

## SEAC

## Special Education Advisory Council 919 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 101 Honolulu, HI 96814

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March 17, 2015

## **Special Education Advisory Council**

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Amanda Kaahanui, Staff Susan Rocco, Staff Mr. Don Horner, Chair Hawaii State Board of Education P. O. Box 2360 Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: VII. D. Board Action on authorization of Department of Education to negotiate and execute the renewal and revision of ESEA Flexibility from No Child Left Behind ("NCLB")

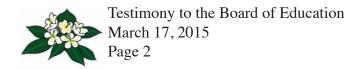
Dear Chair Horner and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), supports the Department's request to execute a renewal and revision of its ESEA Flexibility Waiver. However, we request that additional assurances be included in the revision to ensure accountability for the achievement of students with disabilities.

SEAC expressed concern in its comments to the Department's initial waiver application in 2012 over the creation of a High Needs Group. We feared both then and now that aggregating subgroups can mask uneven performance among the individual groups--students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, and students who are disadvantaged.

Students with disabilities account for about 10.5% of students in all grades. For most public school campuses, students who are disadvantaged make up a much larger percentage of the student body. Additionally, their performance on statewide assessments is significantly higher than students with disabilities. In SY 13-14, disadvantaged students were 59% proficient in reading compared to only 21% proficiency for special education students.

This inequity in population size and performance can lead to potential skewing of StriveHI school rankings. For example, Mokapu Elementary was awarded Recognition School status in SY 13-14, despite the fact that only 12% of special education students were



proficient in reading compared to 84% proficiency in the overall student population. Mokapu also had a Two Year Gap Reduction Rate of 23%, while special education reading proficiency was down almost ten percentage points from 2012-13.

SEAC was assured by the Department in November 2013 that STRIVE HI is maintaining accountability for special education achievement. At the same time, we are painfully aware that special education student achievement is woefully behind the achievement of non-disabled students and virtually flat-lined over a number of years. Our problem with the current accountability system is two-fold:

- reform efforts have left special education students largely untouched, and
- the STRIVE HI system appears less than transparent when reporting the performance of students with disabilities.

We respectfully request that the Department make some adjustments to its waiver renewal to address these concerns. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this issue. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

Respectfully,

Ivalee Sinclair, Chair

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