O'ahu public schools transition to distance learning for first four weeks of 2020-21 school year

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The Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE) announced today a modification to school reopening plans for all O'ahu public schools to align with the new safeguards and restrictions prompted by the increasing number of COVID-19 cases on the island.

Starting on Aug. 17, all O'ahu public schools will be implementing full distance learning models. Schools will use next week, Aug. 10-14, to train and prepare for this transition.

HIDOE has designed three phases for O'ahu schools:

1. **First phase, in-person training (Aug. 17-20)**: During the first week of school, students will physically return to campus on a coordinated and scheduled basis, determined by each individual school, to connect with their teacher, receive training on the distance learning platforms, and address issues with connectivity and access to technology. Special considerations will be given to vulnerable students and their families for more in-person access to the school and teachers.

   Starting on Aug. 17, O'ahu cafeterias will be serving only grab-and-go meals; in-person dining will not be allowed. After-school programs will be suspended until students return to in-person blended learning models.

2. **Second phase, learn from home (Aug. 24-Sept. 11)**: For the remainder of the four-week period, full distance learning will be implemented. Staff will report to their designated work sites for continued distance learning instruction. Special education services that cannot be provided in a distance learning format will be available in person. Supervised in-person learning labs at schools will be available for students who do not have WiFi access.

3. **Third phase, transition to blended learning (Sept. 14)**: HIDOE will continue to closely monitor the situation and work with the Governor's Office and the Hawai'i State Department of Health to assess whether or not students can safely return to in-person blended learning models. If distance learning will continue for the remainder of the first quarter of school, an announcement will be made on Sept. 8.

Aug. 17 remains the official start date for all HIDOE students. Neighbor island school reopening plans will continue as planned, with blended learning models. All HIDOE buildings will remain open for faculty and staff, and employees will be expected to follow all health and safety protocols.

"It is our mission to ensure that all students in Hawai'i have equitable access to a quality education, even amidst this pandemic," said Superintendent Dr. Christina Kishimoto. "Learning must take place as we continue to safeguard our island community. Mahalo to our students, teachers, staff and school communities for their continued support and flexibility during these challenging times.

Earlier this week the Department announced the launch of the 'Ohana Help Desk to provide self-service and chat support for families experiencing issues connecting to HIDOE systems remotely from home. The help desk will be able to assist with connectivity-related issues (e.g., network and WiFi connectivity), access and security issues, device support (e.g., devices, applications, software updates) and general IT support.

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve or as new health guidance becomes available, HIDOE will continue to adjust its Return to Learn: School Reopening Plan to ensure that a safe learning and working environment is provided for students, teachers and staff. Updates about the school year will continue to be posted on the Department's website and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn).

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