



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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In reply, please refer to:
File:

July 22, 2020

TO: Honorable Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto
Superintendent, Department of Education

FROM: Bruce S. Anderson, Ph.D. 
Director of Health

SUBJECT: Department of Education Reopening of Schools

The COVID pandemic has presented many new challenges for all organizations. The Hawaii Department of Health appreciates your leadership in making the health and wellbeing of Hawaii's students, teachers and administrators a priority as the Department of Education (DOE) prepares to reopen schools. Hawaii is in an enviable position today with our state having the lowest number of positive cases and deaths per capita in the nation.

Health is understandably an important concern for teachers, students and parents. I was pleased that our State Epidemiologist, Dr. Sarah Park, was able to actively participate in planning sessions with the DOE to carefully and thoughtfully create a plan of action. Dr. Park ensured the school health and safety guidance for your comprehensive Return to Learn plan aligned with recommendations from the DOH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. We believe the Return to Learn plan provides a clear roadmap to restart in-person classroom instruction, while also continuing to offer distance learning to provide equitable access to learning.

As you know, I have also actively supported the opening of schools in Hawaii. The event at Kapolei Middle School last month to showcase was a good opportunity for me to show my support for all the DOE efforts to get ready for reopening. I was very impressed with the attention to safe-distancing details in classrooms, the cafeteria and offices there and have consistently pointed out the importance of in-school learning experiences, particularly during early years at school.

As you have stressed, the Return to Learn plan is a living document. We are learning more about COVID and this pandemic every day and, as we learn more, practices and policies will undoubtedly change. DOH is committed to monitoring best practices and any new guidance that may be available to ensure a healthy environment for students, teachers and staff. Our DOH team of epidemiologists and other health professionals stand ready to provide timely and appropriate support should COVID cases be identified on school campuses--or anywhere else!

Mahalo for your commitment to safety and quality education for Hawaii's children.