

## Former teacher, state teachers union partner to video record BOE meetings

By **KIRSTEN JOHNSON**  
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Big decisions are made at state Board of Education meetings, and yet many teachers — particularly those who work during the day — never know.

At least that's according to Vanessa Ott, a Naalehu-based former Hawaii public school teacher who has attempted to alleviate the problem for more than a year by video recording BOE meetings herself and then uploading them to YouTube.

But Ott, who uses her own recording equipment and is

assisted by one other volunteer, says she needs more help. So, this month she partnered with the Hawaii State Teachers



OTT

Association — the union representing Hawaii public school teachers — in hopes of enlisting more volunteers and reaching more viewers. Ultimately, Ott and the union say they want to increase public awareness about decisions made at the meetings, which for the most part take place on Oahu during business hours, when

most teachers are working.

"There are no teachers who can stop class and listen to a BOE meeting all day," Ott said. "Particularly for people on the outer islands, I envision them watching the videos and saying, 'Hey, maybe I don't know about something' and then writing to the board. ... I'm all about communication, openness and accountability. I really think we have a lot of smart, caring people in Hawaii, but they're disconnected, and this is a way to connect them."

See VIDEO Page A7

### VIDEO From the front page

The BOE has live-streamed audio from its meetings since August 2015. But archiving audio isn't easy because the board's servers have limited storage capacity and managing archived streams requires additional staff resources, BOE spokesman Kenyon Tam said in an email.

The board has to "balance cost with values," Tam said, and currently provides "fairly

comprehensive minutes after each meeting."

The BOE says it would cost about \$5,000 to contract for video-recording services. It unsuccessfully requested that funding from the state in past years.

Details about Ott's partnership with the union will be ironed out early next year, HSTA secretary Amy Perruso said. However, she said the union is

connected to "community members and family and friends" and could potentially "start bringing some of those folks in" to help record.

"We'd just like to lessen the burden for them," Perruso said. "We want the Legislature to appropriate funding for this. In the meantime, we're going to step up to make sure this is taken care of.

"I think we're really

grateful for (Ott's) work. Prior ... there was a long period where no one had access to meetings. It was like a black box. So her work has been really powerful and important."

More information about Ott's efforts can be found on her Facebook page called BOE Watch at [www.facebook.com/groups/BOEWatch](http://www.facebook.com/groups/BOEWatch).

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