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School
Lead Agency Partner: Pacific American Foundation

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 8:53:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Donna Okita	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

February 13, 2026

Aloha,

My name is Donna Okita, I am a recently retired teacher and currently the Community School Coordinator at Olomana School.

I support HB 1896 that supports Community Schools in Hawai‘i.

Olomana School has been a Community School for the past 3 years. Over the last 18 months as the Community School Coordinator, I have made a difference for Administration, Teachers, Students and Families. As a retired teacher, I knew the school’s mission and vision, students knew who I was and I have a relationship with the staff. I was able to meet with teachers right away and find out what they needed help with in the classroom and or outside of the classroom.

I planned field trips, guest speakers, service project day for all students, brought in a guest mural artist and painted a mural. Worked with the counselors to see how we could increase attendance rates which led to starting an incentive program and eventually doing a bus “pick up” pilot program in Waimanalo. Called parents/guardians to invite them to “Ohana Nights/Days” to increase parent engagement. This year, I started an “Internship Wednesday” program with the Seniors and am currently working on a partnership with QLCC.

Today, the needs of our communities are different and having a Community School Coordinator at schools really makes a difference for everyone. This Community School Model gives the teachers the opportunity to teach. Students feel safe both in and out of the classroom. Parents are happy when their students are showing up to school and having opportunities to learn, utilizing various resources.

Please support HB1896 so the Community School Coordinators can continue to follow the Community School Model which helps to strengthen our Schools and Community.

Mahalo,

Donna Okita

Community School Coordinator

Olomana School

Pacific American Foundation - Lead Agency

Donnaokita@gmail.com

808-222-2783

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 8:35:56 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heidi Ilyavi	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

My name is Heidi Ilyavi and I serve as a Community School Coordinator for Waimea Elementary on the Big Island. I am writing in support of HB1896. Our school is approximately 40% Hawaiian and 60% low income. Every day, I see firsthand how students thrive when schools are resourced not just as places of instruction, but as hubs of community support. Each school community has it's own unique needs and Community School Coordinators are there to address those specific and unique needs.

Through partnerships and coordinated efforts, we have been able to address critical needs at Waimea Elementary. With the support of The Food Basket and dedicated community friends and volunteers, we established regular food distributions serving families who face food insecurity. These distributions ensure that our keiki come to school nourished and ready to learn, while also supporting the well-being of entire households.

We have also created a school garden that provides hands-on learning opportunities, strengthens cultural connection to ‘āina, and promotes healthy eating habits. The garden is more than an educational tool—it is a living classroom that teaches responsibility, sustainability, and community stewardship.

Additionally, I have successfully applied for and secured funding on behalf of the nonprofit organization I work with, Partners in Development, to bring additional resources and programming to our school community. These funds have helped expand services, strengthen partnerships, and respond flexibly to emerging needs.

However, this work depends on sustainable support. Community schools require consistent coordination, relationship-building, and funding to maintain and expand programs that address food security, enrichment, family engagement, and student wellness. It allows for teachers to teach and CSC to support them and counselors with the good work they continue to do. HB1896 represents an investment in a proven model that strengthens not only schools, but entire communities.

By supporting HB1896, you are supporting:

- Increased food security for families
- Expanded enrichment and hands-on learning opportunities
- Stronger partnerships between schools and community organizations

- Improved student attendance, engagement, and overall well-being

As someone working directly with students and families, I can confidently say that the community school model works. It transforms schools into centers of opportunity and stability. I respectfully urge you to pass HB1896 and continue investing in the success of our keiki and communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Respectfully,

Heidi Ilyavi

Community School Coordinator

Waimea Elementary School

Partners in Development

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:03:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Fuli Soa	Waimanalo School Resource Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

I am the Director for the Waimānalo Elementary and Intermediate Family Resource Center and I support HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

Our school is currently a community school and our school enrolment has dropped drastically over the last couple of years. With that, we have a limited budget and that has impacted our staff and students. To continue to provide rigorous instruction and quality teachers to support our students academic success, funding is crucial. To support the tireless efforts of our community school's coordinator position and those who work in other community schools, funding is crucial.

I strongly urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Fuli Soa

Testimony in Strong Support of HB 1896 – Relating to Community Schools

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Junell Fonokalafi, and I serve as the Community Schools Coordinator at Mākaha Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of HB 1896, which would allocate critical funding to sustain Community Schools across our state. I respectfully urge you to pass this measure to ensure existing Community Schools can continue serving students and families in the upcoming school year.

As the Community Schools Coordinator, my role connects the school with community partners to provide services such as tutoring, health care access, and family support. I organize programs, build partnerships, and work directly with ‘ohana to help remove barriers so students can succeed academically and personally. Community Schools improve student achievement, attendance, and overall well-being while also strengthening the entire ‘ohana and community.

In just my second month as the Community Schools Coordinator in October 2025, I worked closely with a houseless ‘ohana who has one keiki attending our school. After months of working alongside the mother and repeatedly reaching out to multiple organizations, we were able to secure transitional housing in December - the week right before Christmas. The mother was incredibly grateful and shared how excited she was to surprise her keiki with the news that they would have a home to spend the holidays in. This is the power of Community Schools, we do not give up on our families, and we walk alongside them until they are stable.

We have also built strong partnerships that directly support our families. In partnership with 'Elepaio Social Services, families went home with over 50 pounds of groceries in December and enjoyed a free dinner prepared by the Wai‘anae High School Culinary Program. Through our partnership with Kamehameha Schools Community Learning Centers, ‘ohana receive five pounds of kalo and are able to ku‘i together, strengthening connections to one another and to Hawaiian culture. These events do more than provide resources — they build relationships, community pride, and cultural connection.

Additionally, as a Community School, we provide hygiene items, household essentials, school supplies, and backpacks to students whenever there is a need. These supports remove barriers to learning and allow our students to come to school ready to focus and succeed.

Testimony in Strong Support of HB 1896 – Relating to Community Schools

Without continued funding, many of these vital services are at risk. The loss of Community School funding would not just impact events - it would impact children, families, and entire communities who rely on these supports every day.

HB 1896 is an investment in our keiki, our ‘ohana, and the long-term strength of our communities. I respectfully ask that you pass HB 1896 and continue supporting Community Schools so we can sustain this important work.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Me ke aloha,
Junell Fonokalafi
Community Schools Coordinator - Ceeds of Peace
Mākaha Elementary School

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 2:13:49 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Ziu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I write in support of HB1896. Community Schools provide resources for our families in Title 1 areas like the Wai'anae Coast to connect with greater supports. This allows our schools to be more of a hub of wraparound services, in partnership with other nonprofits and organizations organic to our area. When we can assist in taking care of the whole family, we know we are better preparing the whole child for improved school attendance, wellness, focus, and positive lifelong outcomes.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 2:19:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Little	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Community, connection, collaboration. Everyone working together towards the same outcome: the success of the youth in our care. Why *wouldn't* we want this?

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 2:58:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Seonaid Uebelhardt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 13 , 2026

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

I am Seonaid Uebelhardt, the Community School Coordinator with Waikoloa Elementary and Middle School.

I support HB 1896 that supports community schools in Hawaii.

Our school is now in its third year of being a community school. The impact it has had is invaluable to our students, their families, our school administration & staff along with the community and the community partners we collaborate with. Our students and families benefit from food distributions which assist in lessening food insecurities in their homes. Our school personnel benefit from the additional resources and connections made available through the efforts of the Community School Coordinator position. This position also provides outreach to address the chronic absenteeism common in many communities. The reduction of chronic absenteeism has a positive impact on higher testing scores and gainful strides in learning/retention.

Please support HB 1896 so my school and other community schools in Hawaii can continue this vital work that supports our keiki and their ohana.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:06:31 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Griffin Bolan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 14, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

I support HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

There are multiple community schools on the Leeward Coast, where I work, and their impact is clear and obvious. Post COVID-19, we have seen a huge uptick in families living on the street, and the community schools model has been crucial in helping those families get access to resources that they need to support their kids' education.

I urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Griffin Bolan

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 4:11:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
mary drayer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

i support this bill

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:07:20 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee members,

I support HB 1896 which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to support community schools. The allocation of funds is extremely essential to the community schools.

Cheryl Burghardt

Nuuanu Oahu

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 3:10:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ernestine L Belaski- Epstein	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Ernie Belaski, and I serve as the Community Schools Coordinator at Wai‘anae Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of HB1896 and the continued investment in the Community Schools model across Hawai‘i.

At Wai‘anae Elementary, we see every day that students cannot thrive academically unless their basic needs are met and their families are supported. The Community Schools framework allows us to address the whole child by integrating academics, family engagement, and community partnerships into one coordinated system of support.

Through this model, we have been able to connect families with essential services, provide enrichment opportunities beyond the school day, strengthen attendance, and create meaningful partnerships with local organizations. Community Schools are not an “extra” program — they are a strategy that aligns resources efficiently and intentionally to remove barriers to learning.

In communities like Wai‘anae, where many families face economic hardship, housing instability, and transportation challenges, the Community Schools approach ensures that students receive the wraparound support necessary to succeed. We are seeing stronger relationships between families and school staff, improved student engagement, and a greater sense of belonging on campus.

HB1896 represents a critical commitment to sustaining and expanding this work statewide. Continued funding ensures that schools can maintain dedicated coordinators who build partnerships, align services, and track outcomes. Without this infrastructure, many of the supports our students rely on would not be possible.

Investing in Community Schools is an investment in prevention, equity, and long-term success for Hawai‘i’s keiki and families. I respectfully urge you to pass HB1896 and continue supporting this transformative model.

Mahalo for your leadership and your commitment to Hawai‘i’s students and communities.

Sincerely,
Ernie Belaski
Community Schools Coordinator
Wai‘anae Elementary School

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 5:02:08 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shonnalee Ontiveros	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shonnalee Ontiveros, and I submit this testimony in strong support of HB1896, which advances the Community Schools framework in Hawai‘i.

Community Schools are an evidence-based approach that integrates academics, health and social services, youth development, and family engagement to address the whole child and strengthen communities. As a community school coordinator working closely with students and families in West Hawai‘i, I have seen firsthand how barriers such as housing instability, food insecurity, mental health needs, and transportation challenges directly impact student learning and well-being. HB1896 recognizes that schools cannot address these issues alone and that coordinated partnerships are essential.

This bill is important because it promotes collaboration among schools, community-based organizations, county agencies, and families. Community Schools help create safe, supportive learning environments where students thrive academically and socially. They also strengthen family engagement, expand learning opportunities, and connect families to critical resources such as health care, counseling, and basic needs support.

For rural and neighbor island communities, Community Schools are especially impactful. Many families face geographic isolation and limited access to services. A Community Schools model brings supports directly to where families already are the school, making services more accessible, culturally responsive, and efficient.

HB1896 also supports the public good by improving educational outcomes, reducing absenteeism and behavioral challenges, and strengthening long-term economic and social stability. Investing in Community Schools is an investment in Hawai‘i’s keiki, families, and future workforce.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony. I respectfully urge you to **pass HB1896**.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 5:41:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Savelio Makasini	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

My name is Savelio Makasini, and I support HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

I serve as a Community School Coordinator and have been apart of the Community Schools program for a couple months. Within that time frame, I have been able to get our Family Resource Center up and running at Kaimuki High School with the help of our admin, teachers and families. Our official opening will be on the 18th of February! Research shows that family engagement and students success will improve with ‘Ohana Centers like this one. With this bill, we can sustain the work that has been put in, and continue to foster growth and success with families and students.

I urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai‘i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Savelio “Nuki” Makasini

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:43:51 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joseph Passantino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joseph Passantino and I am the principal of Ke'elikolani Middle School. Ke'elikolani is a challenged middle school serving a community with significant academic and social needs. I am writing in strong support of HB 1896 because this bill directly impacts our ability to serve students, families, and the broader community in a meaningful and sustainable way.

As a CSI (Comprehensive Support and Improvement) school, we receive targeted funding to provide essential academic interventions, mental health supports, family engagement programs, and staff resources that our students desperately need. These supports are not luxuries — they are lifelines.

However, the current system creates a painful contradiction.

When a CSI school improves academically and successfully exits CSI status — which is the very goal of the program — the funding is drastically reduced or removed altogether. Yet the needs of our students and families do not suddenly disappear. In many cases, they remain just as great.

We are essentially punished for success.

I often explain it this way: it is like being told to prepare a full Thanksgiving dinner for a large family — but being given only a loaf of bread to do it. No matter how skilled, committed, or creative you are, it is simply impossible to meet expectations without the necessary resources.

Our school has worked tirelessly to raise achievement, build trust with families, support student mental health, and create safe, engaging learning environments. But we cannot maintain — let alone expand — these critical services when funding is removed the moment progress is made.

Improvement should be rewarded and sustained, not financially stripped away.

HB 1896 is essential because it recognizes that school transformation is not a short-term fix. It requires continued investment to ensure gains are not lost and that students continue moving forward. Without consistent support, schools risk sliding backward, undoing years of hard work.

Our families rely on our school not just for academics, but for stability, resources, and hope. When funding disappears, it is our most vulnerable students who pay the price.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 1896 so that schools that demonstrate growth are empowered to sustain success — not struggle to survive it.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my testimony and for your commitment to Hawaii's students and communities.

Respectfully,
Joseph Passantino

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 10:45:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Rice	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

I strongly support HB 1896. I am a licensed social worker and researcher with direct experience evaluating Hawai'i community schools, the views expressed are my own and do not represent my any organization I have been employed or contracted by. I have seen firsthand how the community school model positively impacts students, families, schools, and the broader community.

Community schools strengthen academic outcomes by addressing students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs while fostering meaningful family and community engagement. They create coordinated systems of support that reduce barriers to learning, enhance student well-being, and promote long-term educational success. Importantly, these schools also empower families and leverage community partnerships to build more resilient, connected neighborhoods.

Based on both my professional practice and research experience, HB 1896 represents a thoughtful investment in evidence-informed strategies that support whole-child development and equity across Hawai'i's public education system.

I urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Sarah Rice

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 15, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

My name is Katrina Olivier, and I am both a staff member and a parent at Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School. I proudly support HB 1896, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

I began my journey at our school as an Educational Assistant. Through mentorship, support, and opportunities made possible within our community school model, I have grown into my current role as the Family Resource Center Assistant. At the same time, I am a mother of three boys who attend this very school.

Because I wear both hats — educator and parent — I see firsthand how community schools strengthen families and staff alike. As a staff member, I witness how coordinated partnerships bring food support, family engagement, and critical resources directly to our campus. As a parent, I have personally benefited from these services and know the relief it brings to families when support is accessible and stigma-free.

Community schools do more than serve students. They create pathways for local parents like me to grow professionally while staying connected to our children's education. They build trust between families and school staff. They create a sense of belonging.

This bill matters because it sustains opportunities — for students to thrive, for families to feel supported, and for staff members like me to grow in leadership while serving our own community.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 1896 and continue investing in a model that strengthens schools from the inside out.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katrina Olivier

Family Resource Center Assistant

Parent of three students

Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:31:07 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth D King	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

House Committee on Education

Representative Justin H. Woodson Chair

Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

February 9, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica and members of the Committee,

I, Dr. Beth King, the community school coordinator at the Hawaii School for the Deaf and Blind supports HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

Passing this bill will help the Hawaii School for the Deaf reach the families who are raising Deaf and hard of hearing keiki across the State. On each island there are individual programs and placements for parents to choose in order to match an educational practice or mode with the unique needs of children with hearing loss; however, there is no community based support that truly educates parents at all stages on the knowledge needed, nor provides all the resources available at the national, state and county level directly to the families in a manner that is received with grace, respect and empathy to bilingual bicultural needs of our diverse community. Community Schools now have the

potential to connect American Sign Language instructors, Deaf advocacy groups, local Deaf community based social groups and leaders in a dual-capacity framework that values the input and encourages the participation of parents to an elevated degree that what has occurred prior. Community Schools in the fine thread that tightens the gap between family needs and effective support. Passing this bill can finally address the limits of language deprivation to which deaf keiki suffer when born into families that have no access to sign language nor those competent in this mode of communication. Community School programs can also aim to address the need to “grow our own ASL interpreters” by connecting the caregivers and family members of Deaf children to engage in potential work related professions that surround dDeaf citizens.

I, Beth King, urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities. Thank you so much for caring about our Deaf community. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Beth King, EdD

HSDB Ceeds of Peace, CSC

8088704818

drbdking@gmail.com

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 12:50:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
May Okihiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a senior pediatrician who has worked in Wai‘anae for over 25 years in Hawai‘i, I know that the community schools model works to support our families, especially now. We must continue to breakdown silos and this is an effective way. Please support HB1896.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 10:37:09 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amber Corrales	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I ask for your support for Bill HB 1896 Community Schools. North Kohala depends on the connections that are formed under this model and we are an exemplar for the rest of the state on how well this model works, how it can be done even when major corporations are absent, and it helps kids get jobs!! We need that, especially in rural, isolated communities like ours that are being inundated by bunker building billionaires and millionaires with little to no understanding of our communities. Our future and identity depend on our Community Schools. Look at what we have done with so little!!

Mahalo,

Amber Corrales

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 7:31:10 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ariel Herring	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 1, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

I'm a parent in the waimanalo community. Here's my thoughts.

During the most unstable times in my life, school wasn't my first priority, survival was. There was no time to focus on my schoolwork, since I was faced with worries and struggles no child should carry. I often think about how if I was offered the resources then what is offered now, maybe I would have been able to focus more and I would have completed school. That's why state funding for schools is so critical especially for communities like Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School. For many children, the resources there are not "extras." They are lifelines. Access to caring teachers, counselors, meal programs, academic support, and enrichment opportunities can mean the difference between simply surviving and truly thriving. When families are struggling with poverty housing insecurity, substance abuse or simply not being able to provide the basic needs like food, schools become the front line of stability and hope. Investing in schools like Waimānalo isn't just about education, it's about breaking cycles and giving children a real chance at a better future. For students facing hardship, those resources can change the entire trajectory of their lives. Thank you all for your time.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:35:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kathleen Matsuda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 15, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

My name is Kathleen Matsuda from the Kohala Resilience Hub and I support HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

We are a small town and our community is close. We work together to find solutions for our community. Kohala schools becoming a community school is the best thing to happen and it works! The Kohala Resilience Hub always connects with our schools with information and involve them in our community events. We work great together! Passing this bill will help them to continue. *Ross Pagat was passionate in helping our school become a community school and also help build the resilience hub which started during covid. The only way our community can exist is the connection of our community with every organization, school, health departments, offices, stores etc...*

I Kathleen Matsuda from the Kohala Resilience Hub urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai‘i and organize our resources towards the

success of learners, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Matsuda

Director of the Kohala Resilience Hub & Outreach

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 2:09:39 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Lamson Leatherman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Reps of the EDN Committee,

Our ‘Ohana is 100% in support of this bill/ effort to better support and fund our community schools. As a new parent, I recognize how important outside resources are to a holistic education for the next generation - especially for more remote island communities. This bill is a step in that direction, and I hope it passes into the next hearing with your support.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Best,

Megan Leatherman

Honalo, HI

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 2:36:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Lamson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha members of the House Committee on Education,

A quick note to share our **wholehearted support of this proposed House Bill 1896** that will increase funding / capacity for community schools. Hawai'i Wildlife Fund (HWF) is a small nonprofit committed to protecting native wildlife of Hawai'i through research and education. Our youth environmental education work over the past three decades includes both experiential and service-learning activities / fieldtrips, and in-school classroom lessons designed for GK-12 students to learn about and engage in their natural world. Many of the schools we work in are community schools, including Na'alehu Elementary and Ka'ū HS and Pāhala Elementary, and would benefit from the passing of this bill with increased cooperation and collaboration with local NGOs like ours. Please vote in support of HB1896.

Mahalo for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,

Megan Lamson, HWF President

Kealahou, HI

House Committee on Finance
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 16, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

My name is Evelyn Barut, and I am writing in strong support of HB 1896, which appropriates funding to the Department of Education for community schools.

At Governor Sanford B. Dole Middle School, I have seen firsthand how the community school model strengthens attendance, family engagement, and student achievement by aligning school staff, families, and community partners around shared goals. Through meaningful community partnerships, family participation has increased significantly, particularly at school events and in our Ohana Center, where we operate a food pantry to support families in need.

Families also receive health services through the Hawaii Keiki Nurses program. Access to these essential resources allows families and students to focus on consistent school attendance and academic success. These supports remove barriers that might otherwise prevent students from thriving.

If this bill passes, it will help Dole Middle School and its community sustain the progress they have worked so hard to achieve in both academic performance and family engagement. Continued investment will ensure that this proven strategy remains strong and can expand to benefit even more students and families.

I urge you to support HB 1896 to sustain the community schools movement in Hawaii and to better organize our resources around the success of learners, families, and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Evelyn Barut

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 1, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

I, Trish Papalimu, support HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

Tucked away on the slopes of Mauna Loa in South Kona sits Hōnaunau Elementary School, educating just under 200 students. Although we are small, we are mighty and it shows in our continuous increase in our academic growth & community partnerships. As a current Community School, we host a School-Based Community Health Center as well as a Family Resource Center which I have the privilege of being the Director of alongside my role as the Community Schools Coordinator.

Through our Family Resource Center we support other schools in the community like Ho'okena Elementary, Konawena Complex, 'Ehunuikaimalino, Kūpa'a Homeschool Academy, and the University of Hawai'i-Pālanui by providing necessities they need if we have them in stock.

In my role, and with huge support from DOE staff of other schools as well as my own, we have served as a hot meal distribution site through COVID and have run KauKau4Keiki distributions and Food Basket distributions throughout the years. I've led Vibrant Hawai'i food distribution through the Federal furlough with the same team of family, educators and community that have consistently been my backbone in this work time and time again. We were blessed to have our State Representative Jeanné Kapela support us at our distributions as well!

Through Community School efforts and partnerships we learned how to navigate fear, grief, and brokenness through smiles and unsure reassurance through the ICE raids that happened in our community. Many other schools, including other Community Schools pushing to support this Bill delivered, mailed, ordered online for pickup, and flew over with a multitude of essential items to support not just our immigrant families that were affected, but our community as a whole. That is the POWER of Community Schools. That is the MANA of all of us who hold these roles as pillars in our communities as a person who is safe, transparent, trustworthy, and who exudes respect and ALOHA. A person in and of that community who serves with purpose through heart with no expectations in return but to see our lāhui thriving as just that, a lāhui.

Community Schools bridge that gap between school and community. We support school functions and outside community events. We provide opportunity for cultural learning, activities,

and values. Our efforts help students thrive in their learning environment by providing food/snacks when they're hungry and clothing when it's needed. We help ease food insecurity, provide internet access and printing capabilities, and provide that sense of "belonging" to our students, families, and community.

Community Schools should not be something that needs a "seat" at this table. It should be the "meal" that we are all eating and getting fulfilled from. We should all be hungry to support this Bill because the (PAST) teachings of our kūpuna matters. The healing of our (PRESENT) generations matters. The foundation we set forth for our (FUTURE) matters. WE matter. We're all hungry to continue this work of Community Schools across this pae 'āina so let's lay the spread out on the table and E.A.T (Engage-Activate-Transform)!

I urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Trish Papalimu, Ceeds of Peace

Community Schools Coordinator

Family Resource Center Director

Hōnaunau Elementary School, South Kona

House Committee on Finance
 Representative Chris Todd, Chair
 Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 15, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896: Sustaining Community Schools in Hawai'i

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

As the Principal of **Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School**, I am writing to express my **strongest possible support** for HB 1896. This bill is not merely requesting "add-on" funding; it is an investment in the essential operational framework that drives our school's core academic mission.

At Waimānalo, our Community Schools Coordinator, Leialohamakamae Lum King, has proven that this model's success stems from the seamless integration of Community School Pillars with our **SY 2025-2026 Academic Plan**:

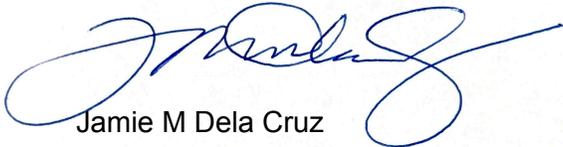
Academic Plan Priority	Community Schools Pillars	Symbiotic Impact
1. High-Quality Learning	Rigorous, Community-Connected Instruction & Expanded Learning	Grounding instruction in <i>‘Āina-based learning</i> and career programs addresses root causes of low achievement by providing a curriculum students are excited to engage with.
2. High-Quality Workforce	Culture of Belonging & Integrated Systems of Support	By partnering with providers like <i>Ku I Ka Mana</i> to address non-academic barriers, we reduce the secondary burden on teachers, directly improving staff morale and retention.
3. Effective Operations	Collaborative Leadership & Powerful Family Engagement	The <i>Community School Hui</i> ensures our operations (HMTSS) are informed by <i>‘ohana</i> voice, moving family engagement from "attendance at events" to "true shared governance."

The Community Coordinator is the "bridge" between academic goals and the community resources required to reach them. Without this dedicated position, the responsibility for managing these complex partnerships falls back onto faculty, diluting their focus on instruction.

Furthermore, the establishment of a central system to train and support coordinators—as proposed in this bill—is vital. To effectively operationalize these resources across the islands, we need a standardized support structure to scale the 40% attendance improvements seen in successful model schools.

I urge you to pass HB 1896 to sustain this movement and ensure the continued success of our learners, families, and the Waimānalo community.

Malama Pono,



Jamie M Dela Cruz

Proud Principal of Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 6:46:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Olga Kalashnikova	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Olga Kalashnikova, and I am a preschool teacher at Na‘alehu Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of HB 1896 to fund community schools in Hawai‘i.

In my preschool classroom, I serve many migrant students whose families rely deeply on the resources our community school provides. Access to our Family Resource Center and partnerships with community organizations makes a meaningful difference in their daily lives. These supports help ensure that our youngest learners feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

I also write as a parent. My daughter currently attends Na‘alehu Elementary in first grade, and my son will soon enter preschool. Our family personally appreciates the care, connection, and resources that our community school offers. It is reassuring to know that our children are growing in a school where families are supported alongside students.

Community schools strengthen both education and community wellbeing. I respectfully urge you to support HB 1896 and continue investing in the resources that uplift our keiki and families every day.

Sincerely,

Olga Kalashnikova
Teacher and Parent

Testimony in Support of HB1896 – Community Schools

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lori Gibson, and I am the Community School Coordinator at Ka'u High and Pahala Elementary School. We have been participating in the Community Schools program for 3 years. I have also been the coordinator for the Ocean View Tutoring Center for the past 3 years, where Community Schools has helped with translation and homework assistance for our large population of ELL students. I am writing in **strong support of HB1896**, which advances and sustains the Community Schools model in Hawai'i.

Community Schools is assisting in the creation of a Family Resource Center. Students and families will be able to go to the FRC for specific support in food security, health and education counseling and assistance in understanding the family's role in the school community. A food pantry, shoes and clothing pantry and learning resources will be available to students and families in need.

During my time at KHPES, the Community Schools approach has been instrumental in addressing chronic absenteeism, strengthening family engagement, encouraging student involvement and supporting off-campus afterschool tutoring. Through intentional coordination of resources, partnerships, and supports, our school has made meaningful, measurable progress. As a result of this collective work, **KHPES has successfully exited CSI (Comprehensive Support & Improvement) status as of this school year**. This achievement reflects the power of the Community Schools model to address both academic and non-academic barriers to student success.

HB1896 is critical because it recognizes that schools cannot do this work alone. Community Schools provides the structure and support needed to uplift students, strengthen families, and allow educators to focus on teaching and learning.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my experience. I respectfully urge you to vote YES and pass HB1896.

House Committee on EDN
Representative Justin H. Woodson Chair
Representative Trish La Chica Vice Chair

February 16, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and members of the Committee,

I Leilani Rodrigues support HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools. Here is a little background on what funding for community schools really does for a community

In the small community of Na'alehu, with a population of approximately 900 people, sits a small elementary school serving about 420 students in grades pre-K through sixth. Na'alehu School is located in the Ka'ū district, which spans 922 square miles. The distance from one end of the district to the other is 53 miles and takes nearly an hour to drive.

Many of our students make this commute to school every single day. Some must rely on family members or friends just to reach their bus stop, which can be up to five miles from their home—before they even begin their bus ride to school. On many mornings, temperatures are in the 50s, requiring students to wear extra layers just to stay warm. All of this happens before our students even begin their school day and their learning.

Being a community school allows our students to thrive because the community comes together to support them. Community partners play a vital role in our students' success. They help organize carpools so students can get safely to their bus stops. They provide resources for students and families, such as thrift closets for children who forget a jacket or lose their slippers on the way to school. Food donation services support families experiencing food insecurity, ensuring students can focus on learning rather than hunger.

Our family resource center offers families a place to seek assistance, access needed resources, and participate in family-strengthening classes. Students also benefit from additional learning opportunities both in school and throughout the community that promote wellbeing, foster a strong sense of belonging, and help students feel confident and valued.

Most importantly, these opportunities help our students learn about Hawai'i, Hawaiian culture, and the place they call home. Community schools do more than educate—they uplift entire communities. At Na'alehu School, the community school model ensures that despite distance, geography, and challenges, our students are supported, cared for, and given every opportunity to succeed.

I urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities.

Sincerely,
Leilani Rodrigues

Date: February 16, 2026

To: House Committee on Education
Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
And members of the Committee

From: Douglas Imig, PhD
2381 Aina Lani Place
Honolulu, HI 96822
Dougimig73@gmail.com

Re: Support for HB1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for Community Schools

Good morning. I am writing to express my strong support for passage of HB1896, which would strengthen the development of community schools to support student success across Hawai'i.

Community Schools are a time-tested strategy for connecting students to the supports they need to thrive. They are a proven school improvement strategy, focused on student-centered teaching and learning that better serves the holistic needs of all students and their families. Community Schools are an investment in children, families, and our shared future. Quality Community Schools support higher student achievement and graduation rates and lead them to become contributing members of society by increasing opportunities for ALL students.

Community Schools work in partnership with community organizations, families, and other agencies to advance student outcomes by integrating student supports, active family and community engagement, collaborative leadership practices, and expanded and enriching learning time. Educators may work with partners such as local companies, nonprofits, and higher education institutions to offer students real-world projects that make learning more relevant and engaging. They build connections that can open the door to future opportunities.

The community schools strategy brings funding and resources into schools that would otherwise not be available to them, resulting in an impressive "return on investment" to the government support provided. A research study of community schools in New Mexico found that each \$1 invested in a Community Schools Coordinator returns approximately \$7.11 in net benefits. Kids and families do better when communities work together. More public funding can ensure that ALL students and families benefit from the holistic framework that Community Schools offer--including urban, suburban, and rural communities. It is also a great way to address the needs of parents and students who need specialized support--such as children with disabilities and English language learners.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB1896 which would provide critical infrastructure support to Hawai'i's community schools.

Bill: HB 1896, relating to COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

From: Amy Stafford, Principal, Kohala High School

Date: February 15, 2026

Position: SUPPORT AND COMMENTS

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 1896, which seeks to appropriate \$2,152,500 for the implementation and coordination of community schools within the Department of Education. Community schools are a proven, time-tested strategy that produces vital short-term and long-term outcomes for our students.

At Kohala High, we have seen firsthand how the community school strategy addresses the root causes of barriers to learning. Our community school coordinator has been instrumental in our success, specifically in the following areas:

- **Family and Community Engagement:** By building partnerships and facilitating collaboration, our coordinator has helped us significantly increase family engagement and strengthen our community partnerships.
- **Attendance Initiatives:** Improving regular student attendance is a top priority. Our coordinator has been a key supporter of these initiatives by:
 - Meeting directly with parents and students to identify needs and solutions.
 - Providing incentives for students to attend school regularly.
 - Working closely with the Vice Principal to organize positive recognition campaigns that foster a culture of belonging.

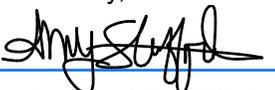
The legislature finds that community school coordinators play a critical role in translating community voice and data into effective action. We see our partnership with our coordinator continuing to strengthen and grow as we establish more robust systems of support that can be built upon each year.

The research cited in this bill highlights a significant return on investment—notably a \$7.11 net benefit for every dollar invested in a coordinator. For Kohala High School, funding to support the community school strategy at our small, rural school is not just a budget line item; it is a critical part of our school's future and our ability to ensure every student thrives.

I urge the Board to support the passage of HB 1896 to ensure that Hawaii's schools have the resources necessary for collective impact and sustainable improvement.

Mahalo for your time and for your dedication to our students.

Sincerely,



Amy Stafford (Feb 15, 2026 2:13:58 HST)

Amy Stafford
Principal, Kohala High School

House Committee on Finance
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 16, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee,

I am reaching out in support of HB 1896, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

I have worked in the field of family engagement for about nine years. Family engagement is critical for student achievement and school improvement. Community Schools support effective family engagement in several key ways, including:

- **Comprehensive services:** Community Schools function as community hubs, offering wraparound services like healthcare, adult education, and social services alongside education. Several Community Schools also have Family Resource Centers which provide opportunities for building trusting, collaborative home-school partnerships, identifying family needs and strengthening families, and connecting families to community resources. This integrated approach makes it easier for families to access needed supports in one location.
- **Shared leadership structures:** Community Schools often include family representatives in school governance and decision-making processes, giving parents a meaningful voice in their children's education. Empowering families to be advocates for their children's education is a key component of effective family engagement.
- **Extended hours and programming:** Community Schools typically offer before and after-school programs, providing working parents with reliable childcare and expanded learning opportunities for students.
- **Two-way communication systems:** Community Schools often establish regular home visits, family nights, and multilingual communication channels to ensure ongoing dialogue between educators and families. Opportunities for families to come to the school campus is a critical step in creating an environment where families feel safe and have a sense of belonging.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill that would sustain the Community Schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Victoria Timmerman, Ph.D.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 8:16:05 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, OPPOSE

current legislations will address this issue. Duplicate services?

1896 HB RELATING TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:50:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley Elizabeth Pualielani Kamalani- Andaya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support community schools. They are much needed in our community. It would help to build and bridge our communities and help to ease the burden of our ever challenging economy here in hawaii.

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:26:21 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Faith Machado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

House Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

February 15, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

My name is Faith Machado. I am a former student of Waimānalo Elementary & Intermediate School, and I proudly support HB 1896 to fund community schools.

As a student at Waimānalo, I remember how meaningful it was when our school hosted family nights and community events. Those evenings were more than just activities — they created connection. Students felt proud to bring their families to campus, and families felt welcomed and involved in their children’s education. That sense of belonging made a difference in how we showed up to school each day.

Over the years, my family has also received support from the Family Resource Center, including clothing and food assistance. Having access to those resources during challenging times helped ease stress for my family. Now, as a parent, I have personally experienced the relief of knowing that support is available when we need it. When families don’t have to worry as much about basic needs, they can focus more on their children’s learning and well-being.

Community schools are not just about programs — they are about building relationships and trust. They provide a safe space where families can seek support without judgment. They create opportunities for parents to stay engaged and connected to their children’s education. They strengthen the bond between school and community.

HB 1896 ensures that these services continue for families like mine and for future generations of students in Waimānalo and across Hawai‘i. Investing in community schools is investing in the success, stability, and strength of our communities.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 1896.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Faith Machado

Community Member

HB-1896

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 8:43:59 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Luiz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Leilani Luiz, and I serve as a Community School Coordinator at Pāhoa High and Intermediate, within the Hawai'i Community Schools network. I write in strong support of HB1896.

Community Schools are not a program. They are a commitment to stand with our most vulnerable families and build from the foundation up. When we strengthen the base, the entire system rises. I see this every day. By working beyond the school bell and outside traditional structures, I build partnerships that remove barriers, restore dignity, and reconnect families to opportunity. This model creates bridges between schools and community, aligning resources with real needs through a clear, coordinated roadmap.

Because of Community Schools, students access essentials, families find stability, and relationships grow into trust. The impact is measurable in attendance and achievement, but it is also felt in belonging and hope.

HB1896 ensures this work continues. It protects a structure that is already proving effective. It invests in keiki, in 'ohana, and in communities that are ready to thrive when given the right support.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB1896.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Me ke aloha,

Leilani Luiz

Community School Coordinator, Ceeds of Peace, Pāhoa High and Intermediate

House Committee on Education
Representative Justin H. Woodson
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

February 16, 2026

RE: Support of HB 1896

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee,

I, Aubrey Parayno am a parent and Community School Coordinator at Kohala Elementary School and I supports HB 1896 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for community schools.

As a Community School Coordinator, I have been able to partner with my school and our community partners to enrich our in school and family engagement events to encourage a sense of belonging for our students. Encouraging students to come to school. As we know, students cannot learn if they are not showing up at school. It was a year long effort of planning with school leadership to create a fun, safe, and engaging school atmosphere. By doing this we have helped address the chronic absenteeism that our school faces. Last school year, 2024-2025 we were able to decrease our chronic absenteeism by 12%, compared to only 4% decreases from previous school years.

I urge you to support this bill that would sustain the community schools movement in Hawai'i and organize our resources towards the success of learners, families, and communities.

Sincerely,
Aubrey Parayno