

Public Advocacy Tactics

How to support the KS Education Strategic Plan and the interests of Hawaiian children in the public sector

As Kamehameha Schools begins to implement the broad vision of our Education Strategic Plan, our involvement in and partnerships with the public sector will grow. The four tactics in early childhood advocacy that are highlighted below will help to promote the interests of young Hawaiian children and their families in the public sector.

- **Hawaiian Voices:** Public initiatives in early childhood learning must include the input and insights of representatives from the Hawaiian community.
- **Hawaiian Choices:** Public policies and programs should accommodate and support the full range of child care alternatives including license-exempt arrangements.
- **Hawaiians in Need:** Public resources should be efficiently targeted to needy populations and communities.
- **Hawaiian Culture:** Public policies and programs must incorporate culturally appropriate methods and cultural content in training programs, curricula, publications, and quality standards and measures.

These tactics address some of the existing gaps in the public system of support for early childhood learning and are consistent with the goals and approaches that underlie our Education Strategic Plan. They should be used as guidelines for Kamehameha Schools' public advocacy efforts (i.e., when we are proposing, reviewing, supporting, and/or providing input on public legislation or policies relating to early childhood learning) and our public sector partnerships (i.e., when we are working with public officials or publicly funded service providers to develop, improve, or expand early childhood learning programs). The following paragraph describes the four tactics in greater detail.

1. Hawaiian voices

Collaboration with community-based Hawaiian organizations is a key element in the early childhood component of Kamehameha Schools' Education Strategic Plan. Hawaiian representation is just as important in the development of public policies relating to child care and early education. As one of the largest, youngest, and most socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged populations within the state, the Hawaiian community is a key constituency for public policies on early childhood learning. However, Hawaiian voices have largely been absent from government-led, public initiatives, meaning that Hawaiian interests are sometimes disregarded and the resulting policies too often fail to address the needs of the Hawaiian community. Public initiatives in early childhood learning must include representation from community-based Hawaiian organizations and coalitions such as ALU LIKE, QLCC, Ho'owaiwai Nā Kamali'i, and the Eleu Early Childhood Education group to ensure that public policies are relevant and responsive to the Hawaiian community.

2. Hawaiian choices

Although the majority of young Hawaiian children are cared for in less formal arrangements such as ‘ohana and kūpuna care, center-based care has long dominated the public agenda on early childhood learning. Most state initiatives in early childhood learning focus efforts on increasing enrollment in, access to, and the quality of center-based programs. To support the substantial number of Hawaiian families who opt for ‘ohana or kūpuna care, Kamehameha Schools’ Education Strategic Plan incorporates components that are specifically designed to improve early childhood learning opportunities in license-exempt child care arrangements. Public entities charged with promoting early childhood learning have a similar obligation to support the diverse child care preferences and choices of the Hawaiian community as well as the larger public. State proposals and initiatives to improve early childhood learning must therefore include provisions for license-exempt child care arrangements.

3. Hawaiians in need

Early childhood learning has the potential to alleviate social inequalities and bring about intergenerational change. But the high cost of center-based care and the lack of support for license-exempt alternatives limit the early learning opportunities available to low-income children, many of whom are Hawaiian. To address this problem, the Education Strategic Plan will increase Kamehameha Schools’ investments in high-need communities. Public resources for early childhood learning must also be strategically targeted to populations and communities that are disadvantaged and underserved. In addition to traditional poverty programs, public investments in early childhood learning should support “gap group” families—whose incomes are too high to qualify for traditional public assistance but too low to accommodate the high cost of child care—as well as community-building efforts similar to that being implemented under the Education Strategic Plan.

4. Hawaiian culture

Few public policies or programs accommodate the cultural preferences and needs of Hawaiian families, many of whom seek early childhood learning opportunities that incorporate cultural values and content. This gap in public service may discourage the utilization of early childhood services by Hawaiian families and deprive Hawaiian children of the benefits of a culturally-grounded care setting. Through its Education Strategic Plan, Kamehameha Schools will actively support the development of programs and curricula that are both culturally rich and developmentally appropriate. To be responsive to the Hawaiian community and increase service utilization by Hawaiians, public initiatives must also actively incorporate cultural considerations into policy and program development. Provider training and support programs, information and referral services, quality standards, and assessment mechanisms all should include cultural components.

Note: This brief is an executive summary of a comprehensive report by PASE. For more information, call 541-5372.