



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
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**Special Education
Advisory Council**

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Catherine Payne, Chairperson
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96814

RE: V.B. Board Action on Finance and Infrastructure Committee recommendations concerning the Department of Education's plan for use of federal funds in the new COVID-19 Relief Package and Annual Spending Bill

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) appreciates this opportunity to review the Department's plan for using the roughly \$184 million in ESSER II funds recently allocated by Congress. This plan addresses current budget shortfalls and mitigates anticipated cuts to the operating budget for SY 2021-2022. We are in strong support of the following priorities:

- **Pay differentials for special education teachers for SY 20-21.** This program has been highly effective in recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers after decades of chronic shortages. The budget notes indicate that this is the final year of the pilot program, and SEAC urges the Department to consider extending these pay differentials into the immediate future to maintain an adequate work force for Hawaii's most vulnerable students.
- **Allocating \$29 million to EDN 150 to offset program fund reductions for SY 21-22.** SEAC agrees with the Department that were these reductions imposed, they would not only significantly reduce the capacity of schools to support special education students, but may also result in Hawaii being out of compliance with IDEA's requirement for maintenance of effort. Restoring the 350 special education teacher positions and support staff will hopefully be targeted first, along with School Based Behavioral Support positions providing direct counseling and mental health supports to all students.



- **Restoring Weighted Student Formula funding for SY 21-22.** The current proposal would put back 26% of the funds identified in the Program Review cut, and SEAC supports assigning additional ESSER II funds to restore teaching positions and other needed resources to school campuses. These positions help to maintain an effective student-teacher ratio and are essential for expanding quality inclusive education.
- **Adequate funding to support the health and safety of students and school personnel.** As more and more students return to campus, the timely provision of PPE will ensure that schools can follow important health and safety protocols without having to dip into their school budgets.

SEAC is generally supportive of programs to minimize learning loss exacerbated by the pandemic, including summer programming and tutoring/therapies provided beyond the school day. However, without more information on these ESSER II priority areas, we are unable to comment on their potential impact for students with disabilities. We would also appreciate more information regarding efforts to ensure equity by providing additional access to computers, tablets and connectivity to students over the next school year.

Mahalo for this opportunity to express our views. SEAC stands ready to work collaboratively with the Department and the Board to find creative solutions to the delivery of quality educational services to students with disabilities.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan
Chair

Ivalee Sinclair
Legislative Committee Chair