Our monthly Ho'ōha'aheo newsletter will temporarily transition to a COVID-focused weekly edition as we strive to provide updates and helpful resources. As students are kept at the forefront of all that we do, we want to ensure employees and school communities are informed. Please keep an eye out for this weekly digital update.

Updates from Interim Superintendent Hayashi

Aloha, HIDOE community!

Please enjoy this edition of the Weekly COVID Updates.

Students Prevail at STN Despite COVID Challenges

» Over the weekend students from 17 of Hawai‘i’s public schools participated and competed in the annual Student Television Network (STN) National Convention.

» Students who compete in the STN competition typically travel to the annual convention’s mainland location. This year, however, the Department provided students a satellite hub at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikīkī Beach Resort to compete virtually due to travel restrictions.

» Despite being unable to attend the hybrid convention in person, Hawai‘i public schools received 36 awards in various digital media and filmmaking categories. To read more about their accomplishments, click here.

Star-Advertiser’s Spotlight Hawai‘i

» On Friday I had a wide-ranging conversation with Yunji de Nies and Ryan Kalei Tsuji on the Honolulu Star-Advertiser’s Spotlight Hawaii livestream program. A recording is available here.

» During the program we discussed the importance of taking care of our students as individuals and caring for their mental health and well-being so that they can learn and thrive on the academic side. We are still in crisis response mode as we continue to work to address the trauma that students, families and staff have endured because of the pandemic.

» The Department is fortunate to have access to federal relief funding designed specifically for addressing the impacts of COVID. Schools and complex areas are implementing efforts that best meet the needs of their school communities, including social-emotional and mental health supports.

Department of Health’s Masking Protocols Continue

» Like all guidelines surrounding COVID-related school policies, mask mandates on campus are informed by the state Department of Health’s (DOH) guidance for schools, which is aligned with CDC’s guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools.

» Based on these guides, we have not been informed of any plans to revise the existing mask policies.
» Should the DOH and CDC make any changes to their guidance for schools, the Department will update our COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidance.

» Some parents and members of the HIDOE community have voiced their support for the continuation of masking mandates in school. The Department values this feedback as we continue our commitment to keeping students safe.

**HIDOE Case Counts**

A total of 311 confirmed or probable cases were reported across Hawai‘i’s 257 public schools from Feb. 14-18 for a daily average of 62 cases (as of Feb. 21). For the latest case count information, visit [bit.ly/HIDOECOVID-19Updates](bit.ly/HIDOECOVID-19Updates).

**Questions of the Week**

**Q:** I heard many schools faced staffing challenges during the omicron surge. How are schools doing now?

**A:** After returning from winter break, many schools experienced staffing challenges. The Department is glad to see school staffing improving across the board this month. While statewide substitute teacher requests hit a daily high of 2,159 in mid-January, numbers have dropped to a daily average of about 1,500 this month. Likewise, in the beginning of January, there was a daily high of 528 unfilled substitute teacher jobs, which has lowered to a daily average of 178 this month. The Department is grateful to all the substitute teachers and school and complex area staff who helped during that challenging time.

**Q:** What will summer school offerings look like this year? Will they have pre-COVID offerings?

**A:** Complex areas and schools are in the process of planning for summer programs, taking into consideration the specific needs of their school communities. Programs will prioritize graduating seniors, students who are academically behind and incoming students in transition grades (kindergarten, grade 6/7, and grade 9). It is anticipated that more information will be available in
April or May. Schools will be communicating these details to families as they become available.

ICYMI

» Since returning to school from winter break in January, substitute teachers have played a huge role in keeping schools open so that our students can benefit from in-person learning. See this the Hawai’i News Now story featuring ‘Ilima Intermediate for more.

» If you are sick, don’t wait. Isolate! Learn more about isolating when sick and use the CDC Coronavirus Self-Checker to help decide whether to seek medical care.

The State of Hawai’i COVID-19 Portal website can be translated into 11 different languages, including Hawaiian. The portal offers current data trends, vaccine information and locations, a test site finder, health information and much more.