



# A NEW DAY IN HAWAII

## Education - Early Childhood

Our Best Investment of Public Dollars

**O**ur values are clear: in Hawaii, we put children first. We have always felt an obligation to future generations and we act on that obligation even when that means sacrificing something today.

The science is also clear: We know for a fact that the brain is shaped for life in early experiences beginning at birth. We know that young children need positive interactions with caring adults to develop properly. We know that it is much more difficult and expensive to remediate problems later in life than it is to support parents in getting their children off to a good start. We know that by 18 months, developmental disparities already appear that will affect educational attainment for the rest of a person's life. We know that risk factors in early childhood, left unaddressed, practically assure poor health outcomes.

We know these things, and yet the State of Hawaii has been dismantling early intervention programs like Healthy Start and has reduced the assistance families need to access early learning opportunities. Right now, we are pouring tax dollars into disease management, incarceration, and remedial education; an Abercrombie Administration will turn this on its head by making efficient and effective investments in the time of life when the brain develops, with particular emphasis on the most at-risk children in the population. Hawaii will return to core values, and we will be the nation's leader in early childhood policy.

We have some of the most able business people, social workers, researchers, educators, philanthropists, and advocates working on early childhood issues in Hawaii. What we need now is leadership and political will. As Governor, I will provide an unprecedented level of leadership in this arena and I will see these commitments through. Investing in early childhood has an impact on education, health, safety net programs, homelessness, crime, substance abuse, community development, and economic development. It was true when I first helped develop the Healthy Start program as a state legislator, and it is true today. On a strong foundation of early childhood development, and by once again being a pioneer in this area, Hawaii will build our social, educational, and economic future.

### **Guiding Principles: Education – Early Childhood**

- Opportunity for every child
- Early childhood investment *is* economic development
- Early identification and prevention
- Child and family centered
- Develop public-private partnerships
- Science-based and culturally appropriate
- Parental involvement and strong families

## **INSTITUTE CABINET-LEVEL LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES**

Programs, services, and leadership in the area of early childhood are currently scattered among the Departments of Health, Human Services, Education, the Judiciary, and other agencies. In order to develop a comprehensive statewide policy to make a significant investment in early childhood, a Department of Early Childhood will be established with cabinet-level leadership to ensure government services are implemented well, improved continuously, and consistently meet needs. Most importantly, by eliminating duplication of effort and engineering partnerships with the private sector, this reorganization will ensure cost-effective use of public resources.

## **EXPAND PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS**

Healthy Start will be reestablished and strengthened to ensure that the most at-risk newborns, toddlers, and their families get the support they need, avoiding much more costly interventions in the future. Hawaii will have universal pre-natal care, including education related to nutrition, alcohol and drug cessation, health care and screening for every child through a medical home, peri-natal substance abuse prevention and treatment services for pregnant and parenting women, risk/needs assessment and intensive home visiting for high-risk families of newborns, universal developmental screening with effective interventions, and school readiness assessments. With better allocation and coordination of public resources and working in partnership with the private sector, Hawaii will have the most comprehensive early child development system in the nation.

## **CREATE A UNIVERSAL NETWORK OF CHILDCARE AND PRESCHOOL SUPPORT**

Ensuring that every young child in Hawaii has access to high quality preschool will be a team effort. By coordinating with schools, nonprofits, foundations, community organizations, and employers, and by

developing a strong legislative framework, the Department of Early Childhood will ensure that all children, including those in families with low-incomes, can realistically access high quality childcare and preschool services. Employers will be encouraged and incentivized to allow for the family interaction that is critical for a young child's social and intellectual development. Preschool programs will be of high quality and—in accordance with the Abercrombie Plan for Education—will be integrated with the Department of Education to create a seamless transition from preschool to the public school system.

## **ESTABLISH THE STATE GOVERNMENT AS A MODEL OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES**

As it encourages private employers to do the same, the State of Hawaii will lead by example by implementing family friendly policies that encourage and enable interaction in families with very young children. Besides supporting healthy development in young children, these policies will improve morale and productivity, and ultimately make government more effective and efficient. Policies will include flexible work schedules, telecommuting opportunities, job sharing programs, on-site services for children and mothers, and family leave. The State of Hawaii will have a new employment paradigm that reflects the value of putting the interests of children first.

## **DEVELOP THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE**

Building on the expertise and commitment that already exists in Hawaii, we will expand capacities and build real career paths so that our best early childhood workers and professionals can stay in the field and make a good living serving our children, families, and communities. Their good work today saves our society billions of future dollars in remediation. The Department of Early Childhood will work with educational institutions, nonprofits, the private sector, and experts to build a workforce large enough to meet Hawaii's needs.