

HFC Committee

From: Chris & Nicole Gniffke <gniffke@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 20, 2020 10:55 PM
To: HFC Committee
Subject: URGENT reconsider mandate on Virtual Learning
Attachments: HIDOE Letter Re-Virtual Learning Aug 20.pdf

Aloha Maui County Healthy Families and Communities Committee ,

Thank you for your service in these unprecedented times. Please if you could take the time in reading my request for Hawaii's government officials to waive immediately the mandates placed on HIDOE instructional days and student hours, please alleviate the pressure tied to funding that is suffocating families, students and educators.

I've attached my letter of concern and request for this issue to be addressed immediately.

Mahalo for your time,
Nicole Gniffke (concerned mother of 2 elementary students attending Puu Kukui Elementary School)

Thursday, August 20, 2020.

Aloha State and County Government Officials, Council Members, and Representatives,

I am writing to request that our Government Officials urgently address the mandate outlined in Hawaii's Department of Education's section §302A-251, requiring our public schools to meet the typical standards of instructional days and student hours amidst our state's Covid-19 State of Emergency. Hawaii Superintendent Dr. Christina Kishimoto made the decision to postpone the motion to "grant a general waiver" during last month's "Special Business" meeting held virtually on July 30.

This week my family has done our best to adhere to our school's requests in the soft launch to this year's virtual learning program, with the expectation to begin full time next week. Let me state first, my children attend Pu'u Kukui Elementary in Wailuku, Maui; the administration and my children's teachers have been outstanding! I cannot rave enough at how thorough, resilient, communicative, and resourceful they have been. They truly have given everything to find, learn, explain, and offer new programs and systems and ways to support their students and families during this time. But as I've begun sifting through schedules, syllabus' and outlined expectations, trying to download programs, clear time and space, and login to daily class times it has become overwhelmingly apparent to me that the expectations simply are not realistic.

Even as a stay-at-home mom, who's not needing to work right now, attempting to hold class virtually for two young children in different classes, while caring for a toddler, all five weekdays, each for five hours a day is inconceivable. With our income suffering like most families in Hawaii right now we must find extra finances to re-install internet in our home (as we had eliminated that in response to financial cuts, and sending my kids to the school's gymnasium to use their wifi while I wait in the car for 5 hours is ludicrous), we have no home printer even though the school has informed us we'll need one, and we've had to borrow school devices like many others to "attend" school. These are just the issues my family is encountering, I shudder to think of students who have both parents working, or no shelter, or who lack a quiet environment, or space and resources to set up school, or food, or someone to assist with the day's assignments, who don't have the option to pullout and homeschool.

I absolutely realize the unprecedented effects of this world's pandemic which is why I think it is of utmost importance we address this issue immediately. To mandate immediate Proclamations responding to: travel, economy, gatherings, leisure activities, and workplaces; ensuring the health and safety of *residents*, but fail to realize the grave effects of government's unwillingness to waive typical standards of education is appalling. These are our most vulnerable people—our children—and our teachers and school administrators are stuck, required to enforce "typical" school standards to a school year that is anything but "typical".

Please grant, immediately, our public schools the opportunity to adapt appropriately to this horrendous problem. Funding for education should not be tied up in how many instructional days or student hours are clocked this year. Families should not have to labor over how or if they'll provide education to their children. The current requirements demand far too much on families and educators amidst the cultural, social, mental, political, and emotional toll we're all enduring right now. Please reconsider what you are requiring of students, teachers (who are also parents), and families, surely education is able to exist with resiliency in a way that gives heed to our humanity.

And if I may humbly submit a viable option for public education to resume virtually: allow teachers to pre-record weekly/daily lessons for students to view, allow funding to send home (pickup or mail) work-packets to each student containing their assignments for the week that they could return at the end of the week or submit online, and allow teachers to virtually meet with students individually or in smaller groups to assess progress weekly. This would allow for families to prioritize education within their own restrictions, and would alleviate the huge ask you have required of parents & care givers to supply or assist in instruction, and would allow teachers the opportunity to instruct their students effectively. We love our teachers and our schools please support them in their profession, don't make this harder than it has to be on top of all the difficulties we're facing in the world currently.

Mahalo for your time, sincerely,

Nicole Gniffke (Concerned parent of two elementary students)