



Schools' furlough days are pau

The governor agrees to release \$57.2 million of the hurricane fund

By [B.J. Reyes](#)

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5 [retweet](#) [Share](#) After enduring a school year cut short by 17 Furlough Fridays, public school students and their parents, along with principals, teachers and other education officials, head into next year with a complete academic calendar once again.

"The bottom line is the furloughs are over," Gov. Linda Lingle declared yesterday at a news conference in her office.

Officials say they hope they can close the book on Furlough Fridays — an embarrassment for the state that drew criticism from national education officials and attracted further attention after a week of sit-in protests at the governor's office led to arrests.

Marguerite Higa, a key activist behind the advocacy group Save Our Schools and one of those arrested, was back at the governor's office yesterday for the news conference.

When asked whether it was worth it, she replied: "Definitely. Do you think that it would've ended, even today, if somebody didn't take a stand?"

"We are so glad that it's over," she added.

[VIDEO](#) Furlough Fridays Are Over



Lawmakers, the DOE, and local bankers come together to forge a deal.

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The Hawaii State Teachers Association, the Department of Education and Board of Education reached a supplemental agreement in March to a contract that restored all furlough days. It was contingent on the Legislature approving the funds and Lingle releasing the money.

Lawmakers set aside \$67 million from the Hawaii Hurricane Relief Fund to fund the agreement.

Lingle has agreed to release \$57.2 million to cover 11 of the 17 furlough days scheduled for next year — an amount she says is needed to bring back "essential" employees. Teachers would convert six of their planning days — when students are not in school — to instructional time, to cover the remaining days.

Additionally, \$2.2 million in federal stimulus funds is being allotted to cover charter schools.

Acting Schools Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi said the Department of Education has been given the discretion to decide the schedule and determine which employees to bring back. Although there still are some details to be worked out with the unions, "essentially we're all on the same page," she said.

HSTA President Wil Okabe said the union is gratified the supplemental agreement will be implemented.

"This represents a first step in getting our schools back to a normal academic year," Okabe said in a statement. "We hope this past year has refocused everyone on the need to give our students and their schools the priority they deserve."

A \$10 million interest-free line of credit is being extended to the state by local banks to cover additional costs if needed. Any loans must be approved by the Department of Budget and Finance and may not be used directly to pay salaries. First Hawaiian Bank has agreed to underwrite the full amount, officials said.

Garrett Toguchi, Board of Education chairman, said schools should be excited about being able to plan a full academic year in 2010-11.

"It sends a positive message to everyone that Hawaii is back on track making public education the No. 1 priority," he said. "That's all that matters right now."

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