

# United States Senate

September 23, 2020

Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto  
Superintendent, State of Hawai‘i, Department of Education  
P.O. Box 2360  
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96804

Hawai‘i State Board of Education  
P.O. Box 2360  
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Dear Dr. Kishimoto and the Board of Education:

Thank you for your hard work in leading the Hawai‘i State Department of Education (HIDOE) during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As schools prepare to reopen for in-person learning, it is important that we take every precaution to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within schools and to keep our students, families, teachers, and other school workers safe.

It is clear that airborne transmission through both droplets and aerosols, including transmission between individuals farther than 6 feet apart, plays a major role in the spread of COVID-19. This has important implications for the mitigation strategies that we put into place, as these particles can travel more than 6 feet in the air and stay in the air for long periods of time. I appreciate that the HIDOE’s July guidance to principals and custodians on air conditioning systems recognized the spread of COVID-19 through aerosols.

Multiple studies have pointed to the airborne spread of COVID-19, and in July, more than 200 scientists called for greater recognition of the role of airborne transmission and corresponding preventive measures.<sup>1</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a letter on a COVID-19 outbreak in a restaurant in China where air-conditioned ventilation contributed to the spread of COVID-19, including between individuals not sitting close to each other.<sup>2</sup> The World Health Organization has also discussed aerosol transmission in choir practices and fitness classes.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a recent study found that there is a high probability that normal speaking causes airborne virus transmission in confined environments.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, proper ventilation is critical in preventing the spread of the virus. The CDC’s guidance for schools calls for many steps that schools should take to improve ventilation.<sup>5</sup> For example, schools should increase outside air ventilation, including by opening windows and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/08/yes-more-data-support-covid-19-aerosol-transmission> and <https://academic.oup.com/cid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciaa939/5867798>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0764\\_article](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0764_article)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/transmission-of-sars-cov-2-implications-for-infection-prevention-precautions>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/22/11875>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

doors, use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and improve central air filtration. Schools should also decrease occupancy in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.

It requires strong leadership to ensure that all schools are prepared to put these mitigation strategies into place. To that end, I request your response to the following questions about how HIDEOE has improved ventilation and how schools are planning to implement the CDC's guidance:

1. What is HIDEOE requiring principals and schools to do to increase ventilation?
2. How many schools intend to use the best option outlined in the "HIDEOE AC Operation Guidance during COVID-19" of opening windows and not using air conditioning systems?
3. Do all schools have the necessary supply of fans to use in conjunction with open windows?
4. Has HIDEOE ensured that the ventilation systems in all schools are operating properly?
5. What steps has HIDEOE taken to improve central air filtration?
6. What other steps has HIDEOE taken to improve ventilation in all schools?
7. What barriers has HIDEOE encountered in improving ventilation, and have those barriers been addressed?
8. Has HIDEOE considered holding classes outdoors? If that option is not being considered, why not?

I appreciate your attention to this matter, and your collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



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BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator