United States Senate

September 23, 2020

Philip Bossert
Executive Director, Hawai‘i Association of Independent Schools
200 N. Vineyard Blvd., Suite 401
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96817

Dear Dr. Bossert:

Thank you for your hard work in leading the Hawai‘i Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As schools 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.

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.[1] 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.[2] The World Health Organization has also discussed aerosol transmission in choir practices and fitness classes.[3] In addition, a recent study found that there is a high probability that normal speaking causes airborne virus transmission in confined environments.[4]

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.[5] For example, schools should increase outside air ventilation, including by opening windows and 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 responses to the following questions about how HAIS's members have taken steps to improve ventilation and how schools are planning to implement the CDC's guidance:

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[1] https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/08/yet-more-data-support-covid-19-aerosol-transmission and https://academic.oup.com/cid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciaa939/5867798.
[2] https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0764_article
[3] https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/transmission-of-sars-cov-2-implications-for-infection-prevention-precautions
[4] https://www.pnas.org/content/117/22/11875
[5] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html

1. What, if any, guidance is HAIS providing to member schools to address ventilation?
2. How many schools intend to utilize the best practice of open windows without air conditioning?
3. Do all schools have the necessary supply of fans to use in conjunction with open windows?
4. Have schools ensured that the ventilation systems in all schools are operating properly?
5. What steps have schools taken to improve central air filtration?
6. What other steps have schools taken to improve ventilation in all schools?
7. What barriers have schools encountered in improving ventilation, and have those barriers been addressed?

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

Sincerely,

BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator