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Hafa Adai GDOE students, parents and families!

First of all, I hope you are safe, secure and in good health as we go through the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, which has resulted in our schools being closed since March 16, 2020. Let me assure you that we all – administrators, teachers, and staff – miss our students and miss coming together each and every day to take care of our kids and to help them move forward in their education. We are all in this together, and I know we will make it through this challenging time if we continue to stay safe, stay home, and do our part to minimize the spread of the coronavirus in our community.

I wanted to use this opportunity to update you on a number of key items that we have been working on these past few weeks. As you know, per directive from Governor Lou Leon Guerrero, public schools will remain closed through April 12, 2020. However, we know that there is a possibility, should the current public health emergency continue, schools could be closed for an even longer period of time. This is unfortunate, but we share the belief that the health and safety of everyone on Guam should take precedence over other matters, and we support her in her decision.

Health and Safety First. When we received notice of the initial two-week closure, my leadership team agreed that we wanted to prioritize the health and safety of all of our students, families, and employees. We did not want to add to the existing stress and confusion experienced globally and locally as a result of this pandemic. Other states and school districts have taken the same approach, to ensure that school stakeholders focused first on the guidance to stay home and to minimize the spread of the coronavirus in the community. For this reason, our first week of closure focused primarily on allowing our students, families, and employees to secure themselves at home, stock up on their supplies, and attend to their health and well-being.

Food Support for All Children. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, GDOE was able to receive approval to allow us to feed our students during the period of school closure. We know that many students depend on school meals, and we are proud that we have been able to feed all of our students school breakfast and lunch at no cost over the past few years. On Monday, March 23, 2020, we were able to successfully launch school lunch distribution sites at 11 schools across the island, and we provided approximately 50,000 school lunches to public schools, private schools, and DoDEA students. The schools included Astumbo Elementary School, F.B. Leon Guerrero Middle School, John F. Kennedy High School and Wettengel

Elementary School up north; Agana Heights Elementary School, B.P. Carbullido Elementary School, George Washington High School and Jose Rios Middle School in the central area; and M.U. Lujan Elementary School, Inarajan Elementary School and Southern High School down south. This also included direct support to organizations such as Sanctuary, Alee Shelter, and Guma San Jose; direct delivery to students with special needs who require transportation support; and direct delivery to areas of high-need in our villages where students may not have a way for their families to pick up meals at schools. On Tuesday, March 31, 2020, we will be adding school breakfast meals to the lunch distribution and opening an additional distribution site at Maria Ulloa Elementary School in Dededo. We have also decided to keep the school meal distribution going through our spring break, April 6-10, 2020.

Support for Distance Education. Now that school closures have been extended beyond the initial two weeks and with the possibility that schools could be closed much longer, I wanted to share and begin implementation of our distance learning plan. This plan is the result of the work of over 250 teachers, administrators, instructional staff and students to provide high quality instructional supports for students during this period of school closure. As we do this, we are well aware that most states and districts are struggling with the same challenges of how to operate during a prolonged closure. Nothing has prepared us for such a global pandemic, and I ask you to be patient and understanding of us, especially our teachers, as we do our best to serve all of our students at the critical time.

- *Distance learning will not be graded.* The GDOE Distance Learning Initiative takes into account a number factors, including the health and safety of our students and employees, the time allotted to implement this plan, the current capacity of the department to support all students equitably, and the fact that a large percentage of our students do not have consistent access to the internet or equipment to allow for regular online engagement with their teachers. Because of these factors, we have decided to separate student grading from our efforts to provide online material to promote learning. This means that, as the first part of our plan, we will be proposing a grading policy to our Board that does not include the work provided to our students through our distance/online framework. This is the only fair and equitable way to address this for all our students and is not unique to Guam. Many states and territories are experiencing these same challenges with providing equitable opportunities and have decided to take similar routes. More information on our grading proposals will be provided this week. Of particular importance to us is the impact these closures will have on students who are expected or planning to graduate this semester. To address this, our schools have already been in communication with their respective senior class councils and graduating class.
- *Resources will be provided online through our GDOE website.* For the second part of our plan, we have our distance learning framework which starts with a dedicated website to organize our resources. This website is being launched this afternoon and will contain a set of websites and online resources that have been compiled and reviewed by our Curriculum and Instruction division to ensure that they are easily accessible, useful, free

and of high quality. These websites and resources are divided into elementary, middle and high school levels. The website can be found at through our main website at www.gdoe.net or at <http://bit.ly/GDOEDistanceLearning>.

- Weekly lessons will begin on April 6th. Starting next week, we will begin including weekly lessons in Literacy, Math and Character Education/Life Skills for Kinder – 5th grades. These lessons and resources are developed and compiled by teams of teachers from every grade level and school working collaboratively. The resources provided in this central website will be supplemented by the resources provide individually by each school. For the middle schools, it will contain links to other resources provided by the different middle schools for their respective students as well as a set of lessons and activities for all middle school students to take advantage of. For the high schools, much of their content will be provide directly by the teachers of the various subjects students are taking. On our website, you will have a link for each high school, which in turn will have the names of all teachers and their email addresses. Parents and students will have work to complete and the opportunity for feedback from teachers.
- Collaboration between school counselors and teachers to support students. School counselors have been active in working with teachers in preparation for character education/life skills lessons at all grade levels. They will also be reaching out to students to share materials for socioemotional learning and will provide updated resources for our students and families as we all try to cope with the current pandemic situation.

We know that for a good percentage of our students and families, websites and online resources won't help much when you don't have the necessary equipment or internet access. We will continue to work on ways to either help you get access to the internet or to hard copies of the instructional materials we are providing online. More information on this is forthcoming.

We are in this together! As I close, I want to thank all of you students, parents and families for doing what you can to stay home and stay safe. I want to also recognize the numerous GDOE employees who are stepping up and stepping forward to help our community during our island's crisis. More than 45 nurses and 10 school resource officers are at the very front of this pandemic, providing support at quarantine sites. Over 100 of our GDOE staff and administrators are working hard to support our successful school meal distribution efforts across the island. Approximately 250 administrators, teachers and instructional coaches met daily through videoconference over the past two weeks to share ideas and to collaborate on a plan for distance learning. We are all worried about our own families and our island's overall wellbeing, but yet, we know that our role in caring for our island community, especially our students, must continue.

Thank you again for all your patience and support. We know that many of our families in the community are being impacted significantly by the present pandemic, including impacts to jobs, incomes, and livelihoods. We hope that we can do our part to ease the anxiety, stress, and worry

as we work together to get our island community through this difficult time and as we prepare to join forces in helping our recovery in the near future.

Senseramente,



JON J.P. FERNANDEZ