

# REVISED

Date of Hearing: March 28, 2008

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent

Title: H.C.R. No. 341 and H.R. No. 282, Requesting the Department of Education of the State of Hawaii to Develop an Improved Method for Calculating Hawaii's Dropout Rates Using a Four-Year Dropout Period.

Purpose: Requesting the Department of Education to develop a new method for calculating Hawaii's dropout rates using a four-year dropout period and that the new method take into account factors used by federal and independent groups that report graduation rates.

Department's Position: The Department of Education (Department) opposes these resolutions. While the Department agrees that lowering the number of dropouts and increasing the number of graduates are important for any school system, the Department notes that some of the information provided to support these resolutions is based on incorrect information. First, the Department

does calculate four-year graduation and dropout rates using four years of student data. Second, the presumption that national data are more reliable than state computed statistics is also incorrect. The Department's four-year graduation rate methodology tracks first-time ninth graders over their four years in high school. Since the Department has a statewide student information system, it is able to track students, over time, and account for each student who enters the ninth grade for the first time. When we analyze these data over the four years we are able to determine how many of the ninth grade cohort transferred out, graduated, were retained, completed with a special education certificate, or dropped out. Rates calculated by other agencies only have access to aggregated totals that the Department submits, annually, to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). These gross counts used by the NCES, and other agencies, include students who have officially transferred out of Hawaii's public school system over the four years. These transfer students show up as non-graduates. The national rates are estimates

based on aggregate counts and do not do justice to any state that has a high student transiency rate. States that have very stable populations can show a higher graduation rate since the number of students who have left their state system will be much less than states with high mobility rates, as is the case in Hawaii. The Department's methodology to compute these rates is the most accurate method to measure a cohort that has been in the system for four years. Until a more accurate method of calculating graduation and dropout rates is developed, the Department will continue to use the best method available.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to these resolutions.