

One-shot construction of school is long shot

Upcountry parents told to lobby politicians, realize situation bleak

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MAKAWAO — If parents want the Upcountry high school built all at once, they had better talk to the politicians who hold the purse strings because there's no way the state Department of Education can afford it.

That's what state Schools Superintendent Charles Toguchi told about 40 people at Kalama Intermediate School Friday night during a meeting to gather public input on the design of the long-awaited school.

Plans for the school call for construction in phases with enough buildings completed by September 1995 to open with the 9th-grade class only. One grade will be added each of the following three years.

Responding to speakers demanding one-shot construction, Toguchi said that while he supports the concept of opening a completed school, it is impossible given the department's financial constraints and the demand for construction across the state.

Toguchi said \$70 million can't be spent for one school when the DOE receives only \$90 million in state funds per year.

Toguchi noted that requests from all 235 schools statewide for the next two-year state budget total \$250 million, and there is a \$2 billion backlog of capital improvements statewide if every school is built to standard with gymnasiums and libraries.

"It's impossible," the superintendent told the audience. "Can you imagine what would happen to our budget if we gave \$70 million to one project?"

Despite the bleak picture, several parents after the meeting said they were optimistic the necessary funds could be found.

One of them was Alec McBarnet Jr., chairman of the Maui District School Advisory Council, who said several community members have pledged to research various state financing methods as possible sources of school funding.

Bond financing, special legislative funds and federal airport money are a few of the sources that will be examined, he said.

McBarnet, a Kula resident, said it was significant Toguchi gave his support to the concept of one-shot construction. Add that to the

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various Maui organizations that have endorsed the idea — including the Maui Chamber of Commerce, the Maui County Council and the Democratic Party — and there appears to be universal support, he said.

"I believe that when everybody wants something and money is the only issue, there are people out there with the financial background who can solve the problem," McBarnet said.

State Rep. David Morihara said there's a chance for one-shot construction but it isn't going to be easy.

Morihara said he would introduce

a bill in the Legislature asking for the extra Upcountry school funds, although he wasn't sure yet how detailed the bill would be regarding the funding mechanism.

"I can support and introduce legislation, but it's just a beginning in a long, hard process," he said.

During the meeting, a number of residents said a completed school is important to the education of their children. They said they didn't want students deprived of the full spectrum of the high school experience. They predicted the constant construction on campus would interrupt the educational process.