



**S E A C**  
**Special Education Advisory Council**

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July 30, 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: III. A Board Action revisions to the 2020-2021 school calendar:  
additional training and professional development days for teachers  
and staff, delaying Students' First Day to ensure health and safety  
preparedness for schools; and

III. C. Board Action on Board expectations regarding: (1) focusing  
additional training and professional development days on health,  
safety, and distance learning; (2) starting student instruction for the  
2020-2021 school year in distance learning mode; (3) mandating  
masks on public school campuses; and (4) detailed, written, publicly  
posted guidance from the Department of Health

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) would like to express  
our appreciation to the Board for its swift action in responding to the  
urgent concerns from a broad spectrum of education stakeholders  
over the re-opening of schools for the SY 2020-21. We trust that your  
decisions today are made in what you believe to be the best interests  
of students and educators. We ask that you not lose sight of your  
commitment to prioritize services and resources for our most vulnerable  
students, many of who have IEPs.

Delay of student instruction in order to allow for additional preparation  
and training of school staff

SEAC understands the immediate need to push back the re-opening  
of schools in order to ensure adequate preparation for the health and  
safety for students and staff and to enable HODOE personnel to receive  
vital training. Most educators require additional knowledge, tools and  
skills to respond to new demands for distance learning options, social  
distancing requirements, provision of compensatory services, and  
addressing the social-emotional and academic competencies of students  
that are likely to have regressed since the closure of schools in March.

SEAC is particularly concerned over feedback from administrators,



teachers and parents that detailed and specific guidance has not yet been publicly shared regarding 1) the provision of special education with accommodations and modifications under the various instructional models, 2) the provision of related services, including contracted services, and 3) the determination of the need for compensatory services and the forms these services may take.

Many of the private service providers who have worked alongside HIDOE for years to ensure the array of services needed to meet the unique needs of special education students are losing personnel due to school closures and uncertainty over contract commitments. If we do not address this potential loss of an essential work force, we may seriously hamper the ability of schools to help students recoup lost skills and maintain newly acquired skills. Support for private service providers may need to include consideration of cost sharing of salaries of contracted personnel who must be quarantined due to exposure to COVID-19 in an academic setting.

Families must also be supported to be informed decision-makers and partners in the education of their children. SEAC believes that prior to the re-opening of schools, many families of children with disabilities have not received adequate information about the learning modes offered by their child's school to make an informed choice. In this information vacuum, they may choose to keep their children at home and not engage with the school.

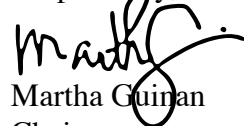
Starting student instruction in distance learning mode

SEAC and families of children with disabilities would appreciate a clear and Hawaii-centric definition of *distance learning* vs. *on-line learning* vs. *virtual learning*. At times they seem to be used interchangeably, and yet they may mean different things to different people. SEAC can broadly state that distance learning (versus in-person learning) does not provide an equitable learning opportunity for many students with disabilities. For others, it may prove beneficial if provided and monitored by a teacher with the skills to deliver specially designed instruction.

Schools should not be left on their own to try to determine whether a student can benefit from distance learning or receive more intensive supports in order to meet the goals and objectives in his or her IEP. Specific metrics must be provided by state leadership to ensure that services are provided equitably from school to school and classroom to classroom, and that a student's right to a free and *appropriate* education is guaranteed.

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