



June 25, 2020

2850 Kahawai Street
Honolulu, HI 96822

808 988 5505
www.pps-hi.org

Lois Yamauchi
President

Kashmira Reid
Vice President

Erin Yagi
Secretary

Ernestine Enomoto
Treasurer

Deborah Bond-Upson

Kay Fukuda

Clare Hanusz

Mary Weir

Susan Wood

The Honorable David Y. Ige
Governor, State of Hawai'i
State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 69813

Dear Governor Ige,

With over 1,000 members statewide, Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i (PPS Hawai'i) is a non-profit organization focused on supporting and improving public education through family engagement. Our group emerged from the Furlough Friday crisis in 2009, and since that time, we have been engaged in advocacy and service for families in the public schools. We view public schools as fundamental to the well-being of our children and families, but also to our democratic way of life.

I am writing in regard to our State's receipt of federal relief funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. We ask that CARES Act and additional relief funds for schools and students be allocated equitably to address the unique learning needs of students from marginalized communities.

We further request that a plan for the proposed use of these funds be made available to the general public and that you create opportunities for students, families, and advocates to have meaningful input into the plan for how these funds shall be distributed and used. Finally, we ask that the Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) create working groups or task forces to assist in addressing the particular funding needs of the special populations mentioned herein. PPS Hawai'i would welcome the opportunity to participate in such an endeavor.

As you consider how funds are spent out of the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, we make the following recommendations below to aid you in ensuring educational equity, particularly in your consideration of Part C of the Certification and Agreement for Funding out of the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund. Specifically, the recommendations relate to remote instruction for students with the greatest needs (Part C1a), students with disabilities, students from low-income families (Part C1b), English Learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care (Part C2a). These recommendations also may inform the DOE as they consider Part D4 of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund Certification and Agreement for Funding application, which requires an explanation for how local education agencies will provide services that permit students, teachers and other program beneficiaries to overcome barriers, including those based on gender, race, color, national origin, disability and age, that impede equal access to, or participation in, the program.

Recommendations

Target Funds Equitably. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated many educational inequities long felt by students of color, English learners, students from families with limited incomes, immigrant students, and students experiencing homelessness, among others. Emergency relief funds should be targeted to meet the needs of the student groups most impacted by the inequities that are being amplified by the pandemic. COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Provide the equipment, connectivity services, and technical training that students and families need to engage in at-home learning, especially in rural communities with more limited access to the Internet.
- Ensure compensatory and remedial education services for students to mitigate the impact of school closures on academic success.
- Provide resources and support for English language learners and their families, including progress assessments, translated materials and access to multiple modes of learning.
- Increase resources for community colleges that may not receive the funds they need due to the funding formulae in the CARES Act.
- Increase funding for programs in the Every Student Succeeds Act and other federal education laws that were created to address inequities and meet the educational needs of multilingual learners, students of color, students from families with limited incomes, and others with special needs.
- Limit requests for waivers of federal law to those that are absolutely necessary to address the immediate needs of the people of the State and ensure those waivers do not harm students and families.

Connect Students and Families to Supports and Services. Local education agencies and institutions of higher Education meet many of the life needs of students and families, including through mental health supports, nutritional services and childcare services.

COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Increase access to counselors, social workers, and other mental health professionals and reliable telemedicine services that can provide critical care and service referrals to students, families, and educators.
- Provide food and healthcare to students and families, through direct payments, nutritional support programs like the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program, meal services and transportation supports.

Ensure Accountability and Transparency. Recipients of emergency funds must be held to accountability and transparency standards, even as they are given some flexibility to spend funds quickly to meet the needs of their communities. Accountability and transparency measures should include requirements that you and the DOE distribute funds equitably and use emergency funds to supplement, not supplant, State school funds. Recipients should detail distribution criteria, use of funds, and transparency and accounting measures. This is a critical part of mitigating COVID-related economic downturn will likely have on school funding systems.

Foster Family Connections to Schools. Schools should always work to ensure deep and meaningful engagement with families. That engagement is now more important than ever, especially as education agencies identify ways to address extended lost learning time. Schools must be able to communicate with students and families, even as they comply with social distancing requirements. COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Support programs to locate and communicate with students and families who have not had contact with their schools since closures began.

- Fund student and family support liaisons who are solely tasked with assuring that student and family well checks, surveying family needs, and sharing critical policy and practice updates with families.

Plan for the Next School Year. Looking toward the opening of the 2020-21 school year, COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Develop non-punitive diagnostic assessment systems and professional development so that teachers can determine the extent of student learning during school closures; and
- Support Statewide planning for educational continuity, including after school and summer learning, compensatory education, and remedial education plans, especially for students of color, English learners, students from families with limited incomes, immigrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and students in the juvenile justice and foster care systems.

Again, thank you for your consideration and the work you are doing to address the COVID-19 crisis in our State. We at PPS Hawai'i are available to support your efforts to support students, families and schools during the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath. We are currently collaborating with the DOE Community Engagement Office to provide our parent engagement program online. We hope that you will call on us to continue to work to support families in our State during these difficult times.

Sincerely,



Lois A. Yamauchi, PhD
President
Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i

Parents for Public Schools Hawaii (PPSHI) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) volunteer organization of parents, community members, and educators working to improve and support public education through family engagement. We are committed to ensuring all children in Hawai'i have access to a quality public education.