



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WINDWARD OAHU DISTRICT
46-169 KAMEHAMEHA HIGHWAY
KANELOHE, HAWAII 96744

KATHRYN S. MATAYOSHI
INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT

LEA E. ALBERT
COMPLEX AREA SUPERINTENDENT

JOYCE V. BELLINO
COMPLEX AREA SUPERINTENDENT

June 29, 2010

TO: Kathryn Matayoshi, Interim Superintendent

FROM: *Lea E. Albert*
Lea E. Albert, Complex Area Superintendent

SUBJECT: Recommendation Regarding the Findings of the Ka'a'awa Consolidation Task Force Study on the Impact of Consolidating Ka'a'awa Elementary School with Wai'ahole and/or Hau'ula Elementary School

It is my strong recommendation that Ka'a'awa Elementary School not be consolidated with either Wai'ahole and/or Hau'ula Elementary Schools. This recommendation is made after careful and objective study and consideration of the findings of the study generated by the Ka'a'awa Consolidation Task Force established under Chapter 8-38. This recommendation is also made after careful consideration of all written and oral testimony gathered on this matter in 11 task force meetings and the public hearing.

I concur with the task force recommendation and their conclusion that not only does the consolidation of Ka'a'awa School not meet the three criteria laid out in Chapter 38 but it also is not likely to meet the goals of a reduction in expenditures as national studies show costs may increase. I disagree that the fact that the portables which met building codes at the time they were constructed, are no longer viable. The fact is that these structures have recently been renovated by the Department of Education (DOE) and did not flood in the last one hundred year storm.

As the report has noted it is highly likely that capital expenditures will be needed in the near term at either Hau'ula or Wai'ahole due to consolidation. I concur with the findings that in these difficult fiscal time other avenues to create costs savings, such as service consolidation, are more likely to meet the more immediate economic goals of the DOE and the State. I also concur that in this case, the economic situation is driving short term decision-making that is detrimental to the future of the state and the education of rural children.

It is important to note that during the course of 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 task force meetings, that the Department of Education, in order to meet an Environmental

Protection Agency mandate, spent two million dollars installing a leech field at Ka'a'awa Elementary School. Avoiding this cost was a significant reason as to why Ka'a'awa was initially targeted for closure in a December 10, 2008 memo from the Superintendent. This "significant reason" no longer exists. Ka'a'awa school's capital improvement needs will remain minimal should the school not be consolidated. Additionally, over the course of the task force meetings, a drainage system was created to mitigate the potential for flooding.

I further support the task force recommendation not to consolidate Ka'a'awa because the savings of \$400,000 to \$450,000 a year proposed by the Department cannot and will not mitigate the damage done to the school-community by this action. The task force has done substantive and valid research on the negative impact of school consolidation on both targeted and receiving rural schools. The three schools in the consolidation study are located in distinct, diverse, tight knit communities. As is the case with rural schools, each is a safe haven for learning and is the heart of the community. Urban students in Honolulu may attend a school in very close proximity to their own in an area that has no distinction from their own neighborhood. Based on the findings of the task force I do not believe that the consolidation of Ka'a'awa is in the best interest of any of the schools or communities in this study.

The course of this consolidation study and the prospect of Ka'a'awa's closure has generated very strong emotions and tremendous anxiety for everyone involved. It remains my profound hope and wish that you will honor the recommendation of the task force as well as my recommendation to leave Ka'a'awa intact as a learning community that has consistently served students and families well. The school is a treasure in this small, rural community. Similarly I ask, based on the task force findings, that Hau'ula and Wai'ahole be honored as equally vital, important and treasured learning centers for their communities.

In closing, I would like to commend the members of the task force, all of whom are recognized community or school leaders, for their department and service through this process and for the volunteer effort and work that went into the completion of this study.

I would also like to strongly recommend that when and if the issue of the consolidation of Ka'a'awa Elementary School goes before the full Hawaii Board of Education that this BOE meeting be held on the island of Oahu and in the Windward District to afford the people of Ka'a'awa the opportunity to be present and testify.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. Please contact me at 233-5700 should you have any questions or need clarification on any points in this letter or in the task force report.