

## DOE changes course on school closing

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In an about-face, it appears Kohala schools will be saved from closing -- for now.

Department of Education Interim Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi amended the recommendation she made to the Board of Education last week from a school consolidation being "desirable" because of the potential savings of such a move to "no consolidation should take place at this time."

The Board of Education's Committee on Administrative Services appears to be thinking along the same lines. While an actual decision was not made at the committee's meeting in Honolulu Monday afternoon, the board's public affairs officer Alex Da Silva said, based on comments from the committee's chairman, it's very likely the next time the committee meets, they will approve the education department's recommendation.

Da Silva said the board will likely make its decision Aug. 19 at the meeting slated in Hilo.

"We're hopeful. ... It seems (the committee members) were saying to us 'Don't worry. Your voices have been heard,'" said Kohala School Consolidation Task Force Chairwoman Randee Golden, who attended Monday's meeting.

"The board took to heart the concerns of the community," said Sen. Josh Green, D-Kona, who also attended the meeting. "I'm confident they'll make the right decision in the end to keep the school open."

Matayoshi's amended recommendation again claims the consolidation of the Kohala schools can't be achieved without major capital improvements that will take years to implement, given the economic climate and list of priority projects that must first be tackled by the education department.

"I revisited the issues with Randee Golden and the Complex Area Superintendent (Art Souza) and looked at some of the other issues surrounding the master planning and decided to make a change," Matayoshi said, when asked why she amended her recommendation.

Matayoshi's original recommendation also included a proposal for a master plan, but it was removed because "such a proposal is not part of the original charge, which was limited to school consolidation," her amended recommendation states.

Even without the last-minute changes, the Kohala community was not going down without a fight. Golden said there will still be a community meeting at 6 p.m. Friday at Kohala Middle School.

"It's not over until it's over, and we're not going to stop sharing our feelings about our needs and the process itself," Golden said.

Kohala Middle School Principal Janette Snelling, Kohala High School Principal Catherine Bratt and Golden testified at the meeting, as well as two students, and Green e-mailed DOE Assistant Superintendent Randy Moore, appealing to him to keep the schools open.

"I understand how difficult a position you are in trying to manage the fiscal realities of our DOE, but this school is central to the identity of Kohala," he wrote. "This is an isolated community that suffers all of the hardships of being super-rural. ... In most ways the schools here are the only sustained defining determinant for their sense of self, and



therefore closing this middle school would be catastrophic."

Formed in May 2009, the Kohala School Consolidation Task Force deliberated for nearly eight months before handing over a draft report to West Hawaii Complex Area Superintendent Souza in February, recommending not consolidating the middle school with the elementary and high schools for varied reasons, touching upon academic, financial and social implications for keeping the status quo.

Souza then made his recommendation to Matayoshi urging her to accept and approve the task force's report and keep the middle school as a separate campus. Matayoshi requested Moore complete a follow-up study on the possible consolidation of the three North Hawaii schools. He presented his findings to the task force and community members in late June, then presented his final report to Matayoshi.