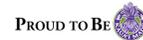




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Hopes still high for charter school

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Posted: Thursday, January 15, 2015 12:45 am

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LIHUE — When the state public charter school commission turned down her request last year to establish a charter school on Kauai, Deena Fontana Moraes was disappointed.

But not deterred.

"Though it was difficult to hear a no, at the end of the last period, it was a blessing," she said. "It really made us go back to the drawing board and create the school we wanted."

Moraes is back and still determined to form an iLEAD (international Leadership Entrepreneurial Development Arts Design) charter school. A recent public meeting generated enthusiasm and ideas and indicated there was strong support for the proposal.

"It's truly our heart and soul to see this school happen for the island of Kauai," she said.

So, the Sarah Lawrence College graduate is again leading the charge for the school, whose theme is "roots in the islands and wings for the world."

The free, publicly funded school would be for open to students grade K-8, and eventually expand to high school. Goals are still to open in August 2016 with 125 students in the Kapaa area, though other sites are being considered. But first, it must be approved by the charter commission, and then receive state OK.

Moraes said the school will be different from traditional schools. It will be project-based learning, with integrated, hands-on lessons. It will have high academic standards, as well as focus on collaboration, critical thinking, communication, innovation and leadership.

It wants to encourage students to excel, explore, question, push beyond the status quo and develop deep understanding of subjects. A goal is to develop in students skills necessary for future success.

It's more than listening to lectures, writing notes and taking tests.

"Kids that are wiggy in their seats will do well in our school," Moraes said.

There are two iLEAD schools operating in California, where Moraes has taken a residency post to learn all aspects of the charter school and prepare for the director role when it opens on Kauai.

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That the schools are based in California, however , was one of the reasons cited by the commission for denying the charter application.

"... the application often used California examples, but failed to explain how the California model would be appropriately adapted to Hawaii," the commission wrote.

The commission also had other concerns.

"Also, the applicant glossed over the challenges it may face in negotiating supplements to the collective bargaining agreement. The financial plan also showed that the applicant did not do due diligence regarding Hawaii's economy when preparing the budget," it wrote.

The commission did note "the applicant does demonstrate a deep understanding of project-based learning and exhibits a sophisticated level of curriculum design. Their holistic focus on students and use of brain-based research is compelling. Finally , members of iLEAD Development demonstrate strong school leadership and management skills."

Moraes said they are preparing another proposal that will address the commission's concerns. Dr. Kani Blackwell came on board as a partner and a hui of parents and teachers formed.

Moraes said they will be presenting the new application in two parts to the charter commission. The first will be presented today . The second will be presented in March. A decision is expected this summer .

When rewriting the charter , she said it will emphasize that it will meet the needs of local students and utilize the area's history, culture and geography .

Operating costs are estimated at \$1.6 million for 2016-17 and \$2.1 million for 2017-18, according to the original application. Along with state funding, iLEAD will seek financial assistance from businesses, community groups and individuals.

"We need strong financial partners who can give the funds that we need to create the school that we truly want to have for our kids," she said.

Moraes, a Kauai High School graduate, worked several years at an international school in Brazil before returning to Kauai about two years ago.

"The island is just hungry for something different," she said. "Not that what exists is not good. It's just something different."

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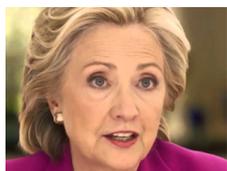
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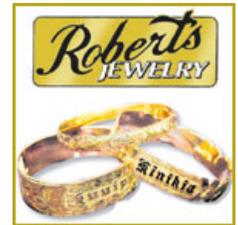
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