



OHA-2
HB 208/SB 437
HB 874/SB 778 (Alternate Versions)
Hawaiian Language Immersion Student Assessments

This bill would require the Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) to partner with the Hawaiian language community to develop annual assessments formulated originally in Hawaiian to be administered to immersion students. If enacted, this legislation would ensure that Hawaiian language students, like mainstream students, are assessed in a test that is originally in their language of primary instruction.

BACKGROUND

The Hawaiian language was once a thriving language used by Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians. However, by the late twentieth century, the Hawaiian language was pushed to the brink of extinction due to a number of factors, including an 1896 law that functioned to ban the speaking of the Hawaiian language in Hawai'i schools.

Fortunately, several historic initiatives, including the Hawai'i Department of Education's (DOE's) Hawaiian Language Immersion Program—Ka Papahana Kaiapuni—have ensured that the language was preserved. Today, the Kaiapuni program is offered at 20 public schools and educates more than 2,000 students annually from kindergarten through the twelfth grade.

WHAT ARE ASSESSMENT EXAMS?

Under federal law (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), states must implement statewide assessments to measure their ability and the ability of their schools to enable students to meet academic achievement standards. During school years 2011-2012 through 2013-2014, Kaiapuni students in the 3rd and 4th grades were offered an English-to-Hawaiian translated tests (they are not formally introduced to English until 5th grade). However, the translated tests have raised serious concerns in the Hawaiian education and Hawaiian language communities.

Kaiapuni students in the 5th grade and above take the assessments in English, but this is not appropriate for students whose primary language of instruction is Hawaiian. These bills would address these issues by requiring the DOE to partner with the Hawaiian language community to develop annual assessments formulated originally in the Hawaiian language, to be administered to Kaiapuni students.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT EXAMS?

The translated tests given to 3rd and 4th grade Kaiapuni students contain many technical errors including grammatical and vocabulary errors as well as inconsistent terminology. They have been replete with problems, including cultural biases, translation inaccuracies, grammatical errors, vocabulary errors, and inconsistent terminology. As such, the translated assessments have not produced, and are not capable of producing, valid and reliable data regarding the proficiency of Kaiapuni students in any of the tested subject areas. Frustration with these nonsensical and linguistically inappropriate assessments has led to many Kaiapuni parents “opting out” their children from taking the statewide assessments, which may contribute to negative school rankings and put the school at risks for other sanctions. Translated assessments also fail to consider cultural frames of reference and popular understandings, resulting in confusion and nonsensical problem statements.



The tests in English given to Kaiapuni students in the 5th grade and above raise equity concerns. The dominant and primary language of classroom instruction should be the language of assessment. That is currently being denied Kaiapuni students in the 5th grade and above.

HOW DOES THIS BILL PROPOSE TO FIX THOSE PROBLEMS?

These bills would require the Department of Education to partner with the Hawaiian language community to develop assessments originally in the Hawaiian language to be administered to Kaiapuni students. An assessment that fairly evaluates Kaiapuni students' progress is necessary to prevent irreparable impacts to the Kaiapuni schools, teachers, students, and ultimately, the revitalization of the Hawaiian language.

**An example of a problematic assessment question can be found on the backside of this paper.*

Example of the Translation Problem

A sample problem statement from the Hawai'i State Assessment for fourth graders contains the following prompt and question:

"It's OK," Jake said. "But look at my new battery-operated car! It's so cool! You push a button, and it runs all by itself. See?" He pushed the button and had to go running after the car as it headed down the sidewalk.

Q: When Jake says his new car is "cool," he means that it

- A) will not work well in hot weather.*
- B) has windows that let in air.*
- C) is a lot of fun to play with.*
- D) does not have a motor to run it.*

See <http://www.hsaitems.org/ItemRelease/Questions.aspx#>.

There is no Hawaiian language translation for the word "cool" in the English colloquial sense. Nor is there a connection between the several words for a cooler temperature, and the English sense of coolness in terms of popularity or social desirability. A direct word-for-word Hawaiian translation of this question would therefore not only be nonsensical, but may also result in an incorrect answer (i.e. B) being selected, particularly if a Hawaiian word for a cool or cold temperature is used in the question prompt.