



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council

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Human Resources Committee

Hawaii State Board of Education

P. O. Box 2360

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RE: IV. A. Report on 2015-2016 Office of Human Resources
Delivery Plan

Dear Chair De Lima and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) supports the efforts of the Office of Human Resources (OHR) to improve the recruitment, retention, and training of qualified teachers for Hawaii's classrooms. We are on record with your Committee as being very concerned about the shortages of special education personnel to meet the unique needs of Hawaii students with IEPs.

The PowerPoint presentation of the OHR Delivery Plan provided in the hearing notice contains little detailed information, making it difficult for SEAC to anticipate the depth of the discussion. Therefore, we would like to offer the following broad comments that reflect our historical perspective on practices related to the work force that yield successful results:

Recruitment

It is our understanding that the Department is planning to utilize Mainland recruiting agencies to fill some of its teacher vacancies. However, due to Hawaii's cost of living, the lack of financial incentives (such as moving expenses and affordable housing) and the lack of social support networks for newly transplanted teachers, it is difficult to recruit, and especially to retain, qualified applicants. If Hawaii is to meet the need for qualified special education personnel, in particular, it may need to revisit the level of supports offered during the Felix Consent Decree.

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Retention

It is SEAC's understanding that the average length of time a qualified special education teacher spends delivering specially designed instruction is only about five years. Efforts to lure these individuals back into teaching special education with teaching bonuses, such as the bonus discussed later in this agenda, have been largely unsuccessful. Either the bonus is too small, or the real issues behind teachers leaving the field have yet to be addressed. The Department would be advised to ask teachers what supports are crucial to their job satisfaction in order to stem the exodus of qualified teachers.

Training

It is SEAC's understanding that there has been little to no money in the Department's budget for professional development for special education teachers and for general education teachers who are accommodating special needs students in their classrooms. SEAC has been informed of special education training modules available to teachers on-line. However, there is ample evidence that online modules are not an effective training tool without active mentoring and supervision. We have also heard from special education teachers that they are often expected to train the general education teachers serving students with IEPs, in addition to their other numerous duties, thus becoming a potential retention issue.

Selection of Teachers

SEAC has long reported that teachers entering the Department with new degrees are often placed with student populations whose learning needs are a mismatch for the teachers's pre-service training specialization. So, for example, a teacher who has been trained to work with students with significant disabilities, like autism, is placed in a resource room, or a teacher who graduates with a mild-moderate specialization is assigned to a fully self-contained classroom. We understand that the reasons for the mismatches are varied. As a result, students' needs are not adequately addressed and teachers experience additional job stress.

Recruitment of Classified Personnel

Educational assistants are not mentioned in the OHR report, despite the fact that there appears to be a vacancy rate as large as 20% for special education EAs. To the best of our knowledge, this shortage does not appear to be shrinking, and it poses a serious threat to adequately meeting the needs of students with IEPs.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Office of Human Resources Delivery Plan. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan, Chair