DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR

DR. CHRISTINA M. KISHIMOTO
SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAI`I
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAI`I 96804

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

February 25, 2021

TO: Complex Area Superintendents
All Principals

FROM: Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto
Superintendent

SUBJECT: **Commencement and Transition Ceremony Guidelines for School Year 2020-21**

I am pleased to see the state is experiencing a gradual decline in the average number of daily new COVID-19 cases. We remain hopeful that this trend will continue as vaccinations roll out and individuals continue to follow mitigation strategies.

Our school leaders have shown they are able to implement and enforce the protocols that have kept our staff and students safe. While we cannot completely prevent exposure to COVID-19, the Department has systems in place to address cases immediately and have avoided transmission of the virus at a Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) facility thus far.

It is because of this planful approach, and dedication shown by our administrators, that we are able to move forward with limited in-person graduation and transition ceremonies. They will not look like pre-pandemic celebrations, but they will allow additional flexibility for our schools beyond purely virtual options in bringing our graduates together for this momentous occasion.

It is a delicate balance between honoring our graduates and ensuring we do not unintentionally create situations where COVID-19 transmission is likely to occur. Limited in-person ceremonies will be required to follow strict parameters and some schools may not be able to coordinate an in-person event due to class size, limited resources and/or community transmission considerations. It is everyone’s responsibility to ensure that we approach graduation season in a safe manner that does not prolong or hinder the state’s efforts to respond to this pandemic.

Limited in-person ceremonies must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The ceremony must be held outdoors or in a venue with adequate ventilation. Third party venues are allowed given some of the limitations of HIDOE campuses and facilities;
- All employees working at the event, attendees and participants must remain 6 feet apart to the greatest extent possible;
- Graduates are allowed to bring a maximum of two members from their household, no additional guests will be allowed and schools can reduce this number based on venue restrictions and ceremony formats. Schools are encouraged to consider limiting in-person ceremonies to graduates and school staff only with a virtual option for parents and guests;
- School staff, security personnel and/or off-duty law enforcement support must be used to break up groups who congregate at the event site before and after the ceremony;
- In-person performances that include singing and/or wind instruments are not permitted. Solo performances and pre-recorded music are allowed;
- Schools must limit the number of school, complex and state personnel in attendance to those serving critical functions in event coordination. Personal protective equipment (PPE) must be made available to employees working at the ceremony including hand sanitizer, masks, gloves and face shields;
- Masks are required at all times and may be removed briefly to take photos or for a mask break. Guidelines for mask breaks are included in the Health & Safety Handbook;
- If schools pass out other items besides a diploma, it must be done in a manner that avoids the gathering of participants and expedited to limit the amount of contact between individuals;
- If temperature checks are conducted, schools can either use temperature scanning equipment or non-contact infrared thermometers. Individuals administering the check must wear a face mask and face shield. Temperature screenings will not detect someone who is asymptomatic and positive with COVID-19;
- Schools must remind employees, participants and attendees prior to the ceremony that if they have any COVID-like symptoms or have been directed to quarantine by the Hawaii State Department of Health, they should not attend; and
- Student participation is voluntary.

Larger schools may find it difficult to host a safe limited in-person ceremony. These schools are encouraged to consider staggered or drive-in formats that reduce the potential for in-person congregation and traffic. These options include but are not limited to:

- Student-only in-person ceremonies with virtual options for parents and guests;
- Hosting an additional ceremony with a maximum of two events to limit the financial and staffing burden on a school;
- Staggered drive-through where vehicles are limited to members of the same household and one vehicle per graduate; and
- Drive-in where vehicles are limited to one vehicle per graduate. Graduates may exit the vehicle to participate in the ceremony; however, the number of students outside should be limited so proper physical distancing can occur.

Other requirements mentioned in the January 11th memorandum, “Social Gathering and Commencement Guidelines for School Year 2020-21,” are still required (e.g. one person per seatbelt, members of the same household in one vehicle, etc.). All events must also ensure the following:

- Compliance with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state Department of Health, and respective counties, including any new advisories in effect on the day of the event;
- No person-to-person contact during the celebration (e.g. shaking hands, hugs, etc.);
- High touch surfaces (e.g. podium, handrails, microphones) must be frequently cleaned and disinfected;
- Availability of hand sanitizers and masks; and
- Security measures are in place to ensure a positive and safe event.

Practice sessions are encouraged so staff and students are prepared and understand safety procedures before, during and after the ceremony.

Schools are encouraged to consider the formats outlined in the January 11th memorandum as a way to supplement the celebration for school community members who are not able to attend.

This guidance is subject to change if there are any sudden developments that would compromise the safety of our students and staff.

CMK:lc
c: The Honorable David Y. Ige, Governor
The Honorable Clare Connors, Attorney General
The Honorable Mitch Roth, Mayor, County of Hawai‘i
The Honorable Michael P. Victorino, Mayor, County of Maui
The Honorable Rick Blangiardi, Mayor, County of Honolulu
The Honorable Derek Kawakami, Mayor, County of Kauai
Department of Transportation Director Jade Butay
Department of Health Director Dr. Libby Char
Deputy Superintendent
Assistant Superintendents
HIDOE Risk Manager