



S E A C
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May 17, 2018

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Advisory Council**

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Lance Mizumoto, Chair
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: V. A. Presentation on findings of Superintendent's Special
Education Task Force and Superintendent's recommendations

Dear Chair Mizumoto and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) appreciates this opportunity to offer our strong support for the findings of the Superintendent's Special Education Task Force. Prior to the convening of the Task Force that included four of our current members in its deliberations, SEAC had long championed most, if not all, of the recommended actions for improved outcomes for students with disabilities. In our comments below, we offer additional insights that will strengthen these powerful and timely recommendations.

- 1) **Articulate a shared vision of inclusive education.** SEAC spent several months during SY 16-17 crafting a vision of inclusive education with the support of DOE leadership that fits within the framework of Nā Hopena A'ō (see attached). For those staff not familiar with special education, this vision reinforces the universality of the HĀ principles for all students and frames efforts to increase access to the general education classroom in a positive light.

The Task Force Report's identification of essential elements of inclusive education is key to the appropriate implementation of the Strategic Plan's success indicator for Inclusion Rate defined as *the percentage of students receiving special education services who are in general education classes for 80 percent or more of the school day*. Supports for inclusive education go far beyond a seat in the general education classroom. They include supplementary aids and services (ranging from assistive technology and



specialized equipment to adaptive curricula and social interaction support) as well as access to highly qualified, highly effective educators. Classroom organization utilizing Universal Design for Learning is another vital academic support for all students.

- 2) **Assess the governing structure to ensure a cohesive and effective statewide system of support.** Special education is one area where the importance of consistent standards of practice and communication outweighs individual school autonomy. The proposed study for SY 19-20 to identify best practices related to resource allocation will help to set future standards. This study will also highlight the importance of administrative leadership in allocating resources at the school level.
- 3) **Design fundamental professional development.** A shared vision of inclusive education must include the student's and his or her family's perspective and insights in order to be truly meaningful. Professional development efforts will have a greater impact, if they include the student and parent voice, either as co-presenters or receivers of information in inclusive professional development activities. General education teachers must also be included in professional development so that they can have the skills, tools and resources to be confident in their ability to effectively teach students with disabilities in their classrooms.
- 4) **Redesign funding allocation based on student needs.** Returning to individual student needs, as the basis for staffing allocation, is a big improvement over the proportional allocation model in place for the last decade. SEAC has also suggested providing some kind of mechanism within the allocation process to encourage adequate staff for co-teaching in classrooms with natural proportions of students with disabilities.
- 5) **Adopt a replacement tool to improve quality of IEP process.** Finding a new, more effective database to document and guide the IEP process is long overdue. It will offer the opportunity to reduce data collection that is superfluous or unnecessary to satisfy legal mandates and provide effective data for decision-making. SEAC encourages the Department to consider providing limited database access to parents as key members of the IEP team.
- 6) **Financial support for special education reform efforts.** In order to maximize funding for adequate staffing and resources, including technology, SEAC urges the Department to apply for federal and private grants and foundation monies that have been historically overlooked and to partner with other institutions, such as the University of Hawaii and its Center on Disability Studies, in seeking additional funding opportunities and resources.

Finally, while not addressed in the report, SEAC places a high priority on the Department moving forward on offering **authentic (innovative) assessments** to Hawaii's students with disabilities. The majority of these students have performed poorly on the Smarter Balanced Assessment and



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other traditional standardized tests for a variety of reasons, including test anxiety and difficulty understanding test content presented at a higher reading level than the student's actual ability. Authentic assessments provide a truer reflection of the student's skill level and understanding and give teachers more guidance on adjusting instruction. Thus these assessments would offer a more accurate indicator of improved academic performance by students with disabilities and reduction of the achievement gap.

Now that consensus has been reached on the direction for the next two years and beyond, we ask that the Department include SEAC and other key stakeholders in the implementation and evaluation of these short- and long-term goals. Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on this very important set of recommendations. Should you have any questions regarding our testimony, please contact me or Ivalee Sinclair.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan
Chair

Ivalee Sinclair
Legislative Committee Chair

Attachment