August 31, 2020

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Senator Schatz:

Thank you for your letter to the U.S. Department of Education (Department) regarding the impact of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic upon grantees funded by the Native Hawaiian Education Program (NHEP). Your letter was forwarded to me, and I am pleased to respond.

The Department understands that educational institutions across the Nation have been severely impacted by COVID-19 and that many of the goals and objectives articulated in grant applications funded by the Department will be difficult to carry out as originally planned. As a result, the Department has proactively reached out to grantees to help them identify how they can implement their grants in a manner that meets the scope and objectives of their funded proposals while also addressing the challenges created by COVID-19. In particular, the Department has encouraged grantees to expand virtual learning and distance learning offerings when that is helpful and needed, support technology enhancements, and replace travel and convenings with alternative learning settings. In addition, on a program by program basis, we are also providing technical assistance and flexibility in our expectations for the administration of grants, such as approval of no-cost extensions for grants in their last year of operation.

In support of this work, the NHEP program hosted a webinar on June 9, 2020, to help current grantees prepare annual performance reports that discuss the challenges presented by COVID-19. The webinar also allowed Department staff to share with grantees the ways that they can adjust their project plans as necessary (to access the webinar PowerPoint slides see: https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/rural-insular-native-achievement-programs/native-hawaiian-education/resources-10/). We will also continue to provide technical assistance to current grantees and consider whether their projects should be modified because of the many disruptions caused by COVID-19. In addition, we recognize pending new awards may also need to be adjusted because of the impact of COVID-19. We remain committed to providing support to grantees in these difficult times. We continue to provide additional information related to COVID-19; all available Department information is posted on our website at: https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus.

400 MARYLAND AVE. SW, WASHINGTON, DC  20202
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The Department of Education’s mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.
Should you need additional assistance, please feel free to have your staff contact the Department’s Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at (202) 401-0020 or the NHEP team at (202) 401-1265. Thank you for your interest in NHEP and your commitment to the Native Hawaiian community.

Sincerely,

Frank T. Brogan
Assistant Secretary
for Elementary and Secondary Education