



**For More Information Contact:**  
Darcie Scharfenstein  
(808) 228-0211  
[darcies@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:darcies@hawaii.rr.com)

INSTITUTE FOR NATIVE PACIFIC  
EDUCATION AND CULTURE

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**Improving Literacy Rates for Hawai'i's Keiki —  
Education Leaders Unite at P-3 Principals' Summit,  
Addressing Urgent Needs for our Students**

*Early Childhood and Elementary School Communities Gather to Share  
"What Principals Should Know & Be Able To Do" and Plan for Working Together*

**(Honolulu, Hawai'i)** – What will it take for Hawai'i's children to read better? To learn more? To succeed not only in school, but also in life? More than 300 of Hawai'i's elementary school principals and experts on early education gathered today to strategize on these questions, overcome the gap in early learning and better serve the state's preschool through third grade students.

"It is crucial to provide principals and early childhood education leaders a venue to work together to improve the school readiness and continuing success of Hawai'i's keiki," said Good Beginnings Alliance executive director Elisabeth Chun. "Our focus is on the young learner – from birth through third grade with a shared goal of improving reading skills, literacy and instilling a love of reading."

The 2006 Hawai'i State School Readiness Assessment report reflects that at the start of the school year in only one out of every five kindergarten classes did the majority of the children possess adequate early literacy skills such as knowing the names of some letters and sounds and showing familiarity with books. And, while 61% of entering kindergarten children attended some preschool or formal early learning experiences before kindergarten, a significant percentage of children had no such experience.

Also, according to the 2006 Department of Education data only 52% of our third grade children across the state are reading at grade level. Put together, this means that many children are not entering school ready for success and not enough children are reading at grade level by third grade - a critical benchmark.

Today's summit provided resources toward improving early education quality, supports programs that work with parents, eases the transition to elementary school, and assesses the impact of these efforts. It was organized by early education nonprofits Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA) and Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE) along with its programs and partners including the SPARK Initiative, P-20 Initiative, State School Readiness Task Force, the Hawai'i State Department of Education, Hawai'i State Charter School Office, Hawai'i Elementary and Middle School Administrators' Association, and the Head Start Collaboration Project.

Disa Hauge, Principal at Maili Elementary School, noted, "Learning begins at birth and happens in every day moments whether at home, in an early education setting, or playing with friends.

This natural desire to learn marks the exciting potential for every child and the foundation upon which all later education is built."

"When young children are talked with about their world -- what they see, who is in it, how it works -- they gain precious insight into how their world is organized and how to stay safe in it. When children talk a lot about their world, they gain complex language skills that allow them to express themselves and accurately describe their world. These receptive and expressive skills are the foundation of comprehension and success in school." Hauge presented and participated at today's summit.

Among the many leaders in early education were State Department of Education Superintendent Patricia Hamamoto, Honorable Lieutenant Governor James Aiona and Honorable Representative Mazie Hirono, and Mississippi State Superintendent of Education Hank Bounds, who delivered the keynote speech.

Dr. Bounds touched on the importance of P-3 for all children, emphasizing the job of an educator as one who saves lives. "The need for children to be reading at the end of grade three is urgent, and America is sleeping through a crisis," said Bounds. He posed questions to the audience, "What would Hawai'i look like if we decided to make this initiative a reality? What would America look like if we truly believed that no child should be left behind?"

Bounds encouraged all to embark on a mission that is larger than anyone as an individual, focusing on leadership and asking principals to build a culture of success, build systems that predict success and ensure that students and teachers are in the best position to win. He noted, "If our goal is to have all children reading at grade level by third grade, we know we can't start at Kindergarten -- we need to start at birth."

Further emphasizing the importance of reading at grade level, the Harold K.L. Castle Foundation awarded 21 Hawai'i schools \$10,000 each for their excellence in improving reading scores for keiki in the third grade. The cash grants were given under the Castle Foundation's Nā Alaka'i Ho'ona'auao Reading Leadership Awards program during today's Summit.

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P-3 means connecting the learning of a very young child (P = provisions for early learning) through the third grade. This connection creates meaningful educational experiences for children and a solid foundation for life-long learning. P-3 comes at a critical time, since Hawai'i is facing two significant challenges in keiki learning.

Explained Chun, "A significant number of young children in Hawai'i do not possess the necessary skills for success and lack access to quality early learning experiences before kindergarten."

INPEACE CEO Rae DeCoito commented, "Thousands of Hawai'i's keiki have not received a quality early education and are at a disadvantage when they enter kindergarten. A large percentage of these children are of Native Hawaiian descent and the lack of readiness is particularly felt within our communities. By sponsoring the summit and spearheading P-3 efforts in our communities, we are fostering cultural sensitivity when working with parents and young children," she added.

Chun concluded, "Our goals for the day were met with great success. We were able to develop an awareness of the P-3 Approach in Hawai'i, acknowledge the work being done in our schools

and engage elementary schools and early childhood providers to participate in requesting funds to expand their work toward greater P-3 endeavors.”

**About Good Beginnings Alliance**

Good Beginnings Alliance is a statewide public-private initiative for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. We strive to ensure the safe and healthy development of all children from pre-birth to age five. Good Beginnings is designated in Act 77 of the 1997 Session Laws and is responsible for building Hawai'i's early childhood system.

**About INPEACE**

INPEACE is a 501(3)(c) nonprofit dedicated to improving the quality of life for Native Hawaiians through community partnerships that provide educational opportunities and promote self-sufficiency. INPEACE shares its expertise and community partnerships in areas such as early childhood education and care, literacy, educational research and evaluation, teacher training and professional development, culturally responsive curriculum development.

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