

SB303

Date: 02/23/2009

Committee: Senate Education and
Housing/Senate Health

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 0303 RELATING TO SCHOOLS

Purpose of Bill: Requires each school to establish and post a pandemic preparedness plan on the department of education's website.

Department's Position: The Department of Education's position is that Senate Bill 0303 which requires each school to establish and post a pandemic preparedness plan on the department of education's website is unnecessary. In December 2007, the Department published our Pandemic Flu Guide which followed the "School District Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist" developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and recommended by the U.S. Department of Education. We also consulted with the State of Hawaii Department of Health during the development of the plan. In 2008, the Department was awarded a Federal Grant called the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools or REMS Grant. One of the major deliverables of the grant is to assist public, private, and charter schools in developing their emergency management plan format and guidelines, including their pandemic flu emergency plans. The projected timeline for this deliverable is by December 2009. Therefore, with all of these actions either already in place or being implemented, the Department's position is that this bill is not necessary.



February 23, 2009
1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 225

TESTIMONY TO
THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON
EDUCATION & HOUSING AND HEALTH

RE: SB 303 – Relating to Schools

Chairs Sakamoto and Ige, Vice Chairs Kidani and Green, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Robert Witt and I am executive director of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS), which represents 97 private and independent schools in Hawaii and educates over 30,000 elementary and secondary students statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to **comment on Senate Bill 303** – Relating to Schools, which requires each school to establish and post a pandemic preparedness plan on the Department of Education’s website. **The Association takes no position on this measure but respectfully requests that it be amended to exclude Hawaii’s private schools from its scope, as our member institutions are already addressing the issue of pandemic preparedness. As such, HAIS suggests that the measure specifically reference public schools.**

Over the past few years, HAIS has been working to assist its member institutions with planning and preparing for a flu pandemic. Currently, we are in the process of updating and improving the existing resources available on our website on this topic and are also actively participating in the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) discretionary grant program, which is funded by the US DOE and administered by the Hawaii DOE. We will be using the information gathered from this program and its related activities to develop a model pandemic preparedness plan for our schools by the summer of 2009.

In addition, we are revising the HAIS accreditation and licensing processes – which already deal with student safety issues and include standards related to crisis management and emergency preparedness – to specifically address pandemic

preparedness. The revised edition of the HAIS accreditation manual, which is currently in development and scheduled for release in the summer of 2010, will have additional standards and/or indicators particularly related to pandemic preparedness, and we are working to have similar standards and/or indicators included as a part of the licensing process as well.

As evidenced by the aforementioned activities, HAIS is vigorously addressing the issue of pandemic preparedness for our members; however, in order to be consistent with the Legislature's de-regulation of the private schools and to maintain the subsequent self-monitoring protocols which HAIS and its affiliated licensing body, the Hawaii Council of Private Schools, have developed for their members, we ask that the private and independent schools of our state be exempted from this legislation. We suggest that the measure be amended so that all references to "schools" or "school" are changed to "public schools" or "public school."

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.