



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

September 17, 2020

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The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani
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Dear Members of the Senate Special Committee COVID-19:

The Office of Student Support Services (OSSS), Exceptional Support Branch (ESB), is responding to the following requests from the Senate meeting held on September 11, 2020, regarding:

(1) a response to questions listed in a letter from the Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities (HSCDD) dated September 11, 2020, and (2) a request for dates of meetings available to HSCDD to increase the avenues for discussion between both the HSCDD and Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE).

(1) Response to concerns in the HSCDD letter (Dated 9/11/20):

***TIMELY INFORMATION:** Parents are not receiving crucial information they need to understand the various models of education and instruction being offered to students during this time of change in a timely manner. Parents and caregivers have voiced concerns about the lack of transparency from the HIDOE regarding new policies and procedures for students with disabilities since school closures in March.*

Questions:

- *How will timely dissemination of materials be provided to families from now on?*
- *What is the HIDOE's timeline assuring parents/caregivers receive the necessary information for meaningful participation in their child's special education plan?*
- *Is there a plan in place to offer parent training? If so, what is this timeline? Who will be providing it?*

RESPONSE:

The OSSS, ESB has been meeting regularly for the past several months with various stakeholder groups to ensure that information is both gathered and disseminated to the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) of students with disabilities. These community partners include Leadership in Disabilities and Achievement Hawaii (LDAH), Special Parent Information Network (SPIN), Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), and HIDOE Community Children's Councils (CCCs). Both the LDAH and SPIN receive federal funds to support and train parents of children with disabilities.

The LDAH is Hawaii's United States Department of Education funded parent training and information centers intended to serve parent(s)/legal guardian(s) of children of all ages (birth to 26) and all types of disabilities (5-year competitive award). The SPIN is a parent to the parent organization in the State of Hawaii that provides information, support, and referrals to parent(s)/legal guardian(s) of children with disabilities funded through the HIDOE via a Memorandum of Agreement with the Hawaii State Department of Health. More information can be found at each agency's website:

<https://seac-hawaii.org/>

<https://ldahawaii.org/>

<https://spinhawaii.org/>

[Community Children's Councils](#)

Meetings with these community partners to share information, ideas and to create parent-friendly resources began in April 2020. This work resulted in the posting of the HIDOE documents on parent websites and the development of several infographics on the reopening of schools. These infographics can be found on the Special Parent Information Network (SPIN) website at <https://spinhawaii.org/infographics/school-reopening-infographics/> and the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) at <https://seac-hawaii.org/infographics/>

The HIDOE will continue this collaboration work and expects to engage in additional parent(s)/legal guardian(s) training and support activities.

To provide additional assurances that parent(s)/legal guardian(s) receive timely information, schools will be directed through a memorandum to provide families with the SPIN infographics (hard copy or electronic), resource websites, and phone numbers where updated information can be accessed.

In addition to the targeted parent group work, the HIDEOE has made available to the public its reopening resources and guidance. The Return to Learn: School Reopening Plan which outlines reopening procedures for schools can be found on the [Return to Learn website](#). Procedures for students with disabilities and Special Education Guidance and Resources can be found on the HIDEOE Website at [Special Education Information Page](#).

Schools, complex areas, and our community partners provide ongoing training to parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and community members. The LDAH disseminates updated information and provides training for parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and families including but not limited to every Friday the Parent Talk Cafe and the Traveling Mini-Conference on October 16, 2020. Topics include the impact of COVID-19.

Additionally, the SPIN disseminates Special Education information and resources on its website and is holding the annual SPIN conference for parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and family workshops on October 17, 2020.

The CCC conducts monthly regional meetings to facilitate parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and community partnerships and to share information. OSSS ESB participates by providing a special education update in the Co-Chair Quarterly meeting. The CCC also facilitates the annual Footsteps to Transition Fair scheduled for October 24, 2020, providing additional training for educators, students, parent(s)/legal guardian(s), and families.

INFOGRAPHICS: *have now been created and recently placed on websites (9/08/20) to help support parents with the information they need to make an informed choice.*

Questions:

- *How is HIDEOE reaching parents/caregivers with information other than digitally?*
- *When will printed materials be made available? When will translated versions in other languages be available? Are accessible infographics going to be made available? (i.e. Braille, enlarged print)*
- *What type of system is in place to ensure that all parents/caregivers receive the crucial information in these infographics?*

RESPONSE:

The HIDEOE meetings were held with the SEAC, SPIN, LDAH, and CCC community and development of several infographics on the reopening of schools on the following topics:

- Definitions for learning during a global pandemic;
- Reopening Requirements for Students with Disabilities;
- A Checklist for a Total Distance Learning Plan;
- School Closure Contingency Plan Checklist;
- Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Students with Disabilities;
- Online Learning Options, Parent(s)/Legal Guardian(s) Tips for Virtual Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- Using Technology to Deliver Related Services; and
- 7 Definitions for Learning During Pandemic in Hawaii.

These infographics and others can be found on:

SPIN website at <https://spinhawaii.org/infographics/school-reopening-infographics/>
SEAC at <https://seac-hawaii.org/infographics/>

To provide additional assurances that parent(s)/legal guardian(s) receive timely information, schools will be directed through a memorandum to provide families with the SPIN infographics (hard copy or electronic), resource websites, and phone numbers where updated information can be accessed. This information will be provided at the first student IEP meeting or any other meeting and available at schools. Translation of parent(s)/legal guardian(s) resources into other languages and other formats such as braille are currently being coordinated to ensure access to the information.

CLARIFICATION AND UNDERSTANDING: For HIDOE to be aligned with its mission to ensure all students reach their aspirations and that the Department is student-centered in their decision making we need *clarification and understanding* of the education and instructional model options available to special education students. There have been widely varying and inconsistent models of both by the HIDOE.

Questions:

- *Why has the HIDOE not gone with consistent education options and instructional models? Allowing each individual school to choose their own option causes great confusion. This makes is not only difficult for parents/caregivers to understand.*
- *For example, why does 100% Distance Learning have different meanings at different schools in the same district? Schools have sent letters to families stating the by choosing a Distance Learning Model they are opting out of Special Education; there is a school here on Oahu that gave an education model option to complete Form 4140 and withdraw their child from public education, (students under the age of 14 or middle school age).*
- *It is our position this option should never be used when discussing the choices for a special education student.*
- *Parents/caregivers are being asked to attend meetings to discuss things such as Distance Learning Plans and Contingency Plans, but with no information given to them. Parents and caregivers are expected to address the impact Covid-19 have had on their child's education without knowing that their input from working with their child at home is supposed to be used in this determination.*

RESPONSE:

Schools are obligated to provide all students with disabilities with a free appropriate public education. Guidance with consideration to reopening has been provided to the field to ensure this happens.

Upon reopening, schools were directed via the [SPED: Reopening Schools - Students with Disabilities Return to Learn](#) memo to conduct IEPs and Section 504 meetings within the first quarter for all students with disabilities to:

- Identify what accommodations/modifications, if any, are needed to access instruction given the schools instructional model;

- Develop an individualized contingency plan; and
- Determine if the student has different or additional needs due to COVID-19 school closure.

The IEP revisions must be based on students' needs and not on available instructional models. Parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are considered an integral part of the IEP team with valuable information to contribute. Any decision regarding a student's educational program must be made in collaboration with the parent. When parent(s)/legal guardian(s) do not wish to have their child on a school campus they may opt for total distance learning. In these cases, the IEP team will meet and determine which services can be provided via distance learning; develop a Total Distance Learning Plan (referred to as the Alternative Learning Plan). The IEP will be implemented to the greatest extent possible.

TECHNOLOGY: *We have not heard from a single parent or caregiver stating they've received the necessary training in technology from the HIDOE to support their child's Distance Learning. Many special education students are being cared for by grandparents who may not know about technology. Parents/caregivers may only have a device instead of computers making it difficult to access virtual learning platforms.*

Questions:

- *How will the HIDOE be addressing the overall lack of technology, connectivity, and Internet speed?*
- *Where are the numbers for how many special education students have the necessary technology for Distance Learning? (Surveys conducted earlier this year digital.*
- *How will students who live in rural areas without internet service be accessing their education? The first quarter is more than halfway done.*
- *What about students who are not able to participate in Distance Learning? How will their IEP's and education be provided to them?*
- *Some districts are implementing plans to the best of their ability, but there is no consistency. How is HIDOE going to address this inconsistency?*

RESPONSE:

The HIDOE has made a series of purchases of devices, hotspots, and management systems to address the lack of technology to access education for the highest-need students. Currently, the HIDOE has made three purchases, each of more than 10,000 devices with associated hotspots and management. A fourth purchase is being planned. Each purchase was designed to further close the technology gap, based on the best information available at the time. These purchases were designed to address a variety of vulnerable students, including but not limited to the following categories:

- Special education students;
- English learner students;
- Students on free or reduced lunch, including homeless students; and
- Students are otherwise especially vulnerable to disruptions from the ongoing COVID emergency.

Students in rural areas are having network needs met in a variety of ways, depending on the exact situation in a particular rural area. Approaches include but are not limited to the following:

- Provisioning hotspots with a carrier that provides coverage in that area (e.g., Verizon devices are used on Molokai);
- Working with telecommunications companies to extend wired or cellular access (e.g., ongoing work by Hawaiian Telcom to extend fiber access to Hana);
- Enabling community centers with WiFi access points to allow students to access the network from a nearby hub (e.g., a community center in Ocean View on the Hawaii Island that includes an extension of the Kau High School network);
- Vans or busses outfitted with cellular and WiFi access points to visit the community; and
- Other technical approaches where wired or cellular networks are not available, including long-range WiFi, microwave, and satellite network access.

For students who are not able to participate in Distance Learning, the implementation of the IEP and services will be delivered in person at school. The HDOE has deployed social workers and homeless liaisons to assist in identifying and supporting those students in areas without access to the internet or cellular service.

The consistency of the program approach is balanced with tailoring the needs of the specific community and specific students. Schools provide a program for a specific student but ensure review occurs to meet standards. Challenging issues can be addressed by a Complex Area Superintendent, who can reallocate resources to address unusual situations.

OTHER CONCERNS: *When parents or caregivers have a concern, it is common for them to hear from the school “they aren’t sure or they don’t know,” leaving parents on their own. If parents do try to network, they often can’t help each other because each school is different. There is no consistency or standardized helpline that can support parents and caregivers who are the ones bearing the brunt of supporting their child’s learning at home. This may include learning accommodations or behavior support plans, things the IEP Team has already determined are necessary for a student to access their education. Parents are being asked to participate in meetings with their schools when they may not have access to technology or connectivity.*

- *How is this going to be addressed since there are no in-person meetings at this time?*

In summary, parents and caregivers are reporting a total disconnect at this very stressful time. Having a child with special needs at home 24/7 then having to function as both parent and teacher is a new experience. Most parents report they do not feel equipped to do this.

RESPONSE:

Meetings are being held virtually, telephonically, and when consistent with health and safety guidelines in-person parent(s)/legal guardian(s) or caregivers with a concern or question should contact their child’s teacher or the school administrator. If parent(s)/legal guardian(s) or caregivers are not feeling supported regarding their child’s needs from the school, they can then reach out to their Special Education District Educational Specialist.

The following Hotlines and Resources are available to support parent(s)/legal guardian(s):

- HIDOE Ohana Help Desk (technology concerns): 643-DESK (3375);
- Hawaii Keiki Health Hotline and Telehealth (health and mental health concerns): (844) 436-3888 (toll-free);
- Leadership in Disabilities and Achievement-LDAH (concerns regarding the IEP process): (808) 536-9684 or info@ldahawaii.org; and
- Special Parent Information Network-SPIN (concerns regarding Students with Disabilities): (808) 586-8126 or spin@doh.hawaii.gov.

(2) A complete list of meetings available to HSCDD to increase the avenues for discussion between both the council and HIDOE:

RESPONSE:

On September 15, 2020, Assistant Superintendent Heidi Armstrong of OSSS and the ESB team met with the Chair and the Executive Administrator of HSCDD to provide meeting dates and determine the next steps. A complete list of meetings was made available to HSCDD to increase the avenues for discussion between both the council and HIDOE. Continued partnership and collaboration were agreed upon in moving forward to address the needs of parents and families.

(3) Status update and expected completion dates for the Pandemic Handbook revisions and email hub to collect feedback on remaining gaps in protocol implementation.

RESPONSE:

Pandemic Plan: The HIDOE appreciates the feedback from our stakeholders and is aware that the Pandemic Contagious Virus Plan needs to be updated in order to reflect the changing guidance for the current COVID-19 situation. After discussing the intent of the plan and the next steps to ensure all guidance documents are aligned, the HIDOE leadership determined that the plan needs to incorporate a broader set of guidelines that will inform the HIDOE leadership on their role and responsibilities during any pandemic situation, not just with COVID-19. The goal is to create an evergreen document that will outline the scope of work at each level of the HIDOE.

With that in mind, the HIDOE is revising its pandemic plan and, barring any delays during the review process will have a final version ready to share with the public and this committee by the end of October.

This does not mean that the HIDOE is operating without a plan during the current pandemic. The Return to Learn Plan, which includes the Principal Handbook and Health & Safety Handbook, serves as the guiding document with specific protocols and procedures for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our goal is to incorporate best practices and lessons learned during the response to COVID-19 into the revised pandemic plan. It will also have a broader focus on response procedures. This will help create an evergreen plan that will inform future teams on how to implement successful systems of support based on the specific symptoms and spread of the virus. It will

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also, help reduce confusion as it will be one fewer document stakeholders need to reference during the current pandemic to get the latest guidelines.

Email Hub: An email account was created for COVID-19 specific inquiries; however, it has not been officially rolled out yet as the HIDOE is determining the best way to utilize this communication tools and how to properly staff it.

The HIDOE already has a number of two-way communication channels it manages that stakeholders can use to share any concern, including HIDOE-specific COVID-19 issues. They include the HIDOE's primary email account (doeinfo@k12.hi.us), messaging on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram), and the main phone line, (808) 784-6200. The HIDOE's directory was recently updated to a digital format allowing stakeholders to reach specific offices (<https://portal.k12.hi.us/phonedirectory>).

In light of these existing two-way communication options, the HIDOE was evaluating how a dedicated COVID-19 specific communication channel would work and whether or not it would be staffed properly to ensure timely responses. The update from the Superintendent about this project meant to serve as open communication with the committee on areas of improvement the HIDOE is considering. Should the HIDOE move forward with this project, please be assured that the HIDOE will provide an update to the Committee.

The HIDOE looks forward to our continued partnership with the HSCDD. Should you have any questions, please contact Michelle Arakawa, the HIDOE representative of the HSCDD, at (808) 305-9806 or via email at michelle.arakawa@k12.hi.us.

If you have any questions about the HIDOE COVID-19 response, including the Pandemic Plan, please contact Deputy Superintendent Phyllis Unebasami at Phyllis.Unebasami@k12.hi.us.

Sincerely,



Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto
Superintendent

CMK:ha

c: The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi, President of the Senate
Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities