LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SUBJECT: Report on the two-tier Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten Program

REFERENCE: Act 219, Twenty Second Legislature, 2004

ACTION REQUESTED: The Department shall submit findings and recommendations to the legislature regarding the implementation of the two-tier Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten Program no later than twenty days prior to the regular sessions of 2005, 2006 and 2007.

DOE REPORT:
Introduction:
The Department of Education affirms the value of a quality kindergarten program and has initiated the first year of a three-year plan for the statewide implementation of a two-tier Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten Program.

Since the enactment of Act 219 in July, 2004 the Department has engaged in several actions, which include the following:

- Enlisted the participation of Kamaile and Leihoku Elementary Schools to serve as exploratory sites to provide baseline feedback and discussion on the critical elements for a Junior Kindergarten Program (Jr. K Program).

- Created a resource teacher position to support the state and Leeward district exploratory schools to ensure that all efforts are integrated and work within the context of other ongoing initiatives at a school.

- Developed a (draft) Framework for Implementation that will outline the key components of a Jr. K Program, including guiding principles from national early childhood (ages 0-8) standards for quality programs.

- Enlisted the support from staff of the University of Hawaii Manoa and Honolulu Community College, Department of Human Services – Head Start Collaboration Section, the SPARKS initiative (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) and Good Beginnings Alliance and has participated in the BUILD initiative, a national collaboration of states promoting partnerships.

- Conducted the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment Survey (HSSRA) in partnership with the Good Beginnings Alliance for baseline data on children ready for school and schools ready for children. Seventy percent of elementary schools participated. Reports are in the process of being finalized at this date.
FINDINGS

1. The design of a Jr. K Program requires a focus on the quality of current kindergarten programs and classroom practices in light of new research on early learning.

2. The kindergarten grade level has taken on new importance based on brain research and the critical role of parents in their child's development and implications for learning.

3. The impact of the Jr. K Program extends beyond the implementation of a new cut-off age, but encompasses other critical areas such as grouping practices and class size, instructional strategies, and provisions for an enriched curriculum for all kindergarteners.

4. Assessment of young children is a new field of study requiring new knowledge and skills for classroom teachers and administrators.

5. The information gathered from the HSSRA in addition to current school data, will provide the initial step for schools to address school readiness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based upon the Framework and key components of a Jr. K Program, articulate and integrate resources within current programs, such as the Parent Community Networking Center (PCNC) and Primary School Adjustment Project (PSAP) to support a seamless delivery of services so schools can provide quality services leading to the full implementation of a Jr. K Program.

2. Support the Framework for Implementation which will provide schools with a working document that outlines the key components of the program and operational timelines. It will be completed by the Spring of 2005 and be available for use by pilot sites in the school year 2005-06.

3. Support the Department's biennium request for professional development for administrators and teachers, including curriculum and research as well as implementation guidelines identified through feedback from our exploratory sites.