



MidWeek

This column by Senator Michelle Kidani
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Our session adjourns this week

Our major focus in this 2017 Legislative session has been on the state budget for the two-years beginning July 1. A detailed spending plan is now ready for final approval this week as we move toward adjournment on Thursday, May 4. My priority, as Chair of the Education Committee, has been to support our youngsters and their teachers in our public schools. Here are a few notes:

I am pleased that the budget includes funds to support the state's Early College Initiative so that this program that has been so successful at Waipahu High School can be implemented on other campuses. There is also support for implementing a Keiki Healthy and Ready to Learn health assessment and monitoring program in schools beyond the initial, very successful pilot phase. We are also providing funds for a "Hawaii Promise" plan that will supplement financial aid for University of Hawaii students.

Until just a few days ago, some of the biggest fiscal unknowns had been the costs of new contracts for our public employees. I am so pleased that our 13,500 public school teachers have reached an agreement with the state on their new four-year contract. The salary increases and improvements to health benefits should help to retain qualified teachers, and perhaps serve as an incentive for still others to enter the teaching profession. There is still work to be done to make this happen. I included in the budget funds to support teacher education that we all hope will, for example, encourage many hundreds of current substitute teachers to take the next steps to earn their teacher licenses.

My much-discussed bill to create a state property tax surcharge, with revenues dedicated to our public schools, fell by the wayside in a conference committee. Committee members from the Senate – which overwhelmingly passed the bill 22-3 – were prepared to send a final version to a vote. House conferees raised last-minute, irrelevant "legal concerns" with no justification except to kill the bill.

The measure would have established a permanent funding base for our keiki and the schools. It did so through a constitutional amendment that would require voter approval in the 2018 election. But in this case, the House denied allowing the public to make a decision about this important matter.

I still believe the DOE would benefit from a dedicated source of funding that would take some of the budget pressures off our teachers and administrators. It's an idea worth pursuing.

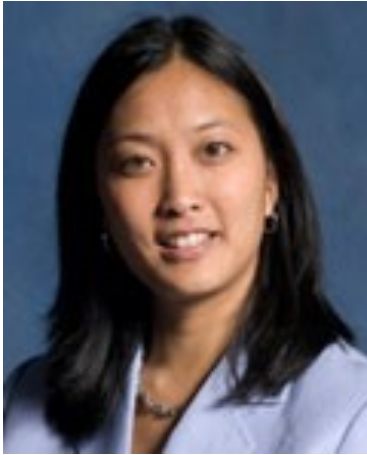
Construction projects in the budget provide for many of the items that are priorities for our area schools – including \$15 million for a new classroom building at **Waipahu High School**, and \$1.4 million for a classroom building to replace portables at **Waikele Elementary**. West Oahu readers will also welcome the allocation of funds for more classrooms at **Campbell High School** and for a new **East Kapolei Middle School**.



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Superintendent of Education finalists named

The search committee reviewing applications from candidates for Superintendent of Education has announced the selection of two finalists who will be invited to Hawaii for meetings with education stakeholders in early May and for interviews with the Board of Education on May 11.



Dr. Linda Chen (left) served as the chief academic officer for Baltimore City Public Schools in Maryland, and as deputy chief academic officer for Boston Public Schools. She is also a former assistant superintendent of schools for the Philadelphia school district.

Dr. Christina Kishimoto (at right) is superintendent of Gilbert Public Schools in Arizona, and was previously superintendent of Hartford Public Schools in Connecticut.

The Board of Education will name their choice to succeed outgoing Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi effective July 1.



Graduation season



Just over 500 seniors in the **Waipahu High School** Class of 2017 will receive diplomas on May 18 at Blaisdell Center. At last count, at least 20 seniors are eligible to graduate as valedictorians. That means earning a GPA of 4.0 or higher and fulfilling the requirements of at least one Honors Recognition Certificate.

At **UH West Oahu**, the campus will graduate its largest class ever this coming weekend. Altogether, 315 students have completed their work on bachelor's degrees or professional certificates this semester.

Congratulations, graduates, and mahalo to teachers and families who have mentored and supported you through your schooling.

