



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council

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April 5, 2016

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

RE: IV. D. Presentation by the University of Hawaii College of Education, Special Education Department on special education inclusion nationwide and statewide, and
IV. E. Presentation on special education inclusion in the Department of Education

Dear Chair Halagao and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide suggestions and recommendations to the Committee regarding providing a definition of inclusion, expanding the discussion to cover early childhood inclusion and adding inclusive elements/practices to the Board's proposed policy on inclusion (105.13).

SEAC is committed to effective inclusive practices in all Hawaii schools to enable students with disabilities to benefit from high quality instruction with appropriate supports and services that prepares them for successful lives in the community. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is very clear in its requirements that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities, including students in public or private institutions or other care facilities, be educated with students who are not disabled. §612(a)(5).

In the spirit of partnership to improve services for Hawaii's students with disabilities, SEAC offers the following recommendations based on our experience and expertise:

1. Provide the field with a definition of inclusion/inclusive education.

SEAC has observed that for a number of years there is considerable

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confusion in schools and classrooms over what is meant by the term inclusion, as it is not defined in IDEA or Chapter 60. Having a common definition would help to clarify the direction of the Board and the Department. SEAC favors the definition by Richard Villa and Jaqueline Thousand included in Dr. Sheehy's presentation: *[Inclusion is] "the commitment to educate each student, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. Inclusion brings the support services to the student (rather than moving the student to the services) and requires only that the student with a disability benefit from being in the class (rather than having to 'keep up' with the other students.)" (2005)*

2. Expand the focus and discussion to include early childhood inclusion.

Data from Hawaii's Annual Performance Plan for 2014-15 show that only **28.7%** of children with IEPs aged 3 through 5 are attending a regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program. The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services released a **Federal Policy Statement on Including Children with Disabilities in High-Quality Early Childhood Programs** in September of 2015 (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-executive-summary.pdf>), in which they state "it is the Departments' position that all young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs, where they are provided with individualized and appropriate support in meeting high expectations."

3. Include additional inclusive elements/practices in the Board's proposed policy.

SEAC appreciates that your draft policy includes a number of elements that help to ensure the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. For greater clarity, we suggest that you consider adding additional inclusive elements, such as the following:

- Early intervening supports and strategies to support students at risk of school failure due to academic or behavioral challenges;
- Authority and resources for IEP teams to discuss the full range of supports (i.e. behavioral supports, class size, accommodations, staff support, etc.) necessary to maintain a student in the least restrictive setting;
- IEP team placement decisions based on student needs rather than on the perceived availability or lack of availability of financial, personnel or other resources;
- Staffing and funding options that support collaboration and the provision of education in the Least Restrict Environment;
- Inclusion of students with disabilities in nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the individual student;
- Flexible learning environments, with flexible curricula and instruction;
- Multiple teaching/learning approaches like team teaching, co-teaching, peer partners, cooperative learning, etc.; and
- Support and training to general education teachers and ensuring adequate staffing ratios so that students can be successful.

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SEAC's experience and expertise on inclusive practices dates back more than 25 years. We provided input on the first inclusion policy developed in 1995, the amendments to that policy in 2006 and the proposed amendments in 2011, which followed an Office of Special Education Programs visitation that posited two factors leading to low numbers of students having access to the regular education classroom--a lack of supports and services available in the regular education classroom and inappropriate placement decisions.

Despite SEAC's constant and collective voice on the need to improve inclusive practices, frustratingly little progress has been made. However, we are hopeful and eager to work with the Board and the Department on planning, implementing and evaluating future efforts to provide greater access to the general education classroom for students with disabilities.

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

Respectfully,



Martha Guinan
Chair