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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GDOE POSTPONES FACE-TO-FACE INSTRUCTION UNTIL JANUARY; DISTANCE LEARNING TO CONTINUE THROUGH SECOND QUARTER

The Superintendent of Education has directed all Guam Department of Education (GDOE) schools to continue distance learning and has postponed face-to-face instruction until at least January 2021.

In a letter to the Guam Education Board (GEB) Friday morning, the superintendent indicated he has directed all GDOE schools to continue distance learning through hard copy and online instructional models for the second quarter. The second quarter begins Friday, October 16, 2020. He also directed that face-to-face classroom instruction will not be offered during the second quarter based on risks associated with the island's current public health situation, which is unlikely to be conducive to in-classroom learning by December 2020. This assessment is based on data the department has been tracking using a framework provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which assesses the risk of introduction and transmission of the COVID-19 virus in schools.

"Based on the CDC framework, we are in the highest risk category based on new cases and positivity rates. For this reason, it is my assessment that any decision to reopen schools in the near future is premature, and even if authorized by the Governor, it is my judgment that reopening GDOE schools during second quarter will pose untenable risks to our employees and students," GDOE Superintendent Jon Fernandez said. "It is important that our stakeholders understand that we will be working to offer and strengthen distance learning options for the second quarter and that they do not need to worry about a sudden, ill-planned return to school in the middle of the quarter and in the midst of our continued public health emergency."

This decision was based on key observations from current public health data:

- Guam is currently reporting a 14-day 12.6% test positivity rate, which is over four times the level needed to be in the lowest risk category, set by the CDC at less than 3%.
- Guam is currently reporting 514.6 new cases per 100,000 people over a 14-day period, more than 100 times the level needed to be in the lowest risk category, set by the CDC at less than 5 new cases per 100,000 people.
- Young people aged zero to 19 years of age have more than doubled their share of Guam's total number of positive cases, accounting for 7.2% of total cases back on July 1, compared to 16% of total cases on October 15. There are now 547 positive cases among this age group.
- Young people aged zero to 19 years of age make up an increasing percentage of new cases over a rolling 7-day window, averaging 12.5% of new cases in August, 15% of new cases in September, and 19.1% of new cases in October to date, reflecting the community spread of COVID-19 at the household level, despite PCOR1 restrictions in place and despite the prohibition on face-to-face classroom instruction since August 17.

Fernandez indicated that reopening of school facilities for face-to-face classroom instruction is unlikely to take place until January 2021 *at the earliest*, depending on the island's health situation. In preparation for potential on-campus operations later this school year, the superintendent has reactivated the District School Readiness Task Force (Task Force) to update the reopening plans in light of the latest health data and experiences of school districts across the nation. The Task Force will be focused on ensuring that schools have the necessary protective equipment and supplies, a robust training plan to reinforce the safety and disinfection protocols, support for the socioemotional wellbeing of students and employees, input from stakeholders through rapid response surveys, as well as options for phasing in students back to school facilities based on different grade levels, school levels or groups who may benefit most from returning to school.

Fernandez is seeking the GEB's support of this directive and will be updating the GEB every Friday at 11 a.m. beginning on Friday, October 23, 2020. In addition, the GDOE will provide regular briefings for the GDOE community and members of the media throughout the planning period.

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