



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
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March 17, 2015

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

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Mr. Jim Williams, Chair
Human Resources Committee
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: IV. C. Committee Action on Department of Education's request for Board authorization to commence a reduction in force of classified employees pursuant to collective bargaining agreement provisions

Dear Chair Williams and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), expresses our strong opposition to the Department's request for Board authorization to commence a reduction in force (RIF) as it relates to classified employees providing special education and related services to students with disabilities. SEAC would also like to express our concern related to the Department's willingness to reduce support to students with disabilities.

The Department's informational materials for this meeting and the General Board Meeting on this date cites a primary reason for authorizing a RIF eliminating positions as "reductions in Special Education allocations due to changes in Special Education student needs." However, when budget restrictions were proposed, the Department justified a reduction in special education funding citing salary savings from UNFILLED special education classified positions, not changes in student needs. The Department's proposed restriction of special education funds by \$9 million for SY 14-15 was cut to \$4.9 million after community testimony.

The Department promised SEAC and the Board of Education that despite the restrictions, requests to fill needed special education positions would be honored, at the same time efforts would be made to address the causes of unfilled special education classified positions.



This chronic shortage of positions negatively impacts students with disabilities' access to a free and appropriate public education. SEAC has recently received information indicating school level requests for additional classified positions go unanswered.

We are at a loss to understand the source of the proposed Special Education Allocation reduction, as both the Executive Biennium Budget and Executive Supplemental Budgets anticipate the same number of positions and an actual increase in SY15-16 in the number of student with disabilities requiring support. In fact, the number of students with disabilities has remained fairly constant from SY11-12 through SY14-15.

As you may not be aware, the academic performance of students with disabilities on any measure of the Department's StriveHI school improvement system is well below that of other student groups. Additionally the Department has historically struggled to recruit and retain qualified individuals, classified and certificated, to provide educational services to students with disabilities. A possible RIF of classified staff will only further exacerbate the problem.

We urge you to reconsider the recommendation of the Department given the negative impact on students with disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter. Should you have questions or concerns, you are welcome to contact me.

Respectfully,

Ivalee Sinclair, Chair



Testimony to the Finance and Infrastructure Committee

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