

Statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Hawai'i Chapter on Return to School for Students Affected by Maui Fires

Aloha,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, Hawai'i Chapter (HAAP) represents over 200 pediatricians who care for keiki from birth through high school across our islands. Pediatricians practicing on Maui have seen firsthand the suffering and struggles of families who have lost their homes, loved ones, and livelihoods. We are united in our conviction that children affected by the catastrophic fires in Lahaina will benefit greatly from a return to school that is as prompt, structured, and trauma-informed as possible. Prompt return to school is one of several factors that can play a critical role in healing for children and teens after a disaster. Furthermore, it provides respite for exhausted and traumatized parents, so that they can focus their attention on the family's immediate material needs and on their own recovery.

When planning for a return to school for the children affected by the fires, we ask the BOE to keep the following in mind:

- Teachers and other school staff will need, at minimum, basic training in trauma-informed care principles so they can help children recover and avoid inadvertently triggering trauma responses. This should include training in common ways that children of different ages and developmental stages respond to stressful events (for example, first graders having accidents or teenagers acting out) and the best ways to respond to these incidents when they arise. High quality mental health resources within the school should be made available to all students immediately, if possible. If this is not possible, we recommend maintaining a list of free or low-cost resources that students can access with minimal barriers and wait times. If our assistance is needed in this area, please let us know.
- Trauma-informed care training sessions should be offered to parents and caregivers as well, equipping them as well as possible to support their children and other dependents during this time of crisis and beyond.
- Teachers and staff will need a safe space and dedicated time for self-care (including, but not limited to, access to mental health resources) to process their own feelings and experiences.
- It is critical to minimize exposure to traumatic triggers, such as watching images of the devastation repeatedly. School provides a structured environment that will help keep children from doing this. When planning logistics of school return, it is important to avoid driving children past the devastated areas on a daily basis or engaging in other activities that may be triggering to a significant number of students.
- As much as possible, it will be important to minimize bureaucratic obstacles to meeting essential needs. Many families are currently housed in resort rooms reliant on free meals and unable to cook. Children who did not previously qualify for the free lunch program may now be depending on two filling meals at school for much of their basic nutrition. The sign-up process should be as simple and accessible (including multiple

formats, e.g., online and paper, as well as multiple languages and minimal documentation requirements) as possible.

We thank you in advance for your hard work to get children back into school and provide them with support during this incredibly difficult time. We stand prepared to provide support to all those affected by the disaster in any way we can. Mahalo.

Drs. Jeff Okamoto (president), Maya Maxym, Melissa Kim, Casandra Simonson, Felicitas Livaudais, Brooke Hallett, Mike Ching, J. Gary Dela Cruz, and Vince Yamashiroya on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Hawai'i Chapter