

WHY SCHOOL REFORM LAGS; HOW WE MIGHT DO BETTER

By Mary Anne Raywid

SURELY Hawaii ranks high when it comes to school disgruntlement. Elsewhere in the nation, it is only in the cities that one encounters such intense and pervasive negativism about schools.

The central reason may well be that none of Hawaii's initiatives tackles the fundamental properties that make Hawaii's schools operate as they do.

Here is a list of situations that must be confronted if things are to change for the better — along with a suggestion or two on how to deal with each of them.

■ Remove the incentives that make principals want to keep moving. So long as a principal's income and status are tied to the size of the school he or she runs, neither teachers nor the public can count on continuity.

To discontinue the profitability of

moving, either end the link between pay and enrollment, or add a subsidy to the salaries of principals of small schools.

■ End the seniority entitlements that enable the experienced teachers to abandon the neediest students after a year or two. The effect is a revolving door, leaving the students most dependent on teaching excellence with a new group of novices annually — novices who move at the first opportunity.

Install incentives that attract and retain experienced teachers in these schools.

■ If all the talk about school-based management means anything, then it has to mean that less management is needed at state and intermediate (district) levels. Yet we are told that decentralization is occurring here without the loss of a single job.

Any effort that is halfway serious would have to entail at least a modest reduction in administrative, managerial and other auxiliary staff

— a minimum 15 percent perhaps.

■ Again, if you are really serious about decentralization, then don't adopt any plan — including school-based management — as The Answer, to be implemented in all schools.

First, no school improvement plan yet adopted anywhere can claim sufficient supportive evidence to warrant such an act of faith! And second, the single-strategy approach makes inevitable a top-down stance requiring an undetermined number to be marching under orders — not a very promising way to elicit the teacher commitment and support necessary to any plan's working.

■ As long as principals retain the powers they now hold, a new principal can come in and with a single stroke wipe out his or her predecessor's improvement plan, along with all the teacher effort that went into it.

Removing such a powerful disincentive to school improvement



"The central reason may well be that none of Hawaii's initiatives tackles the fundamental properties that make Hawaii's schools operate as they do."

— Mary Anne Raywid

will require a more appropriate allocation of authority.

■ Don't leave the fox in charge of the hen house! If you are serious about real school change, then don't assign the present education establishment the role of fleshing out any and all reform policies. As long as the Education department continues to write the "guidelines" for all new policy, expect minimal change. This is not malice or evil intent: It is simply the way of bureaucracy, whose chief virtue is stability.

■ Enable some public schools here to operate with the advantages private schools enjoy: independence of a constraining bureaucracy and its rules, a self-selected staff, students who choose to attend and a distinctive program designed by the

staff.

Such schools are now operating on the Mainland in the interests of reform and new governance arrangements. They are called "charter schools" and they are held publicly accountable through contracts specifying goals and outcomes rather than through bureaucratic oversight and control.

Try these! They just might work!

□

Mary Anne Raywid is professor of educational administration and policy studies at Hofstra University, Hempstead, N.Y., where she specializes in school reform and restructuring. She is a frequent Hawaii visitor and in 1989 was a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii.