



LATE

Hawaii State House of Representatives
Committee on Finance
March 6, 2013

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Nishimoto, Vice Chair Johanson and Members of the Finance Committee, Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HB200 State Budget. This testimony is specifically in support of a line item for facilities funding, as recommended by Lynn Finnegan of the Hawaii Public Charter School Network.

The School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability is a newly authorized public charter school for grades six through twelve that will be located in the greater Honolulu area. We plan to open our doors to 6th and 7th graders in August 2013.

As a brand new school, we are faced with the nearly impossible financial challenge of finding a facility in Honolulu that we can afford to rent. In our first year we project an enrollment of sixty five students in the 6th and 7th grades. This small number enables us to begin our school with just a few classes, and develop our systems, processes, and school culture before we grow to a larger school. The idea of starting with a few grades in the first year and then growing as the students age is consistent with best practices in charter schools across the country.

However, we are faced with a serious dilemma. Sixty-five students multiplied by the per-pupil allocation of approximately \$6100 gives us an operating budget of just over \$400,000. With those funds, we need to pay our five teachers—as a secondary school our students need access to Science and History in addition to English Language Arts and Mathematics, plus Arts. Our school administration will be run by a School Leader/Principal and a School Manager in our first year. As you can estimate, paying fair salaries for our employees uses up the bulk of our revenues provided by per-pupil allocation. We also need to purchase curricular materials, technology, infrastructure, and provide professional development for our teachers.

And then we must pay rent! The challenge of finding school-appropriate property at a price we can afford within Honolulu—the district for which we have written our charter, because it is where we saw the most need and interest in a secondary public school of choice—is nearly an impossible one. By full size, our school will reach approximately 350 students. Accordingly, by full size we will need on the order of 20,000 to 30,000 square feet to house our facility. There is no doubt—we cannot afford a facility of that size at this point, with our current budget. So we have been searching for a facility that could house us for 2-3 years while we grow from 65 students in the first year, to 120 in the second, to nearly 200 in the third.

This has still proven to be nearly an impossible task. At commercial real estate prices ranging from \$1.35 to \$2.00 per month and up per square foot, and seeking a facility that is approximately 10,000 square feet in which we could work for two or three years—this is **still** well outside our budget.

We are currently considering facilities that could house us simply for our first year, and then we will face moving next year. We would very much like to avoid the need to move every year of our school's operation as our school grows.

Unless we are able to find a rent-free facility, which we have not been able to do, we will need to do significant fundraising in order to cover our facilities costs regardless of the rent price. Any fundraising we do—and any extra time we spend searching for a facility year after year—is time that we spend away from working with students. Our school was authorized, through an incredibly rigorous process this year, based on our vision for a school that is based on best practices in education, as well as community need and interest. We want to spend as much time as possible making our school successful for our students, and we believe that our primary role as a school is to focus on what's happening **inside** the school, working with teachers, students and content.

Facilities funding from the legislature will enable us to do the work we set out to do, and that we were authorized to do. Please consider including a line item for facilities funding for charter schools in the state's budget.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Buffy Cushman-Patz
SEEQS Founder and School Leader