



HAWAII STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## News Release

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SUPERINTENDENT

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### **Department of Education releases sexual education report**

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Education (DOE) today released a report that announces actions it is taking based on a panel review of *Pono Choices*, a middle-school sexual health education curriculum. The report entitled, *Implementing Sexual Health Education: Background and Actions for Improvement*, details 11 specific recommendations to improve the curriculum and a dozen internal actions the DOE is taking to improve curriculum reviews and parental choice.

*Pono Choices* was developed and is owned by the University of Hawaii at Manoa's Center on Disability Studies (UHM-CDS), and was implemented in five schools this past semester. In response to feedback from various stakeholders, the Department convened the [Pono Choices Stakeholder Review Panel](#), chaired by DOE Deputy Superintendent Ronn Nozoe to review the curriculum and make recommendations. The Panel generated a report, *Stakeholder Panel Review: Pono Choices Curriculum, February – May 2014: Final Report*, which summarizes their discussions and lists specific recommendations.

The DOE is formally requesting that UHM-CDS consider addressing recommendations for changes to further improve the curriculum and address stakeholders' concerns. Among the recommended changes: characterization of the anus as a genital, increasing information about the risks of anal sex, and improvements to the Parent Night Guide to provide more transparency to families about the curriculum to inform their decision making.

The DOE's report also announces 12 additional internal actions it is taking to improve curriculum review processes and increase parental role in decisionmaking around sexual health education. They include changing the requirement from a parent *opt-out* decision to an *opt-in*; reviewing the design and sequence of health and life science courses; and defining a clear process for curriculum and instructional materials review and approval that reflects state law and Board policy regarding roles and responsibilities.

The Department also recommends that the Board of Education review, as part of its ongoing policy audit, policies 2210 and 2245 to provide clarity around the context for classroom discussions about prophylactic devices.

"Let's not forget that the goal of this curriculum and our sexual health education standards, Board policies, and state laws, is to reduce unintended teen pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV," noted Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi. "Given the

statistics about Hawaii's youth — the rate of sexual activity, failure to use protection, rate of pregnancy, and the spread of disease — we must work together to ensure students are educated to make better choices.”

The full list of the actions and recommendations can be found below and in the report.

“There is no avoiding the fact that sexual health education is a sensitive and divisive issue,” stated Nozoe. “We took the concerns raised by members of the public seriously. Both the recommendations to UHM-CDS and changes to the department’s internal processes reflect that.”

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## **Highlights: *Implementing Sexual Health Education: Background and Actions for Improvement***

### **DOE Recommendations to UHM-CDS to improve Pono Choices curriculum**

- While the *Pono Choices* curriculum is developed and owned by the UHM-CDS and the DOE does not have the authority to amend the curriculum itself. The DOE is requesting that UHM-CDS consider addressing the specific recommendations found on page 17 of the report and submit a revised version for review and approval in advance of School Year 2014-15. Schools shall not implement the *Pono Choices* curriculum in SY14-15 until the Department has received a revised version of the curriculum for review and approval for use.

### **DOE actions to improve internal processes**

#### ***Strengthen parent awareness of and role in sexual health education options***

- Change the current requirement to provide parents an option to *opt-out* of sexual health education to an *opt-in*.
- Provide a customizable template for opt-in parent letters.
- Require parent notification letters to offer an opportunity for parents to review materials or discuss activities with the teacher or administrators.
- Recommend that schools implementing a new curriculum, program, or other activity covering controversial issues proactively host a family night or information briefing to educate families.

#### ***Improve public information about sexual health education***

- Disseminate updated Youth Risk Behavioral Survey results.
- Work with UHM-CDS to publish a short resource for parents that summarizes nationally-recognized research on sexual health education and strategies for behavior prevention.
- Make information about academic standards, including sexual health education standards, more accessible and user-friendly on the DOE’s website..

#### ***Review sequencing and timing of health education and science courses***

- Review the research and practices of other states and districts to determine if the timing of health courses, including sexual health education, and science courses covering life sciences are designed and timed to be the most developmentally appropriate and effective.

#### ***Improve internal processes for curriculum development, review, approval, and data collection***

- Work with the curriculum and instruction teams to make the materials review process clear and transparent, reflect state law and Board policy regarding roles and responsibilities, and ensure it:
  - Differentiates between approval for research, pilot, and statewide use;
  - Differentiates between approval as recommended, exclusive, or mandated;
  - Clarifies decision-making process and escalates decision-making for curriculum and materials regarding controversial topics;
  - Standardizes materials vetting process and stakeholder involvement;

- Clarifies availability of evaluation criteria and evidence-based process for school-based selection of materials;
  - Annually announce, internally and to the public, a list of state reviewed, approved or mandated curriculum or instructional materials.
- Explore the feasibility of an annual information collection from schools to identify curricula and instructional materials that are being implemented. Any such data collection must be done in manner that maximizes utility and minimizes burden on school staff.
  - Re-review approved sexual health education curriculum to identify and address and concerns similar to those identified for *Pono Choices*.

#### **DOE recommendations to the Board**

- The Department recommends that the Board of Education review, as part of its ongoing Board policy audit, policies 2210 and 2245 to provide clarity around the context for discussions about prophylactic devices.

#### **About the Hawaii State Department of Education**

The Hawaii State Department of Education is the ninth-largest U.S. school district and the only statewide educational system in the country. It is comprised of 255 schools and 33 charter schools, and serves more than 185,000 students. King Kamehameha III established Hawaii's public school system in 1840. The DOE is in the midst of a range of historic efforts to transform its public education system to ensure graduates succeed in college or careers. To learn more, visit [HawaiiPublicSchools.org](http://HawaiiPublicSchools.org).

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