



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 03/30/2026

Time: 01:00 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: EDU

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: GM654, SUBMITTING FOR CONSIDERATION AND CONFIRMATION TO THE HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD, GUBERNATORIAL NOMINEE, DAPHNE OKUNAGA, FOR A TERM TO EXPIRE 06-30-2028.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) supports Daphne Okunaga's nomination to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board.

Ms. Okunaga is an exemplary educator with nearly two decades of dedicated service to Hawai'i's public school students. Having served as a secondary mathematics teacher at Pearl City High School from 2005 to 2024, she brings deep, classroom-level expertise to the board.

As a teacher mentor since 2015, she understands how to support fellow educators in classroom management and instructional practices. Additionally, she also helps guide state level strategy by serving on the State Task Force for Mathematics, collaborating with university professors and Department specialists to shift mathematical experiences toward outcomes that better support student interests.

In her current role as an Instructional Strategist for Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education, Ms. Okunaga continues to drive systemic improvement by coordinating funding for program initiatives and collaborating on work-based learning and career technical education.

Ms. Okunaga's extensive history of mentorship, her commitment to high professional standards, and her first-hand experience as a licensed teacher in the Department make her an ideal candidate for the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board.

The Department respectfully urges this Committee to confirm Daphne Okunaga to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

GM-654

Submitted on: 3/26/2026 12:05:33 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/30/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linda Furuto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Whom It May Concern:

I strongly support bill 654 GM Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board, Gubernatorial Nominee, DAPHNE OKUNAGA, for a term to expire 06-30-2028.

Over the past decade, I have been inspired by the depth of Daphne's commitment to scholarship, teaching, leadership, and service, as evidenced by her engagement in the academic community and beyond. In all her endeavors, Daphne looks for ways to learn, discover, and innovate because she is dedicated to equitable and quality education. In the process, she enriches the lives of all those around her.

Daphne's prolific career includes a host of awards, including local, national, and international honors. Dedicated, compassionate, humble, and brilliant are words I would use to describe Daphne. She is innovative and willing to take on challenges that build capacity to improve student outcomes within the communities she is endeavoring to serve.

Among Daphne's many strengths is the generous way she gives of her time and talents. She is the epitome of a teacher leader in Hawai'i and beyond. On numerous occasions, Daphne's peers have commented that they look to her exemplary model of both professionalism and personal character.

In conclusion, I am profoundly grateful for the scope and impact of Daphne's work and it is without question that I endorse this bill.

Mahalo,

Linda Furuto

JOSH B. GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
WAIPAHAU HIGH SCHOOL
94-1211 FARRINGTON HIGHWAY
WAIPAHAU, HAWAII 96797
(808) 307-9555

March 24, 2026

Aloha, Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the appointment of Daphne Okunaga to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB). Having known Daphne for nearly 20 years in both a professional and personal capacity, I have witnessed firsthand her ability to connect with students, her collaborative spirit, and her unwavering dedication to the teaching profession in Hawai'i.

With over 18 years of dedicated service in the classroom, Daphne embodies the professional excellence and commitment to high standards that the HTSB requires. Her background is rooted in deep pedagogical knowledge, supported by a Master of Education and an HTSB License in Secondary Mathematics.

Daphne stands out as an ideal candidate due to her ability to translate classroom experience into systemic improvement. She currently serves as an Instructional Strategist for Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education, where she develops multi-year strategies for career pathways, bridging the vital gap between education and industry. In 2017, she received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, the highest honor bestowed by the U.S. government for K-12 STEM teaching. Her leadership was further recognized as the 2022 National Career Academy Teacher of the Year and the 2023 Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i Teacher of the Year.

Daphne possesses a rare ability to balance rigorous professional standards with a practical understanding of what teachers need to succeed in today's classrooms. Her contributions to the state's educational infrastructure include her hard work around assessment, policy, and mentorship. She has served as a Hawai'i DOE Evaluator for the Algebra II End-of-Course Exam and as a member of the State Task Force for Mathematics, where she helped shift mathematical experiences toward outcomes that support student interests. From 2015 to 2024, she served as a teacher mentor, guiding colleagues in classroom management and professional growth. She has

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

an innate ability to connect with others, making her a leader from whom peers find it easy to learn.

Daphne is a hard worker who brings immense value to every space she enters. She is an innovative and supportive educator who is not afraid to challenge her students or her peers. Most importantly, she is a leader who refuses to lower the bar when it comes to standards, ensuring that "Quality Teachers" remains the benchmark for our state.

Daphne Okunaga is a person of high character and a role model for educators across the islands. Her appointment will provide the HTSB with an invaluable perspective from an educator who has spent her career advocating for both student success and teacher empowerment. I strongly urge this Committee to support her confirmation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this outstanding nominee.

Mahalo,



Brandy Yagi
brandy.yagi@k12.hi.us
(808) 307-9555

March 24, 2025

To the Members of the Hawaii State Senate,

I write in strong support of the confirmation of Daphne Pi'ilani Okunaga to the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board. I have had the privilege of knowing Daphne professionally through our shared work as Hope Street Teacher Fellows, and our paths have continued to intersect through the academy school community here in Hawaii. In that time, I have come to know her as one of the most thoughtful, accomplished, and genuinely teacher-centered educators working in our state today.

Daphne's credentials speak for themselves: a Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, Chamber of Commerce Hawaii Teacher of the Year, National Career Academy Teacher of the Year, and nearly two decades in the classroom before stepping into her current role as an Instructional Strategist with Hawaii P-20. But what those titles don't fully capture is the quality of her professional judgment and her deep respect for teachers and students alike. In every interaction I've had with her, Daphne brings both the practitioner's perspective and the systems thinker's eye, a combination that is exactly what the HTSB needs.

As fellow Hope Street Teacher Fellows, we were part of a cohort committed to using teacher voice to shape state education policy. Daphne was someone who took that responsibility seriously. She engaged thoughtfully with complex issues, sought out the perspectives of others before forming her conclusions, and consistently advocated for approaches grounded in what actually supports teacher effectiveness. Those same qualities were evident in her leadership of the International Business and Design Academy at Pearl City High School, where she guided her team to earn National Model Academy With Distinction status — the highest honor conferred by the National Career Academy Coalition.

Our ongoing connection through Hawaii's academy school network has reinforced my confidence in her. The work of building and sustaining career academies demands a rare blend of vision, relationship-building, and stubborn attention to outcomes for students. Daphne embodies all three. She understands what it takes to support educators from the inside, not as an abstract policy matter, but as someone who has mentored teachers, developed curriculum, led professional development, and sat across from students in a classroom for nearly twenty years.

The Hawaii Teacher Standards Board plays a critical role in shaping who enters and remains in our profession, and how they are supported and held accountable. I can think of few people better suited to that work than Daphne Okunaga. She brings experience, integrity, and a genuine commitment to the teachers and students of this state. I wholeheartedly support her confirmation and trust she will serve the board with distinction.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dawn Taba

College & Career Counselor, Kauai High School
Academy of Innovation & Design

GM-654

Submitted on: 3/26/2026 10:59:45 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/30/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tammy Yoon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Kim and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tammy Yoon, and I am a teacher at Pearl City High School. I am writing in strong support of Daphne Okunaga's nomination to serve on the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board.

I had the opportunity to work closely with Daphne when I first started teaching at Pearl City High School. We were part of a freshman team where she taught math and I taught social studies. As a new teacher, that first year can be overwhelming, and Daphne was one of the people who made a lasting impact on me. She was incredibly supportive, always willing to help, and someone I could rely on. To be completely honest, I may not have stayed in the profession if I didn't have that kind of support from her and our team.

Beyond the classroom, Daphne consistently takes on leadership roles that directly support both teachers and students. She served as the graduation teacher chair, where she handled the many logistics that come with organizing graduation. It is a significant responsibility, and she took it on without any additional compensation or incentives,, but simply because she cares about our school and our students.

More recently, Daphne served as my co-chair for our Dive Into Education conference. She truly stepped up and took the lead in many areas, which allowed me to focus more on my teaching responsibilities. Her ability to take initiative and support others is something I have experienced firsthand time and time again.

Daphne is someone who leads by example, supports those around her, and is deeply committed to education. I strongly believe she would be an excellent addition to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I respectfully urge you to support her confirmation.

Sincerely,
Tammy Yoon

March 30, 2026

TO: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

FR: Reena Rabago

RE: Support – GM654
Consideration and confirmation to the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board,
Gubernatorial Nominee, DAPHNE OKUNAGA, for a term to expire 06-30-2028.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Ms. Daphne Okunaga for confirmation to the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board. I've known Daphne for over 30 years. I've volunteered with her at Pearl City High School, our Alumni with leadership camps. Daphne is a compassionate, talented and extremely dedicated educator.

I believe Daphne fits the definition of lead by example. She demonstrates to no end that stepping into leadership roles, mentoring and volunteering is the pathway for future success.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of Ms. Daphne Okunaga's consideration for confirmation.

GM-654

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 11:30:26 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/30/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana Tanigawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Testimony in Strong Support of the Confirmation of Daphne Okunaga to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB)

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dana Tanigawa, and I am writing to express my support for the consideration and confirmation of Daphne Okunaga to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board.

Having worked alongside Daphne for nearly a decade within the Department of Education, I have witnessed firsthand her unwavering advocacy for students, educators, and the broader educational community in Hawai'i. It is rare to find a subject matter specialist in Mathematics who possesses such a profound blend of professional rigor and infectious enthusiasm. She excels at bridging the gap between abstract classroom concepts and real-world application.

Daphne is a deliberate and thoughtful leader. She consistently makes sound decisions while remaining deeply empathetic to the human impact of those choices. Her deep institutional knowledge and her commitment to the profession make her an ideal nominee to uphold the standards of teaching in our islands.

I strongly urge the Senate to confirm Daphne Okunaga to this position. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Na'u,

Dana Tanigawa, Ed.D, NBTC

GM-654

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 12:03:01 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/30/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Liane Sataraka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Kim and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you in support of a highly valued colleague, Daphne Okunaga, one of the most exceptional educators with whom I have had the privilege to collaborate. I initially encountered Ms. Okunaga nearly 20 years ago upon her arrival at Pearl City High School (PCHS) as a new teacher. Even early in her career, Ms. Okunaga demonstrated the ideal balance of structure and guidance, tempered with genuine affection and respect. She was the teacher whom students sought out for academic assistance, even when she was not their assigned math teacher. Her instructional approach effectively engaged students in the learning process and addressed their academic deficiencies. Furthermore, student test results demonstrated successful mastery of the requisite standards. Her profound commitment to teaching and learning is evident in all her endeavors. The numerous accolades she has received confirm that her excellence is widely recognized, including the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and the Pearl City-Waipahu Teacher of the Year, among others.

Ms. Okunaga’s dedication to service and continuous improvement is manifest in her extensive involvement with various task forces and initiatives. During her tenure at PCHS, she served as the academy lead teacher, School Community Council Chairperson and a teacher mentor for nearly a decade. Currently, she is an active participant in the Hope Street Teacher Fellowship program, the State Task Force for Mathematics, and serves as the state representative for the Smarter Balanced Performance and Practice Committee, to name a few key roles. The experience she has accumulated over the years provides her with a broad perspective and vision regarding education and its improvement.

I highlight the impressive experiences on Ms. Okunaga’s education journey not merely to commend one of the most outstanding educators I have encountered, but to emphasize her unwavering commitment to students and the field of education. Her departure from PCHS was deeply felt by both students and staff. We lost a master teacher, a coach, an advisor, and a great leader. However, I believe that Ms. Okunaga is destined for influence beyond the confines of our school. I am confident that if afforded the opportunity to serve on the Hawai’i Teachers Standards Board, her expertise, comprehensive knowledge, and genuine dedication will significantly contribute to shaping a stronger future for education in Hawai’i. Thank you for considering this recommendation.

GM-654

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 1:00:39 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/30/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malamalama Ada	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is a privilege to submit this testimony in strong support of Daphne Okunaga for appointment to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board. As her colleague, I have witnessed firsthand her profound impact on education. She possesses the rare blend of classroom excellence and systemic vision necessary to advance the HTSB's mission.

Daphne embodies the "highly esteemed" professional envisioned by this Board. Her accolades reflect a career dedicated to the highest standards of the profession. Her commitment to growth is further evidenced by her participation in prestigious programs such as the Pacific Century Fellows, the Patsy T. Mink Leadership Alliance, and the Hawai'i State Teacher Fellows. She does not just meet licensing standards; she constantly seeks to redefine what it means to be an elite educator.

Above all, Daphne is driven by student success. I have never met an educator more dedicated to building the foundational relationships that allow students to thrive. She consistently goes above and beyond to help students realize their potential, providing unwavering support even when they stumble. She understands that these relationships are the bedrock of a successful public education system.

Beyond her own classroom, Daphne is a tireless advocate for her peers. She is the first to encourage colleagues to pursue fellowships and professional expansion, while simultaneously seeking ways to recognize and celebrate the hard work of fellow educators.

Daphne understands the daily realities and challenges of being an educator in Hawai'i. Her "on-the-ground" perspective will be invaluable in ensuring that HTSB's licensing and credentialing processes truly support teacher growth and build public confidence in our profession. I urge the committee to confirm her appointment.

Sincerely,

Malamalama Ada

School Counselor

Pearl City High School

Blake K. Oshiro, Esq.
222 S. Vineyard Street, #401
Honolulu HI 96813
Blake.Oshiro@808cch.com

March 3, 2026

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

Subject: Testimony in **Support of GM 60754** Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawaii State Teacher Standards Board, Gubernatorial Nominee, **DAPHNE OKUNAGA**.

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of Daphne Okunaga's appointment to the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB).

I have known Daphne for several years as we both attended Pearl City High School (PCHS) and are alumni (albeit several several years apart). I first met her as a volunteer with a leadership camp held each summer with the student council. I met Daphne first as a student leader, and later as she became an alumni like me who would volunteer and come back and help current PCHS student leaders build their personal, interpersonal, and leadership character over an intensive 2-3 day program.

Ever since first getting to work with Daphne, she stood out first as a student leader and later as an alumni leader. She is and has always been sincere, honest and forthright. She has a bright and charismatic personality, a natural leader.

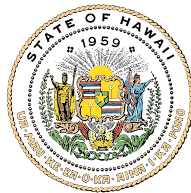
Professionally, it was not surprising that she decided to go back and teach at PCHS as a math teacher. She did that for several years because she was great at her job, was great with the students and was ever loyal to her school.

But throughout that time, she has expanded her professional development and moved on to become an educational resource for teachers.

While I have not had the pleasure of getting to interact with Daphne in her professional capacity, nor getting to see her as often as I would like, I am entirely confident that she will be an asset on the HTSB given all of her years of practical experience as well as her leadership qualities that make her an exceptional educator.

I am pleased to express my support for Daphne's appointment. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Go Chargers!!!

Sincerely,
Blake Oshiro



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
PEARL CITY HIGH SCHOOL
2100 HO'OKI'EKI'E STREET
PEARL CITY, HI 96782

March 27, 2026

It is with great enthusiasm and a firm sense of conviction that I recommend Daphne Okunaga for a position on the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board. I have witnessed her professional journey and her remarkable contributions firsthand. I am confident that she possesses the expertise, integrity, and leadership required to serve our state's educators and students at the highest level.

Daphne is a highly motivated, student-driven professional with a commitment to excellence. Beyond her technical proficiency, she possesses the rare courage to do the right thing even when it is difficult, a quality that is essential for a board tasked with maintaining the standards of our profession.

Her deep roots at Pearl City High School, where she served as a Secondary Mathematics Teacher from 2005 to 2024, provide her with a profound understanding of the classroom experience. During her nearly two decades at Pearl City, her impact was both broad and deep:

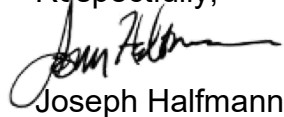
- **Instructional Leadership:** She served as the Math Department Chairperson (2013–2018) and a Data Team Leader, where she led the department in analyzing state assessment blueprints to improve student outcomes substantially.
- **Academy Excellence:** As the International Business & Design Academy Lead (2018–2024), she guided the program to earn the National Model Academy with Distinction status, the highest honor from the National Career Academy Coalition.
- **Holistic Student Support:** Daphne's dedication extended far beyond mathematics. She served as the Graduation Advisor, a Core Team Leader focused on reducing absenteeism, and a Football Academic Advisor and Soccer Coach.
- **School Governance:** She chaired the School Community Council, where she played a critical role in reviewing academic and financial plans and participating in the selection and evaluation of the principal.

Daphne's accolades, including her recognition as the 2023 Chamber of Commerce Hawaii Teacher of the Year and the 2017 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, reflect a career defined by high-level achievement and a commitment to rigorous instructional standards.

Page 2

Daphne Okunaga is an exemplary leader who understands the complexities of the Hawaii Department of Education and the diverse needs of our students. I offer my strongest support for her nomination, knowing she will bring thoughtful, principled, and courageous leadership to the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Halfmann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joseph Halfmann
Principal

TO: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair; Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair; and Members of the Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Shaun Kaanoi

HEARING: Monday, March 30, 2026, at 1:00 PM

RE: GM 654 – Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board, Gubernatorial Nominee, Daphne Okunaga.

POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT

Aloha Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shaun Kaanoi. I am testifying today in my individual capacity as a private citizen. The views expressed in this testimony are my own and do not represent the official position of the Department of Education or the State of Hawai'i.

While I am testifying as an individual, I currently serve as the Educational Specialist for Mathematics within the HIDOE Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design, where I am the Program Manager for both the Hawai'i Math Pathways Initiative (HMPI) and the Introduction to College Mathematics (ICM) course. It is from this professional vantage point that I offer my strongest possible support for the confirmation of Daphne Okunaga to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB).

Daphne is an upstanding leader and a "teacher of teachers" whose career reflects the very highest professional standards. I believe she is an ideal fit for the Board for the following reasons:

- **From Practitioner to State Trainer:** Daphne taught the Introduction to College Mathematics (ICM) high school transition course for many years with incredible success before stepping into her current role as an ICM State Trainer. She was instrumental in evolving the curriculum to include high-impact Project-Based Learning (PBL), where students engage in real-world scenarios—from pitching sustainable products to industry panels to navigating the math of securing financial freedom. Historical data for the ICM program has shown that participants enroll in and persist through college at rates higher than the statewide average.
- **A Champion for Equity and Relevance:** As a critical member of the Math Pathways Coalition within the HMPI—a statewide partnership and collaboration comprising HIDOE and University of Hawai'i math educators—Daphne advocates for diversifying rigorous and relevant math options alongside the traditional calculus track. She has been instrumental in our work to propose high school courses like Quantitative Reasoning (a third-year option) and Data Science (a fourth-year option). These course offerings provide students with the mathematical literacy needed to meet their post-secondary aspirations and

diverse career interests, ensuring math serves as a gateway to their future success.

- **Systemic Vision with Hawai'i P-20:** In her current role, she leads the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Math Integration Initiative, where she facilitates robust professional development and builds capacity in school leadership teams. She understands how to integrate rigorous math concepts into CTE so that students are prepared for the 21st-century workforce.
- **Infectious Leadership and Mentorship:** Well-respected across the state, Daphne brings out the best in everyone around her. She operates with a positive, “can-do” influence and a fundamental belief that there is a “math person” in everyone, regardless of their circumstances. A 2017 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) recipient, she consistently “nudges” her colleagues toward national-level excellence, embodying the HTSB’s mission to elevate the teaching profession.
- **Commitment to the Professional Growth Cycle:** Daphne embodies the HTSB’s mission of elevating the profession through her dedication as a lifelong learner. She has consistently translated her own high-level professional development and leadership opportunities—such as her work as an evaluator for the Smarter Balanced Assessment and the Algebra II End-of-Course Exam—into practical classroom implementation. By mastering the ability to bring the Standards for Mathematical Practice and content standards to life through real-world applications and tools like Desmos, she has developed an effective pedagogy that she now shares with educators statewide.

Daphne Okunaga understands that math should be relevant, equitable, and life-changing. Her evolution from a high school teacher to an instructional strategist for Hawai'i P-20—coupled with her infectious energy and dedication to innovation—makes her uniquely qualified to serve on the HTSB.

I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend her confirmation.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shaun Kaanoi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shaun Kaanoi

March 28, 2026

GM 654- HTSB Nominee Daphne Okunaga

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board nominee Daphne Okunaga.

As a high school math teacher with twenty years of teaching experience, working in a public school on the Big Island, I strongly support Mrs. Okunaga's nomination to the HTSB.

I first had the opportunity to work with Mrs. Okunaga when our school signed up to offer Intro to College Mathematics, a new high school course created by the community colleges to help students find more success in their transition to higher education. Mrs. Okunaga had been piloting the course and was helping to run our introductory sessions. As an educator who had been to many, many trainings over the years, I found Mrs. Okunaga's portion of the session to be highly engaging, thought provoking and inspiring. I left feeling more confident as an educator, and more motivated to push my students to excel.

Working with Mrs. Okunaga over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to observe how committed she is to helping our teachers become better and more effective. She is always professional, always encouraging and always pushes her colleagues to think in ways that will best help their students to find success. Because of her many years of experience in the secondary math classroom, her ability to think flexibly and work with different stakeholders, and the various leadership roles she has held, I do not believe you will find a stronger candidate.

After her many years of experience teaching mathematics on the island of O`ahu, Mrs. Okunaga chose to take on an even bigger challenge to help educators across the state through her role as an instructional strategist with Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education. Through this role, Mrs. Okunaga has worked with many schools on the outer islands, which gives her a robust understanding of the schools in our state and their needs. Our math department always finds our time with Mrs. Okunaga to be helpful and directly impactful on our work with students. Because of our time with her, our classrooms are more engaging and our curriculum is more accessible to our students. Within our math department, Mrs. Okunaga has helped to establish a community in which we share insights and work together on initiatives.

Mrs. Okunaga has a lot to offer by serving on the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board, including her many years of experience, her passion for excellence and her dedication to the educational systems in Hawai'i. I do not believe you will find a more qualified or well-rounded candidate, and I urge you strongly to consider her for this position.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Christina Rossman". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Christina Rossman
High School Math Teacher

GM-654

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 10:21:41 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/30/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Ishihara	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senate Chair Donna Mercado Kim and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am Patricia Ishihara, a colleague of Daphne Okunaga.

I am testifying in favor of confirmation of Daphne Okunaga to the Hawai'i Teachers Standards Board.

I first met Daphne when she was a member of the Hope Street Teacher Fellowship, during which time she was already advocating for what is best for students as well as teachers. Since that first meeting, I have seen Daphne continue to seek ways to create relevant and rigorous experiences for students. Always a learner herself, she has deep faith that all students can rise to any goal they set their minds to do, and with her no-nonsense but caring way, she has seen them through time and time again.

Daphne's passion translates into impacting teacher instruction. Her belief in her students often puts her in circumstances where the otherwise humble Daphne would step forward to strongly advocate for what is right for students, and what is right for teachers in service of what's best for students. She inspires others, holding herself to high expectations as a learner and doer, and in turn lifts up everyone around her as individuals, and more importantly as a learning community, to realize their full potential. In this way, she has been a tremendous teacher leader.

Daphne's experience, her humility, her belief in and advocacy for students and teachers, her ability to positively impact the growth of others around her, and her passion for making teaching and learning a truly engaging experience speaks highly of the value she will bring as a member of the Hawai'i Teachers Standards Board.

Respectfully submitted for your consideration,

Patricia Ishihara