



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
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October 20, 2015

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

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Mr. Brian De Lima, Chair
Human Resources Committee
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: Agenda Item IV. B. Presentation on special education staffing,
including staff shortages and their effects on the delivery of services

Dear Chair De Lima and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individual's with Disabilities Education Act, expresses our support of efforts to provide highly qualified, highly effective teachers, educational assistants and related services personnel to meet the needs of Hawaii's students with disabilities. We take seriously our responsibility to advise the Superintendent of the unmet needs of students with disabilities. It is clear that many of these students are not faring well academically. In our most recent Annual Report, we pointed out that special education students were significantly behind their Hawaii non-disabled peers and the achievement gap is growing (see attachment). In comparison to other states, Hawaii's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for special education students are among the lowest in the nation.

While special education personnel shortages and training are an issue for all but a few states, it is clear that Hawaii students are being impacted to a greater degree. Among SEAC members there is a sense of urgency in addressing these needs. In that vein, we would like to offer the following comments regarding the presentation prepared by Assistant Superintendent Barbara Krieg with support from Assistant Superintendent Suzanne Mulcahy.

Special Education Teacher Vacancies

The vacancy rate for special education teachers of 6.4% in August 2014 under-reports a much larger problem. SEAC has been informed from several sources that 400-500 of these special education positions are filled by general education teachers who have no foundational training in special



education. Another not insignificant percentage of teachers on the job are emergency hires who are required to enroll in a teacher preparation program, but who not have completed their training. There is also a significant issue of special education trained teachers who have completed a State Approved Teacher Education Program (SATEP) and are licensed who are teaching out of their field of licensure. Placing a graduate of a Mild/Moderate program in a classroom of students with severe disabilities is like hiring a cardiologist to assume an orthopedists's cases.

In weighing the preparedness of teachers to meet the complex needs of disabled students, it is important to ask what percentage of teachers who are in special education teaching positions actually have completed their teacher preparation program and obtained their initial license to teach before they started teaching. These teachers are associated with more favorable outcomes such as very low attrition during the training program, low attrition during the initial years of teaching, and special educators who remain in the field for a healthy number of years.

Educational Assistant Vacancies

The number of Educational Assistant (EA) positions is noted; however, there is no information regarding vacant positions. In September of 2014, Senior Assistant Superintendent Amy Kunz made a presentation to SEAC in response to our concern that the Department initially intended to use \$9.1 million in special education "salary savings" to meet the Governor's budget restrictions. She mentioned that 400 of the vacant positions were EAs. That's roughly 20% of all EA positions. SEAC is quite concerned that this lack of daily support for students with significant disabilities and/or behavioral issues is hindering the students' abilities to progress in the general curriculum. We are also worried that some of these positions are being used for duties other than supporting special education students, thus exacerbating the problem.

Article VI Teacher Vacancies

The presentation notes likewise make no mention of Article VI teacher vacancies. These positions were specifically created to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. SEAC would like to know the extent of any current vacancies of Article VI teachers.

Related Services Personnel Vacancies

While there is no data presented on staffing vacancies for related services personnel—speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc.—we know there to be a significant shortage in rural areas. For example, on the Big Island, where even contracted speech pathologists are hard to find, the Department is removing direct services from student's IEPs and replacing them with consultation.

SPED Staffing Methodology

SEAC representatives participated in the discussion facilitated by WestEd several years ago around the optimal staffing methodology for Hawaii. The discussion revealed that while there is a common



methodology for distributing special education teachers and EAs to complex areas, there is great variation in how complex areas determine where to place personnel. SEAC is not aware of any policies or procedures that would result in more equity and transparency in staffing allocations. If these exist, we would like to have a copy.

Teacher Recruitment/Retention Incentives

During the last legislative session, the Department received \$3 million for teacher recruitment and retention incentives. SEAC would like to know what portion of these funds are being applied to the recruitment and retention of special education personnel.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our knowledge and expertise from a broad range of stakeholders. We continue to look forward to collaborating with the Board and the Department in resolving the issues that we currently face.

Sincerely,

Martha Guinan/SR

Martha Guinan
Chair

attachment