



Testimony BOE &lt;testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov&gt;

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## Testimony

1 message

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m I <worldster09@gmail.com>  
To: testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov

Wed, Jul 14, 2021 at 3:19 PM

### Distance Learning Options at Public Schools in Hawaii

Our household has an elementary student that will be attending school in-person during the upcoming 2021-2022 school year if distance learning is not available to local families. I am worried that we have come this far, only to rush into having our children back in school without knowing if COVID-19 could impact and spread among children or asymptomatic children, and into multi-generational homes. The COVID-19 variants are *very* concerning.

I was motivated to testify after seeing the KHON2 news report interviewing HSTAs president. I thought he was on-point when he suggested, "...Distance learning to be a complex level, even a state operation." I would agree with Mr. Tui after witnessing the Federal governments response when COVID-19 first hit our population under the Trump administration. I'm making that comparison because the COVID-19 pandemic response has greatly improved under the Biden administration.

Hawaii's households are different from those in the continental United States. Most of us reside in multi-generational homes and I can't stress that difference enough. I have researched and suggested to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for more guidance for multi-generational homes. I have not heard or read anything from the CDC, addressing this issue thoroughly.

I am testifying about what I have observed at our elementary school since the pandemic affected everything and everyone. Since the pandemic hit, our keiki were distance learning (DL) for about two months in 2020 and for the whole 2020-2021 school year if we chose that option.

At our school, we had a call-in session prior to the 2020-2021 school year with the principal. He explained how the 2020-2021 school year will be managed if your child is on campus or distance learning. I brought up the technical problems we've experienced (listed below) in 2020 but was not given a sufficient answer. It became clear at this meeting distance learners were on their own. Two teachers were available for technical problems only. During this Q&A session the principal reiterated that we could not assist our keiki while they learned asynchronously (on their own) in iReady or Acellus. I didn't agree with that assessment but I wasn't able to work with the student in our family until May of 2021 which was too late.

At our school, I am not aware if students were not given an orientation on how to use the software in the 2020 or the 2020-2021 school year. Or if they were oriented, I don't think it was not made clear to them how to navigate within the software program. For example, in the reading comprehension section, our fourth grader didn't know how to scroll back to the passage they already read. It was only after a year that she found out the arrow buttons allowed scrolling back to the story. Basically, she spent a year memorizing written stories in iReady in order to answer questions about the story later in those lessons. In the vocabulary section, our fourth grader thought using a dictionary to look up words was cheating. In the math section, during the third grade, our student found the track pad limiting while working on a math problem. Meaning she didn't have enough track pad space to input her answer, the software had marked her automatically, as wrong. These were some of the problems she experienced learning asynchronously.

At our school, working independently in iReady and Acellus software and having two teachers available for technical problems only, was not enough for DL students. That decision assumed someone would be home answering questions from our keiki. Or if there was an adult to speak to our keiki about their distance learning experiences with software and then getting them to speak up about it.

I have found researchers who uncovered bias in existing software and in artificial intelligence. Software is only as good as its writers and programmers and there is much more work to be done uncovering racial and gender bias. Some Hawaii educators have found bias and reported the lessons in the Acellus software program and I applaud our educators for finding this racial bias. We are only in the beginning of uncovering bias in educational software. These were some of the experiences we have had with DL.

7/15/2021

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Having been a DL learner myself, I believe it can be used to educate, with a qualified teacher at the helm. I can't speak for the educators at the University of Hawaii, Manoa but the graduate program I am in, has the expertise in online education that could possibly assist K12 educators if they want it. Designing, researching, peer-reviewing educational modules takes a lot of time, revision and a budget.

I am also aware that hindsight also provides better vision while moving forward. I do understand everyone was doing their best dealing with an unknown virus that impacted and harmed so many people.

I am testifying for a distance learning option for our keiki. We have waited this long to keep everyone safe. We can't send our keiki back until they have a choice to be vaccinated too. There are too many unknowns.

Thank you for your time.

Sharon Ho/ M.Ed. candidate, Learning Design and Technology, University of Hawaii, Manoa



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## Distance Learning Options

1 message

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**Kristi M. Kubota** <kristikubota@gmail.com>  
To: testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov

Wed, Jul 14, 2021 at 4:01 PM

Aloha, members of the Board of Education:

I am writing, because we have growing concerns over the spread of the new delta variant of COVID-19 in the community and regarding how this might affect my daughter Abigail. Last school year was her first at Alvah Scott, for kindergarten, and while it was challenging, we opted for distance learning for the entire year to keep her healthy and safe. While I am aware that there was no spread communicated through campus contacts, I am even less comfortable with the situation in the pandemic this year than last, because: one, the entire elementary school population is unvaccinated, along with an unknown number of staff and faculty, which is precisely the situation in which the variant is spreading; two, this variant is proving to be more dangerous to children, both due to the fact that they are unprotected and due to the fact that this variant is more transmissible and leading to more severe outcomes for young children; and three, after over a year with this virus, new information is emerging about the long-term health consequences to children in addition to adults. The situation will only grow more dangerous to the children when the state drops all mandates shortly and continues this overwhelming tourist drive to our state.

I am aware that the Board of Education is reconsidering offering distance learning options, and we would like to encourage this again. While it was difficult to not have the same setting and routine of the traditional classroom setting, we believe that it is what is necessary in the interim (between now and when Abigail will be vaccinated) to keep my daughter safe. We are heavily considering homeschooling options, but we really would prefer to stay in the DOE system, if at all possible. If we need a district exception for her to attend a school offering distance learning options, we are also open to that possibility and would appreciate direction to do so.

I realize the steps that have been taken to keep the entire school population safe and healthy, but under the current circumstances, we are apprehensive that it is enough to protect the students. We look forward to the day when Abigail can return in person safely. Again, I cannot more strongly urge you all to reconsider offering this option to those students who wish to utilize it for their safety.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,  
Kristi M. Kubota



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**Testimony - Support Distance Learning 2021-2022 "NO PERSONAL INFORMATION"**1 message

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[REDACTED]  
to: testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov

Wed, Jul 14, 2021 at 5:30 PM

Aloha,

Thank you for the opportunity to share. Our family supports distance learning opportunities provided by public schools. Currently we are not sending our children back to school due to the new Delta variant of COVID-19, and the fact that a vaccine is not available for younger children. I have an elementary and middle school aged student.

At the end of the school year we were told distance learning would go away and that student would return to school. We decided that our children would not return to school.

Unless distance learning is an option for our children to attend public schools, they will not return and we will look for homeschool options.

Our family supports distance learning. I have seen my child's grades and attitude improve since they were able to learn from home. They have more time to spend on a subject, get individual one-on-one help when needed and best of all they do not have to deal with bullies.

Honestly, we feel it is the responsibility of the department of education to offer distance learning as long as there is not a cure/vaccine that will protect the entire family from COVID. My father was killed due to the COVID virus. If it was not for the virus my father would still be here. We are not willing to lose anyone else or spread the virus to others.

Thank you for your time.

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## Distance Learning

1 message

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**Joni Kamiya** <jonikamiya@gmail.com>  
To: testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov

Wed, Jul 14, 2021 at 10:53 PM

Aloha Board of Education members,

I am writing to you as a mother of 3 children in public schools and as a health care worker. As the opening of schools are upon us, I hope that there are some epidemiologists and other public health input being considered with your decision to reopen campuses to full capacity.

As we are seeing nationwide, unvaccinated people are making up all of the hospitalizations for COVID and children are also being hit by this disease. With 2 of my youngest kids being not eligible to be vaccinated and no mandates in place, I have great concern for the potential of spreading. I not only worry about my family contracting this but also for the homebound elderly that I care for also.

I have seen how this disease robs people of their quality of life and changes them forever. My heart aches to see how families struggle to take care of their family after COVID. Very few people see the long term impacts of this to know why this is a pandemic. It is not something to take lightly in guiding your decision.

My everyday garb for work include a faceshield, mask, shoe covers, gloves, and sometimes a gown with no ventilation. I do this to protect my community. The same applies to the decision ahead of you today to do what is right for the community first and foremost.

We can stop this pandemic and get back to normal utilizing the data to guide the best decision. What is of utmost importance is the health of community and keiki. Make your decision wisely today.

Joni Kamiya  
Kaneohe

Sent from my iPhone

July 14, 2021

Aloha Board of Education Members:

Our daughter, has Type 1 diabetes. It is a lifelong autoimmune condition that requires insulin to live. The CDC categorizes Type 1's as high risk for developing serious complications if she were to contract COVID-19. Therefore, we would like to have the option for her to continue with Distance learning in the fall.

The school in her district is offering a distance learning option which they described it as being "student driven and parent led". When we asked what that looked like, the principal said basically they would only provide the online learning platform for us to use and for them to monitor. There is no teacher instruction/interaction or student interaction.

The interaction with students and teachers is vital for the child's mental health and social well-being.

We were very disappointed when we spoke to the complex area superintendant's office:

- We asked if anyone else in the district is asking for a distance learning option with teacher instruction and student interaction. He said no, we're the only ones, so there was/is no need to provide it.
- We asked if the complex could talk to other complexes and see if you combine the children together, then maybe a viable distance learning option could be created.
- We asked if the conversation could be started to help children who NEED to be at home because they are high risk due to COVID. He said, they can't due to medical privacy laws (even though we said you don't need to talk about anyone's specific condition).

The point is, we can't be the only ones with children who are high risk. I thought the reason for having children go back to school (in person) is so the child benefits from both educational and social learning. But the distance learning option we were offered does not address both issues.

For now, because of COVID, if medically needed, all children should be offered a comparable distance learning option.

Thank you so much for your consideration of our concerns and for your time.



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## Testimony

1 message

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**John Johnson** <john@onebreathphoto.com>  
To: Testimony.BOE@boe.hawaii.gov

Thu, Jul 15, 2021 at 8:39 AM

I am writing with respect to the general business meeting concerning distance learning options for the coming school year. I STRONGLY SUPPORT keeping in place distance learning options.

I have two children who are school age which are not old enough to get vaccinated. We have sacrificed a lot in the last year and a half to keep them safe. We have weighed the benefits versus the drawbacks both academic and social and determined that, as parents, our foremost concern is the health and safety of our children. We made the decision to put our kids in distance learning even though we did not want to. It was a burden on both us and the teachers. But it was deemed the safe thing to do. When schools returned to Face To Face we still held back, noting the high number of cases and opening up of our economy to tourism. With the uptick in tourism came all the variants of the virus. Our caseload is now in triple digit territory again and the variant of the disease most prevalent is much more transmissible and is affecting younger people. Early estimates show that about 30% of children getting this variant will have long-term effects. Given this, combined with an ever-changing set of requirements on mask-wearing and hygiene and uneven caseload reporting across the school system, we do not believe the school system is capable of protecting unvaccinated children from catching COVID-19. Furthermore, there is a growing movement among the religious and political right to flout the rules put in place to protect everyone during the pandemic. There are anti-vaxxers, religious groups who have systematically lied about superspreader events they have held, political groups promoting unmasking as a form of protest, and regular folks who are simply weary of the rules. Our kids will be going to school with the children of these folks. In previous semesters we were aware of some of our children's classmates being involved in events that were shut down over quarantine violations and that weighed heavily in our decision to have the kids remain in distance learning. So now, with the resurgence of the virus in the Delta variant, the schools' inability to protect the unvaccinated, and the growing opposition to sensible regulations we desperately need the option for distance learning until our children are able to get vaccinated. We are not asking for a year or even a half year. I am simply asking for the amount of time necessary to get our kids vaccinated and reach peak immunity. Then I will be comfortable sending them back into school. So I STRONGLY SUPPORT keeping in place distance learning options and offer a sincere thank you to all the teachers who have worked so very hard to adapt to these changes in the last year and a half.

Sincerely,  
John and Lisa Johnson



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## Support options for virtual instruction/hybrid instruction

1 message

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**Allison Mikuni** <allison.mikuni@gmail.com>

Thu, Jul 15, 2021 at 12:08 PM

To: Testimony.BOE@boe.hawaii.gov

Written Testimony for Special Meeting on July 15, 2021 regarding Remote Learning Instruction

I support allowing all students the option to select remote learning instruction if preferred. This would include exclusive (all days of the week) or partial (a few days a week).

The Covid lockdowns have caused great changes for everyone in the way we interact, learn, teach, and commute. Allowing students to choose what works best for them will create a positive and productive educational environment. Some students perform better in environments with less external stimuli. Keeping some cars off the road will be an additional benefit to reduce traffic on the roadways.

Flexibility will be needed because as students grow and mature, their optimal learning environments will change. So please don't make it an all or nothing situation and tell students you have to be all remote learning for the entire school year. Some students will need the flexibility to be able to choose partial on-campus instruction midway through the school year depending on their learning and developmental stage, which varies from person to person.

Thank you,  
Allison Mikuni  
Palolo Oahu resident





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## Distant learning option

1 message

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**Samantha Tanuvasa** <samantha.tanuvasa@gmail.com>  
To: testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov

Thu, Jul 15, 2021 at 3:24 PM

Aloha, members of the Board of Education:

I am writing, because we have growing concerns over the spread of the new delta variant of COVID-19 in the community and regarding how this might affect my two children, Samuel aged 5 entering kindergarten and Abraham age 4, who was born at 27 weeks premature and per his doctors will be higher risk to lung infections and other respiratory issues until clear into his teenage years. Abraham was all set to start the Special Education Pre-K program in March of 2020, but COVID hit. In the fall of 2020 we were offered distance learning as an option, but didn't feel it was the right choice at the time.

Now, our oldest, Samuel, is due to start kindergarten. While I am aware that there was no spread communicated through campus contacts, I am even less comfortable with the situation in the pandemic this year than last, because: one, the entire elementary school population is unvaccinated, along with an unknown number of staff and faculty, which is precisely the situation in which the variant is spreading; two, this variant is proving to be more dangerous to children, both due to the fact that they are unprotected and due to the fact that this variant is more transmissible and leading to more severe outcomes for young children; and three, after over a year with this virus, new information is emerging about the long-term health consequences to children in addition to adults. The situation will only grow more dangerous to the children when the state drops all mandates shortly and continues this overwhelming tourist drive to our state.

I am aware that the Board of Education is reconsidering offering distance learning options, and we would like to encourage this again. While it was difficult to not have the same setting and routine of the traditional classroom setting, we believe that it is what is necessary in the interim (between now and when our sons will be vaccinated) to keep my children safe. We are heavily considering homeschooling options, but we really would prefer to stay in the DOE system, if at all possible.

I have learned that a centralized distance learning option has been introduced. I would like to voice my agreement for this, since it's been reported that numbers are low requesting a distance learning option. This option also appears to be much easier for teachers who can solely concentrate on virtual students instead of burdening teachers with the task of working with both in person and virtual students.

I realize the steps that have been taken to keep the entire school population safe and healthy, but under the current circumstances, we are apprehensive that it is enough to protect the students. We look forward to the day when our children can return in person safely. Again, I cannot more strongly urge you all to reconsider offering this option to those students who wish to utilize it for their safety.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,  
Samantha Tanuvasa