



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

September 17, 2020

TO: The Honorable Catherine Payne
Chairperson, Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto
Superintendent

A blue ink signature of Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto.

SUBJECT: **Presentation on Acellus Learning Accelerator Distance Learning Program (“Acellus”): Program Review Process; How Acellus is used by Schools; What Elementary and Secondary Students use Acellus for; Content and Rigor; Parent and Guardian Distance Learning Election; Supports for Students, Teachers, Administrators and Parents and Guardians**

BACKGROUND

The Acellus Learning Accelerator has been utilized by the Hawaii State Department of Education (“Department”) schools in different capacities over the past decade. With the sudden closure of our school facilities in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the needed shift to distance learning, the Department expanded the use of Acellus. The Acellus Learning Accelerator was selected based on curriculum availability to fulfill course needs, cost-effectiveness, implementation timeline, and consultation with schools already utilizing the program. The Acellus Learning Accelerator was used during Summer 2020 for credit recovery.

At the beginning of this school year, the Department planned for opening our school facilities using selected school models. Parents were given an opportunity to consider virtual learning as an alternative to face-to-face instruction rather than homeschooling or seeking another educational institution.

Due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases near the beginning of the school year, the Department decided to open with full distance learning. Initially, distance learning was to be conducted for the first four weeks of school. By August 27, 2020, distance learning was extended for the remainder of the first quarter for most schools. To implement distance learning, some schools have adopted programs such as Acellus as their full distance learning option and as content for their regularly scheduled classes. Hana High and Elementary School on Maui and Kilohana and Maunaloa Elementary Schools on Molokai have implemented their school models which include face-to-face instruction.

The Department has been aware of the concerns of parents regarding the Acellus Learning Accelerator since early August. Out of an abundance of caution, the Department has been working to identify any questionable content and has been working directly with the Acellus vendor to address any content deemed inappropriate. The Department has addressed requests for information and the concerns raised, including scheduling meetings with and responding directly to inquirers.

PRESENTATION

1. Acellus Learning Accelerator Distance Learning Program

The Acellus Learning Accelerator program offers over 300 courses for grades K-12 in every core content area. Each Acellus course has a Department teacher of record to oversee the progress of each student and provide the additional support needed to ensure a quality learning experience for all learners. With Acellus, teachers make the instructional decisions.

Specific deficiencies in students' understanding of core concepts are identified through the Acellus Prism Diagnostics^{®1} and instruction is customized with personalized instructional videos to address these deficits. This diagnostic assessment can be utilized in fully self-contained classes all the way up to Advanced Placement classes.

Programs used for distance learning continue to be managed and approved at the school level. Many schools have selected Acellus for distance learning because of its ease of integration as well as the positive feedback received from other Department schools and teachers with first-hand experience in using the program.

2. Program Review Process

The Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design (OCID) completed a cursory review of the Acellus Learning Accelerator elementary-level modules for potential alignment to existing state and national standards. The OCID internal review of online content samples took place within a span of ten days. The reviewers were instructed to review content and materials for one to two courses each and provide any comments/questions and overall feedback regarding the content for these courses/lessons.

The process was expedited following the July 2, 2020 Return to Learn announcement to allow schools time to select a full distance learning option for parents who wanted an alternative to school models that included face-to-face instruction.

The Department will conduct a comprehensive review of the Acellus Learning Accelerator, which will involve content specialists across all subject areas, equity specialists, representatives from schools and complex areas, and experts in the field of study, prior to the start of the second quarter. The review team will utilize the tools for selecting resources that can be found on the Learning Design website to evaluate the rigor and alignment to state content standards. These tools include non-negotiable alignment criteria, alignment criteria, and indicators of quality. Tools can be viewed at

¹ Acellus Prism Diagnostics[®] can be viewed at <https://www.acellus.com/for-your-school/>

the following website: <https://learningdesign.hawaiipublicschools.org/school-design/learning-materials>

The comprehensive review process will also include teachers piloting and providing feedback on promising curriculum and instructional materials; vetted curricular resources and Open Education Resources; and ongoing quality assurance reviews.

Schools will retain their authority to design or choose instructional materials or curriculum that best suits the needs of their students.

3. How Acellus is Used by Schools; What Elementary and Secondary Students Use Acellus For

With the school year beginning with the implementation of full distance learning and teachers unable to conduct classes as they traditionally would, teachers have utilized different instructional methods to teach their students. Some teachers, particularly those who are teaching courses that do not have online instructional materials, are using Google Classroom to assign activities from the Acellus Learning Accelerator and monitoring student progress to determine the need for additional teaching and learning activities outside of the Acellus Learning Accelerator. Other teachers are using the Acellus Learning Accelerator as enrichment activities to supplement their lessons. This provides teachers with the option of continuing to use the Acellus Learning Accelerator to supplement instruction when schools implement their school models and students return to the classroom for face-to-face instruction.

High schools are using the Acellus Learning Accelerator as a means to provide students with a credit recovery option to earn credits needed for graduation. Some high schools have also implemented the Acellus Learning Accelerator as instructional material for Advanced Placement classes for this school year. Acellus provides high school students with a greater variety of courses to enroll in.

As of August 24, 2020, 185 public and public charter schools purchased Acellus Learning Accelerator licenses for 78,670 students. Of the 185 schools, 112 are elementary schools with 46,150 licenses; 58 are secondary schools with 29,132 licenses, and 15 are schools with a combination of elementary and secondary grade levels with 3,388 licenses.

The benefit of the video-based lessons included in the Acellus Learning Accelerator is that they provide struggling learners access to learning and addresses different learning modalities.

4. Content and Rigor

The Department is initiating specific actions to address concerns regarding the Acellus Learning Accelerator program. These actions include, but are not limited to, the aforementioned comprehensive review for rigor, equity issues, and alignment to the state subject standards by a multidisciplinary team consisting of content and equity specialists and careful monitoring of the corrections made by the Acellus Learning Accelerator vendor to ensure the immediate removal of inappropriate content.

In addition, the Department has created a process for teachers, parents, and students to report concerning content found in Acellus Learning Accelerator. The specific location and details of such content can be reported via the HIDOE Controversial Content Concern Form at <https://bit.ly/2GqNWt7>. These concerns will be reported to the Acellus Learning Accelerator vendor to be addressed.

The Department is also soliciting feedback on the distance learning experience through the Distance Learning Feedback Form at <http://bit.ly/3BX8WxR>. This feedback will help to inform us on how to improve virtual learning.

5. Parent and Guardian Distance Learning Election

When parents were given an opportunity to consider full distance learning as an alternative to face-to-face instruction, they were asked to commit to full distance learning for a specified period of time - one quarter, one semester, or the entire school year - to reduce the disruption of classes during the school year.

Parents of elementary school students who are concerned about the appropriateness and rigor of the elementary instructional materials in the Acellus Learning Accelerator program will be asked to contact their child's school to discuss their concerns and options. To minimize further disruption of student learning, any mutually agreed-upon decision made to transfer the student from the full distance learning program to the school's selected model should be made for the remainder of the school year.

The Department has included on our FAQ: Acellus Learning Accelerator webpage information on how parents are able to disenroll their child from the Acellus Learning Accelerator program. The FAQs can be viewed at: <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/Acellus-Learning-Accelerator-FAQ.aspx>

Updated information regarding the Acellus Learning Accelerator is shared with our schools and posted on the Department's website.

6. Supports for Students, Teachers, Administrators and Parents and Guardians

The Department deploys a tri-level system of support to ensure our complex area leadership and staff, school leadership and staff, students, and families are provided with the necessary supports.

OCID will provide overall support and guidance in the use of the Acellus Learning Accelerator and establish a tri-level support structure with the help of the distance learning leads at the complex area level. A "How-To" support document is currently being developed to support schools utilizing the Acellus Learning Accelerator. This will include guidance on the use of specific modules/lessons and accompanying strategies to meet the varying academic needs of students. This document will be shared with schools through the distance learning team.

The distance learning lead and complex area support team will provide schools with differentiated supports for the use of the Acellus Learning Accelerator. Schools will work with their students and parents as they navigate through the program.

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Extending distance learning further into the school year will require adjustments for employees, students, families and our communities. As we move forward, schools will revisit their school model, share their plans with their families, and allow for families to make adjustments as we anticipate a longer duration in dealing with COVID and the impact on our schools and communities. Many schools have experienced success in using the Acellus Learning Accelerator, have already worked closely with their teaching staff and families to address issues and concerns regarding the program, and are ready to move forward with the program with confidence.

Mahalo for your continued support and dedication to our schools, our haumana, and our communities.

CMK:pu

c: Phyllis Unebasami, Deputy Superintendent

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