

TASK FORCE TO STUDY CONSOLIDATION OF
MAUNALOA SCHOOL

Minutes of Meeting
February 16, 2010

Task force members present

Rose Yamada, Chair
Daniel Espaniola
Wendy Espaniola
Janice Espiritu
Karen Holt (arrived at 6:03)
Lydia Trinidad
Joe Yamamoto

Task force members absent

Billy Akutagawa
Pancho Alcon
Ronald Davis

Department of Education staff present

Lindsay Ball, Complex Area Superintendent
Randy Moore, Assistant Superintendent

Community members present (who signed in)

Elly Abafo, Rochelle Borden, Perry Buchalter, Jocelyn Buchalter, Alyssa Cacpal, Tina Cacpal, Lana Freeman, Kalani Pagan, Kim Pagan, Bob Underwood

Pule

Mr. Espaniola gave the pule.

Call to order

Ms. Yamada called the meeting to order at 5:13 p.m.

Review of agenda

Ms. Yamada reviewed the agenda for the meeting and introduced the task force members present. This meeting will be devoted primarily to a sharing by task force members with each other. Members of the public were asked to hold their questions to the “public testimony” portion of the meeting.

Purpose of the task force

Mr. Ball reviewed the purpose and expectations of the task force, which is set forth in Chapter 8-38, Hawaii Administrative Rules. The task force is to do a study and make a recommendation. He and Mr. Moore are resources; they are not to influence the task force. The task force will submit a report to Mr. Ball; he will determine its adequacy and ask the task force to hold a public hearing. Following the public hearing, the task force will formulate its recommendation and transmit it to him. He must submit his recommendation, together with the task force recommendation and report, to the superintendent within 15 days. The superintendent has 15 days to submit her recommendation to the Board of Education, together with the complex area superintendent's recommendation, the task force's recommendation, and the task force's report. The Board of Education makes the final decision.

Minutes of the meeting of January 26, 2010

Upon motion duly made, seconded, and unanimously carried, the minutes of the meeting of January 26, 2010 were approved as circulated.

Deliberations and discussion among task force members

Ms. Yamada reviewed a template she had prepared to identify the matters that must be included in the task force report. The task force charge is to study the possible consolidation of Maunaloa School – those things that would be good for the children, and those things that would not be good for the children.

- (1) Efficient school administration and provision of equal educational opportunity;
- (2) The adequacy of facilities, equipment, programs, transportation service, and other support services at Maunaloa and the schools to which students may be transferred;
- (3) The social impact on the children, schools, community and those involved in the consolidation;
- (4) The net financial savings that may be realized from consolidation, including projections of additional expenditures at the schools which may receive transferred students;
- (5) Potential new residential developments, projected changes in enrollment, and other relevant demographic considerations;
- (6) Suitability of using portions of the school facilities to accommodate space requirements of other department or state activities, or other programs; and
- (7) A suggested timetable for implementation if consolidation is recommended.

Mr. Yamamoto distributed his written thoughts on the matters set forth above. He believes the state would save money if the school was consolidated. However, there are benefits of a small school. He is able to spend a lot of time in classrooms giving feedback to teachers. Although students at larger schools have more extracurricular activities, research indicates that students moving from small to large schools do not take advantages of the greater variety of extracurricular activities. At a small school, students get more individual attention; at Maunaloa virtually all students participate in activities

like Makahiki. 5th and 6th graders lead the biweekly assembly at Maunaloa: an example of student participation opportunities. He listed additional school-wide participation activities. Relationships between students, parents, families, teachers, and community members are much closer at small schools. Maunaloa students did not participate in extended school year programs until the program was offered at Maunaloa. The long bus ride that leaves right after school means Maunaloa students will not stay for after-school activities if they are at Kualapuu and Kaunakakai. How large will classes be at Kualapuu and Kaunakakai? If Maunaloa were closed, it would reduce one school choice for students and parents. 30% of Maunaloa students are on a geographic exception – a testament to parental perception of Maunaloa’s high quality. If Maunaloa were to close, parents, students, and the community would feel a loss. Maunaloa students may struggle in larger classes at Kualapuu and Kaunakakai. The distance to Kualapuu and Kaunakakai will reduce Maunaloa parental engagement in their children’s school and school life. A study of small towns in New York shows that small towns with schools grow more and have higher housing values, higher per capita income, a greater equality of income distribution, lower percentages of the population on welfare, and greater civic engagement. Students from schools in these towns do better in high school and college. Money saved from consolidation may be lost in higher social costs and economic costs to the state. How many Maunaloa staff members will lose their jobs, or will bump other employees on Molokai? The relationship between size and cost is not clear. Does the state have research to support its belief that small schools cost more? The Maunaloa special needs population has decreased and there is now only one special education student at Maunaloa. How much is this saving the state? State and federal funds of \$1 million have been invested in Maunaloa to date, with \$169,000 to go. If the school is closed, the facilities will deteriorate and be vandalized. Enrollment has declined at Maunaloa, which is an island-wide phenomenon. Projections are for no change at Maunaloa, a slight increase at Kualapuu, a decrease in Kaunakakai, and a decrease at Kilohana. There are currently 20 vacant homes in Maunaloa.

Mr. Ball suggested that research results elsewhere be related to Maunaloa.

Ms. Yamada asked whether the vacant homes in Maunaloa were new homes or old homes.

Ms. Trinidad asked what the operational costs of Maunaloa were. The answer needs to include general funds and federal funds, as well as expenses that are not in the weighted student formula such as the cafeteria.

Ms. Trinidad said if Maunaloa School costs \$800,000 per year to operate, it is a drop in the bucket for the DOE and the DOE should keep Maunaloa School open. Cut costs somewhere else. Each of the Molokai elementary schools offers something different. Kualapuu, for example, serves the entire island, and looks to other organizations and agencies to provide some non-classroom services to students. She is concerned about the facility maintenance cost, because it is old. It may be better to build a new school.

Ms. Espiritu said she agrees with Ms. Trinidad: keep Maunaloa School open. Kaunakakai School offers after school programs. These wouldn't be feasible for children from Maunaloa, who would need to go home after school. Parent conferences would be challenging for Maunaloa parents if their children were in Kaunakakai. Kaunakakai School is "in between" – not large like Kualapuu and not small like Maunaloa.

Mr. Espaniola observed that all schools' enrollment is declining, now and in the future. If Maunaloa is closed, is Kilohana next? Will it lead to only one elementary school on Molokai? If it's all about money, we're already saving money by not busing students to Kaunakakai. Most parents don't want their young children staying at school late and coming home late. Maunaloa students will lose their identity as the Road Runners and their pride in the community if the school is closed. The task force should show how not closing the school will save money.

Mr. Ball advised the task force to have its "voice" clearly expressed in its report. Board of Education members will not know the school or the community.

Ms. Holt looked at the per student cost of \$14,800. But if it costs \$144,000 for busing students to Kaunakakai, it reduces the cost per student at Maunaloa to a level that is close to the other three elementary schools. Are most of the capital costs already expended? Air conditioning is not necessary. It doesn't look like it makes sense to close Maunaloa.

Ms. Espaniola said she lives in Maunaloa and works at the school. She has a relationship with the students and has a vested interest in the school. Her perspective reflects this emotion. She has worked at Kualapuu and Kaunakakai and agrees each school is unique. At Maunaloa she sees the students after school and on weekends. She sees their parents. Closing the school would be an emotional and social setback for the students. Closing the school will have an impact on the businesses in Maunaloa and on the value of her home.

Ms. Yamada reviewed her thoughts on the matters set forth in the template she prepared. She asked for the priorities for capital improvement projects listed for Maunaloa. Using the data distributed and testimonies collected at prior meetings, Ms. Yamada shared her analyses of the information. She went over the applications of her findings with respect to the indices set forth by the statute/administrative rule. These applications and outcomes were also presented in written form. There were many advantages to consolidation. There were also beneficial situations, which were not of any advantage either way inasmuch as conditions at all the schools involved in the study were equal or comparable. However, key disadvantages to consolidation she identified stood out and got the attention of the other task force members and the audience. Among these were:

- The State has made a significant investment of over \$900,000 in repair and maintenance and capital improvement at Maunaloa within recent years;
- Additional transportation costs to bus students to another school would include \$144,000 at minimum.

- Maunaloa has the highest proportion of disadvantaged students among the elementary schools, indicating the importance of personalized and individualized attention readily available at Maunaloa School, but less so at larger schools.
- Facilities at both neighboring schools appear to be fully utilized and accommodating additional classes may incur additional costs at those schools.
- Distance from Maunaloa to the nearest neighboring school is over 16 miles; this situation would have time, travel, and cost implications to the children and their families.
- Negative social impact on the children was the focus and concern of most of the testimonies presented to the task force.
- Arranging, accounting for, and assisting students, especially very young children, relative to before-/after-school busing logistics will require additional administrative and clerical support at the receiving schools.
- Financial savings were theoretical calculated to be between \$330,000 and \$440,000. However, the savings were reduced in consideration of costs for permanent/tenured staff, transportation, and continued maintenance of State property. The projected results were a savings of \$104,905 (less than the average salary of a school principal) or an additional cost of \$34,838.

Other considerations presented by Ms. Yamada addressed suggestions received from various community members. Information, where available, were shared for conversion to a Charter School, serving Maunaloa middle level students, adding a preschool class, and adding adult education classes. A concluding statement seemed to capture the voice of the presentation, “The closing of Maunaloa School is symbolic of the ‘last straw’ – the deathblow to a community plagued by adversity over the recent years. Maintaining the school will provide leadership and support for concerted efforts to sustain the community and to bolster the economic and social growth potential for its members.”

Members of the task force asked Ms. Yamada to reflect the shared ideas in a draft report to be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting. She, in turn, requested that members study the input, make revisions, and give feedback as soon as possible.

Public Testimony

None

Date, time, location, and work of next task force meeting

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, March 23, 2010, at 5 p.m. at Maunaloa School. The primary purpose of the meeting will be to write the draft report of the task force.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Randy Moore