



**S E A C**  
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June 4, 2020

**Special Education  
Advisory Council**

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

RE: IV. A. Presentation on Department of Education's comprehensive  
plan for reopening schools plan for the 2020-2021 School Year

Dear Chair Payne and Members of the Board,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) thanks you for this opportunity to comment on the Department's plans to reopen schools for the Fall Semester. We are appreciative of the significant planning efforts made by teachers, administrators, resource personnel, state and complex leadership and Board members to prepare for the new school year amidst the harrowing and unpredictable effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also applaud advocates and community organizations like HE'E, Parents for Public Schools, Hawaii Children's Action Network, and Hawaii Kids CAN for maintaining their proactive focus on equity, accountability and family and community partnerships. It is in this spirit of partnership that we ask for greater clarity on the following issues:

Health and Safety

Setting standards for health and safety appears to be a fluid process, with news that the Center on Disease Control is planning on releasing new and perhaps less stringent guidance for schools nationwide in response to political pressure. This uncertainty is causing undue stress and confusion over how to balance the risks and benefits of returning to classrooms. Hawaii's school personnel and families need definitive answers prior to the re-opening of schools on the specific health and safety measures that will be implemented consistently on a statewide basis. It is clear from the amount of testimony received today from teachers and parents on this issue that more dialogue is needed to reach consensus on what these measures will be.

Access to timely and complete information

There are a number of informational links in the plans presented that are only accessible by Departmental employees. Examples include details regarding school attendance, the evaluation process and use of assessments, and intervention and compensatory services resources.



SEAC believes that all stakeholders benefit from receiving the same information at the same time. It is very difficult for families, in particular, to make plans and to ensure their child's rights are protected without a clear understanding of the process, the expected outcomes, the timelines, and the persons responsible for carrying out an activity related to their child's educational supports. In short, all members of an IEP team must have access to the same information.

#### Accountability

In a related vein, it is difficult to ensure accountability when the state leadership's guidance can be interpreted in a number of different ways. If schools are encouraged to make autonomous decisions, SEAC wonders how their actions will be monitored consistently against federal and state mandates. What template will be used to determine if a school is succeeding in providing equitable services?

#### School attendance

SEAC is anxious to gain more details on how attendance will be monitored during distance learning. Students with disabilities have traditionally had the highest rate of chronic absenteeism than any other subgroup resulting in poor academic outcomes for many of these students. It will be crucially important that these vulnerable students be fully supported to regularly benefit from learning opportunities. Good data must also be available to sufficiently capture attendance, so that early interventions can be made available to students who begin to fall off the grid. Attendance metrics should hopefully include at least four components: contact (including the % of students who are unreachable), connectivity (the % of students able to access on-line learning platforms and the % of teachers with the equipment, access and skills for distance learning), engagement (including family engagement) and participation.

#### Technology Support

SEAC could find no specifics regarding the scope of the Ohana Help Desk. To maximize its effectiveness, SEAC recommends that Help Desk coordinators post and update answers to commonly asked questions on a web page that is easily accessed by the public. FAQs can reach a larger audience and educate families who are not sure what supports they need. Short videos and infographics can also be helpful tools in educating families about helping their children access technology.

SEAC is always available to work collaboratively with the Department and the Board to find solutions to complex problems around the delivery of educational services to students with disabilities.

Respectfully,

Martha Guirán  
Chair

Ivalee Sinclair  
Legislative Committee Chair