



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
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July 23, 2020

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

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

RE: VI. G. Board Action on temporary discontinuance of extra compensation for classroom teachers in special education, hard-to-staff geographical locations, and Hawaiian language immersion programs for the 2020-2021 school year

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Department's proposal to temporarily discontinue pay differentials for classroom special education teachers. As you know, SEAC testified in strong support of special education pay differentials last December as a means of addressing the chronic shortage of qualified teachers for this vulnerable student population. At the time, both the Board and the Department committed to maintaining the pay increases for special education teachers, as well as Hawaiian immersion teachers and teachers in geographically hard to staff positions, by finding monies within the existing budget should the Legislature fail to provide the requested support.

No one anticipated the financial crisis brought on by Hawaii's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to maintain the health and safety of our population, nor the Legislature's refusal to add monies for the pay differentials. It is more than understandable that the Department is looking for strategies to mitigate its expected budget shortfalls. However, **SEAC asserts that renegeing on these pay differentials, if only temporarily, will be more costly in the long run than maintaining them.**

Teacher recruitment. While the data on the effect of the pay increases is preliminary, it points to positive gains in recruiting State Approved Teacher Education Program (SATEP) teachers into special education classroom positions. Without this incentive, it is likely that fewer teachers will choose special education positions over general education positions, given the increased stresses and demands associated with



teaching in the current pandemic.

Teacher retention. The Department's data from SY 19-20 show an impressive gain in teacher retention. Compared to SY 18-19 there were many fewer teachers leaving the special education classroom for a non-teaching position or a general education position. There were also fewer teachers retiring from public education.

HSTA has sounded the alarm that many teachers are contemplating sitting out the upcoming school year at home or retiring early. A \$10,000 salary loss to special education teachers might be the deciding factor not to return to the classroom. The cost of replacing these teachers can be quite significant when you add up separation pay, recruitment costs, new teacher mentoring and induction, and salaries for subs in order to free up a new teacher for additional training. Vacant positions or positions filled with unqualified personnel also place a bigger burden on those qualified special education teachers still in the field who must double up their IEP coordination and paperwork to fill in the gap.

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 are returning to school with arguably greater academic losses caused by sporadic or insufficient access to specially designed instruction over the period from March to August. They need teachers who have the skills to help them back on the path to positive academic and functional outcomes.

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 Gunan
Chair

Ivalee Sinclair
Legislative Committee Chair