



**S E A C**  
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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: II. A. Board Action on Superintendent Christina Kishimoto's discontinuance of extra compensation for classroom teachers in special education, hard-to-staff geographical locations, and Hawaiian language programs

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) appreciates this opportunity to urge the Department and the Board to continue pay differentials for classroom teachers in special education as first instituted in January 2020. As you know, SEAC has testified three times previously in strong support of this extra compensation as a means of addressing a decades-long chronic shortage of qualified teachers for the most vulnerable student population.

It was not until the Department's January 21, 2021 presentation of its proposed plan for the use of ESSER II funds that SEAC noted a reference to the teacher differentials as a *pilot program*. This was clearly a surprise and disappointment to SEAC members, as we had been led to believe the pay differentials were permanent.

All evidence points to the fact that this program has been highly effective in recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers in the past year. Given that the argument to discontinue the pay differentials is primarily budgetary, SEAC offers the counterargument that **reneging on these pay differentials, will be far more costly in the long run than maintaining them.** These costs will likely be evidenced by a reduction in qualified teachers, a significant cost to recruit and retain replacements, and a worsening of academic, behavioral and social-emotional outcomes for students with IEPs.

Teacher recruitment and retention. As evidenced by the data and many of the testimonies from teachers regarding the discussion today, the



additional pay differential was a major factor in motivating more teachers to fill vacant special education classroom positions (a 43% *increase* over the previous year). This past year also saw a 28% *decrease* in the number of teachers leaving special education for a general education position. No one doubts that these gains in recruiting and retaining teachers are likely to be lost when, and if, the extra compensation is withdrawn.

A February 2019 presentation by *Education Week* for National Public Radio shared a worrisome trend that the number of special education teachers nationally has dropped by more than 17 percent over the past decade. This will make it harder to recruit qualified teachers for vacated positions who are willing to take on the extra time and paperwork demanded in special education without the additional compensation. The likely outcome is what Education Week refers to as a “quality shortage” where a higher percentage of special education teachers in the state are not fully qualified.

Should Hawaii’s future recruiters be successful in finding new qualified teachers to fill vacated positions, the Learning Policy Institute cites research showing that districts spend on average \$20,000 per recruit related to separation, recruitment, hiring and training. SEAC believes it is likely to be more cost effective to maintain the pay differentials than to pay these hidden costs associated with failing to retain qualified teachers.

Student achievement. If recruitment and retention of qualified special education classroom teachers are negatively impacted by discontinuance of the pay differential, by far the greatest costs will be borne by the special education students themselves. High-quality teachers have the potential to provide substantially higher quality classroom education. A lack or shortage of qualified teachers will compound the already substantial achievement gap. Our special education students have arguably suffered greater academic losses than their peers during the pandemic. They need the stability of teachers who know their individualized needs and have the skills to help them back on the path to positive academic and functional outcomes.

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