



September 7, 2023
Student Achievement Committee

Dear Chair Arakaki and Members of the Committee,

Presentation on Board of Education Update on Strategic Plan, Desired Outcome 1.1.2. “All students read proficiently by the end of third grade, and those who do not read proficiently receive necessary and timely support to become proficient.”

We think that the DOE is going in the right direction regarding its plan to meet the 1.1.2 Desired Outcome. We like the recommended list of approved ELA curriculum and the various PDs on the Science of Reading. We also are excited to hear about the progress of the \$50 million literacy grant.

We have a few questions, comments, and suggestions we would like to share:

1. What is the ultimate goal in changing the ELA standards?
2. Regarding the literacy grant, we are anxious for DOE to share the results at the end of the grant and would like to know how DOE plans to utilize findings and scale across the DOE system.
3. Are any of the programs implemented with fidelity and assessed by a certified credentialed subject matter expert to pinpoint, based on the data, where and what improvements and changes to make?
4. Has the DOE liaised with anyone from Mississippi? The state elevated reading scores from among the lowest in the nation.¹
5. Perhaps DOE could engage in a long-term pilot with a school or complex to have a laser focus on building the fundamentals solidly in kindergarten (providing quality PD on the science of reading and explicit instruction, support ELA instruction with robust teacher feedback, and monitor progress), to see if this makes a difference in outcomes. DOE could establish a strong foundation in kindergarten and continue to build the foundation upwards to 1st, 2nd, 3rd grades, etc. . In addition, DOE could monitor progress of the first kindergarten cohort until the end of 5th grade to see if outcomes improve.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/06/education/learning/mississippi-schools-literacy.html>

Sincerely,

Cheri Nakamura
HE'E Coalition Director

HE'E Coalition Members and Participants
Academy 21

Alliance for Place Based Learning

American Civil Liberties Union

Atherton YMCA

Education Institute of Hawai'i

*Faith Action for Community Equity

Fresh Leadership LLC

Girl Scouts Hawai'i

*HawaiiKidsCAN

*Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance

*Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and
Economic Justice

*Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists

Hawai'i Athletic League of Scholars

*Hawai'i Children's Action Network

Hawai'i Education Association

Hawai'i Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition

* Hawai'i State PTSA

Hawai'i State Student Council

Hawai'i State Teachers Association

Head Start Collaboration Office

It's All About Kids

*INPEACE

Joint Venture Education Forum

Junior Achievement of Hawaii

Kamehameha Schools

Kanu Hawai'i

Kaua'i Ho'okele Council

Keiki to Career Kaua'i

Kupu A'e

*Leaders for the Next Generation

Learning First

McREL's Pacific Center for Changing the Odds

Native Hawaiian Education Council

Our Public School

*Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

*Parents and Children Together

*Parents for Public Schools Hawai'i

Special Education Provider Alliance

*Teach for America

The Learning Coalition

US PACOM

University of Hawai'i College of Education

* Youth Service Hawai'i

Voting Members () Voting member
organizations vote on action items while
individual and non-voting participants may
collaborate on all efforts within the coaliti*



September 5, 2023

TO: State of Hawai'i Board of Education Student Achievement Committee (SAC) Members

re: **September 7, 2023 SAC Agenda Item III. Discussion Item. Presentation on Board of Education Update on Strategic Plan, Desired Outcome 1.1.2.** (Reading Proficiency by Grade 3.)

Aloha,

I hope meeting attendees do not have to sit through anymore oral recitations of written reports, especially this beast of a report, and you get down to business sooner rather than later. I have included some suggested motions for committee members to consider making at the meeting to open discussions on helpful topics. I have three to propose.

I. IMPROVING SUPERINTENDENT'S STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE REPORTS TO THE BOARD

Superintendent Hayashi's 40-page report filled with jargon and buzzwords ends with three half-baked ideas for what the Board can do to support the desired outcome of greater reading proficiency statewide by Grade 3: (1) Adopt the revised ELA standards when the revision is completed; (2) Revise Board of Education Policy 102-2, K-12 Literacy, to include language to reference evidence-based instructional practices in literacy; (3) Approving upcoming literacy budgetary needs.

What Support Can the Board Provide?

- A) Ask the Superintendent to edit his reports so that they provide only new information updates on status, and leave out previously-provided material and unnecessary histories of Education.
- B) Ask the Superintendent to limit requests to the Board to specific, motion-directed topics. For example, requests to do things in the future, like approve standards not presented in the report, revise Board policies to add useless and vague buzz words, and throw more money at a problem without presenting numbers are not helpful.
- C) Ask the Superintendent estimated delivery times for "Next Steps" in his reports.
- D) Ask the Superintendent that when asking for money, he present a budget for specific items.

Suggested Board Motion: "I move that the Committee advise the Superintendent that it would be helpful to limit a Strategic Plan update reports to *new* data and

information since the last report; and that suggested Board supports be phrased as specific motions for the Board to discuss and take action upon.”

II. IMPROVING LITERACY PROFICIENCY BY GRADE 3.

There are two fundamental deficiencies in the DOE that will *always* cause low reading performance for children yet never seem to be on the DOE radar for correction. They are (1) lack of parental and community involvement; and, (2) not having a standard practice of recommending retention at earliest grade levels if students are not proficient in the previous Grade Level standards.

Research has shown that even “high need” schools in communities with low levels of parental income and education, and high levels of English Language Learners are able to achieve high levels of academic performance with community involvement, and this does *not* mean “community partners.” It means the parents and people who live in that community and are not involved because they’re getting money to be involved (i.e., “community partners”). I charge that community involvement in most DOE schools is pathetic to non-existent. Schools are not vibrant hubs of community educational activity. They sit silent, cold, and dark at night and the stakeholders have no means of connection to each other. Collaboration, idea sharing, and problem solving with parents and community members is actively discouraged in far too many DOE schools. Those who push for it are harassed until they leave. Literacy suffers.

Using age as the *only* factor in deciding what grade level a very young student entering the DOE system should be placed is lazy and irresponsible. There should be a screening test to determine reading ability, and each child’s individual circumstances should be considered when selecting the appropriate grade level for placement. I have seen sooooo many children in Hawai’i schools placed in a grade they can’t handle, the disparity is too great, they *never* ever catch up, and teachers are burdened with the utterly impossible task of closing canyon-sized gaps. It’s a completely impossible and a stupid system and we keep getting the same results, year after year.

I have a friend who teaches Grade 2. This year she has two students who can hardly speak English and have NEVER attended school, and a third with extremely limited English skills who *has* been in school, but still hasn’t master Kindergarten literacy. That one should have been retained the first year he was in school and didn’t meet the standards for that grade by the school year’s end. But the DOE just pushes them out to the next grade regardless of ability and a vehement opposition to retention. The early years are THE time to make adjustments for developmental delays, speech delays, etc. But it ain’t happening and it’s likely that any teacher to tries will learn to shut up and not oppose the administration about anything, especially

retaining a child. I've done it a few times and it was a horribly contentious process with the administration, but something those parents are still, years later, thanking me for doing.

What Support Can the SAC Provide?

I think the SAC needs to do a better job of providing a robust agenda aimed and identifying needs and taking Board appropriate action. There need to be ongoing agenda items. The purpose of an "on-going" agenda item is to give the SAC and all stakeholders plenty of opportunity hear from boots on the grounders and people who have good ideas for solutions; then, formulating plans that are put on the agenda for *more* collaborative input; potential policy changes can be suggested; and finally, voting on a concrete plan of action. That's when it no longer needs to be an ongoing agenda item. I ask that the SAC add the following two ongoing items to upcoming SAC agendas.

- A) **Improving Parent & Community Involvement in Local Schools to Improve Reading.**
- B) **Rethinking K-2 placement and Retention.**

Suggested Board Motion: "I move that the Committee place two ongoing items on its agenda to continue until a plan of action is in place or the Committee Chair no longer finds the issue in need of attention. The first item is 'Improving Parent & Community Involvement in Local Schools to Improve Reading.' The second item is 'Rethinking K-2 placement and Retention.'"

III. OPENING THE DOOR TO FREE HELP

For the past two and a half years, I've attempted to get on the agenda a much-needed amendment to BOE Policy 304-3 OPEN COMMUNICATION. Two of the letters I've written with ample arguments in favor of the amendment are below. The suggested amendment is in the April 18, 2022 communication and highlighted in teal.

What Support Can the SAC Provide?

The Committee could put the suggested amendment on the next SAC agenda, and see what people think.

Thank you for your consideration,



Vanessa Ott

From: **Vanessa Ott** <mstvott@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Apr 18, 2022 at 8:12 AM
Subject: This new BOE policy costs nothing and would improve schools in countless ways
To: Shanty Asher <shanty.asher@boe.hawaii.gov>
Cc: Bruce Voss <bruce.voss@boe.hawaii.gov>

Aloha Ms. Asher,

I am writing to you because your BOE Member bio leads me to believe you will have empathy and understanding about the much-needed BOE policy I'm about to describe. It would be a tremendous boon to children with uneducated parents and parents who struggle with English.

I'm cc:'ing Mr. Voss on this because we have spoken many times, and I'm under the impression that he respects the input I've given to the Board. A brief history of two small victories I had with the BOE which led to improvements that had great impact, and cost little to implement here: freespeech4us.com/elsewhere-with-ott-1

NEEDED POLICY:

I suggest that **POLICY 304-3 OPEN COMMUNICATION** be amended to read as follows (additions are underlined):

Excepting certain personnel matters and those collective bargaining matters proscribed by law or union-management agreement, there shall be free and open communication of all programs and information to the public, directly and through the media. Such communication shall also be developed between and among individual schools, complex areas, state offices and all personnel in the Department of Education.

In the event a student's legal guardian or an emancipated student requests that a friend or relative assist with home-to-school communication, The Department shall have and enforce procedures that require this appointed adult be treated with the same courtesy, respect, and inclusion as any parent and/or legal guardian in the public in the schools.

The proposed language draws upon BOE Policies E-304 and 304.1.

REASONING: EQUITY

When a students' parents are uneducated and/or they do not speak English very well, no amount of encouragement is going to adequately engage them in their child's education (BOE Policy E-304). If these students are going to have an equitable

opportunity accessing an education, a relative, family friend, or community member who can facilitate home-to-school communication, and interpret school-to-home communications, is a godsend. However, if a school principal doesn't like this family helper, they are allowed to shut them out, and in Hawaii they *will*, because there is no policy saying they must include this person if the parent wants this. Such is the culture of the Hawaii DOE.

The only way to change embedded cultural norms is to enact laws or government policies, and enforce them.

The DOE claims to provide interpreter services for parents, however it provides only translators. Government-supplied translators only translate what is spoken or written, they do not interpret. Some parents don't have a clue what questions to ask, what those notices sent home are actually saying even when written in a phonetic form of their oral language, nor do they understand how the U.S. education system works. A family helper can explain a lot of things to parents and students that no one else will, *and* an English-fluent family helper can communicate with the school much easier than a parent who can't speak English. Also, even native-English speakers who don't have much education need things explained to them. So an educated family helper needs to be in the school-to-home-to-school communications loop -- without a hassle about it from the DOE.

THIS ISN'T MY PROBLEM

The only motivation I have for writing to you today is that I came to Hawaii with the purpose of educating high-need students. I went back to college in California, and became a licensed public school teacher when I was 46 specifically to do this. I'm now 63, have no children, and have nothing to do with public education anymore other than I still care, and I still appeal to those in power when I have a solution that can fix a problem, and when I have the time. These days, that's not often.

A year ago, this **was** a huge problem for me because I was one of those family helpers whom a principal barred from communicating with a student's teachers under the false pretext that I yelled at a teacher on more than one occasion during distance learning in September. This also was a problem for the Special Education student (I've been his personal tutor since 2017), as well as his single mother who can barely speak English and did not receive an education past the age of 16 in Tonga. The real reason I was falsely accused is because I had filed an IDEA Due Process Hearing request on behalf of this student who had been academically regressing in this DOE middle school since 2019. Fortunately for me, the student and his mother resettled in California last summer where there is an entirely different, and inclusive, culture. I am the first person the CA school contacts when they need something from home because it's more efficient, and they are certain things will be understood and taken care of. I communicate with his teachers and continue to tutor him 5 days a week with distance learning. The CA school was a bit wary at first, but once they realized the benefits, they easily accepted a family helper into the communications loop.

I did try to reach out to others in Hawaii who might give a hoot about this issue. The BOE. Ms Payne never did schedule the meeting I requested. Parents for Public Schools. A tight-knit handful of privileged, educated women who speak English just fine and don't care. We Are Oceania. A group that doesn't want to have anything to do with the DOE and seems to be engaged in good endeavors outside of the public education influence.

I realize that, once again, I'm ahead of the pack. This time, I'm going to end my advocacy with the BOE on this issue with this email unless you contact me for any reason, such as you want more information.

Mahalo,
Vanessa Ott
808 - 854 -1018
MsVOtt@gmail.com
FreeSpeech4us.com
My Curriculum Vitae is posted on my homepage.

From: **Vanessa Ott** <msvott@gmail.com>
Date: Sat, Jan 23, 2021 at 9:00 AM
Subject: Non-English-Proficient Parents (and their kids) get short shrift in Hawaii public schools
To: Christina Kishimoto <Christina.Kishimoto@k12.hi.us>, Bruce Voss <bruce.voss@boe.hawaii.gov>, Catherine Payne <catherine.payne@boe.hawaii.gov>, Dwight Takeno <dwight.takeno@boe.hawaii.gov>, Kaimana Barcarse <kaimana.barcarse@boe.hawaii.gov>, Kenneth Uemura <kenneth.uemura@boe.hawaii.gov>, Kili Namau'u <kili.namauu@boe.hawaii.gov>, Lynn Fallin <lynn.fallin@boe.hawaii.gov>, Maggie Cox <margaret.cox@boe.hawaii.gov>, Shanty Asher <shanty.asher@boe.hawaii.gov>
Cc: BOE <BOE.Hawaii@boe.hawaii.gov>

Aloha Board of Education Members and Superintendent Kishimoto,

Hawaii school funding is based on the number of students enrolled in school. One would think you'd be interested in keeping kids in public school. Well, this month you lost one more addition to your coffers. My friend, the impoverished, Tongan mother of a learning-challenged child, is borrowing money from family, and has enrolled her son in parochial school. Goodbye to one more statistic justifying Hawaii weighted student formula as well as federal SpEd and Title I funds for *this* kid. This shouldn't surprise any of you since I've been writing about the problem for over a year. Which problem? Well, there are so many, I've lost count, but in this particular case this is it:

If an uneducated and/or a non-English-proficient parent wants a friend or family member to collaborate with them and the school to facilitate home-to-school communications, THE HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION WILL NOT ALLOW IT!

What a stupid and venal way to run a school. I have helped this immigrant mother interact with medical, financial, and other government institutions both inside and outside of Hawaii, and once they get verification that she wants me to speak for her, there's no problem. The problem, it seems, exists solely with the State of Hawaii Department of Education.

I really wish you'd change the status quo. Attached is yet another letter appealing to the Board of Education to fix the problems. Please forward a copy of this email to the BOE Student Representative and Military Liaison so they are aware of my concerns to the Board.

Mahalo,
Vanessa Ott
808 - 854 -1018
MsVOtt@gmail.com
FreeSpeech4us.com

ATTACHMENT to Jan 23, 2020 email



2825 S. King St., #2901, Honolulu, HI 96826

(808) 854-1018

FreeSpeech4us.com

MsVOtt@gmail.com

January 23, 2021

State of Hawai'i Board of Education

State of Hawai'i Department of Education Superintendent Christina Kishimoto

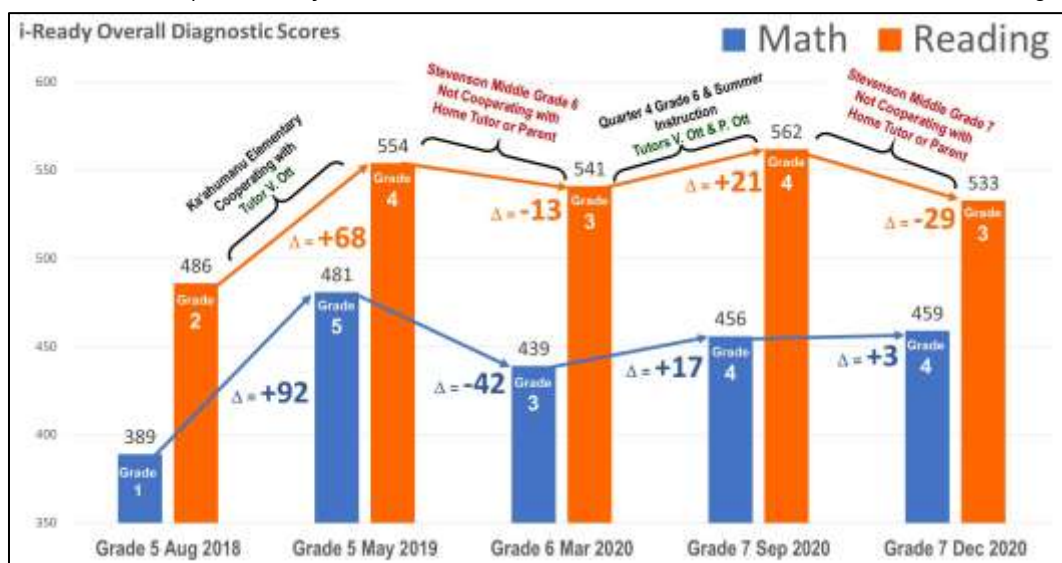
re: As Fed Up Parents Pull Children from DOE Schools, Funding Dwindles

– This Time It Has Nothing To Do with COVID

Aloha Board of Education Members and Superintendent Kishimoto,

Research shows that children have a greater chance of academic success when schools practice authentic family and community engagement. So why has the Board of Education been ignoring my pleas to fix this *serious* problem? Family and community engagement in DOE schools is worse than nonexistent, it's tragically dysfunctional. DOE schools are toxic environments poisoned not by COVID germs but by the exclusionary and sometimes hostile attitudes which drive its operations. That *should* be your area of concern. Are you concerned?

These diagnostic scores clearly illustrate what lack of family & community engagement in Hawai'i public schools does to our kids. It causes failure, stagnation, and regression. The harassment to which we (the student's mother and I) were subjected when we tried to fix the situation for this child was outrageous!



It got so bad that his desperate, impoverished, Tongan mother is borrowing money from her brother on the mainland to send the child to private school. We envision six and a half years of well-worth-it-scrimping. Within a week of contact, even after this school semester had started, we had him tested and enrolled in St. Patrick School. The Principal there was **SO** nice. A stark contrast to DOE Principal Balatico of Stevenson Middle School, Complex Area Superintendent Linell Dilwith, Deputy Superintendent Phyllis Unebasami, and the ever silent State of Hawai'i Board of Education who either actively or in absentia allowed all of us to be abused by the DOE in one way or another. St. Patrick School has no problem with me communicating for the mother and being involved in the child's education because THAT'S WHAT THE MOTHER & THE SCHOOL WANT. That's the right thing to do, which of course, escapes the DOE. What a breath of life-giving oxygen compared to the dictatorial, diseased, suffocating, inbred fortress known as the "State of Hawai'i DOE."

As HIDOE plays around with our public monies, and scrambles to balance its budget, let me remind you that the fundamental revenue source for education comes from having students enrolled in school. DUH! So, you should do your best to encourage them to stay enrolled, huh? But nooooo. Our less than illustrious public education system prefers to harass people until they get fed up and leave. For over a decade I have seen good students and teachers escape the tortures of the Hawai'i public education system through private schools, schools in other states, or other forms of employment/education. Yet the same old problems just keep chuggin' along – Superintendent after Superintendent; Board after Board – and the fundamental problems never get addressed. This family's exodus to a Hawai'i private school is just one more statistic to add to the fodder of damning evidence.

Thankfully, I no longer have any personal connection to public education in Hawai'i. This is liberating, to some extent, but it's also not really true. I cannot liberate myself from my society. The ineptitude and nasty attitudes so prevalent in the Hawai'i DOE affect us all. You on the Board of Education should understand that, and I shouldn't have to educate you about the school to prison pipeline for our underprivileged people.

So why won't the BOE do anything to change the status quo? Why wouldn't BOE Chair Payne talk with the mother and I for the last 10 months for even just five minutes? Why have the issues I've written to the Board about numerous times not appeared on your agendas to even open it up to the public for comment? Why can't we ever fix the core, fundamental problems with the DOE? No accountability. No authentic family and community engagement. No professionalism. Retaliation. Harassment. It's not good.

If you don't believe me that we've been harassed, a list of some of the last year's [incidents of harassment](#) is available online. It's just a list of things DOE employees wrote to me and I wrote to them. It's in their own words. Just read it and you'll see.

| Special Education Equity | |
|--|---|
| Hawaii DOE Refuses to Respond to State Complaint 107Dec2020 | Dear BOE - Letters to Hawaii Board of Education requesting improvements to policies and rules for greater home-to-school collaboration. |
| State Complaint: Inclusion LRE Untrained DOE Admin, 18Sep2020 | Dear Process Hearing - The hearing that won't be heard. Parent can't afford and attorney can't speak English well. That's it. Case closed. |
| Parent Unwillingly Named As Plaintiff in Due Process Hearing 13Aug2020 | Detention - (latest: 29 Nov 2020) In an effort to get rid of advocate Vanessa Ott, local school principal begins a campaign to discredit Ms. Ott. |
| Ethics Complaint - DOE Monitoring & Compliance Branch Refuses to Communicate with Parent 30May2020 | |

If you don't remember, weren't around, or didn't read any of the thoughtful solutions I've written to the BOE on these issues and you care to do that now, click the picture or this link to access those letters on my web

| Dear Hawai'i Board of Education |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27Nov2020 - Lying Is Not a Protected DOE Activity • 18Nov2020 - Testimony: Hawaii needs Authentic Family & Community Engagement and Accountability • 16Nov2020 - Stop DOE Bullying: Need Family Engagement • 17Sep2020 - Testimony: Need More Accountability, Not Less • 01 Sep 2020 - End Systemic Racism • 06 May 2020 - Give Parents Right to Choose an Assistant • 07 Feb 2020 - Family & Community Engagement • 07 Nov 2019 - How to Close SpEd Achievement Gap • 08Jun2017 - Adopt a Framework for Community Schools • 08 Oct 2020 - Policy Allowing ELL Parents to Have Assistants |

site: freespeech4us.com/dear-boe

If want to see testimony I've submitted to the Board of Education (often about the lack of accountability, openness, and family/community engagement and the prevalence of harassment), search for my name (Vanessa Ott) at:

| Hawai'i BOE All Meeting Minutes |
|--|
| 94 documents found |
| <div>Minutes</div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> August 7, 2012 Committee: Human Resource Committee <input type="checkbox"/> September 4, 2012 Committee: Human Resource Committee <input type="checkbox"/> September 4, 2012 Committee: Audit Committee <input type="checkbox"/> October 2, 2012 Committee: Audit Committee <input type="checkbox"/> October 2, 2012 Committee: Human Resource Committee <input type="checkbox"/> September 18, 2012 Full Board <input type="checkbox"/> September 4, 2012 Full Board </div> |

<https://alala1.k12.hi.us/STATE/BOE/Minutes.nsf/a15fa9df11029fd70a2565cb0065b6b7?OpenView>

This letter will join the fray of others I've written attempting to improve the Hawai'i DOE. Will this one fall on deaf ears, too? I hate writing these letters. I wish I didn't have to, but my moral and ethical obligations to my society don't give me any other choice. If you would address these problems I could stop. Otherwise, my appeals will just keep coming, and going up on my web site, until I am unable to protest from my desk any longer. (The list of letters is getting rather long, BTW). Superintendents, Board Members, parents, students, and teachers may come and go, but Ms. Ott isn't going away until Hawai'i has a better education system or death comes callin' for her.

I prefer the former rather than the latter option – and, uh, sooner rather than later is also preferred. 😊

Mahalo,
Vanessa Ott

