

April 29, 2014

Dear Senators and Representatives:

Thank you very much for your concern about dyslexic children and other struggling readers. We truly valued your presence earlier this year at the SCR 120, SD 2 Appreciation Luncheon and dyslexia simulations event which HIDA sponsored at the State Capitol.

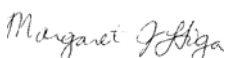
We want to take this opportunity to address the Hawai'i Department of Education's ("DOE") legislative report ("Report") submitted this session in response to SCR 120, SD 2 (2013). The Report shows that the DOE is making an effort to respond to your questions and concerns about the quality of reading instruction in public schools. We are encouraged to see it has initiated public awareness efforts by retaining the Dyslexia Tutoring Center of Hawai'i. This is an important first step; however, making teachers aware of dyslexia is not enough. Classroom accommodations, while essential to helping struggling readers learn, are just band aids. Teachers must specifically be trained in methodologies that support reading instruction for *all* students, including those that struggle.

In that regard, we are very pleased to report that, on March 14, 2014, the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board ("HTSB") adopted licensure criteria for the new teacher license field of Literacy Specialist. The HTSB determined that the standards for licensure and preparation programs for Literacy Specialists shall include the International Dyslexia Association *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading* ("IDA Standards"). We were excited to hear representatives of the University of Hawai'i - Manoa, Department of Special Education, College of Education ("UH") indicate their support of, and belief in, the IDA Standards at the HTSB hearing. They testified that Literacy Specialists must meet the IDA Standards in order to teach dyslexic children; and that if a teacher has the knowledge and skill to teach a dyslexic child, he or she can teach *all* children. They advised the HTSB that the UH is already working to adapt its Masters of Education program to address the IDA Standards. This makes the DOE's statement in the Report, that it plans to "Partner with university and college teacher preparation programs in Hawai'i [to] advocate for the inclusion of knowledge, skills, and best practices for literacy instruction and reading skills," all the more feasible and compelling.

We are sincerely grateful for these efforts and believe that, collectively, they are a great step forward in improving reading instruction in public schools, especially for children with dyslexia and other struggling readers. We ask that you continue to monitor progress made by the DOE, UH, and HTSB, and use your influence as appropriate, on this important matter. We understand they all have many matters on their plates - but teaching Hawai'i's children to read must be one of the highest priorities - if not the highest priority - for our schools.

Thank you, again, for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,



Margaret J. Higa
Executive Director
