



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
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March 22, 2013

**Special Education
 Advisory Council**

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Senator Jill Tokuda, Chair
 Senate Committee on Education
 Senator Brian Taniguchi, Chair
 Senate Committee on Higher Education
 State Capitol
 Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: SCR 120- REQUESTING THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
 AND THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO EVALUATE
 THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR TEACHING READING
 IN HAWAII SCHOOLS AND TO MOVE FORWARD WITH
 APPROPRIATE IMPLEMENTATION

Dear Chairs Tokuda and Taniguchi and Members of the Committees,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), **supports the intent** of SCR 120 that promotes awareness of dyslexia and asks the Department of Education to move to implement the recommendations in the *Comprehensive Plan for Teaching Reading in Hawaii Schools*, prepared with great dedication by the Dyslexia Working Group.

The Working Group included two current members of SEAC, reflecting our ongoing concern that students with disabilities have the lowest rates of proficiency on the Hawaii State Assessment for Reading, with only 1 out of every 5 special education students reading at grade level standards. Additionally, students with specific learning disabilities make up 50% of the school age special education population, and 80% of these students have a reading disability.

The *Comprehensive Plan* driving SCR 120 addresses the needs of these students as well as many students in the general education population whose struggles with reading result in poorer academic performance overall. This plan comes at a time when the Department of Education is undergoing strategic reforms to improve



student achievement including Response to Intervention, an Early Warning system to identify struggling learners, and mentoring support for new teachers.

With respect to SCR 120 SEAC has the following concerns:

- 1) the Department's strategic reform efforts appear to be in the initial stages, and hard data on their effectiveness may not be available before the SY 2013-14;
- 2) SCR 120 calls for extensive data to be collected by the Department for its status report to the 2014 Legislature, and there may not be adequate time to complete the data collection and analysis by the end of December 2013;
- 3) the Department's budget is at risk of significant cuts to funding by the current Legislature, which may forestall efforts to install literacy specialists in every complex, much less at every school; and
- 4) the resolution does not address the issue of preservice training and the responsibility of institutions of higher learning to prepare future teachers with foundational reading instruction skills, the ability to identify struggling readers and writers, and strategies to differentiate supports.

Having stated our concerns, SEAC also believes it is important to move forward as quickly as possible to prevent academic failure and its effect on the quality of life of our students. We offer the following recommendations for your consideration:

- having the Department provide an interim report on the available data specified in SCR 120 prior to the opening of the 2014 Legislature;
- developing awareness strategies around dyslexia and other reading disorders for all stakeholders to implement, including the Department, the Dyslexia Working Group members, SEAC and other parties interested in addressing this issue;
- developing a survey of teachers in the Department to identify those who currently meet the standards for reading specialists, as well as their current placement in the field; and
- utilizing evidence-based practices as a basis for professional development to the field.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important legislation. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them.

Respectfully,

Ivalee Sinclair, Chair