

The town of Lahaina, and the people of Lahaina have suffered the most unimaginable loss. Loss of family members, loss of homes, loss of jobs and businesses, loss of pets, loss of ohana. It will take years to be able to dig out from under the loss and pain, and for many there will never be full recovery. The term “new normal” will take on meaning for those who are able to push forward and rebuild. What we see will be forever changed, but what we feel can remain unchanged as I saw in the beautiful photo taken by Matt Schweitzer from above the paddle out on September 8. His lens captured the very essence of the West Side and the spirit of togetherness that will be needed to raise Lahaina from the ashes and it inspired me to write today.

While the adults need to move forward with the business of planning and rebuilding our town, our keiki need to make every effort to get back to the business of school and learning; a task made all the more difficult by the loss of Kam 3 and Sacred Hearts, and the delayed openings of Princess, Lahaina Intermediate, and Lahainaluna, causing them to be bussed to schools away from the West Side. The students beginning school this year were lucky enough not to be too impacted by the Pandemic for their high school days, but are now faced with another kind of uncertainty creating stress and anxiety far beyond the normal issues kids are forced to face while navigating their high school careers. But kids can be surprisingly resilient as I have seen with students I am working with this year.

High school seniors are going to have a tougher than normal time with getting their college applications completed, but the good news is that the process will be complete in a couple of months so try very hard to stay organized and get things done. You may need to use computers in your new school library to get started.

-The Common Application is open and schools are taking applications now. Get your Common Application account opened and fill in all of the basic information that is generic for all schools. Make sure to proofread carefully before you submit anything.

-If you are applying to the California State University or UC systems, those applications are also open to begin, however October 1 – November 30 is the application period.

-If you have not already done so, get going on your essay. Do not be afraid to dig deep and express how the wildfire has impacted your world. Be yourself, be authentic, tell them who you are. It is (after a strong academic record) the most important part of your application, and it is your time to shine.

-Find a teacher at your new school to be a recommender, and touch base with the college counselor to let them know you want to go to college next year. They will need to write a recommendation too.

-Don't go wild and apply to too many schools. Seven to 9 well selected schools should be all you need. Applying to more will just give you more work to do, more expense, and confusion when it comes time to choose.

-Apply early for the best shot at financial aid. Parents, you will want to get the FAFSA filed as soon after the October 1 start date as you can. This may be a challenge if your financial records were all destroyed, but do the best you can.

-Be mindful of application deadlines, they will creep up on you. It is important to stay as organized as you can.

Recognize that this is possibly one of the most horrendous things that can happen to a person, and for it to happen to children and young adults feels beyond comprehension. Take each step and each day one at a time. We will get through this together, like all of those paddlers on the water that made that beautiful photo from above. One paddler alone would have looked tragic, but the vision of all of them together was one of hope.

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