



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

May 14, 2021

TO: Principals

FROM: Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto
Superintendent

A blue ink signature of Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto.

SUBJECT: **In-Person Learning for School Year 2021-22**

As we prepare to close out the school year 2020-2021, I would like to acknowledge and say mahalo to our school leaders and their teams for leading us through another challenging academic year dominated by COVID.

We had high hopes of starting this school year with in-person and blended learning models, knowing how disruptive it was to our students and families to have to shut down our campuses last school year. But due to conditions at the time, nearly all schools implemented online learning models on Day 1, something our system had never undertaken before.

Our educators rose to the challenge and we saw incredible examples of innovation and a shared commitment to ensuring high-quality learning continued, all while addressing new or increased social and emotional needs of our students.

Our schools also grappled with the new reality of responding to COVID cases on campuses. Despite more than 800 cases reported by schools and offices since June 2020, consistent adherence to safety protocols has meant that — to date — no transmission of the virus has occurred at a Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) facility.

As COVID conditions evolved and more health guidance for education settings became available, schools began transitioning to blended learning models beginning in Quarter 3. As we reached the one-year mark of the health crisis, improving conditions along with science-backed research and updated guidance allowed us to set the goal of safely ramping up in-person learning opportunities at elementary schools during Quarter 4.

Getting to this point has been tough but the results are validating. I have been visiting elementary campuses across the islands the past few weeks. It has been a great source of joy to hear the sounds of students engaged in learning and interacting with peers, their teachers, and their support

teams, in classrooms and on playgrounds. It has also been reassuring to see our youngest learners dutifully practicing mitigation strategies such as hand-washing protocols, consistent masking, and distancing when appropriate.

We also now have an added layer of protection with COVID vaccinations more widely available to Hawaii residents, and the recent approval of the vaccine for adolescents ages 12 and older, who make up roughly half of our student population.

Hawaii appears to be turning the corner as case numbers continue to drop, more residents are getting vaccinated, the economy is starting to recover, and restrictions on gatherings and other precautions are slowly easing.

While it is not a time to let our guard down, it is time to commit to resuming a sense of normalcy as we look ahead to the fall. In guidance published in December 2020, officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that given the disproportionate impact school closures have on communities with the least economic means, public schools should be the last settings to close and the first to reopen.

We wholeheartedly agree. Our schools play a critical role in providing students a safe learning space for social connections and cognitive and personal development. Therefore, for the school year 2021-2022 scheduled to begin on August 3, 2021, the expectation is that **all HDOE schools will be fully open for daily, in-person learning**. This also includes resuming co-curricular and extracurricular activities such as clubs, band, and athletics at all schools.

This approach means that schools will not be offering a full distance learning model as an alternative to in-person learning for the school year 2021-2022. Distance learning may be an option if schools have to close due to unexpected emergencies or other student-focused circumstances as needed.

We must remain vigilant in our efforts to keep our school communities safe. We have worked closely with the Hawaii State Department of Health, which provided guidance prioritizing **three core essential strategies to be implemented in every situation**: Directing students and staff to stay home when sick, consistent mask-wearing, and proper hand hygiene. We will continue to work with health leaders as mitigation strategies continue to be studied and refined.

When prevention strategies are consistently and correctly used, the risk of transmission in school environments is decreased even further. Our schools have proven to be safe spaces and our students are eager and ready for this transition. Let's work together to make this happen.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to our students.

CMK:nk
c: Deputy Superintendent
Assistant Superintendents
Complex Area Superintendents