



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

April 29, 2020

Ms. Cheri Nakamura
Hui for Excellence in Education
4348 Waiialae Avenue, Suite 322
Honolulu, Hawaii 96816

Dear Ms. Nakamura:

Since Governor David Ige's initial emergency proclamation in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) has placed the health and safety needs of our students and staff as its highest priority. During the past five weeks since the Governor's "stay-at-home, work-at-home" mandate, Hawaii's economy and way of life has come to a sudden and catastrophic halt. This crisis continues to leave an indelible and devastating effect on members of our HIDOE 'ohana, most especially our haumāna.

Both the Hawaii State Board of Education (Board) and HIDOE have acted with haste to secure the health and safety of our HIDOE 'ohana while implementing a response to the abrupt loss of in-class instructional days and securing sources of food for our students. Our initial food distribution sites came online within a week of the first stay-at-home proclamation and we have since increased our meal distribution to 74 sites across the state. While coordinating this critical meal delivery endeavor, our leadership team was simultaneously conducting daily virtual meetings with staff at the state, complex area, and school levels to immediately develop a plan to ensure the continuity of learning in light of the unanticipated and immediate loss of classroom instruction. These daily meetings resulted in a multi-faceted approach that includes the distribution of educational materials, created and compiled by our outstanding teachers, both online and via instructional packets; resources for students, families, and staff available through our Continuity of Education website and individual school websites; and educational programming broadcasted on television.

As you may be aware, many of our families are juggling a multitude of challenges both at home and at work. Our goal in implementing the distribution of both food and educational materials for students was to provide both ease of access while limiting the exposure of students, families, and staff to COVID-19 infection through strict adherence to the guidelines issued by the Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention. Every critical decision was centered around doing what was within our control to mitigate pressure on our HIDOE families for the duration of the pandemic.

As this crisis progresses and we react to rapidly changing conditions, shortcomings in our system are revealed. Instituting a more permanent platform to effectively execute distance learning throughout our public school system has become a clear necessity. The diversity of the communities and the student population we serve requires flexibility to adequately adapt to the unique needs of our schools. This allows us to hone in on our most vulnerable student populations who are in most need of support. Establishing an effective system that ensures equity of access and the continued academic progress of all students through distance learning without hindering any momentum towards achieving their educational goals is essential.

The HIDOE is currently working to obtain a comprehensive distance learning platform, which every school can implement in parallel with traditional in-class instruction. Leaders at the complex area level are working with principals to assess the capacity of their schools to institute distance learning by the start of the upcoming 2020-2021 school year. Plans to include variations of distance learning for summer school instruction are currently under development. We are also committed to providing credit recovery and credit attainment opportunities with continued attention to seniors who require extra support as they prepare to graduate and proceed with post-secondary educational and workforce opportunities.

Throughout this process, we have been in regular contact with our relevant stakeholders, including our students and their families, the members of Hawaii's congressional delegation, Governor Ige, members of the Hawaii State Legislature, the United States Department of Education, the Hawaii State Teachers Association, the Hawaii Government Employees Association, and other community and business organizations. This communication and collaboration have been critical in forging a path ahead during this unprecedented time. The dialogue we have engaged in with our partners has proven effective in assisting us with developing policy solutions and making budgetary decisions for the Board's consideration.

As Superintendent, I am exceedingly humbled and awestruck by the dedication, commitment, and innovation of our entire organization. While many similarly-situated organizations were struggling with the concept of teleworking, our capable and devoted staff and faculty were able to coordinate and execute alternate plans in the face of sudden challenges. This ingenuity and desire to connect with their respective communities is evident in the dedicated outreach which is uniquely individualized on school websites and based on the strong relationships that exist between the schools and their communities. Together with our tremendous aforementioned partners, we are successfully prioritizing and addressing the needs of our students during this extraordinarily difficult and chaotic time. The dedication of our frontline teachers who continue to innovate their content and methodology to reach all of their students and meet their educational and social emotional needs is nothing short of inspiring. Collectively, they are more than just educators; they are also mentors, counselors, and cheerleaders.

Ms. Cheri Nakamura
April 29, 2020
Page 3

I am pleased that you are in regular contact with members of the HODOE's staff as you seek answers to similar questions that every school district across the country struggles to address. Please keep the HODOE updated with any suggestions or constructive plans your organization may have to assist in addressing the unique challenges that our communities face today. Thank you for your continued interest in our public school system.

Sincerely,



Dr. Christina Kishimoto
Superintendent

CMK:wk

c: The Honorable Catherine Payne, Chairperson, Board of Education
Members of the Hawaii State Board of Education
Members of the Hawaii Congressional Delegation