



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

April 2, 2020

TO: The Honorable Catherine Payne
Chairperson, Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto
Superintendent

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Christina M. Kishimoto".

SUBJECT: **Board Action on Department Request for Waiver of Board Policy 102-15
High School Graduation Requirements and Commencement for School Year
2019-2020**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic has created an unprecedented situation for our state. Since January 2020, the Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) has been systematically planning to prepare for and respond to this crisis.

The Department leadership including Assistant Superintendents, Complex Area Superintendents (CAS), school principals, and state educational officers interface directly with the Governor, County Mayors, State Legislators, the Department of Health (DOH), Emergency Management Operations, and the Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission, to take the necessary steps to mitigate the potential effects of COVID-19 on our public school system. Various actions have led to significant changes in the Department's approach to addressing the unique needs of our schools' learning environments, support services and business functions.

In response to the pandemic, the Governor issued an emergency proclamation on March 23, 2020, mandating a statewide stay-at-home order effective until April 30, 2020. Pursuant to the Governor's proclamation, the Department responded on March 24, 2020 by temporarily discontinuing traditional in-school instruction until at least April 30, 2020.

On March 25, 2020, the Department virtually convened the state's tri-level public education leadership team consisting of Assistant Superintendents, Complex Area Superintendents, school principals, and the Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission to discuss the best course of action to address graduation requirements for the Class of 2020 including dual credit (including early college), high school credits and credit recovery, grades and grade point average, and commencement exercises.

As a result of this meeting, the Department is requesting a waiver to the Board's policy pertaining to high school graduation requirements and commencement. The Department is committed to implementing a plan to effectively ensure the continued support of our students while enabling them to progress towards their advancement to the next grade level and/or careers beyond the Hawaii school system, during these unprecedented times.

Finally, the Department will continue to monitor the developments of the pandemic and are considering alternatives to commencement exercises to honor the educational accomplishments of the Class of 2020. The Department plans to solicit student voice by engaging our student leaders, within the context of strict health and safety conditions. A decision regarding commencement exercises will be rendered no later than April 15, 2020.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Board approves the Department's request to waive the credit requirements pursuant to Board Policy 102-15, High School Graduation Requirements and Commencement, for School Year 2019-2020 to ensure high schools are allowed the flexibility in awarding a diploma or certificate to graduating seniors, based on approval from administration.

Link to Board Policy 102-15, High School Graduation Requirements and Commencement:
<http://boe.hawaii.gov/policies/Board%20Policies/High%20School%20Graduation%20Requirements%20and%20Commencement.pdf>

3. RECOMMENDED EFFECTIVE DATE

Upon Board approval.

4. RECOMMENDED COMPLIANCE DATE

Upon Board approval.

5. DISCUSSION

a. Conditions leading to the recommendation:

The current COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented situation globally and for our state. The Department has been planful in preparing for and responding to this crisis since January 2020.

These actions have led to significant changes in the Department's approach to addressing the unique needs of our schools' learning environments, including the delivery of instruction and students' ability to demonstrate subject matter proficiencies, which ultimately led to the Department's request for this Board action.

The Department requires flexibility in order to effectively meet the challenges of this unprecedented COVID-19 crisis to ensure the success of our students, particularly our approximately 10,000 seniors.

- b. Previous action of the Board on the same or similar matter:

None.

- c. Other policies affected:

None.

- d. Arguments in support of the recommendation:

The loss of in-school instructional time is due to circumstances outside of the control of the Department and the educational consequences of COVID-19 are being experienced by educational institutions both nationally and globally.

The recommended action will allow students to continue moving forward with their future plans for advancement in school and in their lives.

For the Class of 2020, a denial of this recommendation could jeopardize existing plans to attend college, join the military, or start careers as working professionals.

- e. Arguments against the recommendation:

Some may argue that the Department is prematurely requesting the waiver and should reassess alternative methods to demonstrate a students' progress towards achieving proficiencies for course credit given the loss of instructional days associated with the COVID-19 situation.

- f. Other agencies or departments of the State of Hawaii involved in the action:

None.

- g. Possible reaction of the public, professional organizations, unions, Department staff and/or others to the recommendation:

The unique circumstances of COVID-19 requires the Department to prioritize the collective needs of our students, parents, professional staff and extended educational community to ensure the success of all public school students in achieving their educational goals. The Department remains committed to collaborating with all stakeholders to find innovative solutions in attaining this objective. Thus, the Department anticipates the overall reaction to this recommendation to be favorable.

The general consensus is that a waiver approval is a positive step forward in removing the unanticipated obstacles that may inhibit high school seniors from graduating on time.

h. Educational implications:

Approval of the proposed waiver will provide educator-driven solutions to address the loss of educational content due to the decrease in instructional days as a direct result of the COVID-19 crisis. This action will allow the Class of 2020 graduates to proceed with post-secondary educational and workforce opportunities without unnecessary delays.

i. Personnel implications:

Teachers, leaders and support services staff will primarily utilize a telework approach to the instructional design during the State's stay-at-home directive. Summer school and other credit recovery opportunities will require educators to administer and operate programs.

j. Financial implications:

The Department remains hopeful that the COVID-19 situation will be contained by June 2020. As a result, secondary schools anticipate being able to offer summer school and other credit recovery opportunities to compensate for the lost instructional days, including e-school options. The Department will require financial resources including but not limited to salaries, instructional equipment and materials to allow for the delivery of classroom instruction, and the provision of online platforms for distance learning courses.

As public school systems across the nation deal with the fallout of one of the worst economic downturn in U.S. history, congressional leaders and President Trump are swiftly moving forward with the passage of an emergency \$2 trillion relief bill aimed at mitigating the financial havoc caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The Department is closely monitoring this legislation and the federal relief it may provide for our system, including potential support for educational options such as summer school and credit recovery.

6. OTHER SUPPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATIONS

None.

CMK:ab
c: Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design