



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

Date: 02/11/2026

Time: 01:29 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: EDU

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB895, SD1, PROPOSED, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Relating To Education. Short form bill.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) respectfully offers comments for SB895 SD 1. The current kindergarten entry assessment requirements reflected in Act 210, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2021, are satisfactory for appropriately assessing the developmental needs and prior preschool attendance of all children in both Hawaiian- and English-medium classrooms across the Department.

The current consistent common assessment data collected gives a measure of where the Department's kindergarten students are at when they enter kindergarten across the state from every complex area. The current KEA only requires the assessment to be given once. Teachers are able to utilize the data on language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development for planning and addressing individual student needs.

The Department defers to the Hawai'i State Board of Education regarding adopting rules pursuant to Chapter 91.

The amendments in the bill would require kindergarten teachers using their professional judgment and discretion to conduct an observational assessment for each child in their class regarding the child's development and school readiness, including but not limited to: language and early literacy development, cognitive and problem-solving skills, social and emotional development, physical development, and whether the child attended preschool or another early learning program before entering kindergarten.

The Department wants to note that the amendments will no longer result in a common data set, as assessments may vary school by school, dependent upon the kindergarten teacher's expertise. The kindergarten teacher will be responsible to assess all the areas mentioned in the bill. Currently, schools do not pay for the KEA, and teachers do not need to develop their own assessments. If in the future the state considers assessing the impact of investments in preschool classrooms, individual kindergarten assessment data will not be available beyond whether a student attended preschool or another early learning program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB895 SD 1.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



ROY M. TAKUMI
CHAIRPERSON

**STATE OF HAWAII
BOARD OF EDUCATION
PAPA HO'ONA'AUAO**
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Senate Committee on Education
Wednesday, February 18, 2026
1:02 p.m.
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 229

Measure: Senate Bill 895 SD1, Relating to Education

Purpose of Measure:

Establishes new requirements for teacher-led kindergarten assessments in public and charter schools. Authorizes the Board of Education to adopt rules. Repeals certain requirements for the Department of Education and State Public Charter School Commission to share data with the Department of Human Services.

Aloha Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The Board of Education (Board) respectfully offers comments on Senate Bill 895 SD1.

The Board defers to the Department of Education and Executive Office on Early Learning regarding the current implementation and goals of the kindergarten entry assessment.

The Board also notes it would be more appropriate for the Department to promulgate administrative rules related to kindergarten assessments, as the Department would continue to be responsible for implementation.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Board.



STATE OF HAWAII

Executive Office on Early Learning

Ke'ena Ho'okele Ho'ona'auao Pae Kamali'i o Hawai'i Moku'aina
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

TO: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Testimony on S.B. No. 895, S.D. 1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Committee: EDU
Date: Wednesday, February 18, 2026
Time: 1:02 p.m.
Location: Conference Room 229

Executive Office on Early Learning's Position: **COMMENTS**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments on S.B. 895, S.D. 1 and defers to the Hawai'i State Department of Education regarding implementation and funding.

EOEL respectfully requests that kindergarten assessments remain uniform statewide and that EOEL retain access to the data needed to inform efforts to strengthen kindergarten readiness across Hawai'i's mixed-delivery early learning system.

The current Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) provides a uniform, statewide measure of key domains of school readiness through a combination of direct assessment and teacher observation. Pursuant to section 302A-1165, HRS, EOEL uses KEA data to help close the school readiness gap at kindergarten entry.

It has been a valuable tool for EOEL in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities for administering the EOEL public Prekindergarten Program. Specifically, KEA data help EOEL to:

- Identify areas of highest need to inform public PreK expansion decisions;
- Guide annual professional development priorities for PreK teachers, educational assistants, and administrators; and
- Measure the impact of the EOEL public PreK program on kindergarten readiness.

Now in its third year, the KEA also provides an opportunity to assess the impacts of recent statewide investments, including the expansion of the public PreK program and increased funding and expanded eligibility for the Preschool Open Doors subsidy. The proposed changes to the assessment would likely reduce the availability of consistent quantitative data needed to evaluate the effects of these and future policy decisions.

We appreciate the Legislature's ongoing investment and shared commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's early learning system for our youngest keiki and their 'ohana. Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments on S.B. No. 895 S.D. 1.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MAKALAPUA ALENCASTRE, Ed. D.
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
('AHA KULA HO'ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1100, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

FOR: SB 895 SD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION
DATE: February 18, 2026
TIME: 1:02 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Education
ROOM: Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission ("Commission") appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 895 SD1** revises the practice of kindergarten assessments to clarify legislative intent, restore teacher-led assessment practices, reduce unnecessary administrative and financial burdens, and ensure that kindergarten assessments remain developmentally appropriate and instructionally focused.

The Commission appreciates the efforts of the Legislature to recognize the importance of teacher professional judgement and discretion in assessing student performance as well as the instructional autonomy of charter schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 1:10:51 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Piikea Kalakau-Baarde	Testifying for Teach for America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senator Kim, Chair, Senator Kidani, Vice Chair, and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Pi'ikea Kalakau-Baarde, and I work at Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a former public school teacher and now support TFA Hawai'i's local initiatives, including our corps member programming, early literacy, alumni leadership development, external affairs, and more.

I'm reaching out in support of SB895, which establishes new requirements for teacher-led kindergarten assessments in public and charter schools.

A significant portion of my current role involves advancing a 10-year goal around early literacy that we established through research and over 400 local interviews and survey responses from educational leaders, community organizations, students, and families. Specifically, our goal is that by 2030, twice as many children in Nānākuli and Wai'anae will reach proficiency in 3rd-grade reading, indicating that they are on a path to economic mobility and co-creating a future filled with possibilities. We believe that revisiting Hawai'i's Kindergarten assessments would positively impact this goal.

Kindergarten educators utilize daily observation and direct interaction to monitor student progress continually. As trained experts, they are uniquely qualified to assess a child's development after an initial period of adjustment. Mandating standardized, external assessments during the first weeks of the year creates an undue administrative load, detracts from vital learning time, and adds unnecessary pressure to both the classroom and the staff.

This measure restores legislative intent by:

- Ensuring assessments are teacher-led and developmentally appropriate;
- Allowing sufficient time for meaningful observations for formative assessments;
- Requiring follow-up assessment later in the school year to measure growth; and
- Explicitly prohibiting the mandatory use of costly, externally contracted assessment tools and excessive training requirements.

This bill supports children, respects teacher professionalism, and represents responsible stewardship of public funds. I respectfully urge your support.

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 1:22:18 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Weber-Yarbrough	Testifying for Teach For America Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this measure as it restores legislative intent, respects teacher professionalism, and represents responsible stewardship of public funds.

Mahalo,

Anne Weber-Yarbrough

Managing Director Regional Initiatives

Teach For America Hawai'i

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 1:38:57 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grace Brown	Testifying for Teach for America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure as it restores legislative intent, respects teacher professionalism, and represents responsible stewardship of public funds.

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:04:22 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meilan Akaka Manfre	Testifying for Teach For America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Meilan Akaka Manfre, and I serve as the executive director of Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a former public school teacher and public school parent. Mahalo again for the work you do.

I'm reaching out in support of SB895, which establishes new requirements for teacher-led kindergarten assessments in public and charter schools.

The original intent behind Hawai'i's kindergarten assessments was simple: to help teachers understand where children are developmentally so they can better support learning in the classroom. This formative type of assessment would provide common information on the percentage of students entering school ready for kindergarten, as well as areas of opportunity for academic and social intervention. A post-test in the fourth quarter of the school year will also be used to determine how many students have been able to meet Kindergarten expectations.

As I have seen in my own child's classroom, kindergarten teachers provide the best assessment through daily classroom interaction. Imposing external tests in the opening weeks of school diverts time from teaching and creates needless stress for students and staff alike. Let's prioritize instruction over administrative burden.

This measure restores legislative intent by:

- Ensuring assessments are teacher-led and developmentally appropriate;**
- Allowing sufficient time for meaningful observations for formative assessments;**
- Requiring follow-up assessment later in the school year to measure growth; and**
- Explicitly prohibiting the mandatory use of costly, externally contracted assessment tools and excessive training requirements.**

This bill supports children, respects teacher professionalism, and represents responsible stewardship of public funds. I respectfully urge your support.

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 6:00:11 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nakoʻolani Warrington	Testifying for Kupuna for the Moopuna	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT OF SB 895 SD1 PROPOSED

We, Kūpuna for the Mo‘opuna, a hui of Hawaiian Homes Commission Act kūpuna beneficiary farmers from Pana‘ewa, Hawai‘i, **testify in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 895 SD1 PROPOSED.**

We appreciate this common-sense approach to a sound way of using kindergarten teachers’ time and Hawai‘i taxpayers’ dollars to benefit young learners.

Please support and pass this bill. Mahalo.

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 2:20:01 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly SUPPORT SB 895 SD1. Educators throughout the years have always assessed students. It is past time to return this to kindergarten teachers who are excellent at observing, using meaningful tools and moving forward from them to help our students. The next step is to return this same to educators K-12. The overreach of standardized testing to meet "data" needs for funding from the Feds. etc. was a step backwards. This bill giving the assessment to the people who should have it, I ask that you also support it.

Cheryl Burghardt, retired DOE elementary educator

Nuuanu Oahu

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 12:40:45 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

895 SB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

LATE

SB-895-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 7:59:23 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rain K. Kahula Yong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Kumu Kahula Yong, and I am writing in support of SB895, SD1, which establishes new requirements for teacher-led kindergarten assessments in public and charter schools.

This bill strengthens early childhood education by giving teachers clear guidelines and support to conduct meaningful assessments of students' learning and development. Teacher-led assessments allow educators to better understand each child's strengths and needs, ensuring instruction is responsive and effective from the very start.

However, it's important to note that **kaiapuni teachers face additional challenges**. Our Hawaiian language immersion classrooms operate under unique standards that go beyond conventional expectations, including advanced language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and specialized instructional approaches. Currently, these differences are **not fully reflected in the existing assessment system**, which can make it harder to accurately capture student progress and teacher impact. SB895 provides an opportunity to ensure assessments are more equitable and inclusive of the diverse teaching contexts across our state.

Additionally, by authorizing the Board of Education to adopt rules and repealing outdated data-sharing requirements with the Department of Human Services, this bill reduces administrative burdens and allows teachers to focus on instruction and student learning rather than paperwork.

Supporting SB895 means **prioritizing early learning, empowering teachers across all classrooms including kaiapuni and improving outcomes for our keiki**.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB895, SD1.

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration,

Kahula Yong

Kumu Kaiapuni, Papa 2 @ Ka Waihona o ka Na'auao PCS