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Dear Esteemed Leaders and Partners,

Hawai'i stands at a defining moment. The global acceleration of artificial intelligence is reshaping education, workforce readiness, economic competitiveness, and public-sector service delivery. Around the world, jurisdictions that act with clarity and coordination are positioning their people to thrive. Those that delay are finding themselves dependent on outside tools, outside standards, and outside assumptions about what learning and work should become.

ND Enterprises LLC is honored to present the enclosed strategic report: Hawai'i Education, Workforce, and AI Strategy: What Hawai'i Can Realistically Learn from China's AI-in-Education Model.

This report was prepared to support Hawai'i's business, educational, and political leadership in making informed, future-ready decisions. It is grounded in Hawai'i's unique governance structure, cultural responsibilities, economic realities, and statewide aspirations.

Why This Report Matters Now

Hawai'i is the only state in the nation with a single statewide public school district, a unified 10-campus university system, and a P-20 coordination layer capable of aligning K-12, higher education, and workforce development. These are extraordinary advantages - if Hawai'i chooses to use them.

At the same time, Hawai'i faces real constraints:

- Persistent teacher shortages, especially in special education and Hawaiian-language settings
- High housing costs that weaken recruitment and retention
- Uneven access to high-quality learning across islands
- A labor market that urgently needs productivity gains in health care, tourism, climate resilience, logistics, cyber, and public-sector operations

The enclosed report argues that Hawai'i does not need to copy China's political model or surveillance practices. But Hawai'i can learn from China's seriousness - its sequencing, teacher preparation, data infrastructure, and alignment between education and economic strategy.

The goal is not to make Hawai'i look like China.

The goal is to make Hawai'i faster, more coherent, and more future-ready - on Hawai'i's own terms.

What This Report Provides

The strategic report offers:

- A clear comparison between China's AI-education model and Hawai'i's current landscape
- A realistic blueprint for statewide AI literacy, teacher training, and data modernization
- A culturally grounded approach that strengthens Hawaiian language, identity, and place
- A workforce-aligned strategy tied to Hawai'i's real economic sectors
- A phased implementation plan (Years 1-6) for policymakers, educators, and industry partners

It is designed to support decision-makers across sectors - education, business, government, and community leadership.

A Call for Unified Action

Hawai'i has the opportunity to build a model that is not only technologically advanced, but culturally grounded, equitable, and economically relevant. This requires coordinated leadership across:

Higher Education: To embed AI literacy across general education, teacher preparation, and workforce pathways.

K-12 Education: To adopt statewide AI literacy standards, strengthen teacher capacity, and ensure neighbor-island equity.

Business and Industry: To co-design internships, micro-credentials, and work-based learning aligned to Hawai'i's economic lanes.

Legislators and Government Leaders: To fund multi-year pilots, data modernization, teacher stipends, and language-technology initiatives.

County Mayors and Local Partners: To ensure that rural and neighbor-island communities benefit from the same opportunities as O'ahu.

Our Commitment

ND Enterprises LLC / Green Hawai'i Conferences is committed to supporting Hawai'i's transition into an AI-enabled future that honors culture, strengthens workforce resilience, and expands opportunity for all residents.

We stand ready to assist with:

- Stakeholder convenings and statewide summits
- Policy briefings and legislative testimony
- Cross-sector coordination
- Workforce and industry engagement
- Community-facing education and outreach

Closing

The decisions Hawai'i makes in the next 12-24 months will shape the next generation of learning, work, and cultural stewardship. The enclosed report is offered as a practical, actionable roadmap - one that respects Hawai'i's values while preparing Hawai'i's people for a rapidly changing world.

Thank you for your leadership, your partnership, and your commitment to Hawai'i's future.

With respect and aloha,

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Executive Summary

Hawai'i Education, Workforce, and AI Strategy: What Hawai'i Can Realistically Learn from China's AI-in-Education Model

Hawai'i is at a pivotal moment. Artificial intelligence is reshaping global education, workforce readiness, and economic competitiveness. China's rapid, coordinated AI-in-education strategy demonstrates what is possible when a jurisdiction treats AI not as enrichment, but as infrastructure. Hawai'i does not need China's political model - but it can learn from China's discipline, sequencing, and system coherence.

Hawai'i's Strategic Advantages

- The nation's only statewide public school district, enabling unified policy and implementation
- A 10-campus University of Hawai'i system already developing a systemwide AI agenda
- A strong P-20 network linking K-12, higher education, and workforce
- A growing work-based learning ecosystem with 22,000+ students engaged

Hawai'i's Structural Challenges

- Persistent teacher shortages, especially in special education and Hawaiian-language immersion
- High housing costs that undermine recruitment and retention
- Uneven access across islands
- A labor market needing productivity gains in health care, tourism, climate resilience, logistics, cyber, and public-sector operations

What Hawai'i Can Learn - Without Copying China

Move from scattered pilots to a statewide AI literacy progression

Define grade-band expectations from elementary through high school.

Train teachers first

Prioritize teacher-assistive AI tools before student-facing automation.

Modernize data and procurement

Build a statewide, trusted, auditable infrastructure to avoid tool sprawl.

Use AI to strengthen Hawaiian language and place

Develop culturally grounded AI tools with Native Hawaiian leadership.

Tie AI education to Hawai'i's real economic lanes

Health care, tourism operations, climate resilience, cyber/data, logistics, and language technology.

Support rural and neighbor-island delivery intentionally

Ensure equity through shared platforms, remote coaching, and vetted tools.

Strategic Blueprint (Years 1-6)

Phase I (Year 1):

- Establish a Governor-DOE-UH-Workforce Steering Group
- Publish interim statewide AI guidance
- Launch a 12-20 school pilot cohort across islands

- Fund teacher stipends and professional development
- Select 3-5 economic lanes for pathway development

Phase II (Years 2-3):

- Adopt statewide AI literacy standards
- Stand up a statewide vendor-review and procurement framework
- Connect pilot schools to UH certificates and work-based learning
- Develop Hawaiian-language and culturally grounded AI resources
- Publish annual public scorecards

Phase III (Years 4-6):

- Scale statewide with differentiated support
- Embed AI literacy in teacher and administrator preparation
- Expand postsecondary micro-credentials
- Favor interoperable, auditable tools
- Tie AI education to economic diversification

The Strategic Choice Ahead

Hawai'i can build a model where AI strengthens culture, improves workforce resilience, and expands opportunity - or it can drift into dependence on outside tools and standards. Coordinated action now will determine which future becomes reality.

1. Hawai'i's Current Education Landscape

1.1 System structure and current performance

Hawai'i's starting point is structurally distinctive. The Hawai'i State Department of Education is the only statewide public school district in the United States, serving about 164,000 students across 296 schools on seven islands. Operationally, the system is led centrally through a superintendent and state office structure, with 15 complex area superintendents supporting regional clusters of schools. That degree of statewide coordination is a strategic asset if Hawai'i decides to move seriously on AI: it reduces the district fragmentation that slows many mainland states.

The higher-education side is also more integrated than outsiders often assume. The University of Hawai'i is a 10-campus system, and in 2025 it began standing up a systemwide AI planning process and then a broader systemwide AI approach, with task forces focused on curriculum, operations, and responsible use. That means Hawai'i already has a plausible K-12-to-postsecondary governance bridge for AI talent development.

Performance data shows a system that is recovering, but not yet comfortably future-ready. In the 2024-25 Strive HI results, statewide language-arts proficiency reached 53 percent, math proficiency 41 percent, science proficiency 43 percent, regular attendance 76 percent, postsecondary enrollment for the class of 2024 rose to 53 percent, and on-time graduation held at 86 percent. Those figures show progress; they do not yet show a state positioned to lead in an AI-driven economy.

1.2 Structural challenges Hawai'i cannot afford to ignore

Teacher supply is still a real vulnerability. HODOE's 2025 compensation report shows that hard-to-staff location differentials are built around geographic isolation, emergency-hire trends, and vacancy conditions. The same report found that some differentials improved retention or reduced vacancies in targeted areas, but it also found policy misalignment, confusion about eligibility, and persistent instability in some of the very places that need the most staffing stability. Special education and Hawaiian language immersion remain especially sensitive areas.

Housing and cost pressure are not side issues; they are operational constraints. HODOE's own report describes high housing costs as one of the most significant barriers to recruitment and retention, with teachers reporting difficulty affording housing and administrators warning that Hawai'i competes at a disadvantage against mainland districts and local employers. Any AI strategy that depends on more teacher initiative, more professional development, or more after-hours redesign work will fail if it ignores this labor reality.

Hawai'i also carries obligations that many jurisdictions do not. The Office of Hawaiian Education is actively developing a 2025-2029 Kaiapuni Strategic Implementation Plan, reflecting the state's responsibility to support education through the medium of Hawaiian language. That matters strategically. In Hawai'i, AI policy cannot be culturally neutral. Decisions about curriculum, language tools, assessment, and data governance are also decisions about cultural preservation, trust, and sovereignty.

1.3 Existing assets Hawai'i can build on immediately

Hawai'i is not starting from zero. Hawai'i P-20 reported in early 2026 that the state's work-based learning intermediary network had generated 350 work-based learning experiences, reached more than 22,000 students, and engaged more than 2,000 industry partners in the 2024-25 school year. That is the kind of operating backbone an AI strategy needs: not just coursework, but real transitions from school to work.

The labor-market signal is also clear enough to justify action. Hawai'i's Department of Labor and Industrial Relations projects statewide employment to grow 6.1 percent from 2022 to 2032, with around 83,050 openings per year, most driven by replacement and mobility rather than net new job growth. Health care, hospitality, and related services remain central to the state's economy. The implication is blunt: Hawai'i does not need AI education for prestige. It needs AI capability to upgrade productivity and resilience inside the sectors it already relies on while building adjacent growth areas in cyber, data, health, climate, logistics, and language technology.

2. China's AI-Driven Education and Workforce Strategy

2.1 The strategic logic: AI is infrastructure

China's core move is strategic, not cosmetic: it is building AI literacy as national capability. The Ministry of Education's 2024 guidance on enhancing AI literacy in primary and secondary schools set the direction, and subsequent policies in 2025 and 2026 deepened the integration of AI into curriculum, teacher development, and system modernization. The underlying message is consistent: AI is not treated as a standalone 'tech elective'; it is treated as a foundational layer for education quality, talent formation, and economic competitiveness.

The strongest public signal came from Beijing. Beginning in the fall of 2025, Beijing required schools to provide at least eight class hours of AI instruction per academic year for every primary and secondary student, either as standalone instruction or embedded within other subjects. The instructional progression is staged by age: primary school emphasizes exposure and experience, junior high emphasizes understanding and everyday application, and senior high emphasizes practical use and innovation.

In April 2026, China broadened the frame again through the AI + Education Action Plan. According to the State Council's English-language briefing, the plan calls for integrating AI education into local curricula nationwide, embedding interdisciplinary AI teaching, expanding AI in after-school services, supporting rural and remote schools through national platforms, making AI a basic public course in higher education, and integrating AI into vocational programs tied to industrial transformation.

2.2 What China is actually building

China's model has at least five layers. First, curriculum: schools are expected to establish AI-related learning content and routine evaluation, not just one-off enrichment. Second, teacher capability: the 2026 action plan calls for a national teacher AI literacy standard and a tiered training-and-assessment system, and it explicitly contemplates AI knowledge in teacher qualification exams and certification processes. Third, infrastructure: China continues to expand national digital learning platforms and education data systems as part of a broader digitalization strategy.

Fourth, talent pipelines: universities are being pushed to make AI a general public course, create interdisciplinary majors, and align programs with industrial upgrading. The same 2026 policy package promotes AI within vocational education so that AI capability is not confined to elite academic tracks. Fifth, labor-market alignment: China is repositioning AI education as an engine for workforce transformation, lifelong learning, and competitiveness, not merely a student-skills agenda.

There are already concrete indicators of scale. State media reported that by the end of 2025 the adoption rate of AI across different levels of schools in Beijing had reached 87.7 percent. The Smart Education of China platform had, by May 2025, grown to more than 160 million registered users, giving the country a delivery mechanism that most jurisdictions simply do not have. At the university level, Fudan reported more than 100 AI-related courses, over 13,000 enrolled students, and 41 'X + AI' dual-degree programs.

2.3 What is strong about China's approach - and what Hawai'i must not copy

Three strengths stand out. China sequences learning across age bands instead of improvising by school. It supports curriculum with teacher standards and platform infrastructure instead of pretending that classroom enthusiasm is enough. And it links education to industrial and labor-market strategy instead of treating workforce policy as a separate conversation.

But Hawai'i should be careful not to romanticize the model. China can move with a degree of central directive power, data integration, and political control that Hawai'i neither has nor should want. Official Chinese implementation metrics are useful for understanding policy direction and operating scale, but they are not a substitute for independent evaluation of student outcomes, teacher workload effects, or civil-liberties costs. A serious Hawai'i strategy should learn from China's coherence while explicitly rejecting surveillance-style monitoring, coercive top-down adoption, and culture-blind standardization.

3. China and Hawai'i: Comparison and Strategic Implications

The comparison below is the heart of the assignment. It shows where Hawai'i can borrow principles from China - and where direct imitation would be either unrealistic or unwise.

| Dimension | China | Hawai'i | Implication |
|------------|--|---|--|
| Scale | National system with platform and industrial depth | Small island state with limited fiscal room | Hawai'i must prioritize ruthlessly rather than attempting universal breadth immediately. |
| Governance | Central ministries can set direction quickly | Statewide K-12 system helps, but U.S. law and public accountability slow change | Hawai'i can be coherent, but only with transparent governance and stakeholder |

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| Dimension | China | Hawai'i | Implication |
|---------------------|---|--|---|
| | | | trust. |
| Teacher model | National standards, training, and certification pathways tied to AI | Teacher capacity is uneven and labor pressure is high | Teacher support must come before ambitious classroom automation. |
| Infrastructure | National smart-education platforms and data systems | Data, procurement, and tool adoption are more fragmented | Hawai'i needs a shared data/procurement layer to avoid tool sprawl. |
| Curriculum | Tiered AI pathway with increasing complexity | AI activity exists, but not yet as a statewide K-12 progression | Standards should define what every student should know by grade band. |
| Workforce alignment | Education explicitly tied to industrial upgrading | Career pathways are improving, but AI is not yet a dominant organizing frame | AI literacy should be tied to health, tourism, climate, cyber, trades, and language tech. |
| Culture and values | Technology deployment is state-defined | Native Hawaiian values and public legitimacy are essential | Hawai'i must embed cultural leadership and local consent in |

| Dimension | China | Hawai'i | Implication |
|-----------|-------|---------|-------------------|
| | | | design decisions. |

The key strategic takeaway is this: Hawai'i actually has one major structural advantage over most U.S. states - centralized K-12 governance. What it lacks is not the ability to coordinate, but the willingness to choose a tight statewide architecture and hold to it for multiple years.

The second takeaway is less comfortable. China is succeeding on the dimensions that most American systems underinvest in: coherence, teacher formation, data infrastructure, and talent-pipeline design. Hawai'i will not close the gap through inspirational language alone. It will close the gap only if it treats AI as a system redesign problem rather than a classroom novelty problem.

4. What Hawai'i Can Learn From China Without Copying China

Lesson 1 - Move from scattered pilots to a statewide learning progression.

China's biggest advantage is not any single tool. It is the staged progression from early exposure to advanced application. Hawai'i should define grade-band expectations for AI literacy: foundational awareness in elementary, data-and-evaluation literacy in middle school, and applied AI plus ethics in high school. That progression should sit inside existing literacy, science, social studies, CTE, and digital-learning frameworks rather than compete with them.

Lesson 2 - Build teacher-assistive AI before student-facing AI dependence.

If Hawai'i rushes student-facing AI without strengthening teacher capacity, it will amplify inconsistency and mistrust. The smarter sequence is teacher-first: lesson planning support, reading-level adjustment, multilingual drafting support, rubric building, formative feedback suggestions, and administrative automation - all inside approved tools and with clear use policies. China's policy stack repeatedly emphasizes teacher capability and system support. Hawai'i should do the same, but with more explicit guardrails.

Lesson 3 - Treat data architecture as strategy.

China's Smart Education infrastructure matters because platforms make scale possible. Hawai'i does not need a China-sized platform, but it does need a common statewide approach to vendor approval, privacy review, identity management, analytics, and interoperability. Otherwise every school will buy differently, govern differently, and expose students differently.

Lesson 4 - Use AI to strengthen language and place, not erase them.

Hawai'i's opportunity is more interesting than generic AI adoption. It can use AI-enhanced language learning, speech tools, tutoring, and content support to strengthen Hawaiian language learning, Pacific language support, and place-based curriculum - if cultural leaders help govern the design. That is one area where Hawai'i can do something China cannot: build an AI strategy that is explicitly indigenous, restorative, and place-rooted.

Lesson 5 - Tie AI education to real economic lanes.

China links education to industrial upgrading. Hawai'i should do the same, but locally. The relevant lanes are not just software engineering. They include health care operations, tourism and hospitality analytics, climate resilience, ocean and land stewardship, energy systems, logistics, cybersecurity, public-sector service delivery, and language technology. AI education becomes credible when students can see where it leads.

Lesson 6 - Support rural and neighbor-island delivery intentionally.

China's 2026 plan explicitly mentions supporting rural and remote schools through national platforms. Hawai'i needs its own version: shared statewide courseware, remote coaching, teacher communities of practice, and common access to vetted tools so that AI opportunity does not concentrate only on O'ahu or in already-advantaged schools.

5. Tangible Recommendations for Hawai'i Stakeholders

| Stakeholder | Priority actions | What success looks like |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Teachers | Use approved AI tools for lesson drafting, differentiation, reading-level adjustment, translation support, exemplar generation, and formative-feedback prep. Receive baseline AI-literacy plus ethics training before any expectation of classroom integration. | Teachers save time without surrendering judgment; student work remains assessable; trust increases instead of collapsing. |
| School administrators | Adopt site-level AI use policies, maintain inventories of approved tools, use AI for scheduling/resource patterns where appropriate, and designate a human owner for every AI-enabled workflow. | Schools reduce tool chaos, protect privacy, and gain visible operational efficiency. |
| State education leaders | Publish K-12 AI literacy standards, procurement and privacy rules, model acceptable-use guidance, and a statewide pilot architecture with | The state moves from isolated experimentation to coherent system learning. |

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| Stakeholder | Priority actions | What success looks like |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| | common metrics. Fund teacher training and neighbor-island implementation support. | |
| University and college leaders | Embed AI literacy across general education, expand teacher preparation for AI-rich classrooms, and align certificates and pathways to workforce demand. Continue the UH systemwide AI effort and connect it to K-12 transitions. | Students move from high school into clear postsecondary and workforce lanes with less friction. |
| Legislators | Fund multi-year pilots, teacher stipends, data modernization, and language-tech initiatives; align AI education with labor-market planning and innovation incentives; require periodic public reporting. | AI strategy survives beyond a single budget cycle and becomes a durable state capability. |
| Employers and industry partners | Co-design projects, internships, micro-credentials, and work-based learning experiences tied to local sectors. Stop waiting for schools to guess industry needs. | Students see real relevance; employers gain better-prepared talent; schools get sharper signals on demand. |

Three implementation rules matter here. First, every recommendation should reduce teacher burden before it adds teacher burden. Second, every student-facing AI use case should be tied to a learning objective that is still human-assessable. Third, every procurement decision should be reversible; Hawai'i should avoid locking itself into opaque platforms that cannot be audited, governed, or replaced.

This is also where Hawai'i should be stricter than China. In public education, opaque AI systems are a governance risk. Hawai'i should explicitly prohibit facial-recognition-style surveillance, emotion-detection claims, and any classroom monitoring tools that cannot clear a high public-interest threshold.

6. Future Scenarios for Hawai'i

The scenarios below are not predictions. They are decision consequences. Hawai'i will get the future that matches its level of coordination.

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| Scenario | Short term (1-2 years) | Medium term (3-5 years) | Long term (6-10 years) |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Minimal adoption | Schools experiment unevenly; teachers self-train; procurement fragments. | Achievement effects are limited; inequity widens between high-capacity and low-capacity schools; employers see weak relevance. | Hawai'i becomes a consumer of outside AI systems, not a shaper of them. Cultural and labor risks rise. |
| Moderate adoption | State defines guardrails, trains early cohorts, and launches focused pilots in selected schools and sectors. | Teacher productivity improves; AI literacy becomes visible in middle and high school; some career pathways connect to UH and employers. | Hawai'i builds a competent, unevenly distributed capability base. Better than lagging, but still not transformational. |
| Aggressive, coordinated adoption | Statewide standards, vetted tools, teacher stipends, common data/procurement rules, and sector-linked pathways launch together. | Student readiness improves, work-based learning expands, UH pathways deepen, and neighbor-island schools gain more equal access. | Hawai'i develops a distinctive AI-and-place model: stronger workforce resilience, more local innovation, and better cultural stewardship. |

Under minimal adoption, student achievement may not immediately collapse - but strategic drift will deepen. The bigger damage will show up in workforce readiness, employer frustration, and the continued importation of tools and standards from outside Hawai'i.

Under moderate adoption, Hawai'i can probably produce respectable local wins. But only aggressive, coordinated adoption gives the state a chance to align education, language revitalization, workforce policy, and economic diversification into a single strategy. That is the only scenario that truly changes Hawai'i's trajectory.

7. Final Strategic Blueprint for Hawai'i

The blueprint below is intentionally practical. It is designed for Hawai'i's scale, budget reality, and governance context - while still being ambitious enough to matter.

Phase I: First 12 months

- Create a Governor-DOE-UH-AI Workforce Steering Group with Native Hawaiian cultural representation and employer participation.
- Publish interim statewide AI use guidance covering procurement, privacy, educator use, student use, and prohibited practices.

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- Launch a 12- to 20-school pilot cohort that includes O'ahu, neighbor islands, rural schools, and Kaiapuni-relevant settings.
- Fund teacher stipends and common professional-development modules rather than expecting unpaid experimentation.
- Select 3-5 local economic lanes for pathway development: health care, hospitality/tourism operations, climate and land/ocean stewardship, cyber/data, and language technology.

Phase II: Years 2-3

- Adopt K-12 AI literacy standards by grade band and embed them into existing content areas and CTE pathways.
- Stand up a statewide approved-tools and vendor-review framework with common contract language and transparency requirements.
- Connect pilot schools to UH certificates, dual-credit opportunities, and work-based learning through the existing P-20 network.
- Develop Hawaiian-language and culturally grounded AI learning resources with governance from language and cultural leaders.
- Publish annual public scorecards: teacher time saved, training completion, student participation, pathway uptake, and equity by island and school type.

Phase III: Years 4-6

- Scale the model statewide, with differentiated support for low-capacity schools rather than one-size-fits-all rollout.
- Make AI literacy part of teacher preparation and administrator preparation pathways.
- Expand postsecondary and micro-credential offerings aligned to Hawai'i's real labor demand.
- Use procurement power to favor interoperable, auditable tools and local innovation partnerships where feasible.
- Tie AI education policy to economic diversification strategy instead of leaving it inside the school silo.

The final strategic judgment is straightforward. Hawai'i does not need China's politics, China's surveillance assumptions, or China's appetite for top-down control. But Hawai'i does need China's discipline: clear sequencing, teacher preparation, infrastructure first, talent pipelines, and explicit linkage between education and economic strategy.

If Hawai'i acts with that level of seriousness, it can build something better than a copy. It can build a model in which AI strengthens, rather than erodes, public trust; expands, rather than flattens, Hawaiian language and culture; and prepares students not merely to consume intelligent systems, but to question, shape, and govern them.

If Hawai'i does not act, the likely outcome is not neutrality. It is dependence: dependence on outside tools, outside standards, outside employers, and outside assumptions about what learning and work should become. That is the real strategic risk - and it is avoidable.

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