Vanessa Ott
P.O. Box 825, Na'alehu, HI 96772
808 · 854 · 1018
FreeSpeech4us.com
MsVOtt@gmail.com

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To: State of Hawai'i Governor Josh Green, M.D.
Hawai'i Boards and Commissions, boards.commissions@hawaii.gov

re: **Letter of Intent: Vanessa Ott Application for Appointment to the State of Hawai'i Board of Education**

Aloha Governor Green,

I am applying for appointment to the State of Hawai'i Board of Education (BOE) because I am an educator and Hawai'i citizen who is dedicated to community engagement in our public education system. Decades of study and research have convinced me that the recipe for successful schools, especially financially-challenged ones, is effective teamwork among all education stakeholders: students, parents, administrators, teachers, support staff, and community groups and individuals.

Describing what Boards of Education do, the *National Association of State Boards of Education* (nasbe.org) writes, "Functioning as the citizens' voice in state education, state boards of education serve as an unbiased broker for education decision making, focusing on the big picture, articulating the long-term vision and needs of public education, and making policy based on the best interests of the public and the young people of America."

My big picture for how I best can serve the BOE, Department of Education (DOE) and Hawai'i's people is to lend my expertise to improving community engagement with our public schools and Board of Education. I envision stakeholder apathy melting away once folks are welcomed, engaged, and part of decision-making processes — from local schools up to the BOE.

New appointees may come to the BOE table with firm ideas of what needs to be fixed. My philosophy is that no matter what issue is at hand, it's important to gather input from many diverse and knowledgeable sources, and listen to "boots-on-the-ground" opinions for how we can create a world-class education system in Hawai'i . Good ideas spring up from unexpected sources when there is a venue for hearing them. Creating and nurturing these venues is how the BOE can become the citizens' voice. I believe that my experiences developing efficient communication systems using modern technology can help transform the BOE into a board of education that involves all stakeholders by establishing standards of practice for School Community Councils and the BOE that are relatively easy and extremely effective.

My skills, experience, education, and temperament make me an ideal candidate for appointment to the BOE. My body does not. I'm handicapped by a spinal deformity that causes constant, chronic pain, and affects my ability to do physical tasks like lifting heavy items, bending, standing up, walking quickly, and sitting for too long. There is one benefit to being a handicapped BOE member. I'm well-versed in the *Americans with Disabilities Act* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. I have a deep understanding of how schools can provide equitable opportunities for those with disabilities, and the barriers to success handicapped individuals face in academic institutions. Even though physical abilities weigh me down, I'm a lifelong learner always working to improve myself. My résumé outlines the many areas of study I've pursued.

In my mid-forties, during the "No Child Left Behind" heyday, I developed a passion for public education. I embarked on a journey to become a certified elementary public-school teacher in Hawai'i, specifically targeting the high-need Ka'ū District at the southern tip of the Big Island. It took years to get there. First, I enrolled in the California State University Teacher Credential program. Acceptance required volunteering as a teacher's aide for a minimum of one semester to be sure the candidate liked working in a public school. After acceptance, a year of full-time classes and internship commenced one month after my second spinal surgery in 2004 (first in 1998). I had to bring pillows, and lie on a table that the university custodians would set up (my first ADA workplace accommodation) just to make it through an hour-long class. I tenaciously pursued my goal, and finally became a full-time, licensed teacher at the southernmost, lowest-performing school in the U.S. beginning with the 2007-08 school year.

In 2012, I stopped working for the DOE, my husband and I rented an apartment in Honolulu, and I began to attend BOE meetings regularly. Many people had suggested I work at a private school instead, but that was not aligned with my desire to improve public education. As I attended more BOE meetings, it became obvious that almost everyone in the state was disconnected from the BOE. Anyone with a job could not attend board meetings in the middle of a work day. People on neighbor islands could not attend. But, I knew technology could circumvent such problems.

This prompted me to record all the board and its committee meetings, and share the videos with the public on YouTube. Others got interested. The "BOE Watch" Facebook group I've managed since December 2014 began as a way to connect people who wanted to convince the BOE to record its meetings and upload the videos to its website. Jim Shon's October 29, 2015 interview with me for *ThinkTech Hawai'i*, now an audio-only archive, is my personal history with this movement, starting with university studies in electronic music, up to the point where I was walking into Hawai'i BOE meetings with my cane, towing a small video camera, tripod, and laptop.

thinktechhawaii.com/one-citizens-effort-to-film-every-boe-meeting-vanessa-ott

A year later, *Hawaii News Now* interviewed me and several other supporters for the November 7, 2016 *Hawai'i News Now* story about this effort. Not long after, the HSTA Speaker's Bureau assumed responsibility for the project's implementation.

hawaiinewsnow.com/story/33653363/former-teachers-mission-make-boe-discussions-more-accessible

Technology has evolved considerably in the last 11 years. Post covid quarantine, remote meetings and video recordings available on-demand via the internet have become commonplace. People can testify at BOE meetings remotely, in real time, from anywhere they have an internet connection. The BOE posts recordings of its meetings on its website for at least a month. Times have changed. What hasn't changed is the paucity of public involvement in public schools. Stakeholders are still disconnected, so of course, most schools languish in mediocrity (see Attachment: *A Decade of Strive HI Data*). I can help change the status quo if given the opportunity.

Hopefully, you want the BOE and DOE to achieve optimum education stakeholder engagement, too, Governor Green. That is the only way to build top-performing schools. Funding certainly helps, but collaboration is key, and the lack of commitment to community involvement from the BOE and the DOE has always been a problem. Hawai'i is generally disposed to the Spirit of Aloha. Imagine what we could accomplish if we create the mechanisms that facilitate all stakeholders working together rather than silenced and shut out.

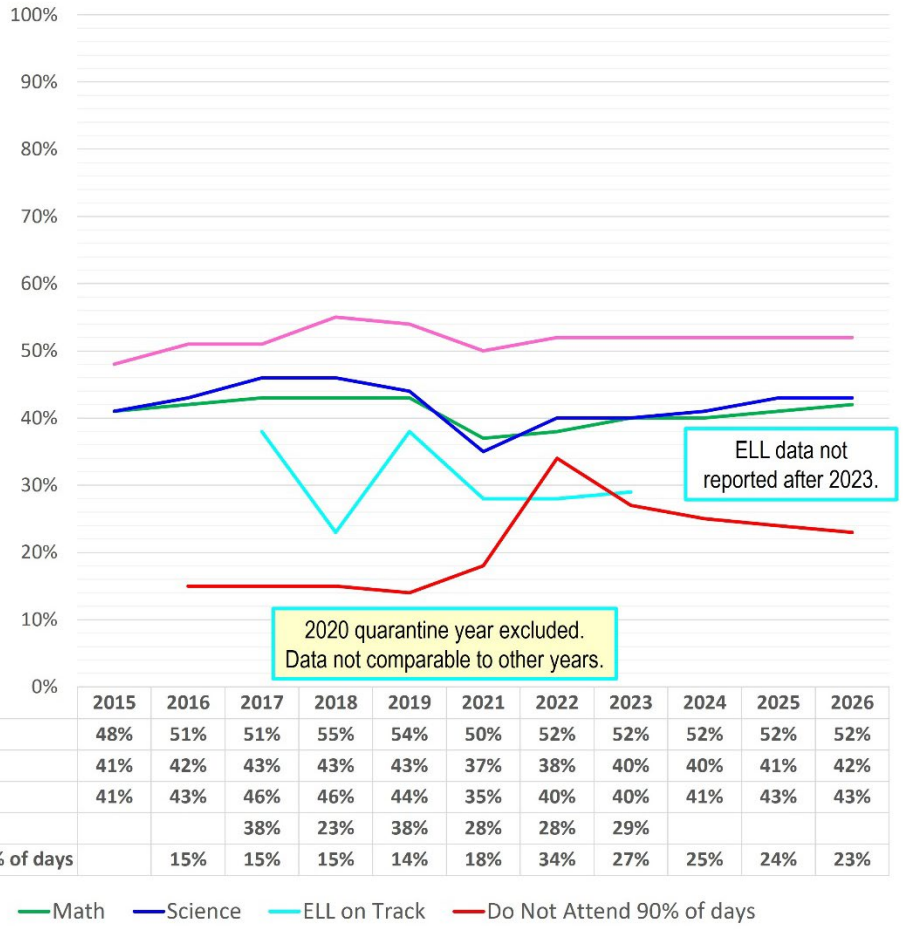
An extremely important asset for the BOE that I possess is formal training in and practical application of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR). RONR is the national "bible" for how people can work together efficiently and effectively to get business done. Over the years, I've witnessed too many BOE members with little knowledge of RONR waste a lot of time getting board business accomplished. Although not an expert parliamentarian, I have a good working knowledge of parliamentary procedure and consider myself a Robert's Rules devotée. Recently, I purchased two copies of the latest edition of RONR — one each for the Na'alehu and Pahala Libraries which had none before.

If I am appointed the BOE Hawai'i County representative, I'm willing to commit to selfless public service that paves the way for everyone to create collaborative, enthusiastic public education communities with the necessary communication tools and proper incentives to use them. Together we can realize a brighter academic and intellectual future for all of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Vanessa Ott

Attachment: A Decade of Strive HI Data



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
LA	48%	51%	51%	55%	54%	50%	52%	52%	52%	52%	52%
Math	41%	42%	43%	43%	43%	37%	38%	40%	40%	41%	42%
Science	41%	43%	46%	46%	44%	35%	40%	40%	41%	43%	43%
ELL on Track			38%	23%	38%	28%	28%	29%			
Do Not Attend 90% of days		15%	15%	15%	14%	18%	34%	27%	25%	24%	23%