# SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

**Draft Minutes – January 10, 2025**

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**PRESENT**: Kathie Awaya, Will Carlson, Annette Cooper, Mark Disher, Nancy Gorman, Martha Guinan, Mai Hall, Melissa Johnson, Helen “Kupu” Kaniho (liaison to the Superintendent), Cheryl Matthews, Paul Meng, Siena Molina, Trish Moniz, Christopher Pelayo, Kiele Pennington, Susan Rocco (staﬀ), Rosie Rowe, Herbert Taitingfong, Steven Vannatta, Jasmine Williams, Susan Wood

**EXCUSED**: Amanda Kaahanui (staﬀ)

**ABSENT**: Virginia Beringer, Tina King, Wendy Nakasone-Kalani, Kaui Rezentes, Scott Shimabukuro, Lisa Vegas

**GUESTS**: Jessica Alipio, Michelle Arakawa, C.J. Chappell, Verna Chinen, Linda Elento, Jamia Green, Alysha Kim, Felicia Friend Linton, Tricia Lukzen, Michael McGushin, Cynthia Mew, Lori Morimoto, Shan Stewart, Ravae Todd, LeeAnn Viernes, Brikena White, Jian

# 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

No written or oral input from the public was received.

# Announcements

* Martha announced that Amanda Kaahanui is not present for the meeting as she has recently moved to the Big Island and is in the process of unpacking. Fortunately, she will remain as staff to SEAC and SPIN from her new location.
* Brikena White announced that Deusdedi Merced will be returning to Hawaii to give a workshop for parents and community members on February 10th on national trends regarding due process decisions, initial evaluations, parent engagement, and discipline and alternatives to suspension. The workshop will be at the Japanese Cultural Center and an invitation will be sent out shortly with the help of SPIN. Mr. Merced has also agreed to make a 90-minute presentation to SEAC on February 14th. Members are encouraged to attend.
* Alysha Kim confirmed that the Chapter 19 regulations are in the process of revisions. Helen Kaniho explained the process will be completed within several years and involve multiple community engagement opportunities. The aim is to make sure that students with disabilities are included in the language.
* Brikena announced that the State Office is changing from eCSSS, the data system for special education, to the Ed Plan which will include a parent portal.

**Alternatives to Suspensions**

Jaclyn Caffrey, an educational specialist for general education and Mike Oshiro, who works with Jaclyn in the Office of Student Support Services, described some preventative programs, as well as out of class supports to intervene when a student’s behavior begins to affect is learning or the learning of others. Their focus is on adult behavior to improve student behavior, looking at behavior through a trauma lens, and shifting away from punitive practices to a more restorative justice, skill-building approach.

Collaboration between general and special education and the community

Recent efforts include: 1) the Positive Behavioral Support Conference with both special education and general education and outside partners, including judges, 2) the Office of Student Support Services Conference, and the 3) Joint School Administrator training with a focus on the Manifestation Determination process to determine whether student misbehavior is related to his/her disability.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Some of the initiative under PBIS include: 1) OASIS, an assessment regarding the student’s environment in the classroom, 2) a tiered fidelity inventory, 3) Back to Basics training including ISLA.

Intensive Skill-building Learning Approach (ISLA)

ISLA is a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Tier 1+ strategy. It trains teachers who can counsel or check in with students and return them to the classroom within fifteen minutes. Prior to returning to class the teacher has a restorative conversation with the student to make sure he or she knows what the next steps are and feels comfortable. This process helps to avoid office discipline referrals, detention and out of school suspensions. One of the strategies in ISLA is WOW: Welcoming students at the door, Owning your environment, and Wrapping up class with intention.

ISLA goals

These include:

* Strengthening preventative systems,
* Reducing the amount of missed instructional time,
* Improving behavior supports for students,
* Supporting skill development in students and staff, and
* Reduce the use of exclusionary practices.

Feedback fom the field

15 schools across the state have adopted ISLA over the last three years, primarily on Oahu, Lanai and the Big Island. As a result, there has been a reduction in out of school suspensions with a lot of schools choosing mediation and a couple of schools on the Big Island establishing a restorative justice program.

Future Plans

Michael shared projects in the planning stage including:

* A Manifestation Determination Guide,
* Cross Department collaboration in multiple areas including restorative justice,
* Revising and expanding discipline guidance for administrators to steer away from punitive and suspensions,
* Continuing to build on Tier 1 focus and transition to Tier 2,
* An attendance campaign, and
* Working with HSTA on behavior.

Additional Feedback on Alternatives to Suspensions

Jaclyn provided a link to a [feedback form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdiqaKqT4bdaXrBz_lZrTIM7_8h5wdQLCxI6DL__-1-l12PIg/viewform?usp=pp_url) for additional suggestions around decreasing discipline removals. Comments are needed by February 15th.

Questions/comments from members and guests

Q. Is the expectation in Tier 1 that the classroom teacher would have the ability to have this conversation with the student? What happens with the rest of the students in the classroom while the teacher is engaging the student? A. The conversation with the student and teacher is mediated by the ISLA. There are prompts that occur prior to having the conversation, including arranging for coverage.

C. Elementary teachers are good at building relationships, but when students get into middle and high school, not all teachers have the skillset or desire to do this. A. What will you do about this?

C. ISLA looks like it is designed to work smoothly in elementary schools but may be a challenge in the older grades. A. Actually ISLA was initially designed for middle and high school students, and Hawaii is adapting it for elementary schools as well.

C. I am interested in knowing more about what strategies we are putting together for student behavior seen through a trauma lens. A. That might be a bigger conversation than the time we have today. We would like to look at that moving forward, if that is okay with members.

C. I see the WOW strategy more effective in elementary settings while suspensions are much more likely in middle and high school where teachers don't always acknowledge ownership of the student.

C. As a former middle school teacher, [WOW] is powerful: greet at the door, own the room and ensure closure.

C. Perhaps professional development for teachers and staff on the adolescent brain may help with relationships.

Q. Who is the third person who works with classroom teacher and the ISLA teacher [as part of the dedicated three-person team to repair and restore damaged relations, etc.]? A. It varies from school to school. It could be a counselor, an SSC, a behavioral health specialist, etc. The focus is on the whole child.

C. My son is 16 and has had a horrible experience with the school system. The one thing he wants educators to know is that kids need to feel safe and not have things forced on them. In light of this, I recommend letting the child choose the third person. A. Yes. We are into building strengths and encouraging students to know what their options are.

C. The concern I have is that 15 schools is not going to make a significant difference in the suspension rates of students with disabilities. By contrast, when the Department committed to improving inclusion rates, they recruited larger cohorts and we did see a sizable difference in the percentage of students in general education classrooms for most of the school day. Q. What do you think is needed to get leadership to be more proactive about supporting this initiative? A. (Jaclyn) It was a slow process. We needed data to ensure that the implementation is working and is sustainable. We are looking to have a statewide initiative within Tier 1 to provide an alternate to suspensions. (C.J.) Project AWARE 2 is helping to crunch the data. Having early adopters first allows for mentor schools in different districts. It leads to more schools wanting to adopt the initiative. (Alysha) In addition to ISLA, we are trying to tackle this from multiple ways, for example PBIS and Chapter 19 revisions where we can embed proactive strategies. We have also put a new work group together around discipline disparities.

Q. PBIS came to Hawaii thirty years ago. I am grateful that you are still pursuing it, but I feel the need to move faster. Now that you have data on the schools who have the highest number of suspensions, are any of these schools included in your initial 15 schools? A. I am unable to speak to the schools higher end suspensions, but the way we are doing ISLA in general, is that we reach out to schools to assess their interest. If they don’t take up ISLA, there are other strategies to use with them.

C. We are a state in need of assistance with IDEA. You now have schools who are in need of assistance regarding suspensions, and they must be required to improve, like it or not. If we ignore them, and take longer, the students are sustaining greater harm. My frustration is that nothing is required, and the poor performing schools continue as usual. A. (Alysha) We really appreciate your feedback. One of the barriers is the system itself—the tri-level system and getting from the state initiative all the way down to the classroom. That is why we are looking at Organizational Behavior Management across all programs and initiatives—how to look at data to make decisions and direct targeted support. It also includes continuous feedback to ensure sustainability. (Tierney) I appreciate your comment about consistency. I do see a positive shift in the follow-up and the use of data.

Q. Do you keep track of how many manifestation determination (MD) meetings occur within a reasonable timeframe of long term suspensions to ensure timely supports are provided to the student? I see schools doing an investigation and bringing in the police, but not getting to the manifestation determination until after the fact. It should be happening concurrently before you proceed with a punitive response. A. We are in agreement and mindful about the need for more MD guidance to make sure that we are supporting students.

C. Roll out to some administrators is not the issue; sometimes it is push back from staff. Changing their mindsets are a challenge.

**Leading by Convening around DOE Preschool Services**

Helen Kaniho acknowledged that preschool services have become a very important topic in the last year, and the Exceptional Support Branch is committed to working together with SEAC and other preschool providers to ensure appropriate and consistent services for preschool children with disabilities across the state. She shared guidance and resources from various sources including:

* the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)—a [policy statement](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/policy-statement-on-inclusion-11-28-2023.pdf) released in November 2023 regarding children with disabilities in early childhood programs. It stresses the expectation of inclusion of students with disabilities in high quality early childhood settings and the use of evidence-based services and supports that are developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically responsive;
* Hawaii’s [Ready Keiki](https://www.readykeiki.org/) plan to ensure children are ready for kindergarten by creating greater access to preschool;
* The [Executive Office of Early Learning’s Public Prekindergarten Program](https://earlylearning.hawaii.gov/we-support-early-childhood/we-value-children-and-families/eoel-public-prekindergarten-program/).

Helen shared the belief that all children deserve high quality programming in any setting. The Exceptional Support Branch has specific expertise in intensive supports, including services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind and Deaf-Blind children. Verna Chinen added that ESB is working with Headstart, EOEL, and private preschools to spread the message that children must be supported in whatever setting they are currently to participate with their typically developing peers.

A Review of Leading by Convening

Steven Wood and Susan Wood reminded members of SEAC’s commitment to using the Leading by Convening model of coalescing around issues, ensuring relevant participation and doing the work together. This is evidenced by how members take the first meeting of the school year to agree on important issues (“buckets”) to focus attention on and then recruit experts to grow our knowledge. As groups begin to discuss preschool services he asked members to be aware of different levels of depth when interacting—from informing to networking to collaborating and transforming. Susan added that another important exercise when tackling a new issue is to decide who needs to be at the core of discussion and who should be in the next layer of providing data and information.

Small group discussions

Steven referred members to Attachment C from the minutes of December 13, 2024, where SEAC discussed both challenges and barriers in the way of improving preschool outcomes, as well as improvement strategies that could be taken. Building on that discussion, Steven gave small groups of members 3 questions to consider:

* What would you like to see as the shared statewide vision and goals for preschool special education services?
* Who needs to be at the table to develop the shared vision and goals, and commit to working together to have them adopted by leadership and stakeholders?
* What are the next steps that SEAC should take to support this process?

Feedback from the groups is captured in Attachment A.

Questions/comments from members and guests

C. The recent Early Childhood Conference shared great information about the important of facilitated play to support learning. I don’t think SEAC has ever had information shared about this evidence-based practice. Perhaps you could provide us with readings that could expand our knowledge.

C. Roy Takumi who is now the Board Chair for the Board of Education was one of the leaders in the Legislature by pushing for universal preschool 20 years ago. The Board should therefore be a helpful partner in expanding preschool options for all.

C. I hope there will be a priority for flexibility in transition timelines and inclusive settings, including homeschool and developmental age appropriate activities and settings, and also empowering parents in decisions for their child with a disability.

Q. May a parent join the monthly Preschool interagency Group meeting? A. We will get back to you on that.

**Review of Minutes from the December 13, 2024 SEAC Meeting**

There were no corrections made to the draft minutes of the December meeting.

**Action: The minutes were approved as circulated.**

**Agenda Setting for the February 14, 2025 Meeting**

Martha offered two agenda items that have been previously scheduled: a 90-minute presentation by Deusdedi Merced, Esq. from Special Education Solutions LLC, a leading expert in IDEA Compliance and dispute resolution, and a budget briefing by Brian Hallett or someone from the Office of Fiscal Services. Susan R. suggested an agenda item related to SEAC’s legislative focus, and three requests for data were made by Mai Hall, Susan Wood and Jasmine Williams:

* data on the percentage of students who have not completed their mandated vaccinations for attending public school broken down by age and vaccine along with the Department's response to the issue;
* data on the current preschool placements for students with IEPs in EOEL classrooms, Head Start and private preschools;
* data on the number of young children exiting early intervention services, the percentage who are found IDEA eligible, and the percentage of children in that category who entering HIDOE preschools.

**Report on the Progress of the SEAC Video**

Steven reported very little progress due to a lack of expertise in the video program purchased—Create Studio. He asked anyone with expertise with that software to consider volunteering for this work group.

**Infographic Work Groups**

**Work Based Learning** and T**ransition Planning in the IEP** were combined into one group as members were not clear how they differed. The other two work groups that met were ***Pro Se* Due Process Hearings** and **Initial Evaluations for IDEA Eligibility.** Each group was asked to come up with a clear message that the infographic will convey and a target audience or audience to report back to the larger membership.

Transition Planning in the IEP – Susan W. reported that the group wants to target an infographic for the parents of 6th through 8th graders that gives ideas on how they can help facilitate the discussion of transition with their DOE partners.

*Pro Se* Due Process Hearings – Helen reported that the group learned a lot about the parent’s perspective. The infographic will have tips for parents for preparing for a *pro se* hearing, so that they are not afraid to exercise their rights.

Initial Evaluations – Tricia Lukzen reported that the group has created a google document with all of the information on what needs to be in an infographic. It was sent to Amanda to choose an appealing format.

Susan R. told members

**Attachment A: Small Group Discussions re: Preschool Special Education Services**

**SEAC's Vision and Goals for Preschool Special Education Services**

* All preschool age students with disabilities having an appropriate setting to go to;
* Schools having a fuller range of environments available to our preschool students with collaboration happening with private preschools and day cares to ensure the services can be individualized to the student's needs;
* Ensuring that students with more specialized needs, including students who are deaf and hard of hearing, and students with visual impairments are accounted for and that social opportunities are built in for them--both with typically developing peers but also with students that have a similar disability so they can see students like themselves and get to know them;
* Having all preschools be more inclusive and providing individualized support;
* Having a continuum of placements that meet the unique needs of the students;
* Ensuring qualified staff with expertise in this age range;
* Providing a safe environment;
* Training for babysitters, daycare providers and private preschool personnel;
* Working closely with the Early Intervention Section to identify children early, especially those who are deaf, hard of hearing or who have vision issues;
* No wait lists for services; and
* Addressing transportation for rural areas.

**Who Needs to Be at the Table**

* Qualified faculty and staff, including related service providers, who know the needs of this particular age group;
* Behavioral specialists;
* Community organizations that provide specialized support and opportunities for social events for children with disabilities;
* Parents and families;
* Representatives from private and charter schools; and
* All people with resources.

**Next Steps for SEAC**

* Following through and getting feedback from DOE as part of the accountability process;
* Helping to make sure that parents are well informed;
* Working with administrators to get information out;
* Increasing parent membership;
* Facilitating other groups like the CCCs to come to the table;
* Getting involved legislatively on this issue with the outcome in mind of increasing staff in early childhood education and looking at workforce development opportunities;
* Training for parents and substitute teachers;
* Securing data regarding the number of preschools across the State, how many students are eligible for special education, what kind of preschool settings are available to them, etc.;
* Getting regular updates from the Preschool Interagency Group that meets on a monthly basis;
* Continuously reaching out to the field to know what's going on in the community; and
* Acknowledging the urgency of the situation and keeping the momentum going.