

TO: Board of Education Chairperson Roy M. Takumi, Vice Chairperson William “Bill” Arakaki, and Members: Kaimana Barcarse, Elynne E. Chung, Kahele Dukelow, Mary Therese Perez Hattori, Ken Kuraya, Wesley Lo, Makana McClellan

FROM: **Chloe Pua‘ena Vierra-Villanueva**

RE: **Report of the Superintendent**

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Chloe Pua‘ena Vierra-Villanueva and I am a proud Pūnana Leo o Ko‘olau Poko parent, Early Childhood Education leader, a former Hawaiian Immersion Infant/Toddler teacher, Hawaiian Language community member, and strong supporter of Hawaiian Medium Early Childhood Education. I am also a Parent Advocate of the ‘Ohana Leadership Council with Hawai‘i Children's Action Network Speaks.

*I am testifying today regarding the **Report of the Superintendent – Relating to Recognitions**, and more importantly, the Department of Education’s ongoing refusal to comply with the legal obligations established in the *Clarabal v. Department of Education* case. The *Clarabal* decision affirmed the State’s constitutional duty to provide **reasonable access to Hawaiian Language education**.*

Ke Kula Kaiapuni o Pū‘ohala’s preschool feeder program is being downsized by half, despite the fact that 90% of its graduates continue on to Ke Kula Kaiapuni o Pū‘ohala. The DOE, though fully capable, continues to rely on private preschools like ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and Kūlaniākea and Windward Community College’s Hānaiaulu Child Care Center to fulfill its constitutional duty to provide Hawaiian language education.

At shared school sites like Pū‘ohala and Waiau, the DOE pits declining English programs against growing Hawaiian Immersion programs, creating division and inequity. This is not about space or staffing—it is about denying access and perpetuating systemic inequity.

Waiau, the oldest Kaiapuni school on O‘ahu, continues to face systemic racism—reinforced by the Deputy Superintendent’s office. In response to concerns about waitlists and non-transparent enrollment procedures, Heidi Armstrong’s office stated, “We are limited by the school’s available space, staffing, and resources.” **But how can that be a space issue with the disparity of class sizes between English and Hawaiian classrooms, and when English programs have multiple school options within the complex—while Hawaiian Immersion has none?**

When our child was accepted into Pūnana Leo o Ko‘olau, we were faced with unaffordable housing issues and had to make the difficult decision to move away from Kāne‘ohe. As current residents of Waiau, we are greatly concerned by the existing system and Kaiapuni programs available.

We currently drive our preschool age child to Pū'ohala Elementary School in Kāne'ōhe from Waiau, Pearl City and back every school day in hopes for a smooth transition into either Kaiapuni Waiau or Pū'ohala. There is no Hawaiian Medium Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs available in our Waiau area. The impact of ECE in overall success in Elementary to Higher Education and beyond should be understood and prioritized.

The DOE has a constitutional responsibility to Article X, Section 4, and Article XV, Section 4 of the Hawaii State Constitution (1978). The DOE needs to **ensure** equitable access to resources and education specifically for Hawaiian immersion education on all islands in Hawai'i's public schools, and uphold guidelines set forth in BOE policy 105-8.

The DOE has 2 language pathways- English and Hawaiian, acknowledged in DOE strategic plan (p. 3). In regard to DOE strategic plan Priority II: High Quality Educator Workforce in All Schools, we need more positions to support the education of kaiapuni students.

The four generations of children that will come after me need your support. "He lei poina 'ole ke keiki" (A lei never forgotten is the beloved child). I implore you to imagine four generations of keiki wrapped around my great grandmother's neck. She was the last Hawaiian Language speaker in my family and died before she could see her great, great grandchild go to a Hawaiian Immersion School and get the free, Hawaiian Language public education he deserves. It could take as many as four generations to bring our language back to life. It only took one generation to lose our family's and many other Hawai'i family's connection to our indigenous language. Three generations later, through my foundation of a private Kamehameha preschool and Hawai'i Public School education, I pursued Hawaiian-Pacific Studies in Higher Education. Hawaiian Medium Education brought the language back into my family.

In conclusion, those four beloved generations of lei keiki will bring life, education, and well-being to every home in Hawai'i and beyond. I urge the Board of Education to **recognize the failure of the DOE and require them to fulfill their legal and moral mandate to the Hawaiian Immersion program**. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo me ka ha'aha'a,
Pua'ena Vierra-Villaneuva
'Ohana Leadership Council

E OLA MAU KA 'ŌLELO HAWAI'I!!