

SCR149

Date of Hearing: March 27, 2009

Committee: Senate Education and Housing

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent

Title: S.C.R.No.149 (S. R. 101), Modify Public High School Graduation Requirements

Purpose: Requests the Board of Education to require fifty hours of community service from all students as part of the Department of Education's civic responsibility requirement.

Department's Position: The Department does not support S. C. R. No. 149 (S.R. 101). This bill is not necessary since the Department is already working on a plan to have students do 50 hours of Volunteer Community Service prior to Graduation.



March 27, 2009  
1:15 p.m.  
Conference Room 225

TESTIMONY TO  
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND HOUSING

RE: SCR 149 – Requests the Board of Education to Modify Public High School Graduation Requirements by Requiring Fifty Hours of Community Service from All Students as Part of the Department of Education's Civic Responsibility Requirement

Dear Chair Sakamoto, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Witt, and I am executive director of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS), which represents approximately 97 private and independent schools across our state.

The Association supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 149, which requests that the Board of Education establish a new Department of Education (DOE) graduation requirement that would require all DOE high school students to perform fifty hours of community service.

HAIS is of the belief that community service programs not only present students with the chance to participate in unique, real-world learning experiences, but also teach them the value and importance of civic responsibility and engagement. Such programs bring schools together with local nonprofit organizations and state departments for the benefit all parties involved, providing the community with much-needed volunteer support and the students with the opportunity to connect with and give back to their communities. In addition, exposure to and involvement in community service activities enable students to acquire valuable character education, promoting the very habits of mind and heart that are the hallmarks of responsible citizenship and which we want to instill in all of our keiki.

For these reasons, we encourage the Committee to pass this resolution.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

Kevin Cheney

UH Intern –Senator Sakamoto

SCR 149

Good afternoon Senators and thank you for this opportunity to testify.

I am here today to strongly support Senate Concurrent Resolution 149 requesting the Department of Education to require 50 hours of community service from all students in the form of a graduation requirement.

I believe that in our current economic climate the time has never been better to renew Hawaii's commitment to civic engagement and service. Besides being the right thing at the right time I believe that requiring 50 hours of service to graduate high school will have several profound effects on our young people, our schools, and our entire community.

First, and most important, will be the positive affect service will have on our young people. High school is a time where students will make decisions and choices that will affect the rest of their lives. It is a time where the foundation is built that will start us on a path to success or a path failure. Adding the community service requirement inserts civic engagement to that crucial foundation. If we put it as a top priority issue, we will get youth who will be engaged in their communities for the rest of their lives. This fact is illustrated by noting that high school students who participate in community service are much more likely to vote and be a member of a community organization 15 years later.

But if we continue to see community service and civic engagement as second tier issues we will continue to get second tier results. I think it's important to note that the National Research Council summary of research on high school engagement found that active participation by students is important for effective learning, and they identify service learning as one of the most effective strategies for improving student engagement and, thereby, academic performance. With academic performance somewhat lacking in many of our schools ideas that have a track record of improving performance should be front and center.

Second, our schools stand to see real benefits. The economic situation in our country and state is hurting to put it mildly. As a result of this situation millions of dollars have already been cut from the DOE's budget and more are expected. Simple things like repainting a school or repairing a playground have been pushed to the back burner to do lack of funds. There are currently 178,369 public school students in Hawaii. If over the next 12 years they all did 50 hours of service we would have 8,918,450 man hours or roughly 750,000 hours a year. The benefits don't stop with just the money saved by free labor because schools painted by students see less vandalism, schools cleaned up by students stay in better shape for longer because service gives you a vested interest in wherever you served.

Third, our community, as a whole, stands to benefit from the new requirement. Our schools are not the only place that is hurting in these challenging financial times. Public services across the state face budget cuts and non-profits need volunteers more than ever. We can truly make this a win

situation for everyone involved. Our youth will be able to include the service on their resumes and college applications making them more attractive, they will have the foundation to lead a civically engaged life, our schools and communities will get some much needed community service, and 25 years from now every person under the age of 40 in the state of Hawaii that graduated from a Public high school will share the special bond that each and every one of them gave 50 hours of their time to make Hawaii a better place for all. Now that is something we can all take pride in. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and please pass this resolution out of your committee.