



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council

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**Special Education
Advisory Council**

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Margaret Cox, Chair
Student Achievement Committee
Hawaii State Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: IV. A. Review of Board Policies to Support Student Mental and Emotional Wellbeing and to Prevent Suicide, and
IV. B. Review of Board Policies to Support the Recommendations of the Special Education Task Force Report

Dear Chair Cox and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, strongly supports your Committee's above priorities. We offer our assistance and welcome an opportunity to participate in reviewing and formulating policy recommendations to positively impact students with disabilities. At this time, we also offer the following preliminary comments:

Student Mental and Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention

For a number of years, Hawaii's middle and high school students have shown a disproportionately high risk of suicide ideation and suicide attempts compared to the national norm. SEAC suspects that many of these students who anonymously respond affirmatively to suicide questions on the Hawaii Youth Behavior Risk Survey are students with disabilities. We also know from other data sources that students with disabilities are disproportionately targeted for harassment and bullying.

In our November 1, 2018 testimony to your committee in response to the HYRBS report, we noted that while the current survey collects demographic data on sex, grade, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, homelessness and military status, it does NOT identify whether the student taking the survey has a disability. SEAC is hopeful that the Board and others can assist SEAC in our appeal to the school health survey work group to consider adding this important subgroup to



future survey versions. Knowing who to target for specific interventions will help to ensure better outcomes for students who are at risk due to bullying and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

Special Education Task Force Recommendations

Your committee has indicated its intention to review key special education-related policies including Special Education and Related Services (105-12), Inclusion (105-13), and Rights of Students Who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, or Deaf-Blind (900-5). In light of the recent publicity regarding discipline data collected by the Office for Civil Rights for SY 16-17, SEAC strongly recommends that you add an additional policy for review--School Climate and Discipline (101-7). Specifically, SEAC is alarmed over the finding that Hawaii students with disabilities experience a significantly higher number of days of lost instruction due to suspension per 100 students than students in any other state.

While SEAC has long been aware that students with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be suspended than their non-disabled peers, we were not aware, until this data was released, that Hawaii administrators are suspending some students with disabilities from access to the school campus for periods beyond the usual practice of most other locales. Any suspension, whether it be for several days or several weeks, negatively impacts these vulnerable students' academic achievement, graduation rates and post-school outcomes. It may be in the interest of Hawaii students to cap the number of days of suspensions, as is done in other states.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this issue. SEAC stands ready to assist the Board and the Department in the development and evaluation of policy revisions and implementation. Should you have questions, we will be happy to provide answers or clarification.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan
SEAC Chair

Ivalee Sinclair
Legislative Committee Chair