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Special Education Advisory Council

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Student Achievement Committee

Hawaii State Board of Education

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RE: V. B. Committee Action on impact of Every Student Succeeds Act ("ESSA") transition on revisions to Strive HI Performance System for 2015-2016 School Year

Dear Chair Halagao and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Department's recommendations to partially implement its Strive HI 2.0 accountability system in preparation for the implementation of new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) performance measures in School Year 17-18. A key part of the Department's plan is to avoid the calculation and reporting of a performance index score for each school, along with assigning a Strive HI classification based on School Year 15-16 performance measures. However, Strive HI school reports based on this performance data will be distributed next Fall to provide an awareness of the schools' progress and to aid in planning.

Moving away from the High Needs Group

Given the proposed hiatus from accountability scores, SEAC highly recommends that the Department do away with the Strive HI High Needs Group calculation for School Year 15-16 and instead publish the achievement data of the individual subgroups at each school. ESSA prohibits the use of "super subgroups" (as currently allowed under waivers) for the same reason that SEAC has repeatedly expressed--a super subgroup tends to mask the performance of the individual student groups within. A super subgroup also suggests that students within the group have equal needs, which is not the case.

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Moving away from the High Needs Group (cont.)

To come into alignment with ESSA, Hawaii will need to publish the achievement scores for each current subgroup--students with disabilities, English Language Learners (referred to as English Learners in ESSA) and low-income students--as well as by race and ethnicity. That data should be easily accessible, and posting the data in the Fall of 2016 will help schools create an awareness of individual group needs and opportunities for targeted interventions. Once implementation begins in School Year 17-18, ESSA demands that schools identify “consistently underperforming” subgroups of students in order to enhance supports through evidence-based strategies and additional resources. Therefore, it is important to have schools in the habit of tracking and reacting to this information.


Selecting an “n” size for accountability purposes

Under ESSA, Hawaii must determine the minimum number of students (the “n” size) necessary to be included to carry out the requirements in the accountability system. Hawaii will be required to document how it included other stakeholders--parents, teachers, administrators, etc--in determining the “n” size. This will be extremely important because schools will only be held accountable for the student groups that meet or exceed this minimum number of students.

SEAC has long held that the Strive HI “n” size of 30 results in special education students falling off the accountability grid at a number of small schools and elementary schools. We recommend that SEAC and other stakeholders be included in future discussions regarding this critically important accountability feature. Aiding this discussion will be the anticipated report from the Institute for Education Sciences that will offer “best practices for determining valid, reliable, and statistically significant” subgroup sizes.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the transition plan for moving from Strive HI 2.0 to ESSA. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,


Martha Guinan
Chair