

Na 'Ōpio Aloha 'Āina

TALK

STORY

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Nanakuli, Hawaii

Parents and educators check out school programs —

⌘ LETTER FROM NHS JUNIOR GETS ACTION ⌘

"THEY WOULDN'T LET US SIGN UP for college prep English. They said it was full. I'm planning to go to college, yet this is the third year I've had to repeat general English!"

So said Liz Sellers, an average junior at Nanakuli High School, to a meeting of parents and members of the Waianae Schools Concerns Coalition. The meeting was called in response to a letter Liz wrote to the Coalition in May about "problems in our instruction."

The Coalition called the meeting to hear out students' and parents' complaints. The parents and members got an earful, and, during two visits to NHS, an eyeful.

HSTA SUPPORT

The Coalition is a widely respected citizen's group fighting to improve educational opportunities for our Waianae youth.

Last month, the Coalition was featured in a complimentary article by John Radcliffe, Executive Director of the Hawaii State Teachers Association.

The article reviewed Waianae educational problems and congratulated the Coalition for its dedication to youth and its move forward for quality education.

STIFF COLLEGE COMPETITION

Supporting Liz Sellers' complaint, Journal Auna, a graduating senior at NHS, said:

"When she gets to college, she will have to compete with those who had advanced training in other high schools. Like Liz," she said, "lots of our NHS students have aptitude to get ahead. But the school doesn't provide the opportunities we need."

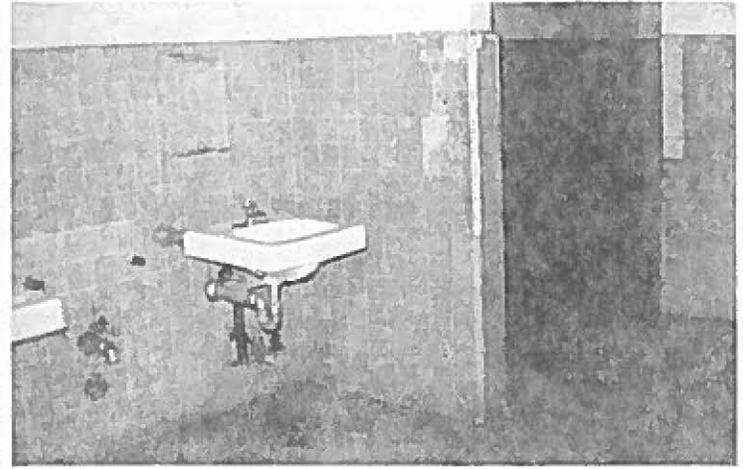
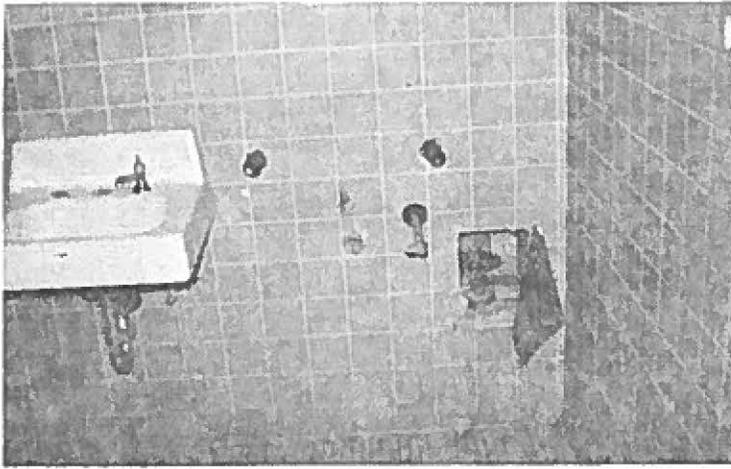
OTHER COMPLAINTS

Many other complaints were heard at two meetings called at the request of concerned students and parents at the Nanakuli Butler Building. These were accompanied by two trips by parents and Coalition members to observe conditions at NHS first hand. They talked with Kenneth Hirohata, principal, some administrators and teachers.

When parents asked about the school's problems, the principal tended to blame others for the difficulties--students, parents, teachers, legislators (on funding), and DOE administration, the group was told. Parents said that much could be done, however, to improve conditions within the existing setup, especially in regard to showing respect to students and their needs.

One parent suggested he be "elected to settle all these matters" with the principal whom he said he knows personally. But other parents felt the students, parents and community should be involved on their own behalf.

Reporting back to the original concerned students, parents, Coalition members and University guests on June 2, the following observations were made by those who visited the school: ▶



RESTROOM FACILITIES were described as "deplorable" by parent visitors to NHS. Here a faucet handle and sinks are missing, pipewells are uncovered and wall tile is unrepaired.

■ **BOOK SHORTAGES** Serious shortages of classroom textbooks and library reference books exist at NHS. Only four stacks with five shelves are available for 1,500 students. Many textbooks are outdated.

■ **POPULAR TEACHERS REPLACED** Qualified teachers respected by students, some with years of experience at NHS, have been replaced by inexperienced or unqualified new teachers from elsewhere.

■ **PRINCIPAL INACCESSIBLE** Students wanting to talk with the principal about curriculum and other concerns were told they had to go "through channels" meaning the student government and other administrators.

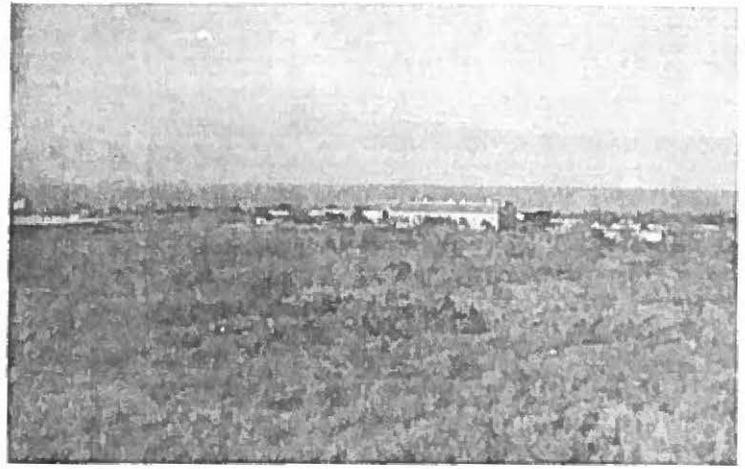
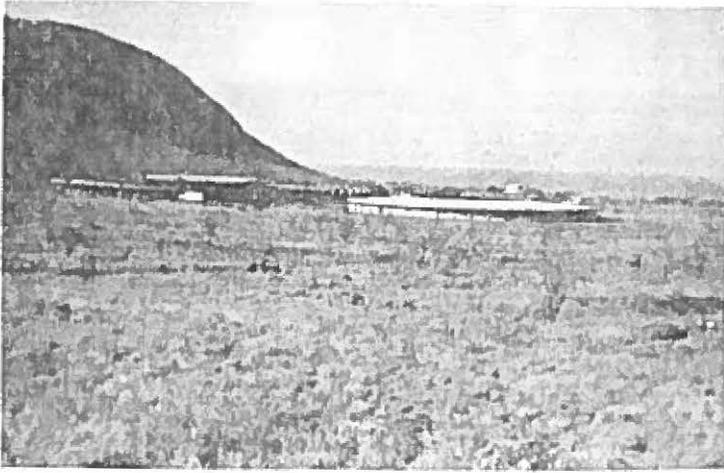
■ **TEACHER SHORTAGE** Asked why NHS has a serious shortage of qualified teachers, Hirohata evaded the question saying, "It's a national problem."

■ **SCHOOL UPKEEP** was found to be "deplorable" by the visitors in spite of sincere efforts by concerned maintenance workers and parent volunteers. One parent said, "I don't blame my child for refusing to use the restrooms there, and comes home instead!" It was found that the student council officers have a private locked restroom for council members only.

■ **SAFETY HAZARDS** Two of three buildings visited had no fire extinguishers whatsoever. In the third building, fire extinguishers were kept at the teacher's desk. Fire warning switches were found inoperative. No fire drills have been held since October 1983. The law requires one drill per month.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SCHOLARS JOIN COALITION CONCERNS

Dr. Stephen Boggs, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Hawaii, and his wife, author and researcher JoAn Whitehorn Boggs, attended the community meetings on the NHS situation. The Boggs were principal researchers in the widely known Nanakuli Study in the 1960's. Their published books achieved national educational attention when they revealed that difficulties Hawaiian youth have in schools are often the result of negative attitudes against them brought to classrooms by teachers and administrators. When negative attitudes were replaced with positive teacher attitudes, student class attendance, interest and learning greatly improved. Researchers offered the opinion that continued progress or backsliding depended on the presence or absence of administrative support for change.



TWO VIEWS of Nanakuli Intermediate and High School show a broad area of untended land windward of the buildings. Daily mauka winds blow dust from the dry field into the circular buildings including food preparation facilities, a cause of student complaints. The gym, right, built about ten years ago, is seldom allowed to be used for dances or special events. NHS was built on Hawaiian Homestead land.

Other findings included poor initiative by the school administration to involve the community broadly in school affairs. Visit requests are met with defensive "stalling tactics," according to a parent involved in setting up the recent investigation.



Students reported the school has no cafeteria so they have to eat in hallways, where dust is blown into their food by mauka winds from the dry field windward of the buildings. Some complained of being served with old food, oranges dried out, sour milk served in leaky cartons.



One former NHS student asked how come the DOE plans to build a new school at West Beach Resort "for new immigrants living in luxury homes while we homesteaders don't have even a cafeteria or up-to-date books we need at NHS?"



School administrators had no proposals, they said, on how to assist families whose working parents were unable to help their kids solve today's homework assignments because they themselves had the same difficulties in school.



Parents and Coalition members freely admitted they or friends had graduated from NHS not knowing how to read or write.

STUDENTS' RIGHTS SUSPENDED

The Coalition also heard students' charges that their civil rights had been illegally suspended last semester by the administration.

The principal had called 8th grade students "assholes" five times during a speech to a large assembly. Students formed a Students Rights Committee and issued leaflets about this and other complaints. They were met with scoldings, threats and illegal confiscation of the leaflets. When the American Civil Liberties Union intervened with the state attorney general, Hirohata's orders to confiscate new leaflets were reversed.

Some parents who had graduated in past years from NHS said the school had never taught them that students and minors had the same rights of free speech that adults had.

No apology has been made to the 8th grade by the principal (by June 5) for his use of profanity, or to the school as a whole for violating the students' civil rights.

According to legal opinion, the constitutional violation could still be taken to court.

A group of parents is pressing the principal to call an 8th grade assembly before school is out for him to apologize for the profanity.
