Stop the Public Attacks on School Leaders

There has been a disturbing trend lately in the form of public protests and attacks on our school leaders. These displays are flaring up around our state and are magnified by social and traditional media coverage. The manner by which these school principals have been treated is hurtful and not in the best interest of either the principal or the school community. The complexity of emotionally charged complaints and the momentum built by those utilizing the media only serves to undermine efforts made to ensure the fair treatment of those accused.

Recent examples include cell phone video of a principal at an assembly that was widely circulated on social media then broadcast by a local TV station. In another instance, a sign waving campaign against a principal was organized, and in still another school district a sign holding demonstration was planned to protest a school leader’s decisions.

We urge the Department of Education to follow up on complaints in a manner that is timely and fair to all parties involved. When complaints are found to be legitimate, through a system that assures the due process rights of the accused, then action should be taken. On the other hand, if the complaints are unsubstantiated and a result of unpopular decisions, then the DOE must also take swift and decisive action to stand behind the principal who is being attacked. Dragging out the process and/or reacting solely to the loudest voices is wrong and sends the wrong message.

School leaders have great responsibility and are the face of initiatives directed by the Board of Education and the Superintendent. As a school leader, principals receive the brunt of the negative feedback on sometimes unpopular decisions that they must make for the good of the school. Initiatives are mandated and many times school leaders have no control over when, why and how they are to be implemented. In addition, principals must painstakingly find ways to try to do the impossible, and make everyone happy and satisfied.
We all can be considered stakeholders when it comes to education in Hawaii. We all have the right to file complaints because we believe that a violation of a policy, rules, laws and regulations has occurred that may ultimately harm a school. But there is a difference between filing a complaint because of an alleged violation of policy and filing a complaint because we are unhappy with a decision.

We urge the community to come together and respect the rights of all and by doing so ensure the fair treatment of our school leaders.

Yes, we have a right to peacefully protest, but as we do this let us always remember that there are two sides to every story. In order to maintain a democratic society we should always demand that both sides be heard through a process that is fair, equitable and respectful, especially as we model this to our children. If our school leaders can be treated like this, who will it be tomorrow?

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