

EDITORIAL

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President and Publisher
Michael J. Fisch • 525-7440
Editor
Saundra Keyes • 525-8080
General Manager
Dennis E. Francis • 525-8673

Editorial Page Editor
Jerry Burris • 525-8095
Executive Editor
Jim Kelly • 525-8094
Managing Editor
David F. Montesino • 535-8205

THE HONOLULU ADVERTISER'S MISSION is to chronicle Hawai'i's story while being a vigilant partner in helping the Islands shape their future. To be diligent, truthful, accurate and fair. To provide a voice for all of the community. To reflect a love and understanding of this place and its people. To honor Hawai'i's ethnic, cultural and social diversity. To cherish the land and sea. To perpetuate the qualities of aloha — tolerance, humility, sharing and respect. To inform, educate and entertain. To be Hawai'i's newspaper.

School financing plan important innovation

In almost any endeavor, it is useful to follow the money.

That is, you can say what you will, but the real power goes where the money is.

In this context, it is both refreshing and hopeful that an idea to change the way the public school budget is spent has suddenly gained momentum. The idea was stimulated by the visit here of management guru William Ouchi, who reported on a recent UCLA study on school governance.

One of that study's findings, Ouchi said, was that schools perform better when their principals control their own budget and are held directly accountable for their performance.

That seems to have jump-started a proposal that would change the way our schools get and spend their money. Money would be allotted according to a fairly sophisticated per-pupil formula, and spending decisions would be largely in the hands of individual principals.

If adopted, this would put fiscal muscle behind a move already under way to leave more decision-making in the hands of the individual

schools and school complexes.

While it undoubtedly will take time to work out details of the plan, there are strong signs that it enjoys support from Schools Superintendent Pat Hamamoto, the unions, key legislators and Gov. Linda Lingle.

Politically, that's a winning combination.

It's long been known that the key to good performance of any school is a dedicated, dynamic, hands-on principal. That's true even in Hawai'i, where the tradition has been for strong central control of education.

Giving principals the flexibility and power to manage their own budgets and — and this is very important — holding them accountable could make a major difference in our public education system.

In effect, this budget plan would treat principals more like the chief executives they already are. It should also pave the way for another long-overdue reform: removing principals from their union, paying them the executive salaries they deserve and putting them on performance contracts.