



MidWeek

This column by Senator Michelle Kidani
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The several months between our legislative sessions have gone by quickly, and from my perspective, the time has been both constructive and instructive. I accepted an appointment to the Senate's budget committee – the Committee on Ways and Means – that provided an opportunity to visit the neighbor island counties to learn about how our budget allocations support state facilities and programs. With my ongoing responsibilities as Chair of the Education Committee, I was especially interested in hearing from principals, teachers and students at the several school campuses that we visited.

By accepting invitations to attend mainland professional conferences, I have also gained valuable perspectives on challenges that are common to many states. I was honored to be named to the Steering Committee of the Education Commission of the States last month, and I also continue to serve as Vice Chair of the Education Committee of the National Conference of State Legislatures. Making sure that Hawaii's voice is heard in the national conversation about public education is critically important in light of uncertain support for public schools from the federal administration.

Visiting so many campuses statewide confirms that each of our public schools is unique in its own way. But there are some common approaches to nurturing our students that guide my legislative efforts:

Making sure that our students have qualified teachers in all of our classrooms is an ongoing concern. The first group of teachers in the UH / DOE *Be a Hero. Be a Teacher* program will begin their studies next month. It's a program I helped initiate, and I included scholarship funds in the state budget so that substitute teachers, emergency hires and educational assistants can quickly earn their teacher licenses. Special thanks to soon-to-retire College of Education Dean Donald Young who was instrumental in moving this initiative forward. This is a great investment not only in our schools, but also in our communities.



I am especially impressed by the active farm-to-table programs in several schools that teach our youngsters about how their food is grown and engage them in making good decisions about healthier eating. These programs also allow our schools to contribute to the economy by providing a stable market for local farmers.

With my colleagues, Representative Cindy Evans and Senator Lorraine Inouye at a Kohala school cafeteria where farm-to-table meals are grown, prepared and served

With Hawaii's economy providing jobs for almost everyone who wants to work, we need to focus on making sure our students have opportunities to learn the right kinds of skills for jobs in the years ahead. Waipahu High School – under the inspiring leadership of Principal Keith Hayashi – has been at the forefront of career-focused programs that guide students into meaningful internships and vocational programs. In fact, Waipahu's Career Academy Director, Gail Izumigawa, was named 2017 Exemplary Educator at the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) annual conference in Nashville, Tennessee earlier this year. (See photo next page) I plan to look for ways to allocate funds to support these efforts – zeroing in on the top 20 growing industries in Hawaii.

Continued next page . . .



From left, NCAC Vice President Connie Majka, Jean Miyahira, Gail Izumigawa, and NCAC Executive Director Jay Steele.

Holidays are here

Finally, let me wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a joyous holiday season as we look forward to a bright new year. May you enjoy these days of celebration and sharing among family and friends in good health and safe surroundings. Mele Kalikimaka and Hauoli Makahiki Hou!

