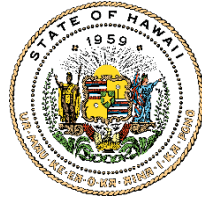


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

**STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804**

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Curt Otaguro, Deputy Superintendent of Operations

Subject: Schools Working Group's Draft Report

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) respectfully submits the following comments in response to the Schools Working Group's Draft Report.

Due to the Lahaina wildfires, the Department has implemented a variety of strategies to focus on ensuring the safety and readiness of students and staff. Additionally, the Department has proactively addressed the needs of the community and its schools during this emergency. The Department collaborated with stakeholders to establish alternative evacuation routes for public schools in the Lahaina area; provided diverse instructional options for displaced West Maui students and their families; instituted measures such as comprehensive soil and water quality testing, rigorous air quality monitoring, and the provision of indoor air filtration systems to ensure the well-being of students and staff; and expanded mental health support services to address the complex mental health challenges facing students and their families.

Concerted efforts are underway to monitor and mitigate potential traffic congestion. As a result of these efforts, coupled with additional student transportation and the lower enrollment counts for schools on Lahainaluna Road, the community is experiencing less school-related congestion around the Lahaina schools than anticipated/feared.

Due to security considerations, the Department has determined that the schools' evacuation plan should not be publicly accessible. While we acknowledge the importance of transparency, the need to safeguard these plans from potential misuse and security threats takes precedence.

In summary, the Department remains committed to addressing the many challenges presented by the Lahaina wildfires while upholding the safety and welfare of students and staff as a top priority. Acknowledging the significant impact of such crises on mental health and overall welfare, we are implementing support measures to ensure access to counseling services, mental health resources, and fostering a supportive environment. Ongoing collaboration with departments such as the Department of Health and the Department of Transportation ensures

coordinated efforts for safe school operations during debris removal. Recognizing the importance of in-person learning for normalcy and support, we are committed to providing flexible options that cater to the diverse needs of families, be it through traditional classes or virtual learning, prioritizing both academic and emotional well-being.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

SCHOOLS WORKING GROUP Justin H. Woodson, Co-Chair, Jenna Takenouchi, Co-Chair
Hearing Date: November 16th, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Woodson, Takenouchi, and members of the Schools Working Group,

I am writing to express my appreciation for the work that your group has done to evaluate the strategies utilized to accommodate displaced students and staff to return to school. However, I want to express my concern about the need for more attention given to language access in your draft report. As you know, language barriers can be a significant obstacle for Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals in accessing critical information and services. This is especially true in emergencies, such as those caused by natural disasters like the Lāhainā wildfires.

32% of Lahaina's 9,118 residents (about 3,000 persons based on 2023 statistics) are foreign-born, a statistically significant difference compared with 18.8% statewide. 36% of persons aged five years and older speak a language other than English at home in Lahaina, a statistically significant difference compared with 25.9% for Hawaii overall.

Your report includes:

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- Several recommendations
- related to school evacuation communication plans.
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- Readyng alternate
- learning options and student support for displaced students.
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-
-
- Minimizing ash contamination

- to schools from clean up in Lāhainā.
-
-
-
- Increasing mental
- healthcare access.
-

However, without adequate language access, these recommendations may not be practical for LEP individuals and their families.

For example, your report recommends involving the community in developing school evacuation communication plans to ensure that the plan meets the community's needs. However, if LEP individuals cannot participate fully in this process due to language barriers, their needs may not be adequately addressed. This is particularly concerning given that your report also recommends that the plan should be translated into multiple languages and should be accessible to students and individuals with disabilities 14. Without adequate language access, LEP individuals may not be aware of the plan and may not understand it, which could put them at risk in an emergency situation.

Similarly, your report recommends readying alternate learning options and student support for displaced students. However, LEP students may be unable to take advantage of these options if they are not provided in their primary language. This is especially concerning given that your report recommends creating a process to hire quickly or reposition Department of Education personnel to accommodate distance learning and learning alternatives better so families can take advantage of these choices more expeditiously 14. Without adequate language access, LEP students may not be able to access these alternatives, which could have long-term consequences for their education.

I urge you to establish a working group on language access to ensure that LEP individuals are included in the development and implementation of your recommendations. This working group should consist of representatives from LEP communities, language access experts, and relevant government agencies. The working group should be tasked with developing strategies to ensure that your recommendations are accessible to LEP individuals and their families.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,
The HAPA Team

Aloha,

In regards to the section on mental health, the following statistics are from the YRBS for Kauai:

The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data of public middle and high school youth on Kauai revealed the following:

	2019 Middle School	2019 High School
Purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die	26%	20%
Experienced a major depressive episode	32%	33%
Never or rarely got the mental health help they needed among those with mental health issues	50%	54%
Seriously considered attempting suicide	29%	17%
Made a plan to attempt suicide	17%	15%
Attempted suicide	12%	11%
Suicide attempt resulted in needing to seek medical care	10%	3%

I recommend mental health stigma reduction efforts on campus for students and families as well as increasing the number of providers on neighbor islands. The state should also consider what other states have done in enabling students over the age of 12 to access mental health support without parental consent.

I also recommend establishing a state initiative to increase the number of Native Hawaiian providers and other providers with key cultural and linguistic skills. The state loan repayment program is a great start. The state should target high school and undergrad NH and Filipino students to support them to access this pathway to becoming a mental health provider.

Mahalo,

Alice Luck
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Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Nanea Lo (*she/they/o ia*) | Micro-influencer
 Admin & Program Coordinator | [HAPA](#)
 Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action 5013-c
 Board Member | [Hawai'i Worker's Center](#)
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"Some people say that Hawai'i will be a better place when Hawaiians no longer stand in the way of progress. But even these people must know that at this point, this will no longer be Hawai'i." - Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio. The Value of Hawai'i