
THE JOURNEY TO ESTABLISH A TRUE TEACHER PROFESSION IN HAWAII

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EARLY STRUGGLES

The aim of establishing teaching as a true profession has been a long-cherished goal for many of Hawai'i's educators. Mirroring the aspirations of our colleagues on the mainland, teachers in Hawai'i dreamed of a time when every child in Hawai'i's public schools would have access to a properly schooled and properly licensed teacher. However, in spite of the widespread appeal of this worthy goal among teachers and other educators, other voices expressed strong opposition to the idea. It was seen, perhaps, as too radical and too closely identified with the agenda of the teachers' unions. Some leaders felt such a board would create an artificial teacher shortage, thus aggravating the system's ability to staff its schools. Some questioned whether teachers could be trusted to govern themselves. Others demanded to know why the department of education should relinquish its authority to certify teachers to the teachers themselves.

Teachers introduced their first bill to establish a professional board in the late 1970s. The board would be similar to that of doctors and lawyers by maintaining strict standards for entry into the profession. Unfortunately, strong opposition from the Department of Education held reform of the profession in check and little progress was made. In the early '90s, the tide began to change and an advisory board was named to test on a small scale whether such a board was feasible. Finally in 1995, after 20 years, the State Legislature moved forward in support of a true teaching profession by approving the establishment of an independent teacher standards board.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE PROFESSION IN HAWAII

In 1996, the Governor appointed the first members of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB), composed primarily of licensed teachers. Unfortunately, the legislature was initially reluctant to implement a fully autonomous board. So, while teachers could set the standards, the Department of Education would still be responsible for implementing the standards and issuing licenses. The Department remained, in effect, both employer and licensing agency--a situation which, many educators felt, posed a deep conflict of interest. One of the major concerns was that raising standards would exacerbate the teacher shortage. Consequently, the Legislature made provisions for the department to hire "credentialled" teachers, e.g. teachers who did not fully meet all licensing requirements.

The law requiring a license to teach in Hawai'i's public schools went into effect in June 1997. Teachers who met the DOE's certification requirements were "grandfathered in."

The work of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board now began in earnest. In 1998, it developed and disseminated a draft document describing teacher performance and licensing standards. After statewide hearings, these standards were adopted and are now used by the department of education for issuing teacher licenses as well as for conducting state approval of teacher education programs. Careful crafting of the standards ensured that they are aligned with the standards of respected national organizations: those of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). For the first time, standards for teacher licensing in Hawaii are compatible with standards used for program accreditation, national standards for initial licensing, and standards for national certification. But even more importantly, teaching professionals -- those who know best what is needed to survive and thrive in the classroom -- have participated fully in establishing minimum qualifications necessary for entry into the teaching profession.

In 1999 the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board convened school counselors and librarians to draft performance standards compatible with the teacher performance standards as well as with the standards set by the school counselors' and school librarians' national organizations. The Attorney General is reviewing these so that the Board can take them to public hearing.

In 2000, Governor Ben Cayetano gave formal approval for Hawai'i to become one of 19 partner states to join the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, a network of states committed to making comprehensive improvements in policies that affect teacher quality. In 2001, Hawai'i's NCTAF Policy Group published a report, *The Magic Weavers: Securing the Future for Hawaii's Children*, which identified 38 recommendations for improving teaching and learning in Hawai'i.

The Policy Group selected five recommendations for legislative action during the 2001 State Legislature:

- (1) "Give the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board the authority and capacity to set and enforce teacher standards (initial licensing, license renewal, revocation and approval of teacher education programs)."
 - (2) "Establish funding support for Professional Development Schools at the college and school levels."
 - (3) "Provide incentives for teachers to acquire licenses in additional fields or shortage areas..."
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- (4) "Allow retired teachers to return to teaching in shortage areas without loss of benefits."
- (5) "Develop an aggressive program to encourage candidates for National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification."

The Governor recently signed all five measures into law. As of July 1, 2002, the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board will be responsible for issuing, renewing, revoking, reinstating and suspending teacher licenses. This time the Legislature fully acknowledged the role of the standards board and gave the teaching profession the responsibility for guarding entry and continuance in its ranks.

In recognition of the difficulties now faced by states in hiring new teachers, the Legislature gave the department of education the ability to hire staff on an "emergency hire" basis. The department must, however, report these actions monthly to HTSB by individual name, school, teaching assignment(s), progress toward licensing. The department must also annually report to the HTSB the reasons and duration of employment for emergency hires, out-of-field teaching assignments, and numbers and types of courses and students taught by out-of-field teachers.

CURRENT EFFORTS

In an effort to keep up with its new responsibilities, the Board is engaged in a number of ongoing projects. First, it is designing an online licensing and license renewal system. This system is expected to facilitate the processing of license applications and provide timely access to licensing information by applicants and employers. The Board also plans to use this technology to facilitate the approval of teacher education programs and the Higher Education Act's Title II reporting requirements.

Secondly, the Board continues to discuss a system of renewing teacher licenses. Board members are considering a license renewal system that:

- is based on multiple criteria;
- is based on HTSB standards;
- is linked to school/system efforts;
- requires a plan and teacher reflection;
- minimizes administrative effort and bureaucracy and
- is financially feasible.

Thirdly, the Hawai'i NCTAF Policy Group – sponsored by the HTSB – will take its initial list of 38 recommendations and develop a strategic plan for their adoption into law. The Policy Group will identify performance goals and measures for its recommendations so that progress can be more effectively measured.

Finally, the responsibility for administering a candidate support program for teachers who wish to apply for National

Board Certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has been assigned to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board. The Board is currently designing training activities in partnership with the Hawaii Institute for Educational Partnerships (HIEP), the Hawaii State Teachers Association, State Farm Insurance and Hawaii's National Board Certified Teachers in order to provide support for teachers applying for national certification.

CONCLUSION

The teaching profession in Hawai'i now has a fully operational professional body, the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board. Teachers have come a long way from their initial attempts to establish a professional licensing board over 25 years ago. Policymakers, too, have embraced the idea that teacher self-governance, via a properly constituted professional board, is an important recognition of the special skills, knowledge and dispositions required of teachers and a vital step forward in achieving higher standards in the profession. As a result of NCTAF and the efforts of the Board and its many supporters, leaders in key stakeholder groups have a better understanding of the complex issues impacting teacher quality. Building on these efforts, the standards board is moving to provide more support and leadership in clarifying issues and identifying ways to address them.

As the Board seeks to develop a meaningful system for renewing teacher licenses, it will require increased involvement of teaching professionals to help make the system work. Teachers may be asked to sit on panels to review the plans of other teachers. Teachers may be asked to make professional judgements about whether a teacher's plan is adequately documented and completed. Teachers may be asked to do what matters most for the teaching profession.

We have made important progress, but we still have much to do.

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