

August 17, 2022

Board of Education
testimony.boe@boe.hawaii.gov

re: **Testimony on Agenda Item IV. (2)**
Exhibit A: Report of July 29, 2022 Board Community Meeting on Communication

Aloha,

It is encouraging to see the BOE *finally* take an interest in improving DOE communications. Finding out what's wrong is the first step in improving Hawai'i's schools. Without listening to those on the front lines of education who can identify the problems, they can never be fixed. Whatever "programs" you pile on top of this weak foundation of poor communication and lack of accountability will be of little use in achieving the ultimate goal: a world-class education system. To do this, the BOE and DOE need to engage and collaborate with all the stakeholders.

In the BOE report of the July 29, 2022 Board Community meeting on communication, many problems that have existed for years finally were published in a BOE report. That's encouraging, but a very long way from effective solutions. I have ruminated on almost all of the issues raised in BOE Exhibit A for well over a decade as the DOE has consistently failed to behave like a professional enterprise, and has completely obliterated any molecule of trust I might have had when I first came to Hawai'i to be a teacher here sixteen years ago.

Rather than dwell on the minutia of all the horrible communications experiences that one, little-ol' me has had with the DOE, I offer some big picture, policy level suggestions for improvement. These are solutions which are grounded in research-based, common-sense business practices, and would address the community's communications concerns at their core – when and if the DOE ever gets around to implementing these types of solutions.

We are fast approaching the second quarter of the 21st century, yet Hawai'i's DOE is in the dark ages when it comes to using technology to communicate with its "customers" and effectively run a business. I know the word "business practices" is anathema to many in the DOE, and quite frankly, that's a big part of the problem. Bad attitude. Unprofessionalism. Inefficient and costly business practices. Feeble customer communication skills. Who the "customers" in Hawai'i's public education system are is clearly outlined in statutes on School Community Councils. The customers are the Students, the Parents, and Community Members. The employees are the Teachers, the Classified support staff, and the Administrators. Far too often, the only voice that's heard is that of Administrators who, in my opinion, are sometimes

not very well educated, out of touch with reality, unsophisticated, and/or downright unresponsive and incompetent. How can the DOE identify and correct the source of common communications problems if it can't pinpoint recurring issues and personnel in need of better training? Here are several suggested solutions.

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

CRM Software

With an enterprise as large as the DOE, it needs CRM software to manage communications. If you don't know what Customer Relationship Management software is, it's time to learn. Every large corporation in the U.S. uses it to route emails to the appropriate parties, track communications to see if they were answered, poll customers on their satisfaction of responses, track trouble-shooting tickets, and gather data on what problems keep occurring so that measures can be implemented to prevent problems, save money, and improve customer satisfaction. Here are some useful resources:

[Customer relationship management - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customer_relationship_management)

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customer_relationship_management

[2022's Top 198 CRM Software \(with pricing\) | ITQlick](https://www.itqlick.com/category/crm)

www.itqlick.com/category/crm

Professionally-Designed DOE & School Web Sites

The DOE website is a mess. The data search engine rarely provides useful hits. It's disorganized and difficult to find information. The DOE needs trained and experienced web designers to manage the design, organization, and search engines. I don't mean write the content, I mean technology professionals who can manage, update, and make a really professional, useful web site – one in which someone can locate the information they seek in less than 2 minutes. And, I honestly think there is not enough talent pool in Hawai'i to accomplish this. Fortunately, qualified web design companies work remotely. Sub-contract until there *are* enough qualified professionals in Hawai'i who are trained to handle this.

There are some decent individual school websites, but that's hit or miss – mostly miss. The DOE needs to provide a website template, connected to a DOE database, that makes it easy for each school to provide basic information without having to do anything. I'm talking about the staff and employee rosters automatically filling all the school web pages with staff names, positions, and contact info. Or each school enters their bell schedule into a main database, and it shows up, synchronized to their website Bell Schedule page. A consistent design for all school websites, with capability for customization would improve communication and save money. Why should someone at every school have to do this by hand? That's what computers and databases are for. Automate! Eliminate repetition and reinventing the wheel.

Digital Signing of Parental Forms through Infinite Campus

Instead of sending reams of paper forms home with every student, every year, enable parents to choose to sign and read forms online. A family with 3 or 4 children should not have to sign a paper form for every child, the DOE should not rely on children to return the forms intact, teachers should not have to spend time collecting these papers, and school personnel should not have to enter data (a process prone to error), when parents can and often prefer to enter it themselves. Besides, when the forms need to be updated for whatever reason, such as new field that needs to be entered, the DOE can manage that centrally.

Go Paperless to Save Money (Personnel Time, Paper, Envelopes & Postage)

This principal squandered \$8 of taxpayer money in postage to send a letter to me on 7/29 that she'd already emailed to me. In this day in age, pray tell why the DOE spends money on postage to send nasty letters certified mail when sending an email is sufficient? Stupid and wasteful. If they're going to insult and threaten people, they can do it a lot cheaper via email.



TRANSPARENCY SOLUTIONS

Without transparency there is no trust.

Budget

The public has been asking for the budget to be more transparent since before I arrived in Hawai'i on 2006. Anyone who's worked for the DOE has seen far too much financial waste. The BOE must set a policy that all the expenditure spreadsheets that would enable a reasonably intelligent person to follow the money trails are readily available to the public.

Training Programs for Employees Open to the Public

Put all DOE employee training program in a publicly accessible area of the DOE website. The taxpayers are paying for these training programs aren't they? We should have ready access to see what the DOE is teaching its employees. This information could be very revealing concerning why

Hawai'i public schools are doing poorly. No doubt this saying is in play, "Garbage in; garbage out, but I'd like to see for myself. I don't think there's any valid reason to keep the content of Employee Training programs a secret and out of the public eye unless the DOE is ashamed of the content.

Contracts Open to the Public

Put all BOE and DOE contracts in a publicly accessible area of the DOE website. The union contracts. Software licensing contracts. Program provider contracts. None of this should be secret. All of this should be easy to find for everyone who cares to look.

Clarify In Laymen's Terms what REALLY is Confidential and What is Not

This warning is attached to the bottom of every DOE email and it's **NOT** true:

This is a staff email account managed by Hawaii Department Of Education School District. This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed.

Not every piece of correspondence has confidential information, yet the DOE intimidates teachers, employees, and the public with this false statement. This is consistent with the DOE's practice of incorrectly claiming "FERPA" and "Confidentiality" when they have something to hide. Consider this true HIDOE story: a handicapped teacher asks for a simple accommodation of a key to the parking gate so she can stay on the campus after 4:30pm and work on weekends; the key is necessary because it's too far to walk from the outside of the gate to the campus for someone with a mobility disability. The Principal won't let the teacher have a gate key claiming that would be unfair to all the other teachers. The handicapped teacher asks to address the faculty and explain why she needs this reasonable disability accommodation. The Principal refuses claiming "confidentiality" when in reality it's the teacher's confidential information and she should have the right to share it, if she wants to do so, in order to resolve the problem.

Give the Public & Employees the Right to Record Adult Proceedings

Video and audio recordings have uncovered a lot of governmental corruption and illegal activity. It's time that the BOE set a policy that the public has the right to record any meeting they have, any interaction they have, with all DOE employees as long as they protect the privacy of students. This would really cut down on DOE employee lying, defamation, and he said/she said controversies.

ACCOUNTABILITY SOLUTIONS

Respond to Public Communications in a Timely Manner

Professional business expectations are that an email or a phone call will be responded to in 1-2 business days. Far too many emails to the DOE (and the BOE) go unanswered unless the inquiring party hounds the DOE for an response. None of the BOE policies set a reasonable expectation for professional timeliness in answering correspondence. To fix this, the Board must set specific policy and expectations for this. Not some namby-pamby “respond in a timely manner,” policy, but something that’s measurable and specific, for those DOE employees who don’t have good communications skills (yet), such as this:

The Department shall:

- (1) respond to all communications within 1-2 business days with accurate and complete information.*
- (2) If more time is required, the first response will explain the delay and provide an expected date of delivery.*
- (3) If the communication is better handled by a different department, the first response will provide the name and contact information of the appropriate recipient, which will then follow steps (1) and (2) above.*

POLICY E-304
COMMUNICATIONS (FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT)

The Department shall encourage and support the public's participation in educational endeavors in such a manner that contributes to the accomplishment of the strategic plan goals. The Department shall have and enforce procedures that, within the bounds of Department policy, both encourage and manage the presence and involvement of parents, community members and the public in the schools.

POLICY 304-1
E KOMO MAI

Board and Department employees shall endeavor to treat members of the public with respect and in a courteous and responsive manner.

POLICY 304-3
OPEN COMMUNICATION

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.

Collect & Review Measurable & Meaningful Response Data

One function of CRM software is to collect data on employee communication response times and “customer” satisfaction. Large enterprise CRM solutions enable the company or agency to identify what kinds of questions are asked frequently, and where there is poor performance in customer satisfaction. If you’ve ever called a company, made a purchase, or sent an email, and been asked to complete a satisfaction survey, you’re acquainted with CRM software.

Measurable data concerning communications satisfaction can lead to greater efficiency. Answers to frequently-asked questions can be made available in the communications interfaces or on web sites. For example, when I first started doing telephone technical support for Wells Fargo Online back in the late '90s, a huge percentage of calls were from users whose password didn't work. Through CRM data analysis, the solution was almost always: TURN OFF CAPS LOCK. This issue was so prevalent with graphic (Web-based) interfaces (GUIs) in all types of businesses that software these days often has a notice to users whose password isn't working to check CAPS LOCK and make sure it's turned off.

Imagine how this translates to the DOE. If people keep asking for the same information, put it on the web and make it easy to find. If one area of the DOE has poor customer satisfaction results, the customer surveys can ferret out the problems, if the survey asks the right questions, issues can be fixed efficiently and effectively.

Attitude Adjustment Solutions

Improve Communication with English-Challenged Parents

The Board needs to pass a policy giving Parents who have challenges with home to school communication the RIGHT to designate a family member or friend as the primary communications contact for home-to-school communications. There is absolutely no good reason for the DOE to continue to forbid this. I have asked the BOE on several occasions to rectify this problem, but have been met with silence on this issue.

Expect Professional Conflict Resolution Skills

All DOE employees should be taught professional conflict resolution techniques. Most DOE employees are absolutely unskilled in this area, and even people in positions of great power behave like the Queen of Hearts. Conflict is usually avoided completely or treated with a heavy, punitive hand that does not serve the students well, but does protect the delicate egos of those who cannot handle challenging ideas from diverse types of people.

So disgusted with how a Principal, and then the CAS, and then the Deputy Superintendent and State Superintendent handled a recent conflict, I submitted the following request to see how DOE employees are taught to resolve conflict, and what expectations the DOE sets for its employees to be respectful, engaging, honest, and accountable.

Hawai'i DOE Management Style



“Off with their heads!”

**August 12, 2022 to DOE Deputy Superintendent
Request to Access Government Record**

I request copies of any and all publications, training materials, procedures or memos that teach, train, and/or guide DOE supervisors at all levels how to use and apply professional and research-based conflict resolution skills, techniques, and methods. For each record, please specify the archived location of the record within DOE (e.g. URL) and purpose (e.g., used in 1-hour session during two month Principals Academy).

Does the Board have *any* idea how conflicts are handled in the DOE?

Board Policy 304-5 regarding Public Complaints is completely ineffectual. Filing a Fraud & Ethics Complaint is ineffectual. Taking the matter up the chain of command is currently ineffectual (it was better when Kathryn Matayoshi was Superintendent). School Community Councils are a sycophantic farce. There is no accountability for the horrid way so many people are treated.

And the Boards less than brilliant idea to give Principal's "local control" has created an army of fascist Principals, unaccountable to anyone for whatever they choose to do is never questioned.

The word, and the concept of fascism come's from the Italian word for "bundle." Fascism does not tolerate diversity. No matter what the DOE and the BOE put on paper, the reality is that conflict is used as an excuse to chop the head off of any dissent or disagreement.

So, until things change significantly, I will continue to maintain that the DOE is a fascist organization.

POLICY 304-5 PUBLIC COMPLAINTS

The Department of Education as well as the Hawaii State Board of Education from time to time receives complaints from members of the public regarding the public education system. The Board of Education believes that a clear process that provides members of the public a means to share their concerns with the Department of Education is important to public confidence.

The Board of Education's primary responsibility is specified by the Hawaii State Constitution to be policy-making. When considering most complaints or concerns, the Board evaluates the extent to which they are addressed by current policy or the extent to which they suggest the need for modified or new policies. When a complaint about school personnel is made to the Board as a whole or to a Board member individually, the Board member shall inform the Superintendent, who shall inform the complainant of the normal channels for reporting complaints about school personnel. The complaint will ordinarily be referred for study and possible solution to the school administrator who directly supervises the staff member involved. The staff member will be advised of the nature of the complaint and be given opportunity to respond to the complaint.

The Board encourages the resolution of public complaints at the level closest to which they occur. As such, when resolving school-level matters, the school principal or designee should be contacted first for further study and solution. If the matter remains unresolved and it appears necessary, the administration, complainant or staff member involved may request a meeting with the school's Complex Area Superintendent for the purpose of fuller study. As the matter is studied, all parties involved may be requested by the CAS to attend meetings for the purposes of presenting facts and evidence, making further explanations, clarifying issues and dispensing with hearsay and rumor. After consulting with the Complex Area Superintendent and receipt of a written decision, or should the matter continue to remain unresolved, the matter may be referred to the office of the Superintendent. At each level of review, the parties shall make reasonable efforts to facilitate communication.