



Testimony

1 message

Victoria Zupancic <victoriazupancic2386@gmail.com>
To: testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov

Tue, Sep 5, 2023 at 12:08 PM

Victoria Zupancic
Curriculum, Testing, Title I, and AP Coordinator / Support Staff at Lahainaluna High School
NBCT

September 7th Special Meeting

Report of the Superintendent: Maui Wildfire Impacts

Comment

It has been four weeks since the fire in Lahaina, and I am saddened to report that as a rank and file employee, our conditions have not improved.

At the time this meeting is held, it will have been two weeks since I spoke to the Board of Education. I want to note that no one from the Department or this Board has reached out personally to any teacher in Lahaina. There are 327 staff members in Lahaina. This Board and these directors could have taken the time. There's 10 of you. That's 30 people for each of you. Ultimately, we report to you. You could have reached out to your teachers and found out how they were doing. You could have prepared resources or figured out how the Board and Department could actively support their employees in need. Can you imagine how the staff in Lahaina would feel if the Board of Education had called?

You did not.

I want to note that I am a casual employee at the Westin. This means that I give whatever availability I can each week and am on call. I sometimes work 3 times a month, but sometimes I will go months without ever stepping on property. Every employee, without question, was provided multiple phone calls, continuous emails and options for weekly meetings, and financial support. Displaced employees are receiving additional financial support along with housing in the hotel. I feel more valued here than at the career in which I've devoted my life.

Our first day reporting back to work to the Ritz Carlton was disjointed and did not follow the agenda that was planned for us. We started with remarks almost 30 minutes after the scheduled start time at 9:10am. While it was nice to see our colleagues, for some folks, sitting in a room waiting for answers was akin to the weeks we've spent without power. Dr. Melissa Brymer was invited to speak well before her scheduled time, and when finishing early, the forum turned into a trauma talk session. I do believe our leaders were lucky to have Dr. Brymer fielding the many heated and traumatic questions, as she was able to just take the heat for the DOE. It was beneficial because none of our teachers who spoke were given reasons or a defense of what their grievances were and are from the employer. But it was traumatic. I didn't come to work that day to relive the events. I came to learn what our plan was and how we were going to support our students. I did not leave with clear answers as community meetings were held halfway through the week.

This is not even to mention that when we entered, we were given our leave balance, forms to apply for leave, printed memos dating back to August 15th about mental health webinars held the 15th (yes it was 8/28), and a one-page, fill-in-the-blank pencil and paper document we need to complete about what schools and what geographic region we might like to work in, along with our interest to work in other areas like distance-learning or Kaiapuni. We were not given instructions, nor any idea how the form would be used. It simply said, return in-hand, by mail, fax or email to Maureen Suzuki. No one is even considering, does that employee know where they are going to live? Did that employee have power or internet to search for schools near their current residence? Did they have a home? Nope.

It has been two weeks since I spoke to the Board. The most problematic thing for me that happened at the August 24th meeting was the follow-up from the Board to the Superintendent. No hard questions were asked. In the most shocking moment, a Chair, I believe Ms. Moriarty, said the Board will support you in whatever you need. And she asked Mr. Hayashi, "what do you need from us?" His reply? "Flexibility."

I have a list of things that I think our schools need, and I have no idea if these things may be in motion. Maybe they are, and that would be great, but I have not heard anything. Here's five that are glaring at me each day.

- 1. Outreach for our Displaced Employees:** We are in the midst of a massive teacher, actually employee crisis, at the DOE. We need our leaders to do whatever they can to keep our staff members. This may look like financial assistance, advocacy to our legislature for Lahaina, or simply a kind word that says, "we care about you." We cannot afford to lose anyone from West Maui. Our schools were suffering before this catastrophe.
- 2. Advocacy to the USDOE so all Lahaina schools remain Title I Schools:** As the Title I Coordinator at Lahainaluna, I have only heard the "deadlines" are flexible from the main Title I office. We have no idea how many students will end up at our schools. We have no idea how many families filled out the Free and Reduced Lunch Application prior to the disaster. We have no idea how many folks did not qualify before 8/8 but now do. There has to be some sort of policy at the Federal level that discusses how to navigate Title I in a State and Federally declared disaster area. If we lose our Title I funding, we will lose the ability to service our students in the coming years.
- 3. Waiver to Testing for Lahaina Schools:** I am also the testing coordinator at Lahainaluna. I can let you know that in the second semester it is non-stop at our school. It heavily impacts instruction, and it is difficult in a "normal" year for students. To get any reliable data, students need to be invested in testing and fully prepared. I do not believe our students will be prepared, and as Strive HI data follows us years down the road, it would be a disservice to Lahaina schools to mandate testing that is only used for ranking schools and internal measures.
- 4. Trauma Specialists on the Ground:** Our Lahaina students have already transferred into other schools. Our colleagues there have received a host of children to put under their wing, and they of course are doing that because that's what teachers do. However, we were promised multiple forms of mental health support. Teachers from these schools our students have transferred into are reporting they've only been given an App.
- 5. Impact Bargaining:** Nothing is normal about what is going on. For Lahainaluna, we will have to report to a campus 45 minutes from us. Does that mean we start there at 745? Is our travel time from our campus part of our work day? If we need to amend our bell schedule to roll with the Department's "be flexible" plan, do we need to go through the massive process to do so? All of this would be so much easier if you worked out so many of these details with our unions (all unions, not just HSTA) because it is causing undue stress and harm.

I also cannot submit testimony without mentioning that multiple of our teachers at Lahainaluna were terminated and continue to be penalized for not submitting a document. We have two teachers, two, that were not awarded contracts beginning 8/1, though they reported on the first day, because...wait for it...they did not have a signed 22-23 contract. They worked the entire 22-23 school year. They showed up on Day 1 for the 23-24 with the impression they had done all their due diligence. Everyone that worked at our campus was under the impression everything was good. No one knew. And these required documents are internal policy, often able to be found at another office. Two folks are being penalized because they were not able to work on their situations until 8/22, and therefore, the Department will not start a contract until after that day. They also will not retro-pay their employees even though they worked on Day 1.

I want to remind the Board, and the Department, we did not have the internet. We did not have power. We did not have cell connectivity. You are penalizing folks who could not help their situation. These teachers have families. One with a brand new baby born in March. These are good teachers that show up everyday. New teachers, who don't necessarily understand the difference between Teacher Recruitment and OTM and OHR and SASA and HTSB and whatever other offices you've created. Teachers who satisfied all necessary requirements for one office but missed a piece of paper at another. We are in a teacher shortage crisis. Why are we making it undeniably difficult to be an employee here?

Between the scenario described above and the lack of care during the absolute destruction of our town, so many of my colleagues have come to me to say, "they just don't care." "I'm just a warm body in a classroom." "I don't know if I can do this anymore."

I urge the Board to seriously examine the care you and the Department of Education extend to your employees. The future of the students depends on it.

--

Victoria Zupancic
Secondary Mathematics Educator
NBCT