



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council

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**Special Education
Advisory Council**

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Grant Chun, Chair
Finance and Infrastructure Committee
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: III. B. Committee Action on Department of Education's proposed operating biennium budget for the 2017-2019 Fiscal Biennium

Dear Chair Chun and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) welcomes this opportunity to support the following key components of the biennium budget impacting students with disabilities. As we reviewed the budget items, we found the descriptions lacking specific details that would help SEAC to advocate for their support at the Legislature, and we hope to secure more information prior to the opening of the session.

Weighted Student Formula - Budget Item 1

SEAC is in strong support of more funding at the school level, which will hopefully facilitate greater inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. However, we would like to know the rationale for requesting this specific amount of funding over another. Once this money is allocated, it will be important to track the correlation between expenditures and student outcomes in order to determine optimal supports and cost efficiency.

School Transportation - Budget Item 6

These additional monies are specifically needed for curb to curb transportation services required as a related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. SEAC supports the additional personnel to ensure timely scheduling and oversight of contracted services. As space allows, SEAC recommends that these bus services also accommodate students without disabilities in rural areas where regular bus service is not available.

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School Based Behavioral Health Positions - Budget Item 14

SEAC endorses these two educational specialist positions for Maui and Hawaii complexes, and stresses the need to select experienced and knowledgeable individuals to supervise and support school level personnel providing behavioral supports to students.

Teacher Mentoring - Budget Item 18

A number of educators testifying at the September 20th Human Resources Committee meeting spoke to the value of teacher induction and mentoring supports in ensuring quality services to students and contributing to greater retention of teaching personnel. In supporting this state level educational specialist position, SEAC requests that more emphasis be placed on finding master teachers with special education expertise to mentor new teachers serving students with disabilities. A lack of meaningful support is a key reason why many special education teachers have left their teaching posts after only a few years in the classroom.

Pre-K Expansion and Induction Program - Budget Item 21

SEAC has been on record supporting the Executive Office on Early Learning Pre-Kindergarten Program, including the 2014 funding of twenty-one public preschool classrooms in rural areas where private preschool programs are limited. Year Two of the biennium budget includes additional monies to open ten more preschool classrooms in SY 2018-19. While SEAC strongly supports the addition of these classrooms, we would like some assurance that these new classrooms, as well as the 21 classrooms already funded, abide by their commitment to include a natural proportion (i.e. 10%) of students with disabilities. Inclusive options for students with disabilities are extremely limited and must be expanded in order to improve the students' academic, social and behavioral outcomes.

Seclusion and Restraints - Budget Item 31

SEAC helped to draft legislation last session to provide an appropriation for training on the appropriate use of physical restraints per Act 206, and more importantly, methods to avoid escalation of behavior that leads to the need for restraint. We have been assured that personnel working with students with behavioral and intellectual disabilities will receive priority for early training, as the incidence of restraints is highest in this population. SEAC strongly supports continued funding of a program manager to oversee training, and we are hopeful that the budget for training can be reduced over time as more teachers in the field become certified in appropriate behavioral training techniques. We respectfully request more information on how many teachers will be trained with these monies and how supervision will be provided.

Preschool Teachers and Educational Assistants - Budget Item 35

We concur with the need for more teaching personnel to support preschool students with disabilities in overcrowded classrooms, and we are grateful to the department for finding the funds to support these positions.

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Training and Licensure of Paraprofessionals - Budget Item 36

Act 107 requires that direct support workers (including educational assistants and paraprofessionals contracted by the Department) who provide autism treatment services to a student as indicated in his or her individualized education plan be licensed as a registered behavioral technician no later than January 1, 2019. SEAC supports the expenditure of the projected \$4.7 million via trade-offs or transfer, and requests more information about how many paraprofessionals are targeted for this training, the time line for trainings and credentialing, and how required supervision will be provided.

Finally, in reviewing the budget, SEAC notes that a number of Request Summaries include the sentence “additional supports will increase capacity to close existing achievement gaps.” While there has been some narrowing of the High Needs Group achievement gap over the last several years, it does not reflect improvements for students with disabilities. This population continues to experience extremely poor outcomes on statewide assessments. In SY 14-15, the last year that assessment scores were available, only about one in ten students with disabilities was proficient in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Consequently, SEAC would like some assurance of accountability that all students with disabilities (not merely students with autism or behavioral needs) are receiving top priority in activities to reduce the achievement gap, and that funds requested in the biennium budget are adequate to provide the personnel and resources required for successful outcomes for special education students.

Thank you for this important opportunity to offer input. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan
Chair