



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council

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**Special Education
Advisory Council**

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Margaret Cox, Chair
Student Achievement Committee
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: IV. A. Presentation on special education inclusion in the
Department of Education

Dear Chair Cox and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) welcomes this opportunity to provide testimony on the Department's presentation on special education inclusion in the Department of Education.

Inclusion vs. Least Restrictive Environment Data

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has a strong preference for the least restrictive environment (LRE)--educating students with disabilities with their same age peers to the maximum extent possible. IDEA cautions schools against removing students from the regular educational environment unless the nature or severity of the student's disability requires an alternative placement. The Office of Special Education Programs requires Hawaii to measure how many students are educated in regular education classrooms for 80% or more of the school day as an indicator of proper implementation of IDEA.

The Board is well aware that Hawaii has extremely low LRE data for placement in the regular education classroom (only 36.8% compared to a national average of 61.2%). However, SEAC cautions against assuming that the "inclusion rate" is equivalent. It is very likely that the actual rate of inclusion is much lower. SEAC has received countless examples over the years of students included in the general education classroom, but not given the necessary supplemental aids and services needed for academic success--hence not truly included. Indeed, there is no reliable source of statewide inclusion data that SEAC is aware of--data that has been vetted to ensure that students are receiving adequate supports, that staffing is appropriate and that



teachers have adequate planning time.

Recommendation: SEAC recommends that additional time and effort is invested to ensure that metrics for the new Inclusion Rate student success indicator measure quality as well as quantity of time in the general education environment.

Continuum of Alternative Placements

IDEA recognizes that not every student can have his or her educational needs satisfactorily met in the regular education classroom. That is why schools are required to provide a range of placements that also includes special classes, special schools, home instruction and instruction in hospitals and institutions. After determining each student's unique needs, the IEP must find the placement that is the LRE for that student.

As the emphasis to include more students with disabilities in regular education classroom gets stronger, some schools are tempted to adopt an "all inclusion" program, meaning that students are only placed in regular education classrooms irregardless of their unique needs.

Recommendation: While SEAC is a strong proponent of inclusive education, we urge the Department to ensure that schools are also aware of their responsibility to provide alternative placements where appropriate.

Vision for Inclusion

As part of our Leading by Convening process and with the urging of Deputy Superintendent Schatz, SEAC is currently developing a vision for inclusion to share with all stakeholders. We found that nationally promoted vision language for including students with disabilities meshes beautifully with the components of Nā Hopena A'ō. Consequently we contacted Jessica Worchel, Nā Hopena A'ō Special Projects Manager in the Office of Hawaii Education, who offered her edits and strong encouragement for aligning the inclusion vision with HĀ. We look forward to sharing that vision with the Board once it is adopted by SEAC.

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