

**Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i**  
**Parent and Family Thoughts on Schools Reopening**  
**September 2020**

**Executive Summary**

Using an online survey, Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i (PPSH) surveyed parents and families for their thoughts and concerns on schools reopening for the 2020-21 School Year during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 585 family members responded to the survey offered from August 25 to September 8, 2020. The respondents' children attended public schools in Honolulu, Central O'ahu, Leeward, Windward, Hawai'i island, Maui/Molokai/Lanai, Kauai, and charter schools, as well as private schools.

Of the respondents' children:

48% were elementary school learners,

29% high school students,

21% middle schoolers, and

3% preschoolers.

11% were in special education and

7% spoke a language other than English as their first language.

Respondents were asked to rate how concerned they were about various issues related to the schools reopening. Their top five concerns were:

- 1) Children's social and emotional needs;
- 2) Children not learning what they were supposed to learn this year;
- 3) Health and safety of teachers and staff;
- 4) Motivation during virtual learning; and
- 5) Children's health and safety in school.

Most respondents (54%) also provided comments about their experiences. While some families did want their children to return to school as usual, more people reported not feeling that it was safe to return for face-to-face schooling, citing concerns about the health and safety of children, faculty and staff.

Family members noted the shortcomings of distance learning, including concerns about online teaching and learning, criticisms of the Acellus program, accommodations for multiple children in one household, concern for children's social-emotional needs, teaching inconsistencies, and too much screen time.

Many families reported that planning and/or communications were confusing or inconsistent.

Families say they obtained information about school changes primarily from:

- 1) Emails and text messages from their children's schools,
- 2) School websites, and
- 3) Phone calls, emails and texts from their children's teachers.

## **Overview**

A total of 585 family members responded to an online survey administered by the non-profit organization Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i (PPSH) in order to solicit families' concerns about school reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic, while children were sheltering at home. Family members responded to questions about their children's grade levels, the school districts that their children attended, whether they received Special Education services, and were non-English speakers. Respondents rated 11 concerns including children's health and safety at school, having adequate computers and internet resources, and children learning at home. They also reported how they received information about their children's schools and classes. An open ended question asked for general comments.

The survey was conducted from August 25 to September 8, 2020 and was distributed through our PPSH website via an online newsletter and social media. A survey link was provided to PPSH partner organizations like the Hui for Excellence in Education (HE'E), the Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance, the Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA), Parent, Teacher, and Student Association (PTSA) who shared the survey with their members. Only 17% of the survey respondents were PPSH members; 30% of respondents requested to become members. We noted that as the survey was conducted exclusively online, it required respondents to have a device and internet access.

## **Information about the Respondents' Children**

Chart 1 shows where respondents' students (n=1,152) went to school. Note that Maui District includes students on Maui, Moloka'i and Lanai'i. Chart 2 indicates that the families had children who were mostly in elementary grades K-5 (46.7%), with others in high school grades 9-12 (28.6%), middle school grades 6-8 (21.4%) and PreK (3.4%). Total by grade level is 1,152. Of all students represented, 11% received special education services and 7% spoke a first language that was different than English. Chart 3 shows where these children went to school.

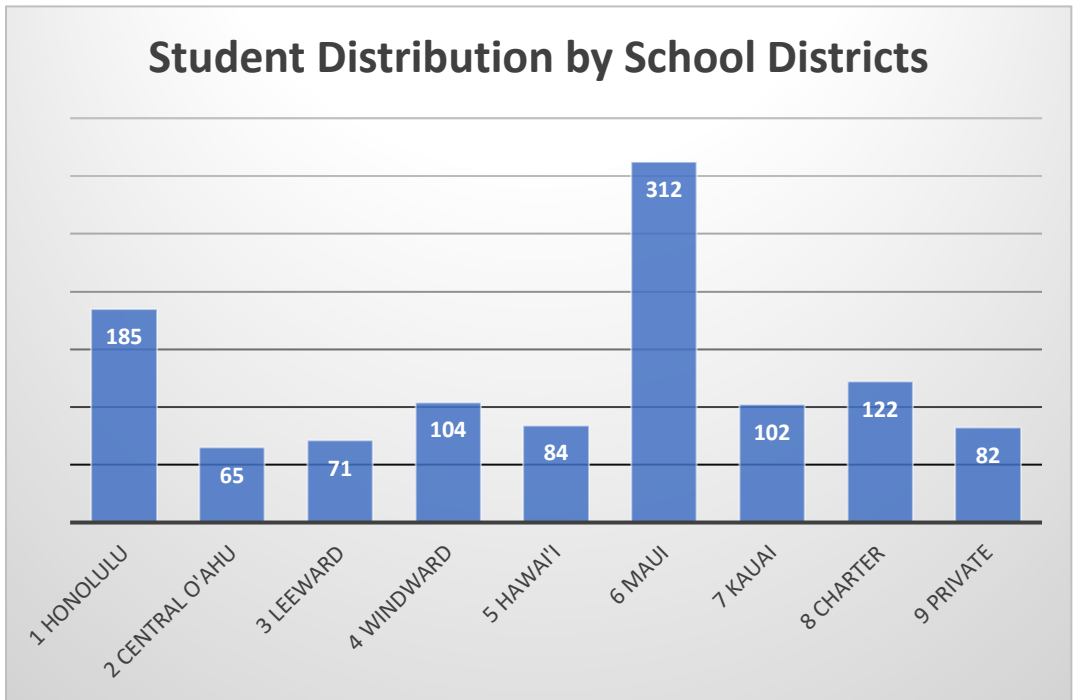


Chart 1 Number of Students by School Districts

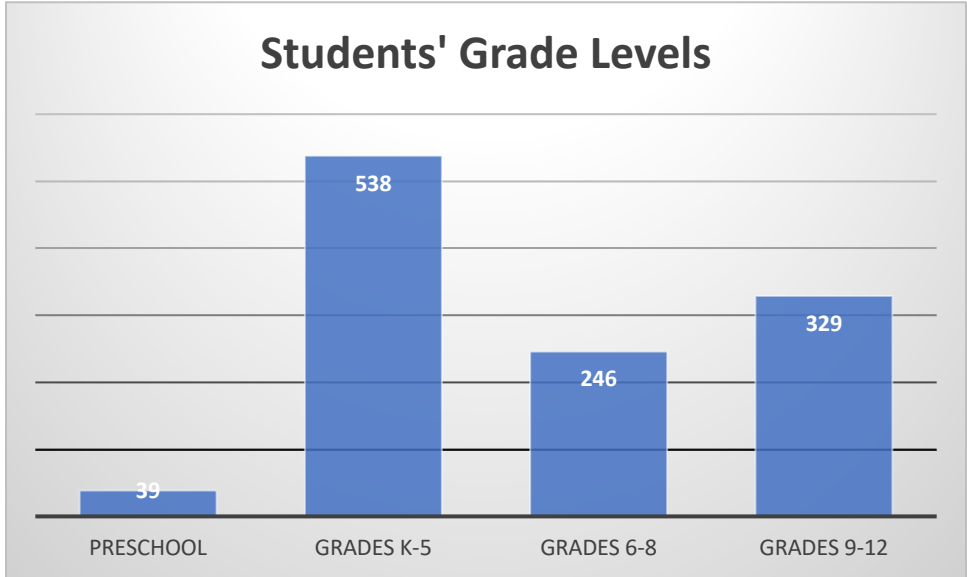


Chart 2 Number of Students by Grade Levels

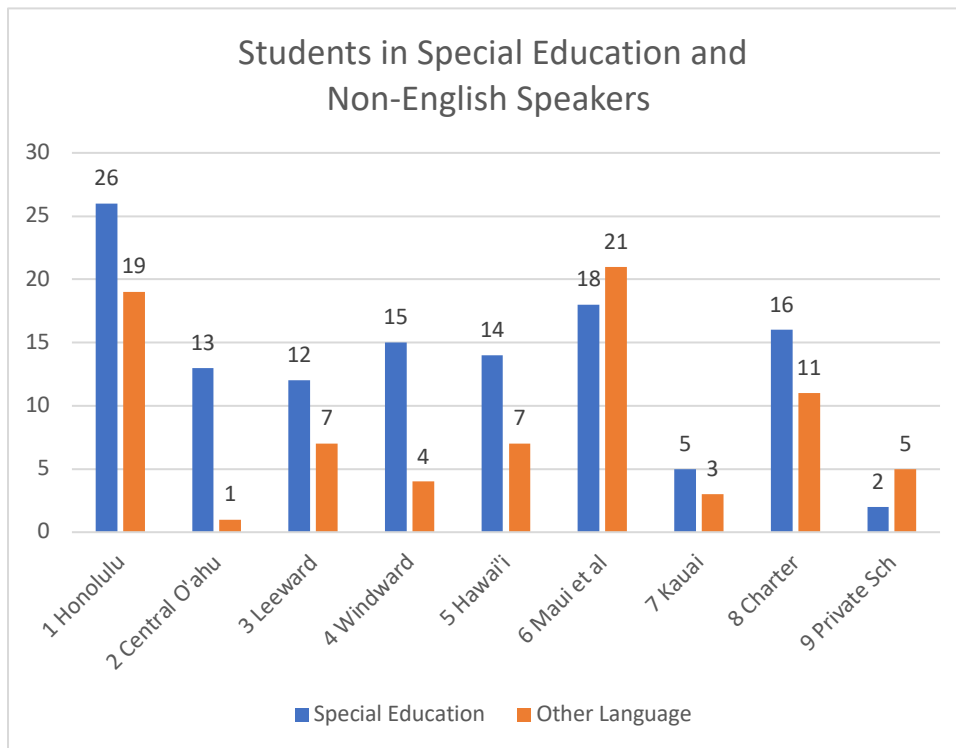


Chart 3 Students receiving Special Education services and Students who were non-English language speakers across the school districts

### Families' Concerns

Families indicated their concerns during the pandemic by rating statements on a scale from 1=Not concerned to 5=Very concerned. Based on weighted averages to rank order the 11 concerns, the top five concerns were 1) Children's social and emotional needs (4.11); 2) Not learning what they were supposed to learn this year (3.94); 3) Health and safety of teachers and staff (3.92); 4) Motivation during virtual learning (3.89); and 5) Children's health and safety in school (3.80). See Table 1 below.

	1=Not concerned	2=Little concern	3=Neutral	4=Concerned	5=Very	Total	Weighted Average
Children's health & safety	11.15% 65	12.69% 74	8.58% 50	19.73% 115	47.86% 279	583	3.80
Health & safety of teachers, staff	7.55% 44	11.49% 67	10.81% 63	21.44% 125	48.71% 284	583	3.92
Adequate computers for school	36.79% 213	10.54% 61	18.48% 107	17.44% 101	16.75% 97	579	2.67

Adequate internet	35.45% 207	13.18% 77	13.87% 81	18.84% 110	18.66% 109	584	2.72
Lacking childcare while at work	29.55% 172	10.65% 62	11.34% 66	17.01% 99	31.44% 183	582	3.10
Receiving current information about school	21.75% 127	13.70% 80	19.01% 111	24.83% 145	20.72% 121	584	3.09
Helping children learn at home	8.73% 51	13.70% 80	10.10% 59	24.66% 144	42.81% 250	584	3.79
Children's social emotional needs	5.33% 31	9.28% 54	7.56% 44	24.91% 145	52.92% 308	582	4.11
Not learning what supposed to learn	9.08% 53	9.59% 56	9.76% 57	21.23% 124	50.34% 294	584	3.94
Not having a teacher to guide in virtual learning	15.09% 88	13.55% 79	14.41% 84	23.33% 136	33.62% 196	583	3.47
Motivation during virtual learning	7.89% 46	11.66% 68	9.78% 57	24.87% 145	45.80% 267	583	3.89

Table 1: Concerns about Schools Reopening

### Comments about Concerns

Supplementing these ratings, respondents had the option of commenting on the reopening of schools. Many respondents did support returning to normal school routines. For example, a Honolulu parent with two elementary youngsters wrote, *“Please open the schools for our children! This situation is not acceptable in the long run, it is hurting everybody. We can do masks, social distancing, but please OPEN!”* This appeared especially so from neighbor island respondents where the COVID numbers were lower than on O’ahu. One respondent said, *“I believe schools should open depending on their own districts, Kauai is pretty safe and i don't see why we would not be able to have face to face.”*

However, many respondents felt that it was not safe to resume school in the face-to-face mode and that the health and safety of children, faculty and staff were of primary concern. The respondents' voices were adamant that children's health and safety were their first priority. For example, a charter school parent said *"I am worried about my kids' health. I can't afford to have my kids get sick especially first grade child."* A Hawai'i respondent with six children wrote, *"I wouldn't let my children go to school at this time, it is too soon and unsafe."* The message of safety came notably from health care professionals like one nurse with children in a Honolulu public school who commented, *"As being in the medical field, RN-I strongly feel the need to think of our children's, teacher's, faculty/staff's SAFETY 1st and their families especially here in Hawaii, many have extended families within their homes including Kupunas."*

Also of concern were the faculty and staff at the schools. A Kauai respondent with two elementary youngsters wrote, *"At this point, I feel that the health, safety and well-being of not only the students, but faculty and staff as well should be our number one priority. I feel that the safest/best way to achieve this would be 100% distance learning for the rest of the school year. I understand that some families are unable to be at home or find semi-permanent child care during "school" hours. For me, it's black and white."*

Other families stated many concerns with distance learning including concerns about online teaching, criticism of the Acellus program, accommodating multiple children in one household, addressing social-emotional needs, teaching inconsistencies, and too much screen time. These comments are highlighted below.

- 1. Shortcomings of the Distance Learning Option:** While respondents generally preferred keeping their children at home engaged in distance learning, numerous short comings with online learning were cited. For example, one Kauai respondent wrote about the challenges experienced with a 4<sup>th</sup> grader. *"Distance learning has been a challenge for my 4th grade child and myself. It's near impossible to balance the necessary supervision and interaction required to keep my child on task and understanding the course material while simultaneously working full-time. I think the teacher is doing the best she can considering the circumstances; however; distance learning is a far distance second to in-person learning."* The same sentiment was echoed for those with younger children, for parents working from home, for those with limited childcare and no adult supervision. Families worried about safety and were also concerned that education might be lacking. A Hawai'i island mother said, *"I worry for my child's health and safety but do not want her to be behind this year because the distance learning is virtual meeting only once a week with her teacher."* A Maui respondent with two elementary children commented, *"I work full-time and feel like it's almost impossible to balance work and distance learning. I hope that schools can open up in the near future but in a safe environment for the children and staff."*
- 2. Critique of Acellus Distance Learning Program:** Notably, some respondents commented about the Acellus distance learning option used by the DOE which had been covered in the local newspapers during the time of the survey. While there were those who felt the

individualized learning program was adequate, most of those commenting felt that there needed to be other alternatives. One respondent from Central O’ahu wrote, *“Acellus is a huge concern. Aside from the controversial racist, sexist and inaccurate content, the program does not have any writing incorporated. Writing is one of THE most critical skills. These children will fall behind. My wish is that all public schools would allow a virtual learning option with actual live Hawaii DOE teachers.”* The preference was to have a classroom teacher delivering the lessons, not using this distance learning program.

- 3. Multiple Children in One Household:** The frustration of families with more than one child at home was particularly evident. A Leeward O’ahu respondent with two in public schools commented *“I am concerned about my children’s health and safety as well as their education. It seems my 4th and 7th grader (are) struggling. I feel like I am failing them as my husband and I need to work as we are essential workers and the teachers assume an adult is home (helping) the children navigate systems that the teachers aren’t very familiar with. I am pulling 10 hour shifts and have to come home to my 4th and 7th grader emotional stressed because they are struggling. We are up until 11p nightly doing work.”* At the same time, many respondents were adamant that they needed their children to be safe. For example, one Honolulu respondent said, *“With three children at home, working fulltime and facilitating their educational needs is very difficult. But the risks of sending them to in-person school are simply too high.”*
- 4. Social-Emotional Needs of Children:** For children of all ages from kindergarten to high school, many commented that distance learning limited their social interaction and emotional development. An elementary school parent from Maui suggested that *“We’re missing developmental milestones in children development.”* A Leeward parent of an elementary age child said, *“I want him to be in a school setting interacting with peers and teachers. I’m concerned about his emotional and psychological health when he returns back to school. Will he change his perception of school when he goes back next school year.”* This Windward O’ahu respondent said, *“As a parent of teenagers, I’m concerned about their lack of socialization with friends and how it effects them emotionally. Also, with school online and homework online they are sitting at the computer for 5-7+ hours a day.”*
- 5. Teaching Inconsistencies Noted:** Respondents commented about the teaching inconsistencies they observed within the same schools and school complex areas. They also noted a lack of communication about curriculum and work expectations. As a Honolulu respondent of three children stated, *“Schools all need to be teaching the same work to students regardless of (their) doing Acellus or virtual with a teacher. There is no consistency and kids are going to fail because of this year’s schooling. The internet connection for online glitches, kids are having a hard time with things right now. Something needs to change and fast!”* At the same time, there were comments about how teachers were not given the *“direction, information, time to plan and resources”* that were necessary. A Maui elementary school father stated, *“Distance learning is too dependent on the individual teacher. It really seems they are on their own to figure it*

out.” Responses ranged from compliments about “*teachers and administrators doing a fabulous job*” to criticism for “*teaching 2 hours total a day video class lessons, 30 minutes each group...no correction, checking in etc.*”

- 6. Too Much Screen Time:** With children spending entire days on their devices, respondents were concerned about eye strain, headaches, and other problems associated with prolonged screen time. A Maui parent of two high schoolers responded, “*Our kids are on computers for 6 hours a day and add another 2 hours for homework. Why are our kids being given more work? That's a total of 8 hours per day. That's way too much screen time. They should be given lessons/tasks that can be completed within the time frame of regular school hours. Too much screen time is not healthy for our kids.*” Similarly, a Maui father said, “*Children need social interaction. In these modern times it is difficult enough to keep them off screens. Distance learning is programming our children to sit in front of a screen all day. What a terrible life.*”

Various other comments made by respondents were about computer needs, poor internet connectivity or disrupted service, motivation necessary to keep children focused online, parents needing support in the way of guidance and direction from the teachers or school. Other comments related to special education needs not being met. A Windward parent with a child receiving SPED services said, “*There is zero plan for SPED virtually. There is a ton of confusion for SPED. I have to make up my own curriculum and teach it. It is ridiculous and we need help immediately.*”

In summary, although some called on school officials to reopen schools for face-to-face instruction, respondents generally felt that it was not safe to do so and that the health and safety of children, faculty and staff were of primary concern. At the same time, the shortcomings of distance learning for families resounded throughout the many comments including concerns about online teaching and learning, criticism of the Acellus program, accommodations for multiple children in one household, concern for children’s social-emotional needs, teaching inconsistencies, and too much screen time.

### **Where Families Get Information About Their Schools**

The survey asked families where they found information about their schools and their children’s learning during the pandemic. Chart 4 shows that of the ten information sources, the top three ways that respondents received information was from: 1) their schools through email and text messages; 2) their schools’ websites; and 3) from their children’s teachers through phone, email messages, and texts.



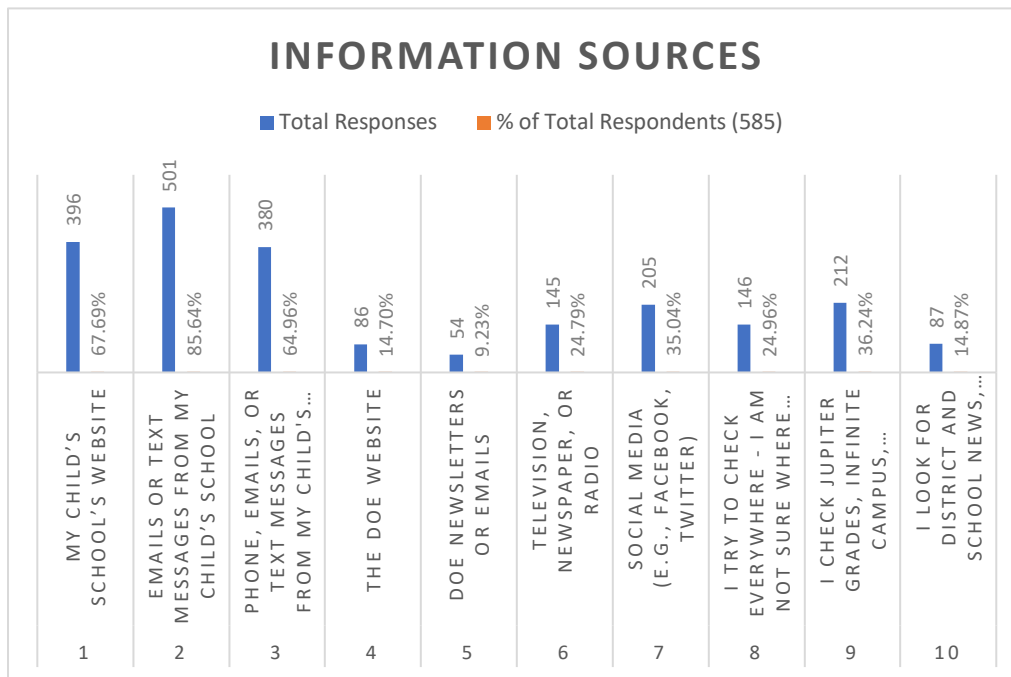


Chart 4: Information Sources

### Mahalo to Families

Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i would like to thank the family members who responded to our online survey. We suggest that the Hawai'i public school leaders draw from these findings as they move forward this school year. We also hope that school leaders will maintain open and two-way communication with public school families to hear their thoughts and concerns in order to work toward equitable and excellent education for the children of our State.