

Date of Hearing: February 8, 2008

Committee: Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent

Title: S.B. No. 2690, Relating to Education

Purpose: Appropriates funds for grants by the Department of Education for the establishment of smaller schools within schools on certain high school campuses.

Department's Position: The Department supports this measure, and concurs that smaller school environments generally provide students with a more personalized setting and an identity where academic achievement can be enhanced through a variety of teaching strategies. On their own initiative, thirteen of our high schools received federal Smaller Learning Communities grant funds to begin this redesign process and have established academies based on student interest and career opportunities available in the community. However, their grants are ending and resources are needed for them to continue this initiative.

The Department supports this bill as long as schools are not mandated to create smaller learning environments. The Department feels strongly that schools should not be mandated to create smaller learning communities as there may be other educationally sound options for schools other

than converting all of them into smaller learning communities. Students, parents, teachers, and their School Community Councils are key stakeholders as well as decision makers, and should be the driving force behind such initiatives.

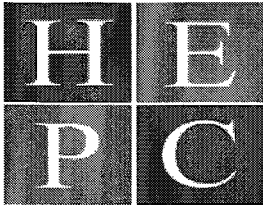
There is one overriding condition for success that is repeatedly cited in the research literature: Smaller school programs must have administrative autonomy along with the latitude and support for the development of a unique and separate identity. Incomplete or inappropriate implementation may have a negative impact on schools without the benefits demonstrated by successful programs. Particular attention must be paid to the implementation of such programs and to ensure adequate administrative, programmatic and organizational support to assist programs with the range of tasks they will face. Smaller school environments in and of themselves do not improve educational outcomes. Smaller school efforts are simply a vehicle to embed high-quality school characteristics —such as personalized teacher-student relationships, a more embracing school climate, and less differentiation of instruction by ability—within a comprehensive plan to improve educational outcomes. Therefore, the Department's

support for of the establishment of small school programs rests on its strategic plan and its accompanying goals.

1. Improve student achievement through standards-based education;
2. Provide comprehensive support for all students; and
3. Continuously improve performance and quality.

The amount of effort and coordination is substantial yet with adequate support, the potential benefits of smaller school environments are inspiring and replicable.

The Department also has concerns regarding **Section 2** that delineates the requirements of the grant. As written, only schools with 1,800 students or more would benefit from this funding. It is projected that next school year, only four of the 43 public high schools will meet the enrollment criteria. The Department is also concerned that major school renovations would be required to ensure that schools within a school maintain their “own, separate continuous assigned space,” as delineated in the bill. This cost would exceed the maximum \$110,000 allowed in the start-up grant. In summary, with the exception of **Section 2**, the Department supports this bill.



**HAWAI'I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER**  
*Informing the Education Community*

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Education  
February 8, 2008, 1:15 p.m., Room 225

By

Valere McFarland, Associate Director  
Hawai'i Educational Policy Center  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

**SB 2690: Relating to Education**

Chair Sakamoto, Vice Chair Takuda, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Educational Policy Center (HEPC) supports SB 2690, which provides for the establishment of smaller schools within public high schools in the form of schools-within-schools, academies, or smaller learning communities. This bill offers a practical way to achieve small schools without the bricks and mortar expense of new construction. The bill also offers a way to build stronger communities for learning in schools.

We in Hawai'i live amidst a culture that values *ohana* over all, yet our schools represent huge factories. It has been well documented that Hawai'i has among the largest school populations in the nation, ranking second in average high school size. The research indicates that what impacts school achievement most—and school safety as well—is school size. Research also indicates that school-to-school transitions e.g. middle-school to high school at 9<sup>th</sup> grade are critical times for students, as they move from nurturing to impersonal environments. Thus, policies that smooth the transition to high school, create closer contact with teachers, and deliver more individual attention to students can help.

There is overwhelming evidence that violence and other incidents requiring disciplinary action are much less likely to occur in small schools than in large ones. Students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging in small schools and truancy and dropping out occurs less frequently. Nationally, dropping out is a significant problem at the high-school level, and this is so in Hawai'i as well, with many disengaged youngsters leaving school without completing it. The impact is not only costly to the individuals involved, but also to the state. Each high school dropout earns approximately \$9,600 less annually in salary than a high school graduate, and over his or her lifetime, costs the state of Hawai'i approximately \$283,000.

SB 2690 addresses the serious academic and social crises that young people face in large school environments. Building usage may need to be rethought to accommodate schools-within-schools, academies or smaller learning communities, with specific criteria clearly in the interests of student wellbeing. Allocating the funding needed to establish smaller schools within public high schools addresses a policy goal that includes graduation as well as achievement on test scores.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.