



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
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January 28, 2022

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Advisory Council**

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Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair
Committee on Education
State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: SB 2820 - RELATING TO TEACHER COMPENSATION

Dear Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), **strongly supports** SB 2820 which appropriates funds for pay differentials for hard to fill teacher positions.

Pay differentials for classroom teachers in special education was first instituted in January 2020 as a means of addressing a decades-long chronic shortage of qualified teachers for the most vulnerable student population. All evidence has pointed to the fact that this program has been highly effective in recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers over the past two years. Providing stable funding for these pay differentials is far less costly in the long run than the disruption to teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and above all student performance should these pay differentials be discontinued.

Teacher recruitment and retention. As evidenced by data from HSTA and the Office of Talent Management, as well as many testimonies received from teachers in the SY 20-21, the special education teacher pay differential was a major factor in motivating more teachers to fill vacant special education classroom positions (a 43% *increase* over the previous year). SY 20-21 also saw a 28% *decrease* in the number of teachers leaving special education for a general education position. No one doubts that these gains in recruiting and retaining teachers are likely to be lost, if the extra compensation is withdrawn.

A February 2019 presentation by Education Week for National Public Radio shared a worrisome trend that the number of special education teachers nationally has dropped by more than 17 percent over the past decade--a trend likely to have been exacerbated by the last two years



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of the pandemic. This national shortage makes it harder to recruit qualified teachers who are willing to take on the extra time and paperwork demanded in special education, especially if we are unable to offer additional compensation. A likely outcome of not offering a differential to this shortage category is what Education Week refers to as a “quality shortage” where a higher percentage of special education teachers in the state are not fully qualified. In addition, the cost of not retaining teachers can include an average of \$20,000 per new hire, including expenses related to separation, recruiting, hiring and training new teachers (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Student achievement. By far the greatest costs of not continuing the pay differential would 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 have arguably suffered greater academic losses than their peers during the past two years of the pandemic. They need the stability of teachers who know their individualized needs and have the skills to help them back on the path to positive academic and functional outcomes.

Mahalo for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 2820. If you have any questions, we are happy to answer them.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan
Chair

Ivalee Sinclair
Legislative Committee Chair