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Special Education Advisory Council

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Lance Mizumoto, Chair
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: VII. A. Board Action on review and extension of 2011-2018
Department and Board Joint Strategic Plan: Final version

Dear Chair Mizumoto and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) welcomes this opportunity to provide testimony on the final version of the DOE/BOE Joint Strategic Plan. We have organized the following comments and recommendations by Plan content areas:

Equity and Excellence

SEAC agrees with the Department and the Board that the new Strategic Plan must include a strong emphasis on reducing the chronic and growing achievement gap between non-high needs students and students with high needs--particularly students with disabilities receiving special education and related services. Equity advances under the Strategic Plan and under the Every Student Succeeds Act require data reporting by distinct subgroup, rather than by a high needs supergroup, as was allowed under Strive HI. SEAC strongly recommends the adoption of a lower "n" size--ideally 10 students--to ensure greater accountability for the performance of these subgroups.

Na Hopena A'o

The values embedded in HA embrace all of Hawaii's keiki, including students with disabilities. The renewed emphasis on belonging, total well-being, excellence and aloha are key to the Department's commitment to inclusive education.

Goals and Objectives for Achieving Student Aspirations

SEAC thanks the Department for incorporating our recommendations regarding the wording of the following objectives:

- adding *behavioral health* as a focus in addressing students' overall health (Goal 1, Objective 2b),

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Goals and Objectives for Achieving Student Aspirations (cont.)

- adding the ability to use “multi-tiered supports” as a goal of professional development in Goal 2, Objective 1b, and
- substituting the verb “partner” for “engage” when describing the interaction with families and communities in Goal 3, Objective 2b.

Implementation

SEAC greatly supports the strong focus on inclusive practices in the Plan. Professional development as well as adequate staffing for both general and special educators will be key in achieving positive outcomes for students with special learning needs.

Statewide Student Success Indicators

SEAC is most gratified to have Indicator 3 - Inclusion Rate and Indicator 11 - Teacher Retention added to the success indicators. We also applaud establishing indicator targets now in order to give schools adequate time to prepare for implementation in SY 17-18. The following are SEAC’s recommendations regarding Appendix C, the Target Setting Worksheet:

1. The current version of the plan sets targets for the general education population. Equity targets must also be included for each equity subgroup identified in order to ensure accountability. SEAC requests to be included in the discussion and decision making on setting the targets for students receiving special education services.
2. While some indicators acknowledge the need to track specific subgroups, others do not. We recommend adding equity targets for special education students for the following indicators: School Climate (2), Ninth Grade On Track (5), Career & Technical Education Concentrator (8), and College-going Graduates (9). We further recommend that staff success indicator Teacher Retention (11) track data on special education teachers and related service personnel.
3. The target of 51% for Indicator 3 (Inclusion Rate) will do little to move the needle on Hawaii’s abysmal Least Restrictive Environment ranking (dead last of all 50 states and territories). SEAC highly recommends setting a more “ambitious and achievable” goal for inclusion, which will benefit general education students as well as students with IEPs.
4. The indicators for Third Grade Literacy (4) and Academic Achievement (6) are important measures to track. However, statewide assessment scores do not necessarily reflect the true abilities of students with disabilities, and have not proven particularly helpful in designing effective remediation strategies. SEAC strongly recommends that authentic assessments also be incorporated in tracking student success for students with disabilities.

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5. We recommend adding additional measurements to the indicator for School Climate (2), for example, Parent and Teacher responses to the Safety Dimension of the School Quality Survey, and the Hawaii Youth Risk Survey as a reflection of middle and high school student perceptions regarding bullying and suicidal ideation and attempts. The Hawaii Kids Count Data Center may also have additional statistical information that can help provide a clearer picture of school climate (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#HI/2/0/char/0>).
6. Measuring teacher positions filled on August 1st does not contribute to student success, unless those positions are held by personnel with the skills to deliver individualized instruction to meet the unique needs of their students. For academic outcomes to improve for students with disabilities, there must be a concerted effort to fill positions with experienced and effective teachers, as well as related service personnel and paraprofessionals. SEAC recommends a more specific equity target be set for teacher positions filled.

In closing, SEAC would like to acknowledge that using the strategy of Leading by Convening with the Department's leadership and Board Vice Chair Brian De Lima has resulted in a stronger shared vision for improving services for students with disabilities. We look forward to continuing our partnership in the future.

Thank you for this important opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please feel free to contact me or Ivalee Sinclair, our Legislative Committee Chair.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan
SEAC Chair

Ivalee Sinclair
Legislative Committee Chair