



July 31, 2016

To: Board of Education Audit Committee Members

re: 8/2/16 Audit Committee Agenda Item IV.A. - Internal Audit Plan – Fraud & Ethics Hotline

Aloha Board of Education Audit Committee Members,

I am writing to you to suggest improvements to the Department of Education Fraud & Ethics Hotline (F&EH) operations I ask that the Board of Education strongly encourage DOE implementation of the following improvements to the F&EH system.

Before suggesting improvements, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude that the Fraud & Ethics Hotline exists. I think the F&EH made its first public appearance at the July 3, 2012 BOE Audit Committee meeting, and I commend the first (2011) governor-appointed Board of Education members for their part in making the F&EH a reality. The F&EH is a great concept – a way for education stakeholders to anonymously report problems without fear of retaliation. Now that the F&EH has been in operation for three years, it is a good time to examine how the process can improve.

DOE F&EH IS LARGELY UNKNOWN

A community stakeholder contacted me about the F&EH because I had written about it on my web site. The stakeholder had been frustrated with the F&EH process for several reasons. One issue was that the DOE F&EH poster was not hanging in the stakeholder's local school office so that everyone could see it. I suggested submitting a F&EH complaint about the lack of a F&EH poster in the school office. [Attachment 1](#) shows the description provided in the complaint and the response received from the DOE.

I have long felt that the F&EH is one of the DOE's best kept secrets, and this community stakeholder's concerns validated my opinion somewhat. I wanted more input. So, yesterday I conducted an informal poll in a Facebook group comprised mostly of Hawai'i teachers across the state. Of the eleven respondents in past 24 hours, ten of them (91%) had never seen the F&EH poster and did not know about the F&EH. One teacher (9%) had seen the poster in an employee workroom not accessible to student, parent, and community stakeholders.

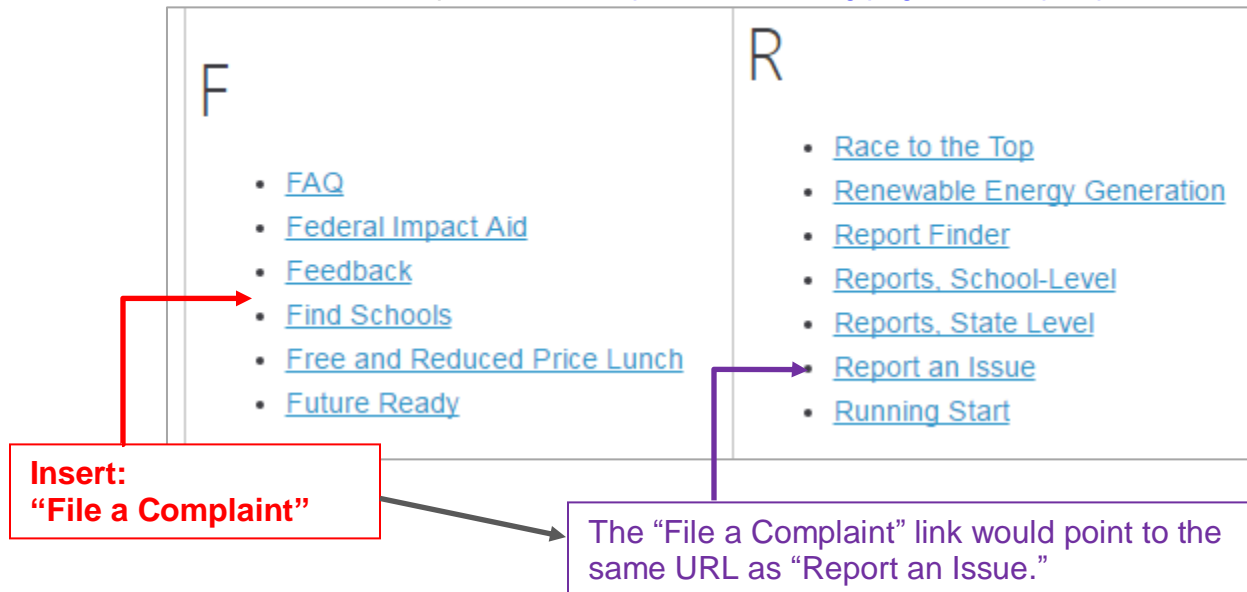
The DOE response to the F&EH complaint (Attachment 1) was this: *One (1) notice to hang the poster in a place where employees can see it was sent in 2013; this year they will send another notice.* This is inadequate dissemination of information about the F&EH and there are no checks on complying with

dissemination of the information by hanging the posters where all can see. What good is it to have a complaint hotline that hardly anyone knows exists? I have heard Board members in the past express pleasure that there are so few complaints. I contend that the statistics are an invalid measure because far too many employees and other stakeholders don't even know the hotline exists.

Therefore, I ask that the following be added to the Internal Audit Management Corrective Action Plan:

1. The F&EH posters shall be hung in school offices where all stakeholders can see it.
2. The directive to hang the poster in each school office shall be included on the DOE public web site so that everyone knows that it is a requirement to hang the poster in public view, and there's no need for stakeholder to dicker with local school management about this.
3. There will be a simple system of checks to affirm that each school has the poster is up in public view. The DOE may use community volunteers to do this to save money.
4. Most people with an "issue" will search for the keyword "complaint" to find information about how to file a complaint. The word "complaint" does not appear anywhere on the DOE public web Site Map. Therefore, a link with the word "complaint" which navigates to a page with information about the F&EH shall be added to the DOE web page site map.

DOE Site Map: www.hawaiipublicschools.org/pages/sitemap.aspx



Mahalo for your consideration,

Vanessa Ott

attachment(s): 1

Attachment 1: F&EH Complaint 7/24/16

Submitted Sunday, July 24 2016

Topic: F&EH Posters Not in DOE School Offices for Everyone to See

Description in Complaint:

I am writing because I'm concerned that Hawai'i Department of Education schools are not required to post the Fraud & Ethics Hotline poster in the school office or they're not aware they're supposed to. I'm talking about the poster online on this page

www.hawaiipublicschools.org/DOE%20Forms/FraudFlyer.pdf

Shouldn't this poster be up in all school offices within view of all the stakeholders who come to the office? Why isn't this poster required to be hanging up in all DOE school offices? If it is a requirement, then why doesn't it say so on the poster or on the Report and Issue web page?

www.hawaiipublicschools.org/BeyondTheClassroom/SafeSchools/ReportAnIssue/Pages/home.aspx

I know that as of this summer, the poster was not hanging in the Honoka'a Intermediate and High School office. There are probably other schools that don't have it up either because there aren't any instructions on the poster to post it. So, maybe schools aren't aware that it's a requirement. If it is a requirement, the poster should say so, and all schools should put up the poster. If it's not a requirement, the DOE Superintendent should make it one.

So which is it?

DOE Response:

Generated Created Information

By

Hawaii
Dept of
Education

7/27/2016

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. In 2013, schools were instructed to display DOE Fraud & Ethics Hotline posters where they would be visible to all employees. This year, we will issue another announcement to notify schools of the DOE Fraud & Ethics Hotline and the hotline poster. We will close this case in the hotline system. Thank you for your concerns.

Hawaii
Dept of
Education

7/27/2016

Thank you for making us aware of this issue. We take each incident seriously and appreciate you taking the time to report this incident. We are currently reviewing the matter.

Your report has been received and the questions displayed need attention. Please answer these questions in the space provided.