

SB86

Date: 02/11/2011

Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Kathryn Matayoshi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 0086 Relating to Education

Purpose of Bill: Requires children who are not attending a private school or kindergarten and who are at least 5 years of age on August 1 of the school year to attend a public school kindergarten.

Department's Position: The Department of Education (Department) does not support SB 0086. According to the current statute, all children who turn five-years-old during the calendar year have access to a public kindergarten program. Approximately 90% of the eligible population of five-year-olds annually enroll in a public kindergarten program. The Department continues to offer quality early learning opportunities to all children who attend kindergarten. The Department recognizes and commits to a kindergarten system that balances quality learning experiences with developmentally appropriate practices to build the foundation of a quality statewide early learning system for Hawaii.



SB 86
RELATING TO EDUCATION
Senate Committee on Education

February 11, 2011

1:15 p.m.

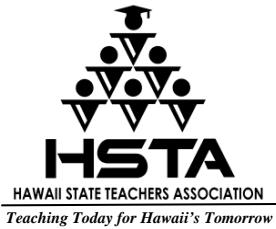
Room 225

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS** SB 86. This bill requires children who are not attending a private school or kindergarten and who are at least 5 years of age on August 1 of the school year to attend a public school kindergarten.

Early education is a powerful tool. Citizens who attend kindergarten are more likely to go to college, not be involved in crime, live healthier lives, and be of overall benefit to the community at large. Early education studies indicate that every dollar spent on early education saves seven dollars in future costs.

Our beneficiaries are among those that would benefit most from SB1384. U.S. Census statistics show that large percentages of Native Hawaiian children ages 0-5 live in remote, rural, and impoverished communities. According to the Hawai'i Department of Education's Readiness Study of 2010, fewer children in these areas enter elementary school with the requisite skills to succeed. In Wai'anae, for example, only 41 percent of the children went to preschool (a readiness indicator) compared to 68 percent in East Honolulu. Mandatory kindergarten attendance will ensure that children living in these areas will have access to vital educational opportunities and ready them for success.

OHA urges the committee to PASS SB 86. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.



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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: SB 86 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

February 11, 2011

WIL OKABE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Tokuda and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) supports SB 86.

HSTA believes in mandatory kindergarten for students reaching five years of age by August 1st. As educators, our teachers know the value of building a strong academic foundation at an early age. Mandating kindergarten affords every child that opportunity.

Research shows the importance of full-day kindergarten programs. Many of our young learners begin first grade several steps behind their peers. Full-day kindergarten builds a strong learning base, improves student achievement in reading and math, social and emotional skills, and provides greater opportunities to advance their potential. Teachers will have more time to get to know and work with their students. By building upon their strengths and addressing their needs to succeed at an early age they will be more apt to be successful throughout school and life.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify



Hearing date:
Friday, Feb 11,
2011; 1:15 p.m.
Senate Committee
Education
Room 225

To: Senator Jill Tokuda, Chair
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

From: Elisabeth Chun, Executive Director
Good Beginnings Alliance

Date: Friday, February 11, 2011, 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 225

Subject: **SB 86: Requires children who are not attending a private school or kindergarten and who are at least 5 years of age on August 1 of the school year to attend a public school kindergarten.**

The Good Beginnings Alliance is a policy and advocacy organization focused on Hawaii's youngest children and their families. We strive to ensure a nurturing, safe and healthy development for all children from pre-birth to age eight. We believe all children deserve safe and supportive environments that meet their needs as they grow and develop. Good Beginnings is also a member of One Voice for Hawaii's Children (www.onevoiceforchildren.net), an alliance of organizations and individuals committed to the development of an effective and equitably funded early childhood system that gives all young children the opportunity to arrive at kindergarten safe, healthy and ready to succeed. The following information is provided to help you in your decision-making process.

Approximately 98% of all 5-year olds attend public or private school kindergarten, and we do not believe it is necessary to mandate kindergarten for all 5-year olds. Parents of late-born children (e.g., turning 5 years old Aug 1- Dec 31) should have the option to instead put their child in another year of preschool.

With the pending elimination of the Junior Kindergarten Program effective School Year 2013-2014, we believe that a public-private partnership should be created with the Department of Education contracting with private early childhood providers to educate this group of late born children. Additionally, the same law that eliminates the Junior Kindergarten Program tasked the Early Learning Council and the Department of Education to propose a plan that will provide for early childhood educational opportunities for the children who would have otherwise been eligible for junior kindergarten or kindergarten, and they are proceeding with this task.

Mahalo for your consideration. For more information contact: Good Beginnings Alliance; phone: 531-5502; lchun@goodbeginnings.org

The Twenty-Sixth Legislature, State of Hawaii
Hawaii State Senate
Senate Committee on Education
Testimony by
Early Learning Council
February 11, 2011
S.B. 86 – Relating to Education

Chair Tokuda and Committee Members:

Established under Act 14, First Special Session 2008, the Early Learning Council is entrusted with the development and administration of the state’s early learning system. The ELC was chartered to establish a cohesive, comprehensive, and sustainable early learning system that ensures a spectrum of quality early learning opportunities for young children from their prenatal period until the time they enter kindergarten.

The Early Learning Council (“ELC”) offers the following comments on S.B. 86, which proposes to amend HRS § 302A-411(c) to require enrollment in kindergarten:

Mandatory Kindergarten:

Today, less than 5% of children eligible to attend kindergarten are not attending. Because so few children would be effected by making Kindergarten mandatory, the Early Learning Council respects voluntary Kindergarten and the principle of parental choice.

Furthermore, the ELC believes that the effort and resources that would be spent on making Kindergarten mandatory would be better spent on educating parents and families on the importance of early education. Children who receive developmentally appropriate care and education in their early years are more likely to have greater success in kindergarten and into adulthood. It is clear from the research available that brains are “built from the bottom up” and that a strong and stable foundation is critical for continued, successful development. Early experiences impact the brain and it is well documented that the relationships and interactions between children and their parents, caregivers and early teachers are critical in establishing stable brain architecture. The more quality early learning experiences a child has, the more complex his or her “brain web” will be, with the promise of stronger and more solid learning. By age five, personality and social skills, along with the foundation for learning, are already in place and that 85% of who a child is, and will be, is already established.

Junior Kindergarten:

Act 183, Regular Session 2010, tasked the Department of Education and the Early Learning Council with assessing public junior kindergarten programs and providing for early childhood educational opportunities for the children who would have otherwise been eligible for junior kindergarten or kindergarten. We encourage the reading of the joint ELC/DOE Legislative Report on Act 183 (SB2068, SD2, HD1, CD1).

By establishing the cutoff birth date for mandatory kindergarten attendance as August 1, S.B. 86 maintains the two-tiered junior kindergarten and kindergarten program established in Act 219, Session Laws of Hawaii 2004. This system was based upon studies that indicated substantial differences between “older” students and “younger students” within a grade, particularly boys born between July and December, were at greatest risk for retention and school adjustment problems.

The Early Learning Council supports age appropriate instruction. Standards established for early learning programs and services are based on current knowledge of child development and reflect ‘best practices’ in early childhood pedagogy (curriculum, environment, and instructional strategies) and professional development. Quality early learning highlights the critical importance of providing the conditions that will promise the development of capable children. Without capable children, we shall not be able to create the foundation critical to a prosperous and sustainable community.

In order to attain age appropriate instruction infused with quality standards, the ELC advocates for the creation of a hybrid system that coordinates private and public partnerships. Such a system would partner private child care providers with public schools to offer quality programs to the student cohort with five-year old birth dates between August 2 and December 31. Each school community or complex area would have the opportunity to partner with community programs to provide early learning opportunities for the student cohort. The partnerships could include private preschools and public schools combining their effort to provide early learning programs to meet the community needs. All providers would follow standards for early learning programs and services as recommended in the report created pursuant to Act 256, Regular Session 2006.

Public/Private Partnerships in Practice

In the recent Race To The Top award, the Department of Education is utilizing this very model of public/private partnerships in the “Zones of Innovation” in the Waianae Coast, and the Kau-Keaau-Pahoa complex. In this model, public funds would be directed through the DOE to private providers who will provide increased capacity in quality settings. If private providers capacity are not available, public programs will need to be developed or expanded.

Conclusion

The Early Learning Council believes that:

- Voluntary Kindergarten supports parent choice.
- The effort and resources that would be spent on making Kindergarten mandatory would be better spent on educating parents on the importance of early education;
- Age appropriate instruction, infused with quality standards, is best for late born 5-Year-Olds and achieved through a quality junior kindergarten program;
- Public/Private partnerships are the best way to achieve age appropriate instruction infused with quality standards; and
- Public/Private partnerships is an effective method for achieving age appropriate instruction infused with quality standards.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Robert Peters
Chair, Early Learning Council