End-of-year goal delayed, but project rebidding, installation moving forward

From Asst. Supt. Dann Carlson, Office of School Facilities and Support Services:

Record temperatures are on its way and in anticipation, the Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) is doing all it can to cool classrooms. Gov. David Ige, the Legislature and community members have helped in this endeavor and the Department is very grateful. Although HIDOE has a heat abatement program to cool school environments, our efforts went into overdrive following the $100 million request to cool 1,000 classrooms.

At the end of January, we started plans to accomplish the goal of 1,000 classrooms by the end of 2016, and more than 3,000 contractors were contacted to prequalify so they could start as soon as the Legislature approved funding. Professional contractors must do AC installation in our schools. Contractors also must be cleared to do work around our students and staff (possess good safety records and have experience working in occupied buildings).

The front work done to ensure qualified contractors did not pay off as planned — we had far fewer than hoped for. (Last month, we reopened the process to expand the pool.) We started to put the projects out to bid on the same day, May 5, that the governor signed Act 47 appropriating the funds. However, the construction boom has led to higher pay and a shortage of skilled laborers and job delays.

The cost of the AC equipment is roughly in line with what we expected but the cost of labor is extremely high. For example, one bid had the overall cost of PVAC per classroom at $135,000, when initial estimates from the industry were about $20,000. Prices like that would prohibit us from reaching our target; hence, we are pushing back the construction to solicit more bids and lower the cost. Under the circumstances, we expect a delay in cooling 1,000 classrooms by Dec. 31, 2016.

While we’re disappointed with this, we’re committed to our ongoing heat abatement efforts and will push for better prices so that we can cool more classrooms, not fewer.
Supt.'s Corner

This spring, HIDOE led an intensive effort to review our students’ progress and engage our community in defining student success and reflecting on lessons learned to inform our review and extension of the Strategic Plan for public education and our state’s plan for the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

In Phase 1 of the Strategic Plan process, more than 1,400 educators, students and community members completed an online survey, and more than 1,100 participants shared their mana’o at 108 diverse focus groups statewide. We’ve also met with our principals to discuss ESSA.

Several themes emerged from the feedback on the Strategic Plan, including the importance of:

• a well-rounded education that considers the “whole child” and personalizes learning for students based on their aspirations and strengths,
• high quality, rigorous hands-on learning opportunities that have real-world applications,
• valuing Hawai’i’s unique strengths and assets, and
• coordination of community partners and resources to support innovation and clear goals for student success.

A full report of the findings of the Strategic Plan survey and focus groups will be shared in August. Join our social media campaign, #HIQualityEd, which is ongoing.

Our Strategic Plan will guide our ESSA planning to ensure that our state take advantage of the law’s intent for increased state-driven flexibility while focusing on achieving Hawai’i’s goals.

HIDOE is analyzing the emerging ESSA regulations and participating in the national conversation about opportunities and requirements. We are working with the Board of Education, the Governor’s ESSA task force and our congressional delegation to ensure Hawai’i’s voice is heard on how the emerging regulations appear to tie our hands and inhibit the promised flexibility of the law.