

**KOHALA SCHOOLS CONSOLIDATION TASK FORCE
REPORT SUMMARY
February 21, 2010**

The Kohala Complex Task Force was appointed by Complex Area Superintendent Arthur Souza in June of 2009. This task force was asked to consider eight specific areas in order to make an informed determination of whether consolidation is a feasible option for the Kohala Complex Schools—specifically whether the middle school could be consolidated with the high and elementary schools at the Honomaka’u campus. The specific areas of focus were categorized into three major considerations: Educational quality/opportunities, financial results, and social/emotional impacts.

At the outset of the process, the task force was informed by Mr. Randall Moore that the impetus for the consolidation study should not be driven by financial reasons. In the end, the recommendation would be based on what was best for students. It is within this perspective that this consolidation process has unfolded.

The process has been a lengthy one that spanned from June 26, 2009 to January 2010. The following outlines the major considerations of the task force as included in the accompanying report.

1. Consideration for consolidation of the Kohala Complex differs from other studies and schools in that this consolidation model is one that would displace students to a school without an existing program for that grade level(s). For instance, an elementary school being consolidated with another elementary school would mean that those students would be absorbed into an existing program where increased enrollment would be the only factor. In this case, however, 6-8 grade students would be dispersed to campuses without an existing program for these students and would require multi-dimensional changes such as program, facilities, etc. This factor along makes consolidation problematic as it would likely decrease the level of opportunities for students.
2. The overall Weighted Student Formula (WSF) monetary distribution would be significantly less in a combined configuration. Information in the report indicates that the high and middle schools are currently able to offer an adequate range of courses within its curricular program using their current financial resources. The array of courses and instructional programs in the high and middle schools currently being offered will be adversely affected by consolidation. In an already problematic situation, consolidation would magnify the chasm that small schools experience in their ability to offer a breadth of course offerings to its students as compared to their urban counterparts.
3. Of import is the reasoning that went into splitting the high and middle school, which began in 1991 and formalized in 2001. A separate middle school campus has allowed for the implementation of a program aligned to the middle school philosophy that addresses intellectual, moral, physical, emotional, and social development unique to students of this age. When the school system was combined prior to 2001, there was a rising sentiment that this population of students was being underserved in a 7-12 school configuration. Testimony from parents, students, and practicing psychologist Dr. Kimo Alameda attest to the unique needs of the middle school child. All of the more than two dozen written and oral testimonies were strongly against combining the schools as people feel consolidation may undermine the process of implementing the middle school model.

4. Current NCLB data indicate the three schools to be in varying stages of the AYP continuum. The current momentum that Kohala Middle School has could be jeopardized were it to be disrupted during this crucial year. Should Kohala Middle School meet its AYP targets this year, it will emerge as a school in good standing.
5. Lack of necessary classroom space was a primary consideration. The elementary school, utilizing state guidelines, currently posts a negative balance in terms of classroom space. In addition, the school has an agreement to encroach on the high school campus to house its library. Although based on enrollment and class size the high school would appear to have an excess of space, the reality is that it requires all of its classroom space to provide a curricular program that is broad enough to address both graduation requirements and an elective program.
6. Expansion of physical infrastructure that would be required if consolidation occurred poses a problem for the high and elementary campuses as there is no land that would be needed for extra classes. In the master plan, the parking area across from the schools was designated as the area for expansion; however, since the master plan was drawn, much of the area was used for drainage and is not suitable for construction. Estimates are that a minimum of 10 additional classrooms are needed to accommodate a consolidation model that only conservatively addresses core requirements.
7. The task force also considered negative impacts on traffic at the receiving schools. One road off the area's only highway provides access in and out of the Kohala High and Elementary campuses. An additional 200 students attending school here would significantly increase traffic congestion which currently experiences long lines going into and coming out of the school in the mornings and after school. An additional 50 or more cars will create even more congestion during these times. Space for parking for staff would also be a challenge.
8. The recent investment in technology and equipment at the middle school should also be considered. Within the last year, a new telephone system, septic system, and technology equipment was installed. By year end, every classroom on the middle school campus will be equipped with an interactive whiteboard, response systems, computers, interactive tablets, and elmos. The investment of new technology totaled well over \$400,000. Abandoning a campus that recently invested in these improvements is questionable.
9. Considerations for a quality middle school program would be compromised with consolidation. Highly qualified teacher designations would become an issue. Currently, the majority of teachers in the Kohala Complex are considered highly qualified. Current HQT difficulties experienced by a neighboring school moving to a K-8 configuration provide precedence for issues that would arise if consolidation was recommended.

Further, the hands-on and interactive learning being developed currently may be impacted due to space limitations and teachers unfamiliar with middle school instructional practices. This middle school is currently developing a special partnership with the adjacent Hawaii Wildlife Center; this opportunity for students to experience authentic learning at this unique bird rehabilitation facility would be eliminated if the middle school left their current location. This campus' nurturing environment would be compromised if consolidated as decisions would encompass the needs of everyone on campus, with high school student needs most likely taking priority.

10. Placement of younger students with high school students is a pressing concern for youth, parents, and staff. An estimated two dozen community members, parents, youth, and teacher testimonies were presented during task force meetings and at the January public hearing. Inappropriate social interactions, intimidation, and the decrease of leadership opportunities for younger students were concerns most cited. Please see attached testimonies for further information.
11. Large capital costs would be required to accommodate consolidation needs. Changes in transportation and utility costs would likely be insignificant. This is based on the premise that utility costs would rise for the campuses accepting an increased population. Data indicates that most of the repair and maintenance costs for the middle school have already been addressed. On the other hand, the costs to construct portable classrooms or add permanent classroom buildings would cost millions of dollars. (Estimates received list a portable classroom costing in the range of \$350,000- \$400,000 and building housing 12 classrooms costing \$15,000,000).

Critical review of data, acknowledgement of public input, and consideration of task force discussions indicates multiple compelling reasons why the schools should remain as separate entities. Therefore, the Kohala Schools Consolidation Task Force wholeheartedly recommends that the Kohala Middle School remain on the Halaula Campus.

Through this process of research and discussion, the following recommendations are supported by the task force:

There is opportunity to help the schools formulate and implement an action plan that will further enhance learning experiences for all students in the Kohala Complex. It is suggested that the complex engage in ongoing collaborative efforts to share resources among schools to effectively utilize assets and to broaden the spectrum of services available to students. As the schools move toward developing a true K-12 construct, the complex will be able to provide a seamless educational experience for the 21st century learner. It is recommended that the schools investigate the feasibility of the School Community Councils being an integral part of this process.

Even though this group has deemed the process beneficial, a recommendation is made that the feasibility of consolidation be considered prior to having a Task Force or Committee created. If minimal research had been done to consider the limitations of facilities and space, this study might have been cancelled. With current pressure and expectations on schools, unnecessary work detracts from the time and energy of school administrators and teachers.