

Star-Bulletin

Dash begins to find room at child care providers

By Rosemarie Bernardo

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Parents have swamped Hawaii's two largest child care providers with phone calls about finding room for their children as the first public school teacher furlough day approaches.

"A lot of parents are very worried about what they're going to do," said Tony Pfaltzgraff, senior vice president of community development at the YMCA of Honolulu. Officials at both the YMCA and Kamaaina Kids are scrambling as well to make plans to address parents' needs.

Costs, location and staffing are some of the details both organizations are working on with the Department of Education. Plans are expected to be completed by Monday.

Many parents are worried about the loss of 17 school days. Students who attend schools on a 10-month calendar will only have five full weeks left of classes in the school year versus 20 full weeks of instruction without the furlough days. The first scheduled furlough day is Oct. 23.

Pfaltzgraff said the YMCA's plan includes helping students with their homework. The organization is also looking into hiring teachers interested in working with the YMCA on furlough days.

One of the main challenges the YMCA is facing, Pfaltzgraff said, is finding staff to cover the morning hours. Generally, the organization hires college students for the A+ after-school programs who work after their morning classes. The A+ program will not be available on furlough days.

Ray Sanborn, president of Kamaaina Kids, said his group is looking into providing some kind of academic structure for youth on those days such as having Tutor Hawaii come in.

Both organizations are communicating with the state in the hope of expanding their programs to school grounds on furlough days. Sanborn was to meet state education officials today to discuss providing at least one program in each complex statewide to make it more convenient for parents.

"The phone is definitely ringing off the hook," said Sanborn. "Parents are very concerned about what's going to happen." Parents have swamped Hawaii's two largest child care providers with phone calls about finding room for their children as the first public school teacher furlough day approaches.

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Third-graders in the A+ program at Ala Wai Elementary School sang for the other children yesterday in the school cafeteria. Kamaaina Kids, which runs the program, and other child care providers have been inundated with queries from parents planning for Furlough Fridays that begin next month.

DENNIS ODA / DODA@STARBULLETIN.COM

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FURLOUGH FRIDAYS

Answers to frequently asked questions, as posted on the Hawaii Department of Education Web site:

- » During the 17 Furlough Fridays this school year, athletic events and practices will continue as scheduled after 3 p.m., but after-school tutoring and school enrichment programs will be canceled.
- » A+ programs will not be offered, but private providers may offer programs at additional expense. Monthly fees for A+ will be adjusted.
- » There will be no meal service or student transportation on furlough days.
- » Dances, proms, plays, conferences and other student activities will be rescheduled if possible to Thursdays. Those that cannot be rescheduled will be held only with permission of the school principal.
- » Department of Education employees may not substitute vacation days or sick days for furlough days.