

Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander



**HAWAI'I
COVID-19**

Response Recovery Resilience

TEAM

**Hawai'i State Board of Education
Special Meeting
July 30, 2020, 1:00PM**

AGENDA ITEM III.C Board expectations regarding: (1) focusing additional training and professional development days included in the revisions to the Department of Education's 2020-2021 school calendar on health, safety, and distance learning; (2) starting student instruction for the 2020-2021 school year in distance learning mode; (3) mandating masks on public school campuses; and (4) detailed, written, publicly posted guidance from the Department of Health.

**IN SUPPORT OF
A DELAY TO REOPEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS UNTIL SAFETY PROTOCOLS ARE DEVELOPED AND
COMMUNICATED**

Aloha * Talofa * Yokwe * Kaselehlie * Alii * Hafa adai * Mālō e lelei * greetings,

The Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander COVID-19 Response, Recovery, and Resilience Team submits this letter in strong support of a delay to reopen of our public schools until safety protocols, guidance, and alternatives are clearly developed and communicated to educators, families, and students of the Department of Education (DOE) school system.

The Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Hawai'i COVID-19 Response Recovery Resilience Team (NHPI 3R) was established in April 2020, in alignment with the national NHPI Response Team, to improve the collection and reporting of accurate data, identify and lend support to initiatives across the Hawaiian islands working to address COVID-19 among Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and unify to establish a presence in the decision-making processes and policies that impact our communities.

Specifically, we urge the Board of Education (BOE) to recognize and act on the disparities among NHPI communities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, such as:

- The technology and digital learning gaps among our NHPI students,
- The needs of our teachers and staff who are parents and caregivers to return to work safely, and
- The long-standing state of underfunded schools in NHPI areas/communities.

Given the increase in positive cases from June 26 to July 24 of 101% for NH and 81% for PI compared to overall State increase of 58%, we urge the Hawai'i State Board of Education to

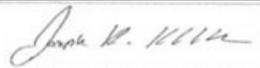
engage our communities to generate a thoughtful and robust plan that is then communicated to all Hawai'i communities, especially the most vulnerable. We envision proactive and effective outreach to maintain health and safety that includes the integration of cultural norms and traditions of our communities, and messaging and educational materials in languages other than English.

COVID-19 and other pandemics throughout human history have taught us many lessons, but most importantly, have shown us that equity and inclusion are at the core of comprehensive responses and effective solutions. As Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) have seen growing numbers of positive cases in the State, we must be equitably represented and engaged in generating solutions to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance.

This pandemic has highlighted the decades of health disparities experienced by NHPI communities throughout Hawai'i. It has impacted NHPI communities, from our keiki to our kūpuna, with devastating impacts to the physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and socio-economic aspects of our lives. Our keiki are disproportionately represented in the public school system, perhaps due to accessibility and affordability. Our families tend to live in multi-generational homes, richly blessed by the love of 'ohana, but face high co-morbidities and social and economic disparities. These factors and more appear to indicate that an outbreak in the public school system could lead to NHPI communities experiencing greater burden from COVID-19.

The DOE is uniquely positioned to help prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by strategically engaging the NHPI communities in generating safety protocols and guidance for prevention and intervention, as well as trainings and resources on multiple modalities of learning. Based on the emerging science and data, the testimonies of the Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) and many others, and a careful analysis by our Policy Committee, the NHPI 3R Team strongly urges the BOE to delay the reopening of our public schools until a clear and comprehensive plan is developed and communicated to all constituents of the Department of Education (DOE) school system.

Respectfully yours,



Joseph Keawe'aimoku Kaholokula
Native Hawaiian Co-Lead



Felea'i Tau
Pacific Islander Co-Lead



Sheri Daniels
Native Hawaiian Co-Lead



Josie Howard
Pacific Islander Co-Lead