



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Date: 02/13/2017
Time: 02:45 PM
Location: 229
Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Kathryn S. Matayoshi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 0547 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Allows for several factors to be weighted for the weighted student formula including but not limited to student characteristics, enrollment trends, and optimal student-teacher ratios. Requires the committee on weights to incorporate into the weighted student formula weights that account for special education teachers and support staff, enrollment increases, and the optimal student-teacher ratio at each grade level.

Department's Position:

The Department of Education (Department) appreciates the interest in continuous improvement to the methodology of equitably distributing appropriated funds to schools. The Department **does not support SB 0547** as it would create significant implementation challenges for the Weighted Student Formula (WSF).

The Committee on Weights (COW) has been tasked with developing a WSF to be considered by the Board of Education. In previous years, this task has involved determining: (1) which Department funds would be distributed by the single formula; and (2) how to equitably distribute those funds using weighted factors to support all schools. In essence, the COW is tasked with coming up with a way to distribute a significant portion of the budget (55-56%) the Department has available to it, and not distributing a budget the Department or any particular school may want.

This bill:

- 1) Encourages the COW to consider "optimal student-teacher ratios;"
- 2) Encourages the COW to determine the "optimal student-teacher ratio for each grade level from kindergarten through grade twelve;" and
- 3) Requires the COW to incorporate into the formula:
 - a) Weights to account for special education teachers and support staff;
 - b) Weights to account for anticipated enrollment increases and associated facility

- concerns; and
- c) Weights representing the optimal student-teacher ratio at each grade level.

Comments:

1) The COW can consider "optimal student-teacher ratios" in its deliberations as suggested, particularly on a system-wide basis, but it is likely that the COW would conclude that achieving an "optimal student-teacher ratio" at all schools would require both additional funds it does not have the means to obtain and a resources allocation formula based on a staffing standard instead of weighted factors.

2) The COW would likely find it challenging to determine a single "optimal student-teacher ratio for each grade level" as what is "optimal" for any individual school is influenced by the size of the school and special needs of the student population.

3a) The WSF is a methodology for distributing funds to schools. It is not the only allocation methodology employed. The WSF budget is appropriated through EDN100 and the special education budget is contained in EDN150. Special Education teacher and education assistant positions are distributed to Complex Areas based on special education student enrollment. It would not be practical to use a single formula to distribute both Regular Education and Special Education funds. In addition, due to federal maintenance of effort/maintenance of fiscal support requirements pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the co-mingling of WSF and Special Education funds is not feasible.

3b) The WSF allocation methodology relies on projected enrollment for planning purposes and allocations are adjusted during the school year based on actual enrollment counts, so the WSF already accounts "for anticipated enrollment increases."

3c) As its name suggests, the WSF relies heavily on distributing funds based on factors based on student characteristics. The incorporation of an "optimal student-teacher ratio at each grade level" that would somehow be turned into a weighting factor could be seen as antithetical, as the new factor would shift limited WSF resources between schools without regard to student needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this measure.