



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

HONOLULU

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

April 11, 2010

Ms. Marguerite Higa
Ms. Olga Boric-Lubecke
Mr. Marcus Daniel
Ms. Clare Hanusz
Ms. Joann Marshall
Ms. Debbie Millikan
Mr. Andrei Sherstyuk
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Ms. Lois Yamauchi
Save Our Schools Hawaii

via email info@sos808.org and sos.lubecke@gmail.com:

Dear Save Our Schools Hawaii:

Your April 5, 2010 letter to me is misinformed and falsely characterizes my efforts to return children to the classroom. While I understand your frustration, your letter contains blatant inaccuracies and your publicly-expressed call for action is misdirected. I encourage you to redirect your energy and effort to convincing leaders of the HSTA that successful resolution of the furloughs will not be possible unless they change their publicly stated position that they will no longer negotiate to find a solution to return Hawaii's children to the classroom.

I want to address the completely false claim in your letter that I have never attended any negotiations aimed at ending school furloughs. I have been personally involved in school contract discussions since mid-2009, including face-to-face meetings with the former and current leadership of the HSTA, the chairman and various members of the Board of Education, the former and current superintendant of the Department of Education as well as various legislators from both the House and Senate. Some of these meetings were widely covered by the media while others, held as recently as last week, were non-public meetings.

I do regret agreeing at one of those meetings to allow the DOE and BOE to determine how they would implement the furloughs they proposed to address the budget restriction they faced because of the state's historically unprecedented decline in revenue. While you may not be

aware that both the original furlough proposal as well as the furlough schedule came from the DOE/BOE, state law is clear that the governor has no authority to furlough or lay off DOE employees.

Contrary to the guidance I gave them and the understanding provided to me by the Superintendent and the BOE negotiating team that their intent was to minimize the impact on student instruction, the eventual settlement entered into with the HSTA intentionally implemented furloughs on Fridays scattered throughout the year rather than other less disruptive approaches. I believe this was done to maximize disruption to the school calendar and the lives of parents and their children. I believe they thought this would create the political pressure necessary to force the state to pay for the restoration of all the furlough days even though we don't have the money to afford and much less sustain such a plan.

Your letter ignores how generously the State's taxpayers have supported public education through the years, despite decades of poor performance by the school system. Not only does the Department of Education expend over 40 percent of the entire State General Fund operating budget, but I have offered to use up to \$62 million from the State Rainy Day Fund to bring teachers and other employees identified as essential by the DOE back to school on furlough days. That would be in addition to the extra \$112 million in new, additional federal funds that the DOE received under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Despite the continuing willingness of our residents to generously support our public education system, it has not produced meaningful improvements or demonstrable progress toward improved systemwide education outcomes. The record is clear that the answer to the problem of an underperforming school system is not solely the amount of money being spent. We have dramatically increased public education spending between the time I took office and the present, and our school system still fails to show meaningful improvement in national test scores. We should not tolerate perpetuating a system that results in situations such as Nanakuli where only 14 percent of the children are proficient in arithmetic. Our public school students and our entire state deserve better.

Finally, I take offense at your final paragraph. I am proud of my unrelenting fight for improvements to our school system. It is gratifying to see that former Democratic governors, who have grappled with the problem of the convoluted public education governance structure, share my view about the need to restructure the Board of Education. My efforts, dating back to 2004, to decentralize educational decision-making by placing spending decisions at the school level, are now being embraced by gubernatorial candidates from both political parties. This effort to put more money in the classroom and less in the bureaucracy has always been strongly supported by the general public.

We cannot allow our public education system to be held hostage to a system that is fragmented and unaccountable for its lack of performance and progress. Nor can we afford to allow our public education system to be driven by a labor union's intent to place focus on the

interest of teachers and DOE administrators at the expense of our children, especially in these challenging fiscal times.

Your misguided and misdirected demands that seek my engagement in something that I am already doing will not alter the circumstances before us. The DOE/BOE and HSTA must recognize the fiscal reality confronting our state and demonstrate a willingness to adopt a student-focused solution to cost savings that will allow the restoration of lost classroom days and the restructuring of our educational system into a form that will bring about improvement and accountability.

You have my personal assurance that I will continue to advocate and fight for a brighter future for all of the citizens of Hawaii, including the children of our state. My efforts to return children to the classroom in a manner taxpayers can afford, and to champion a constitutional amendment to restructure public education governance will result in a better education system for the children and a brighter future for all of Hawaii.

Sincerely,

/s/

LINDA LINGLE