



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

P.O. BOX 2360  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

August 9, 2019

TO: Complex Area Superintendents  
Principals (All)  
Vice Principals

FROM: Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto  
Superintendent

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "CK", is placed over the name "Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto" in the "FROM:" field.

SUBJECT: Suspension Data Concerns

The work you do everyday as key leaders in Hawaii's public school system matters greatly! Mahalo for the incredible care, vision, and leadership that you bring to your school and complex, and for deeply owning your kuleana. In July we held our Educational Leadership Institute (ELI) to kick off this school year and I was incredibly inspired by your response to sharing *Ideas that Transform* in our classrooms, in our schools, and in our communities.

The work that we do as public school leaders happens in the public eye. That means that difficult questions about quality, accountability, and effectiveness may show up in the media, and may be challenged by external organizations and individuals. While we embrace public accountability, we also know that the complex work of educating, supporting, resourcing and loving our children to ensure their success cannot be fully captured in media articles that tell partial stories. Recently, several articles ran regarding suspension rates for our school system that raise important questions that we absolutely agree with, such as, how do we ensure students of particular racial, ethnic or socio-economic groups are not disproportionately represented in our suspension numbers; and how do we ensure that we continue to decrease the number of students who lose instructional time due to suspensions while providing discipline that re-empowers students toward good decision-making?

These questions and conversations are important because they reflect a complex set of situations that are much more significant than counting the changes in incidents year over year. This set of data represents topics that may be difficult for communities to confront. These numbers represent the trauma of generational poverty on our children, the impacts of mental health challenges that our families are struggling with, the devastation of homelessness on our children and their families, and the crisis of drugs and weapons in our community. As public education leaders, you know that we are charged with the health and safety on our campuses, and when children and young people experience trauma, crisis and addictions that require high level community services, we must

respond quickly to ensure both the safety and care of that child in need, while also ensuring the safety of all other children and employees. The speed by which the public school system can respond is in large part reliant on the speed with which other community agencies can provide family counseling, crisis services, drug rehabilitation, housing, mental health services, and so forth. This is the part of the story that is not told in quick media blips, but that we must tell ourselves. The work that you are doing in this area is life-changing, and we must be willing to continue to do more by coordinating statewide services and responsiveness. These are difficult issues, and you have been at the forefront of supporting and loving communities. Mahalo!

Unfortunately, it has come to my attention that erroneous 2015-16 data was submitted by the HIDOE to the USDOE Office of Civil Rights, and the recent media stories cite this incorrect data. I have taken swift action to file a request for correction to the USDOE Office of Civil Rights, so that we can shift conversations to the actual data. Some schools have double or triple counts, and thus our overall correct data for 2015-16 is half the amount of incidents of suspensions in the posted data. The HIDOE values accurate data reporting to ensure equity and quality supports for our students. Our focus will continue to be on using data to inform the review and enhancements of our continuum of quality support services. The work you are doing in this area is impactful and we will continue to seek improvements in order to reduce time away from learning.

As we settle into the 2019-20 school year, I would like to reaffirm the Hawaii DOE's commitment to ensuring our schools have positive climates where our haumana can thrive. As we help our students develop crucial life skills, there will be times when they make poor choices, which is why the Department has wraparound services to address and prevent these types of behaviors. Through our Office of Student Support Services (OSSS) we will continue to provide a variety of proactive and restorative training and programs including:

- **Professional Learning Network-Whole Child:** Social-Emotional Learning: Complex Areas were provided with resources and professional development around identified statewide initiatives.
- **A'o Aloha - Hawai'i Social and Emotional Learning Collaboration:** An inclusive community of practice stakeholder group that strengthens Social-Emotional Learning practice within schools, wraparound services and other community partners by enhancing collaboration, providing technical guidance, informing policy, and leveraging resources.
- **Youth Mental Health First Aid:** Provides complex areas, school, communities and first responders' training/professional development and resources to help a youth in crisis or experiencing a mental health challenge.
- **Response to Intervention (RTI) for Behavior:** RTI training topics include information on alternatives to suspension, understanding bullying and aggression, classroom management principles, school attendance and trauma-informed strategies.

In addition, mahalo for your feedback, review and revision of Chapter 19. Our next step is to provide training to our employees on best practices to support our haumana with these new procedures and to continue our discussions around best practices in supporting students who are involved in situations or experiences that negatively impact their focus on learning to help provide redirection, skill development, supports, and services.

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During this new school year, as we continue to think about how we implement disciplinary measures that support student re-engagement in positive self and community practices, let's continue to seek ways to provide alternative learning environments on or off campus that allow our haumana to keep pace with their academic program. I appreciate your commitment to Hawaii State Board of Education Policy 101-7, which states, "In view of the essential link between instructional time and academic achievement, schools shall strive to keep students in school, in the classroom, and engaged in learning to the greatest extent possible." At the same time, I understand and will continue to advocate for improved cross-agency supports and services for our children and their families, for improved funding to allow for on-campus wrap around services for children, and for staffing allocations to allow for safe and appropriate on-campus in-school suspensions that provide integrated skill development and academic programming.

Mahalo for your continued dedication to deliver on the Department's mission of providing equitable access to a quality public education. In order to fully realize the power and promise of public education, we must continually reflect on our practices, annually improve approaches, and legislatively advocate for the finances and supports needed to address the myriad of societal challenges that impact our students and hamper their ability to fully engage in preparing for their future. Mahalo for being fierce advocates for our public schools!

CMK

c: Deputy Superintendent  
Assistant Superintendents