

Maximizing our Public Education Budget

Although we live in an advanced world, there are still so many problems that need solving. One such problem is the inadequacy of Hawaii's public school system. Education is a vital part of developing the skills of Hawaii's youth; Clarence T.C. Ching would know. Mr. Ching was an avid scholar; he was elected class president twice, and was a part of Saint Louis' Chinese Literacy Improvement Association. He was a diligent, assiduous person, demonstrating proficiency in every field he entered. Although he was faced with challenges in his childhood, he still managed to succeed and make a name for himself. Mr. Ching would be appalled at the state of Hawaii's public school system.

A 2015 government study indicated that the state of Hawai'i spends \$12,855 per pupil-\$1,463 more than the national average, making it the 17th in the nation for per pupil spending. However, Hawaii's public school system ranks 39th in the nation, putting it in the bottom 76th percentile. One question comes to mind: "If we spend that much money, why aren't our schools better?"

If Hawaii doesn't take action now, our public school system could continue to deteriorate. The system that is being used now is not delivering optimal results; if it keeps being used, Hawaii could end up being ranked 51st (including the District of Columbia) in the nation in 50 years. More and more students will be pressured to attend private schools, and those who can't afford it will be forced to attend public school and receive a mediocre education. That is, if we don't act. A change needs to be brought about; and that change needs to happen quickly.

Our state needs to model our education system to mimic that of states that are thriving in the education department, such as Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and

Vermont. These states' public school systems are the top five in the country. By applying strategies that these states use to help their students succeed, we will be on track to righting public education. According to www.expandingopportunity.org, smaller classes in lower grades and additional learning time are strategies proven to help students succeed. Smaller classes in lower grades allow teachers to focus on each individual student, helping them develop their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Additional learning time, such as summer school and after school programs, benefit students that struggle in their studies by giving them more time and instruction to help them understand the material.

One of Hawaii's own schools, Voyager Public Charter School, is already on the right track. They were the top public school in the state in 2014, and are currently ranking second place, according to www.niche.com; here's why. Voyager PCS runs on a TQL ideology: total quality learning. Total quality learning is a credo that the student is responsible for his/her own learning. It focuses on social development, celebrating learning, and is totally student-centered. The attendees are asked what they can do to make their learning experience the best it can possibly be, and are asked what the teachers can do to help them succeed. Peer interaction is encouraged, creating a people-friendly milieu where you are comfortable around your classmates. This "All One Family" philosophy is one of the key parts to the school's success. Pupils at Voyager have learned to take responsible learning risks, set personal goals, measure progress, and give constructive criticism aiming to help, not hurt. By cultivating a secure environment, Voyager has made its students feel that they can ask for help when help is needed, and gather support from their teachers and peers.

Have you ever heard of the Baldrige learning system? According to www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org, a Baldrige-guided classroom is a classroom which has developed a trusting classroom culture, where students can communicate openly with their peers and teachers. Similar to Voyager's total quality learning, the Baldrige learning system emphasizes a student's responsibility for his/her own learning. This learning-centered, results-focused classroom helps children "be agile and innovative when the need for change arises" as well as "take social responsibility" and "focus on their vision for the future". Students who take part in this method are enthusiastic about learning, therefore raising test scores.

It is important to remember that some schools in Hawaii have already implemented these strategies, but it's time for the rest to follow suit. If we act now, students in public schools now will not be totally lost on the effects of our change. We can see these changes happen before our very eyes! Grades will rise, and so will Hawaii's IQ.

With the strategies listed above, I truly believe that we can improve Hawaii's public school system. The Clarence T.C. Ching foundation is dedicated to helping the advancement of knowledge and assisting public institutions, among other things. That is why I think that he would support my fight for a smarter Hawaii.