

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Minutes – December 13, 2024

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Will Carlson, Annette Cooper, Martha Guinan, Melissa Johnson, Amanda Kaahanui (staff), Helen “Kupu” Kaniho (liaison to the Superintendent), Dale Matsuura, Cheryl Matthews, Siena Molina, Trish Moniz, Christopher Pelayo, Susan Rocco (staff), Rosie Rowe, Steven Vannatta, Jasmine Williams, Susan Wood

EXCUSED: Kathie Awaya, Mark Disher

ABSENT: Virginia Beringer, Mai Hall, Tina King, Paul Meng, Wendy Nakasone-Kalani, Kiele Pennington, Kauai Rezentes, Scott Shimabukuro, Herbert Taitingfong, Lisa Vegas

GUESTS: Jessica Alipio, Michelle Arakawa, Verna Chinen, Patty Dong, Kauai Correa, Serena Fujikawa, Lynn Hironaka Fujimoto, Jackie Jackson, Sandy Jessmon, Jian Tan, Michael McGushin, Lori Morimoto, Tiana Tehero, Lynn Romero, Nicole Schmitz, Noe Taum

Welcome/Introductions

Chair Martha Guinan opened the meeting at 9:05 a.m. and read Sunshine Law requirements for testimony. Members and guests introduced themselves and the office or stakeholder group they are representing.

Input from the Public

There was no input from the public.

Announcements

Susan Rocco invited any interested member or guest to consider joining SEAC’s Legislative Committee. The Committee introduces bills of interest to the Council to determine whether a majority of members support testimony for or against each bill, or whether they prefer to have SEAC monitor the progression of a bill through its committee hearings. Committee members then agree on talking points for each testimony and Susan R. prepares testimony for signature by Martha prior to hearing. In addition to legislative testimonies, the Committee also testifies on relevant issues at the Board of Education hearings. Recently SEAC presented comments on regular attendance to the Board based on the November discussion on the topic. (See Attachment A).

Amanda Kaahanui announced that the SPIN Conference is scheduled for March 22nd at the Hawaii Convention Center and members are invited to attend for free. There are plans for a SEAC table and members are encouraged to sign up for a shift to answer questions from parents and other conference participants.

Discussion on Post-School Outcomes (Indicator 14)

Lori Morimoto from the Monitoring and Compliance Branch presented data and improvement activities for the Annual Performance Report Indicator that measures what activities students with IEPs are engaging in to further their careers once they leave high school. The key measurements are the percentage of students within one year of leaving high school who are: A) enrolled in higher education for one term at a college or community college, B) enrolled in higher education or competitively employed, and C) enrolled in higher education or some other postsecondary education or training program, competitively employed, or in some other employment. Competitive employment means

receiving at or above minimum wage in a setting with others who are not disabled.

Procedures for reaching out to former students

Students who have exited receive a letter and a Post-School Outcomes Survey in August one year after leaving high school. If students don't respond initially to the letter by returning the survey, school staff make up to three outreach attempts to reach the student by phone, email, text, or home visits. The survey window closes three weeks later in September.

Post-School Outcomes Survey response rates

Four years of response data from Fall 2021 to Fall 2024 show a baseline response rate of 58.25% which increased slightly for two years and then fell to 57.14% in 2024. The main reason for the decline in survey participation was students opting out.

Performance rates for postsecondary education/training (14A)

The number of students enrolled in higher education and completing at least one term (14A) rose to a high of 26.4% for students from the class of 2022. The percentage of students in higher education from the class of 2023 dropped 4 percentage points. Reasons for not enrolling in higher education included a lack of transportation, not having a high school diploma, lack of funding, or a lack of desire to pursue further education/training.

Performance rates for postsecondary education or competitive employment (14B)

The number of students competitively employed or enrolled in higher education dropped from the baseline of 70.69% for the Class of 2020 to 56.68% for the Class of 2023. More students were initially employed but did not complete 90 days of work. Reasons for not working included having to care for family members, an inability to find work or to work because of the disability, and families not wanting the student to work.

Performance rates for postsecondary education/training or competitive employment or other employment (14C)

During the four year reporting period post-school participation averaged between 75-81%. Strategies for improvement in collecting the data include statewide training, an online dashboard, documentation of multiple attempts and ongoing support to staff at the school level. Improved outreach to students includes the option of an online survey, an informational flyer prior to exit and an effort to collect updated contact information. The Department is also working with DVR to offer students employment training opportunities. Pre-ETS providers for each island were identified.

Request for post-meeting examination of targets for Indicator 14

Because of time restraints, members were asked to fill out the [feedback sheet](#) for post-school outcomes by January 15, 2025 to weigh in on whether the targets should be adjusted or stay the same.

Small group discussions

Members and guests divided into five small groups to discuss the following questions:

What barriers are contributing to the performance issues?

What activities/strategies do you propose that would make a positive difference?

The results of the discussions are contained in Attachment B.

Questions/comments from members and guests

Q. How many surveys were sent out? A. We send the surveys to about 1300 leavers each year. This year we got 760 responses.

Q. Does Indicator 14 count towards the annual OSEP determination? A. It counts as part of timely and accurate data.

Q. Is it possible for SEAC to see summaries of some of the optional questions asked in the survey? A. Yes, we can gather and share that information with SEAC.

Discussion on Preschool Outcomes (Indicator 7)

Patty Dong from the Monitoring and Compliance Branch and Kauai Correa from the Exceptional Support Branch presented data and improvement activities related to early childhood outcomes for preschool children who received special education and related services.

Key measurements of Indicator 7

These include entry and exit scores of preschool students to determine improvements in the following areas:

- A. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships),
- B. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy), and
- C. Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

For each of the following areas two measurements are collected—one related to growth and the other related to age level expectations.

Data trends over a four year period: Growth

For all three skill areas, preschool student growth scores have decreased from the baseline year (2020) to the most recent year (2023): 1) 65.68% to 53.53% for positive social-emotional skills, 68.07% to 56.70% for acquisition of knowledge and 68.21% to 53:45% for use of appropriate behaviors. Hawaii is in the bottom third of states for growth for Indicators 7A, 7B and 7C, although comparison is difficult because states use different measurement instruments.

Data trends over a four year period: Functioning within age expectations by age 6

Age level functioning for social emotional growth preschool student growth in 2023 was higher than baseline (42.86% to 41.20%) as was age level functioning for use of appropriate behaviors (45.39 to 37.32%). However, age level functioning for acquisition and use of knowledge and skills in 2023 fell below baseline (37.49% to 42.65%).

Request for post-meeting examination of targets for Indicator 7

Because results for preschool outcomes only exceeded set targets in one instance (7C2 in 2023), members are asked to fill out the [feedback sheet](#) by January 15, 2025 to weigh in on whether the targets should be adjusted or stay the same.

Improvement strategies

These include the following:

- Training a cohort of teachers and speech/language pathologists Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS);
- Training on Transdisciplinary Play-based Assessments for several complex areas with Kauai taking the lead;
- The Early Childhood Conference which featured several nationally renowned early childhood educators; and
- Training specific to teachers of deaf, hard of hearing and visually disabled students.

Small group discussions

Members and guests divided into five small groups to discuss the following questions:

What barriers are contributing to the performance issues?

What activities/strategies do you propose that would make a positive difference?

The results of the discussions are contained in Attachment C.

Feedback on SPP/APR Meeting

Several members commented favorably on the December 3rd SPP/APR Engagement Meeting. The Japanese Cultural Center provided a positive venue for networking. In addition, each discussion group had a varied mix of stakeholders who were committed to working together to improve outcomes for students.

Questions/comments from members and guests

Q. For the measurement of kids who made gains, is OSEP looking at gains/growth of any kind or *substantial* gains/growth? A. OSEP would like to see both.

Q. OSEP emphasizes continuous improvement, so doesn't that mean that targets should continue to rise rather than readjusting due to declining outcomes? A. Yes. We also must discuss whether the targets set are achievable.

Q. For those 15 teachers who took the LETRS course, are their kids scoring higher on indicator 7? A. The teachers completed the course last June, so we could look at the data for this year.

Q. When did the Department start reducing the number of hours of preschool special education to several hours a day vs. the traditional six hours a day? Is there a connection between the drop-off in instructional time and the lower achievement results for 2023?

C. SPIN has been hearing from parents that they are only being offered two hours of preschool services a day. SPIN staff wonder how DOE can improve behavior and communication skills when the two-hour service delivery window lessens the opportunities for play and time with peers.

Review of the Minutes of the November 8th Meeting

There were no corrections or additions to the draft minutes.

Action: The November 8th minutes were approved as submitted.

Agenda Setting for the January 10th Meeting

Martha mentioned that Brian Hallett, the Chief Financial Officer for the Department, or his designee is being sought for a presentation in January or February on the SY 25-26 budget request. Other suggested agenda items included the following:

- Alternatives to suspensions
- Reasons for dropouts (4140s)
- Differences between the Certificate of Completion, Regular Diploma and GED
- The Dyslexia bill and other legislation
- Infographics
- Video update
- Plans for revising Chapter 19.

Amanda reminded members to check in periodically on the member portal on the [SEAC website](#) to keep up to date on infographic projects and other information.

Attachment A - Board Testimony



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
1010 Richards Street Honolulu, HI 96813
Phone: 586-8126 Fax: 586-8129
email: spin@doh.hawaii.gov

November 21, 2024

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

Ms. Martha Guinan, *Chair*
Ms. Susan Wood, *Vice Chair*

Ms. Kathie Awaya
Ms. Virginia Beringer
Mr. Will Carlson
Ms. Annette Cooper
Mr. Mark Disher
Ms. Nancy Gorman
Ms. Mai Hall
Ms. Melissa Johnson
Ms. Tina King
Ms. Dale Matsuura
Ms. Cheryl Matthews
Dr. Paul Meng
Ms. Siena Molina
Ms. Trish Moniz
Mr. Chris Pelayo
Ms. Kiele Pennington
Ms. Kau'i Rezentes
Ms. Rosie Rowe
Dr. Scott Shimabukuro
Mr. Herbert Taitingfong
Mr. Steven Vannatta
Ms. Lisa Vegas
Ms. Jasmine Williams

Ms. Helen Kaniho, *liaison to
the Superintendent*
Ms. Wendy Nakasone-Kalani,
*liaison to the military
community*

Amanda Kaahanui, Staff
Susan Rocco, Staff

Mr. Bill Arakaki, Chair
Student Achievement Committee
Board of Education
P. O. Box 2360
Honolulu, HI 96804

RE: Agenda Item III. Presentation on Strategic Plan Desired Outcome
1.2.1. All students desire to attend school regularly

Dear Chair Arakaki and members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) fully supports the Department and the Board in your efforts to increase regular student attendance as a proven strategy to boost academic performance and graduation rates. Improving regular attendance is one of SEAC's priorities for the school year given that students with disabilities have consistently experienced attendance rates that are 10 percentage points behind that for all students and 20 percentage points lower than students with low needs (i.e. without disabilities, English Learner status or economic disadvantage). We believe these missed days of instruction contribute significantly to the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

In the spirit of working together to find solutions to complex issues, SEAC offers the following comments for your consideration regarding a number of root causes of chronic absenteeism in students with disabilities that were discussed at our November 8th SEAC meeting:

Root cause: Out of School-Suspensions

Students with disabilities are suspended at a rate twice that of students without disabilities. The National Association of School Psychologists in their 2022 position statement on safe schools stressed that "overly punitive discipline, like suspensions and expulsions, should only be utilized as an absolute last resort as those measures only contribute to opportunity and achievement gaps and make schools less safe."

Potential solution: Professional development for all school personnel in positive behavioral supports and de-escalation strategies.



Root cause: Bullying and Cyberbullying

Students with disabilities are targeted by bullies at 2-3 times the rate of other students with the exception of transgender youth. In addition, the documented rates of bullying are dramatically less than self-reports such as those captured by the Hawaii Youth Risk Behavior Survey, indicating that many instances of bullying may be unaddressed and lead to absences related to students feeling unsafe at school.

Potential solutions: Bullying prevention programs; outside agency partners to help provide resources and out-of-the-box problem solving.

Root cause: Ongoing Staffing Shortages

Staffing shortages among special education teachers, related services personnel and educational assistants lead to inconsistent instruction and IEP supports. Students with complex needs may be most impacted by staff turnover and altered routines which can result in less motivation to attend school, and in some instances, school refusal.

Potential solutions: Higher pay for educational assistants; mentoring of special education teachers.


Root cause: Lack of transportation

Only a fraction of students with disabilities have guaranteed transportation as a related service in their IEPs. Most students receiving special education services have the same limited options as their non-disabled peers. One SEAC member reported students in his district sometimes having to take 3 different buses to get to school. For many students in rural areas, transportation is an all or nothing proposition--either they are at the bus stop early enough or they miss out on a day of instruction.

Potential solutions: Community engagement to develop more options for transportation--both formal and informal; online instructional options that count toward attendance for students who have no transportation get to school.

Other root causes offered by SEAC's membership included inadequate mental health supports for students with anxiety and depression, and a lack of belonging due to placement outside the general education classroom. SEAC is eager to partner with the Department and the Board to find solutions to these long-standing factors leading to absenteeism. Please let us know how we may be of assistance.

Respectfully,


Martha Guinan
Chair

December 13, 2024

Attachment B – Postsecondary Outcomes Discussion Points

Survey Challenges:

- Survey didn't capture volunteer opportunities which are often the first step toward employment.
- Students may feel the social-emotional connection with high school is finished and may not want to reconnect.

Survey Strategies:

- Offer a gift card (for example, a Starbucks card) for filling out the survey. Advertise this incentive in the information given before exiting.

Post-school education and employment challenges:

- Transportation. Public bussing is limited on neighbor islands.
- Some of the college classes have limited offerings for disabled students.
- Students don't know how to get support once they exit high school.
- There is a perceived lack of safety in accessing college or employment.
- Students have minimal self-advocacy skills.
- DOE school settings tend to be over-nurturing to the student and may restrict the opportunity to take risks in order to learn more self-sufficiency.
- A lot of schools were not aware of the incentives being offered this year.
- Schools may not be utilizing the data to follow-up with their students.
- If school/family relationships are not strong, sometimes parents are reluctant to sign their child up for services like DVR until the last minute, because they don't feel safe or have trouble processing all the steps.
- Transportation this past year has been very difficult with the loss of many bus routes.
- After leaving high school, transportation continues to be a barrier, sometimes due to the student not knowing how to access transportation or how to independently use available transportation.
- Students are sometimes unprepared by the rigor required in post school environments; they may not understand the pace of the coursework or the resources that need to be accessed to complete assignments.
- **Post-school education and employment strategies:**
- Offer free transportation (similar to Medicaid transportation options) for qualified students to employment or college from remote areas.

December 13, 2024

- Connect with community colleges to learn the full range of classes available to students and make this information available to potential students.
- Offer better communication about what services are available at the college level to support students with disabilities.
- Include information about post-school resources and contacts during the last year of transition.
- Explain the difference between IDEA and ADA services to students, staff and parents at the high school level.
- Have university personnel offer training to DOE teachers regarding post-school educational supports.
- Create youth circles to make students aware of supports and get peer encouragement.
- Ensure that student voice is part of the transition sections of the IEP.
- Refine survey questions, so that we can understand why students aren't completing their studies or staying on the job.
- Ensure that the Personal Transition Plan accurately reflects the student's choices and post-secondary goals.
- Provide opportunities in the trades for work exposure.
- Provide support for staff turnover and offer training to all staff on the needs of students with disabilities.
- Teach students about bus schedules and pick-up times.
- Designate a point person to help student make the successful transition to college or employment.
- Make relationships more meaningful with student and parents prior to exiting.
- Start the whole transition process earlier, perhaps in 6th grade, to build relationships.
- Develop a more systematic process for collecting student contact information.
- Create a YouTube video that describes the survey, so students may be more prepared to take the survey.
- Work with other entities outside the Department, for instance, UH, to have them remind students enrolled in their first year that a survey will be forthcoming.
- Deemphasize the possibility of opting out of the survey.
- Start discussions with parents earlier to discover their visions for their child's future and build trust.
- Create a video for students on a certificate route that shows students who are successfully employed to show what is possible.
- Work with schools to ensure that bus training is available.
- Be creative with scheduling while in high school to ensure access to the general curriculum in addition to specially designed instruction.

December 13, 2024

- Train students on the use of assistive technology to access the core curriculum and achieve greater independence.
- Support teachers in middle and high school to offer reading interventions to bolster the reading abilities of their students.
- Create circles of support for self-employment for students who would like to take that route.

December 13, 2024

Attachment C – Preschool Outcomes Discussion Points

Challenges/Barriers:

- If student IEP minutes are limited to specially designed instruction, they are missing out on socialization.
- Some preschool students with disabilities are not ready for a whole school day, but there are not enough other options that ensure IEP needs are met.
- Nationally, there was a shift away from facilitated play to curriculum-driven IEPs which is now acknowledged as not helpful as young children learn through play.
- Preschool teachers and school teams who decide on IEP hours may not have the current training to know how to best provide for the child's needs.
- There is a lack of a continuum of preschool environments.
- There are not enough classroom spaces to meet the need.
- There is a lack of understanding by administrators of the needs of the SPED preschooler.
- Substitute teachers need to be trained in disability.
- There is a lack of support personnel in preschool classrooms who are trained in behaviors.
- Some parents don't want to be engaged.
- Schools are not always appropriately assessing the student's needs using the tools that are available.
- Schools don't have sufficient related service providers to meet the needs of 3-5 year olds and DOE providers who have the skill to serve children as young as 3 years old.

Strategies:

- Work to provide access for more students with IEPs in Executive Office of Early Learning (EOEL) classrooms to provide greater opportunities for interactions with same age peers without disabilities and more time for play.
- Shift to IEP decisions made on needs rather than accommodating a restricted schedule that may have been constructed for other purposes.
- Provide virtual training for parents: Social Emotional Learning (SEL), LETRS, etc.
- Provide parent counseling. The sooner educators work with parents to expand their understanding of their child's disability and unique needs, as well as evidence-based interventions, the sooner the child will make optimal progress.
- Help the parent to navigate the system of services and support.
- Partner with EI(DOH) from the beginning, reaching out to families earlier in the early intervention cycle.

December 13, 2024

- Show empathy for the family and look out for the interests of the child.
- Advocate for more EOEL and inclusive classroom environments (universal preschool).
- Look for parental components that would help preschoolers succeed in the preschool setting.
- Raise pay for paraprofessionals to incentivize more personnel to serve in preschool classrooms.
- Look for motivators for families to engage in their preschooler's learning and work together as a team.
- Moving from TS Gold to a new instrument where we look at children developmentally allows us to see progress and target interventions.
- Provide families with developmentally appropriate tools to work with their children at home.
- Provide more opportunities for preschoolers to be with gen ed peers in a language rich environment.
- Ensure that every community has inclusive options.