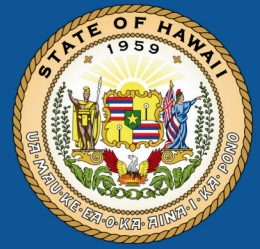


COMMUNITY REPORT

SENATE DISTRICT 18 | MARCH 2024



Serving Mililani Town, Waipi'o Gentry, Crestview, Waikele, portion of Waipahu, Village Park, Royal Kunia



Michelle
KIDANI

**Senate Vice
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Higher Education

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Aloha Friends and Neighbors,

This month has been filled with excitement as we engaged in numerous events, culminating in our annual Education Week program. As the Chair of the Senate Committee on Education, I eagerly anticipate this week-long event each year. It is an opportunity to honor the outstanding achievements of our state's educators, administrators, staff, and students and recognize their contributions to educational excellence.

This year, we partnered with many organizations to host impactful events at the Capitol, including a Book Fair by the Friends of the Library of Hawai'i, a Work-Based Learning Expo by HawaiiKidsCAN, and an Early Learning Day Rally by Hawai'i Children's Action Network. We were thrilled to add to this year's program a Student Showcase by the Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE) and a presentation by the HIDOE's Leadership Institute. Throughout the week, the Capitol was filled with a vibrant atmosphere as families, educators, and children on spring break filled the hallways with energy and enthusiasm.

I am grateful for my staff whose hard work contributed to the great success of this year's Education Week. Each day was a joyful celebration as we honored our students, staff, and educators and welcomed distinguished guests in the gallery. We continue to celebrate educational excellence beyond Education Week. In this newsletter, we highlight the 2024 State Teacher of Promise award and congratulate the Mililani High School's boys varsity soccer team, wrestling, and swimming champs for winning the state championships in their respective sports.

As we enter April, several bills are progressing in the Senate, and we will be sharing updates on social media throughout the month on my [Senate Facebook Page](#). Stay connected by following the [Hawai'i Senate Democrats](#) page and the [Hawai'i Senate YouTube](#) page to keep up with weekly hearings as we continue to make progress on behalf of our community.

Until then, I wish you and your family a joyous Easter season!



Above L-R: Greeting students of Kanoelani Elementary School from my district at the Capitol; Waipahu High School student Lotus Yasuda shares about the school's Early College program.

Recognizing Mililani High School's Soccer, Swimming, and Wrestling Teams

Senator Dela Cruz and I were honored to recognize the Mililani High School boys varsity soccer team for their outstanding performance this season as the 2024 Hawai'i State Division I Champions. The team, along with their student managers and coach, joined us in the Senate gallery to receive the honor. In addition to the soccer team, we were also proud to recognize two additional athletes from Mililani High School, Belise Swartwood, who clinched the Girls Oahu Interscholastic Association (OIA) Swimming Championship, and Moku Jackson, the boys wrestling state champion. These athletes have made their school, community, and state proud with their extraordinary achievements and exemplary representation of sportsmanship and dedication! Congratulations!



2024 Teacher of Promise Award

Congratulations to Kimberly Kim for receiving the prestigious 2024 Teacher of Promise Award from the Milken Educators of Hawai'i! My colleagues and I presented Kimberly with a certificate from the Hawai'i State Legislature to commemorate the occasion. This award is a testament to her outstanding contributions to education, and I have no doubt that she will continue to inspire and uplift those around her. Congratulations once again to Kimberly Kim on this incredible achievement!



Above L-R: Sen. Kim, Kimberly Kim, Rep. Aiu, and I with the joint certificate; Sharing a moment of celebration for Kimberly Kim with faculty from Moanalua Middle School, Rep. Aiu, Sen. Kim, Superintendent Hayashi, and I.

Ho'ākea: Mauka to Makai Navigating our Future Initiative

It was a joy to join our wonderful keiki for a day of hands-on learning about Native Hawaiian voyaging at Kualoa Regional Park. Students engaged in hands-on activities rooted in voyaging traditions and practices, as well as participating in other activities such as composting, knot tying, cooking voyaging foods, and paddling techniques. The aim of this initiative is to help foster in students a "navigator mindset" to become the leaders, stewards and critical thinkers who can navigate Hawai'i into a better future. Mahalo nui to the Hawai'i State Department of Education, Kānehūnāmoku Voyaging Academy, Mālama Learning Center, and Nā Kama Kai for hosting such a memorable event.



Above L-R: Joined by Superintendent Hayashi, aloha 'āina community organizations, and students in front of a wa'a (canoe); Learning how to turn cardboard into compostable products; With Superintendent Hayashi and members of Hānai Kaiāulu.

Education Week 2024

Every spring, the chairs of the Senate and House Education Committees set aside a week dedicated to honoring teachers, students, and education professionals through floor presentations and a series of education-focused events. Our annual Education Week festivities hold a special place in my heart as this week-long celebration allows us to pay tribute to individuals who embody teaching excellence, student accomplishment, and campus leadership. As Chair of the Committee on Education, I am profoundly touched and inspired by the dedication exhibited by each awardee and the unwavering determination and resilience displayed by our education system. Here are a few poignant moments where we had the privilege to recognize our deserving students and educators, along with moments from various events led by our community partners around the Capitol.



The Hawai'i State Senate honoring some of our deserving complex area teacher of the year awardees: (pictured left) Kailua Elementary's Greg Kent, Waianae Elementary's Donna Soriano, 'Ewa Makai Middle's Ariel Villanueva, Farrington High's Norman Ray Sales, Ali'iolani Elementary's Laurie Chang, and Leilehua High's Jackie Freitas; (pictured center) Celebrating Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua Complex Area Resource Teacher Grant Toyooka who resides in my district; (pictured right) Congratulating Ross Angel Bagaoisan, member of Waipahu High's LifeSmarts team.

Hawai'i State Department of Education Student Showcase



Above L-R: (pictured left) former Principal of Kanoelani Elementary and Leadership Institute Executive Director Stacie Kunihisa and I; (pictured center) Kanoelani Elementary students sharing about Project Based Learning with Principal Neil Blomberg; (pictured right) Waipahu High students showcase the Community Health Worker Certification and Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.



Above L-R: (pictured left) Wheeler Middle student demonstrating their AgTech innovation; (pictured center) Joyfully meeting with students of Keonepoko Elementary about their Student Leadership program; (pictured right) Discussing academy pathways to nurture aspiring professionals with 'Aiea High students.

Early Learning Day Rally



Deborah Zysman, Mele Andrade, and the Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) team concluded Education Week with a rally at the State Capitol rotunda. HCAN, along with the Hawai'i Early Children Advocacy Alliance, as well as an outstanding number of parents and keiki, joined us at the Capitol to advocate for quality education, early learning, and a living wage for early childcare providers. It was an impactful and heartwarming morning spending time with advocates and local families, and I am so grateful for their support and dedication to child education!

Education Week District Honorees

I am proud to spotlight the remarkable achievements of the residents in my district. Please join me in celebrating them!



Grant Toyooka

Resource Teacher, Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua Complex Area

Hawai'i Association of School Librarians' 2023 Outstanding Library Service Awardee

Grant Toyooka has served over two decades in the Hawai'i State Department of Education and has exemplified dedication and passion in various capacities at Wahiawa Elementary School and as a District Resource Teacher since 2016. Toyooka spearheaded the librarian Professional Learning Communities within the Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua Complex Area. Notably, Toyooka initiated a series of workshops for parents and students with librarians from Leilehua, Wahiawa, and Wheeler Elementary Schools.

At left L-R, Senator Dela Cruz and I congratulating Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua Complex Area Resource Teacher Grant Toyooka.

Waipahu High School 2024 LifeSmarts State Competition

CONGRATULATIONS to Waipahu High School's LifeSmarts team who placed 3rd overall in the state competition. LifeSmarts is a national educational competition focused on personal finance and consumer topics. This free program, open to 6th-12th-grade students in the U.S., quizzes students about personal finance, technology & workforce preparation, consumer rights & responsibilities, health & safety, and the environment.

At right L-R, Rep. Chun, Stephanie Menor, Ross Angel Bagaoisan, Joybel Parinas, Reagan Chinen, Jordan Nguyen, myself, and Sen. Aquino.



Jessica Peterson

Hawai'i State Department of Education

2024 Pearl City-Waipahu Complex Area Teacher of the Year

Jessica Peterson brings over a decade of experience to her role as a kindergarten teacher at August Ahrens Elementary School. Holding a bachelor's degree in early childhood and special education from The College of Saint Rose, and a master's degree focusing on literacy and math, Peterson has been instrumental in creating inclusive and dynamic learning environments. Her dedication to literacy and numeracy development in early education is matched by her innovative approaches to classroom teaching. Peterson's leadership in inclusion classrooms showcases her commitment to meeting the diverse needs of her students.