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## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: SB 1384, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION.

March 16, 2011

**WIL OKABE, PRESIDENT**  
**HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

Chair Takumi and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) opposes the SB 1384, SD2, that removes the mandatory kindergarten requirement. Kindergarten is an essential first step in the educational journey for a child.

HSTA appreciates the Legislature's recognition of the importance of kindergarten to prepare for the first grade and beyond. We would like to share with you some findings about tests in kindergarten. Even when credible, appropriate tests are selected, kindergarten screening and developmental assessment are still uncertain undertakings because:

- ◆ Normal behavior of young children is highly variable.
- ◆ Young children are unsophisticated in generalizing from one situation to another and are novices in testing behaviors.
- ◆ Young children may not be able to demonstrate what they know and can do clearly because of difficulties in reading, writing, responding, and in using pencils or other markers, or certain abstract symbols.
- ◆ Young children may not be able to demonstrate what they know and can do clearly because of differences in language and culture.
- ◆ Separation anxiety, the time of day the test is administered, and rapport with the examiner can all distort results, especially with young children.<sup>1</sup>

HSTA has serious concerns with the administering of an assessment for academically appropriate grade placement. Presently, the Department has the ability to place incoming first graders into an "appropriate placement."

This amendment does not change the present system in existence today. The bill is to improve upon academic readiness beyond kindergarten. An assessment for students entering first grade is a repeat of what is presently done in kindergarten which can possibly put a student back a year. The bill does not specifically delineate the process or guidelines to determine appropriate placement. Having first grade teachers do assessments presently done by kindergarten teachers is counterproductive and inefficient use of instructional time.

We hope this committee will reconsider, and look at providing our young students the best educational foundation possible.

HSTA is a strong proponent of developmentally appropriate education, which contributes to the academic success of all children. Screening and assessment do not substitute for an observant, competent, caring teacher and a responsive curriculum.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

<sup>1</sup>(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Hargett, 1998; Hills, 1987b; Meisels, 1987; NAEYC, 1987; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991; NEGP, 1998; Shepard, 1994; Shepard et al, 1998)



Wednesday, March 16, 2011  
2:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 309

TESTIMONY TO  
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: SB 1384, SD 2 – Relating to Education

Dear Chair Takumi, Vice Chair Belatti, 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 99 private and independent schools in Hawaii and educates over 33,000 students statewide.

The Association is opposed to SB 1384, SD 2, which would screen kindergarten students to determine if they are qualified to enter the first grade.

Screening should only be used as a component of the assessment process to inform instructional planning and to better serve our students, not as a barrier from advancement. Screening can be used to ensure that students' needs are being met and should be aligned with standards and developmental expectations as defined by early learning experts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Twenty-Sixth Legislature, State of Hawaii  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
House Committee on Education  
Testimony by  
Early Learning Council  
March 16, 2011  
S.B. 1384 – Relating to Education

Chair Tokumi and Committee Members:

The Early Learning Council (“ELC”) opposes assessments that are used for grade placement. As such, the ELC offers the following comments on S.B. 1384, which proposes to amend chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes to add a new section to require that all children entering public school will be screened as part of an assessment process to inform instructional planning.

The Early Learning Council would like to stress that screenings should be aligned with standards and developmental expectations as defined by early learning experts. Furthermore, the ELC would like to emphasize that the data gained should not be used for placement purposes but to ensure that children’s needs are being met through the design of an appropriate curriculum, differentiated instruction and attention to individual needs.

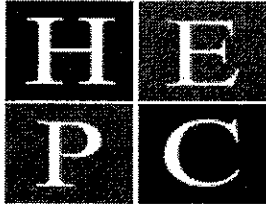
As such, the Early Learning Council suggests that the proposed amendments be modified so that the results of the assessment are used solely for program evaluation, not child placement.

Established under Act 14, First Special Session 2008, the Early Learning Council is entrusted with the development and implementation 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Robert Peters  
Chair, Early Learning Council



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

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Written Comments Presented to the  
House Committee on Education

March 16, 2011, 2:00 pm, Room 306

by  
Valere McFarland  
Hawai'i Educational Policy Center

**SB 1384 SD2: Relating to Education**

Chair Takumi, Vice Chair Au Belatti, and member of the Committee on Education

My name is Valere McFarland. I am providing comments on SB1834, SD2, on behalf of the Director of the Hawai'i Educational Policy Center (HEPC). We respectfully submit the following as input for you to consider in your decision-making process concerning issues concerning early childhood education. HEPC continues to find this bill problematic for the following reasons.

Section 2. 302A. Entrance to first grade; assessment.

- (a) Beginning with the 2014–2015 school year, a child between four and six years of age on or before August 1 of the school year who has attended a kindergarten program pursuant to section 302A-411 or a private kindergarten program shall be assessed prior to entrance to first grade. The assessment shall be conducted by a *qualified teacher with an early childhood education background* to certify that the child is prepared to enter the first grade.

The bill requires that assessments be made by a 'qualified teacher.' However, as we testified previously, a good proportion of HIDEOE teachers are not qualified to assess children who are in early education classrooms. Many have never had education preparation in early childhood development, and often limited, if any, experience teaching in developmentally appropriate ways. Entire Kindergarten programs in some schools are without qualified early childhood classroom teachers; thus, cohorts of children will be at-risk of not having appropriate 'assessments.' When an assessment is treated as a single event or 'test' it is an inappropriate use of a process that can result in a child either being retained or pushed ahead. Researchers have linked retention in the early education grades to dropping out (Oakes, J, 2005; Orfield, G. (ed), 2004; Sacks, P., 2007). We do not believe the HIDEOE will have adequate numbers of teachers qualified to make assessments for children by the implementation date. A recent study found that children of poverty were more likely to be taught; thus, 'assessed' by inexperienced or unqualified teachers or those teaching outside of their areas of expertise (Education Trust, 2010).

(b) All assessments conducted pursuant to subsection (a) by a private kindergarten program shall be certified by the Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools or the early learning council [HAIS or ELC] prior to a child's entrance to the first grade.

We question whether either Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) or the Early Learning Council (ELC) as bodies, are qualified to conduct these kinds of assessment, whether the assessment or paper/pencil test. Observation is a critical component of assessing young children and includes being able to assess social-emotional, physical (bodily-kinesthetic), English language capacity, and developmental delays in cognitive and other areas. Certifying all assessments conducted by a private Kindergarten program would require that HAIS staff and/or ELC individuals to observe all of the private school Kindergarten teachers in the state to determine whether they were making developmentally appropriate assessments. Neither organization has the requisite staffing for the resident expertise in assessment to carry out the task.

(c) Beginning with the 2014–2015 school year, as a prerequisite to entering first grade, a child who will be at least five years of age on or before August 1 of the school year who did not attend any type of kindergarten program shall be assessed by qualified department of education personnel to ensure the child is prepared to enter the first grade. Based on the results of the assessment, the child shall be placed in the academically appropriate grade. A child who will be at least 5 on August 1 of the school year, who did not attend any type of K program shall be assessed by the DOE to ensure the child is prepared to enter the first grade.

As stated above, the HIDOE already has a shortage of experienced personnel qualified for early childhood classroom assessment. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for HIDOE to accomplish the required assessments with qualified staff. Inappropriate assessments by unqualified early childhood personnel may lead to undesirable outcomes such as tracking, retention and other forms of perceived failure. In addition, children as young as 5 should not be considered for placement in grade 1, unless they have been adequately prepared and are socially and emotionally 'ready.' In addition, this section is potentially discriminatory, because it requires that some children be *assessed* prior to entering first grade.

Further problems with this legislation are found on p. 3, Section 3 (1): please see statement above, in Section 2(a) regarding the lack of early education teachers who are qualified to assess young children.

Section 3(2): Regarding using formative and summative assessments: again, qualified early education teachers, who understand the use of assessments, are critical. Formative-assessment is a process, not a tool and should be conducted in many ways, over time. The entire process involves many components including knowing when and how to assess, using appropriate assessment procedures, and making informed judgments about whether results of assessments should lead to adjustments in teaching.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill.