S E A C

**Special Education Advisory Council**

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June 17, 2021

**Special Education Advisory Council**

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Catherine Payne, Chairperson Hawaii State Board of Education

P. O. Box 2360 Honolulu, HI 96814

 RE: IV. A. Presentation on Board resolution on reopening of schools for the 2021-2022 School Year

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) generally supports the Board’s proposed resolution regarding “encouraging vaccination, directing the Department of Education to communicate with families on school safety measures, to offer distance learning for the 2021-2022 school year and to rely on the Department of Health for advice and guidance on all COVID-19-related health matters.” We offer the following comments specific to the issue of distance learning:

While SEAC believes that in-person learning offers the best benefit to a majority of students with disabilities today, we also hold that some students with disabilities actually performed better over the past year with access to quality distance learning. The reasons for their success are varied and may include:

* The ability to select the most convenient and preferred time of learning;
* The ability to select the pace of learning;
* Reduced anxiety for students with social and emotional issues related to attending school in-person;
* The ability to revisit material whenever they happen to forget something and the ability to re-take quizzes and tests; and
* Better attendance for students who face barriers related to health, transportation or caring for family members at home.

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Quality distance learning for students with disabilities must include oversight by a special education teacher who is able to monitor progress and ensure that the program selected is meeting the individualized needs of the student.

Given that this modality may the most appropriate way to provide FAPE to a number of students with disabilities, it should not be left to chance as to whether a particular school is willing or able to offer this instructional mode. Rather, the complex area or the state should offer access to quality distance learning to students who need that option to benefit from their education.

Beyond providing an individualized and appropriate education to students with disabilities, SEAC believes that all students should be prepared for living and working in a digitalized world as well as a world subject to future health and climate challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic forced an unplanned and rapid move to online learning at the beginning of last school year with very little advanced training, insufficient bandwidth, a shortage of devices and little time to prepare. The Department should build upon the expertise they have gained in the last year to offer enhanced and more diverse instructional experiences to its students.

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 Ivalee Sinclair

Chair Legislative Committee Chair