



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
1010 Richards Street Honolulu, HI 96813
Phone: 586-8126 Fax: 586-8129
email: spin@doh.hawaii.gov
June 4, 2020

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

Ms. Martha Guinan, *Chair*
Ms. Dale Matsuura, *Vice Chair*
Ms. Ivalee Sinclair, *Vice Chair*

Ms. Andrea Alexander
Ms. Brendelyn Ancheta
Ms. Virginia Beringer
Ms. Mary Brogan
Ms. Deborah Cheeseman
Ms. Annette Cooper
Mr. Mark Disher
Dr. Kurt Humphrey
Ms. Tina King
Ms. Bernadette Lane
Ms. Cheryl Matthews
Ms. Kaili Murbach
Ms. Carrie Pisciotto
Ms. Kau'i Rezentos
Ms. Rosie Rowe
Dr. David Royer
Mr. James Street
Mr. Francis Tael
Mr. Steven Vannatta
Ms. Lisa Vegas
Ms. Jasmine Williams
Ms. Susan Wood

Ms. Annie Kalama, *liaison to
the Superintendent*
Dr. Bob Campbell, *liaison to
the military community*

Amanda Kaahanui, Staff
Susan Rocco, Staff

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

RE: IV. A. Presentation on request for feedback regarding reopening of schools for 2020-2021 School Year

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) appreciates this opportunity to express concerns related to the education of students with disabilities once schools reopen for the 2020-2021 school year. While we have no specific program recommendations given the fluidity of COVID-19 health-related contingencies and overall school readiness, we would like to point out significant learning challenges experienced by many students who have been receiving special education and related services via distance learning and telepractice since Spring Break.

Access to Assistive Technology

Assistive technology refers to equipment, devices and software used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability including learning, communication and socialization. Students learning from home have encountered barriers such as:

- Access to the individualized technology provided in the classroom, whether it be a laptop, tablet, software or communication device;
- Online platforms that are incompatible with assistive technology (for example, Zoom displays that are too small for a student who is deaf to understand the sign language or pick up physical nuances);
- Lack of adequate bandwidth at home--both to utilize computers and tablets and to accommodate screen readers and audio transcribers;
- Lack of available expertise to program devices.

Inadequate training and support for families to address complex learning needs from home

SEAC credits teachers and parents with working hard, being creative and finding ways to move forward during the pandemic. However, these efforts have not been enough to prevent many students from regressing. While special education teachers have been training parents to teach,



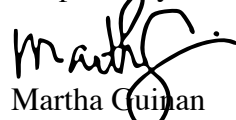
it is not possible to turn a parent into a special education teacher or therapist overnight. Teachers have the benefit of extensive training in adapting instruction to address the unique ways that students think, perceive and process information. Parents, many of whom work and/or manage the diverse needs of other children and family members, have been asked to take on the role of therapist, aide and teacher for students with some of the most complex learning and behavioral needs without adequate skills or supports.

Disruption of normal routines

Change and inconsistency are stressful for most students, and the effects are often magnified for students with autism, emotional disabilities and intellectual disabilities. This added stress can lead to acting out behaviors, heightened anxiety, depression and/or low motivation. Students with difficulties in socialization also miss out on opportunities to make progress through interaction with their peers and teachers.

While SEAC looks to the Board and the Department to make the most optimal programming choices for the coming school year, we ask you to continue to place the needs of students with disabilities as a high priority in order to address obvious educational inequities. Thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns. SEAC stands ready to support the Board and the Department in efforts to support the educational needs of all Hawaii's public school students, including and especially students with disabilities.

Respectfully,


Martha Guinan
Chair


Ivalee Sinclair
Legislative Committee Chair