

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

September 19, 2025

Minutes

PRESENT: Kathie Awaya, Will Carlson, Nancy Gorman, Martha Guinan, Stacy Haitzuka, Mai Hall, Amanda Kaahanui (staff), Helen “Kupu” Kaniho, Dale Matsuura, Cheryl Matthews, Jessica McCullum, Trish Moniz, Cherine Pai, Susan Rocco (staff), Rosie Rowe, Scott Shimabukuro, Steven Vannatta, Lisa Vegas, Jasmine Williams, Susan Wood

EXCUSED: Wendy Nakasone-Kalani, Kiele Pennington

ABSENT: Dominique Anders, Virginia Beringer, Annette Cooper, Mark Disher, Melissa Johnson, Tina King, Christopher Pelayo, Kauai Rezentes, Herbert Taitingfong

GUESTS: Grace Akau, Verna Chinen, Chad Domingo, Patty Dong, Kauai Correa, Elizabeth Higashi, Jackie Jackson, Sandy Jessmon, Michael McGushin, Christine Montague-Hicks, Nikki Schmitt, Brikena White

Welcome/Introductions

Chair Martha Guinan opened the meeting at 9:05 a.m. and asked members and guests to introduce themselves and the office or stakeholder group they are representing.

New Security Protocols and Meeting Procedures

Martha announced new security measures that have been enacted by the SEAC Leadership Team to prevent or mitigate another zoom bombing incident as occurred at the August 29th SEAC Meeting. Two additional measures were put into place to track progress toward addressing priority areas and ensure that time for questions is allowed after presentations. (See Attachment A).

Questions/comments by members and guests:

Q. Could we save an allotted amount of time at the beginning of each meeting to come back to address previous questions that were raised in meetings and notated in minutes, especially pertaining to additional data?

Q. Are we saying then we’re going to start fresh this meeting, and that any questions or concerns that were addressed the last meeting will be pushed on to the next agenda or will be get that today? A. (Susan Wood) Unfortunately, we just got the minutes last night, so there are two questions that were requested answers of, and I don’t think we have informed leadership that we needed to have that for this meeting. If we have time today, we can bring that up and see if they have time to answer. If not, we’ll make sure that it is at the next meeting or in between. (Martha) And by in between she means we’ll send it out right after this meeting.

Q. If a speaker was asked specific questions, they then would then be responsible for reporting that the next time? A. If they haven't been able to give an answer, we're going to make sure that you get the answers from the presenter before the next meeting or at the next meeting.

Input from the Public

There was no input offered from the public.

Vision of a High School Graduate

Elizabeth “Beth” Higashi from the Office of Strategy, Innovation and Performance (OSIP) explained that her office, in collaboration with the Hawaii State Student Council, is gathering input from a variety of education stakeholders on a revised vision of a Hawaii public high school graduate. The intent in revisiting the vision is to communicate the purpose of the vision is not to measure or judge students, but rather to view it as a promise to children, families, and citizens of Hawaii that strikes a balance between aspiration and attainability.

Current Draft of the Vision

The current draft has four components:

- **Knowledge:** The core academic understanding required to take their next steps in post-secondary education, career, enterprise, service, and/or exploration to advance their life journey.
- **Skills:** The abilities to think, learn, contribute, communicate, and create in pursuit of excellence and the realization of their goals.
- **Awareness:** The social-emotional competencies to pursue wellness with a healthy concept of self and meaningful connections to others.
- **Identity:** The feeling of aloha and belonging, and a deep sense of place, community, responsibility, and citizenship.

The vision is intended to preserve the ability for each school community to design educational experiences relevant to their students and to acknowledge shifting movements, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology.

Potential future implications

These could include:

- updating of the personal transition plan, which is a half a credit and a graduation requirement;
- updating high school graduation requirements;
- examination of general learner outcomes; and
- examination of the K12 education curriculum and program alignment.

Small group discussions

Members and guests met to discuss the following questions:

1. What do you like about the vision?
2. Is there a part of the vision you would change?
3. Is there anything missing you would like to see added?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share?

See Attachment B – SEAC Input on the Draft Vision of a Public School Graduate.

Questions/comments from members and guests

Q. What is your next step? A. I'm hoping in the next couple weeks to finish my feedback opportunities, and then we are going to an analysis of all the feedback, create a new draft, and bring it back to the Board of Education for a discussion. There will be opportunities at the Board level for more community feedback and discussion.

Data Presentation on Preschool Placements

Verna Chinen and Kauai Correa from the Exceptional Support Branch and Patty Dong from the Monitoring and Compliance reviewed some of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) data for preschool students with disabilities and discussed the continuum of services.

Indicator 6 - Preschool LRE

This State Performance Plan indicator looks at three categories of placements for preschool students with disabilities:

- A. Regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in that program;
- B. Separate special education class, separate school or residential facility; and
- C. Receiving special education and related services in the home.

LRE data for 2023 and 2024

- A. The percentage of preschool children in a regular early childhood program rose from 17.01% in 2023 to 21.46% in 2024, although targets were not met.
- B. The percentage of preschool children in a separate class, school or residential facility decreased from 44.17% in 2023 to 41.43% in 2024 while missing targets.
- C. The percentage of preschool children who received special education at home increased from 0.56% in 2023 to 1.04% in 2025.

Eligibility categories

The largest categorical group for Hawaii special education preschoolers is developmental delay (64%). 21% of the students had autism, while 9% had a speech language disability and 2% had an other health disability.

Eligibility by age

The majority of the children (46.7%) attending preschool are four-year olds. Three-year olds make up 34.4% and five-year olds make up 18.9%, including children who are late born and students who are retained.

Placement considerations

In deciding on placement, the IEP team takes 4 factors into account: 1) where is the child now, 2) the child's developmental stage and age, 3) the child's culture, customs and practices, and 4) what is available in the community. For early three-year olds, the parent's choice may be to receive services in the home, and at the other end of the age range, the IEP team will be looking at what the child needs to transition into kindergarten. Services can also be provided at home-based childcare providers, community-based childcare centers, and public preschool programs run by the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) and charter schools. The percentage of students with IEPs enrolled in an EOEL classroom jumped to 13% in SY 24-25. The expansion of EOEL to 117 classrooms on DOE campuses in SY 25-26 creates greater opportunities for inclusion.

Hawaii Early Childhood State Plan

This plan facilitated by West Ed and EOEL has a priority that young children with disabilities have access to services that meet their specific needs, which include opportunities to learn and participate alongside peers in regular early childhood programs. Parents are encouraged to participate in a survey and share their own experiences that can contribute to planning around this state plan.

Interagency Partnership

The vision for the Partnership is that Hawaii commits to the inclusion of each and every child with disabilities in all early childhood environments. One actionable step the group has taken has been to develop a streamlined referral process that identifies developmental concerns on EOEL preschool applications and sends them automatically to schools and results in earlier identification and interventions for our children. The group is also working to increase resources and professional development opportunities for childcare centers and daycare providers with a focus on supporting the inclusion of children with IEPs.

Small group discussions

Members and guests divided into small groups to answer the question: "What additional breakdowns of preschool data and types of regular early childhood programs would help you better understand current preschool placements in our school?"

Member suggestions regarding additional data included:

- The number of future students in the pipeline;
- Engagement with private preschools;
- Engagement with private daycare providers;
- Status of recruitment of preschool teachers;
- The number of working families who turn down special education preschool services even when their child is eligible, because they need extended daycare.

Additional comments/questions included the following:

- The community of persons with vision disabilities do not want to be identified as “vision impaired”; they prefer the term “persons with low vision”.
- One of the reasons that preschool placements are not increasing is that it does not include extended childcare for most of the families that qualify for it. Many families work from 8 to 5 and opt not to go through the IEP process, because they need more hours of coverage. Instead, they place their disabled preschooler in a daycare program where they may be eligible for a stipend and only pay \$100/month. Their children receive no educational services and are far behind when they start the IEP process in kindergarten.
- Why isn't universal preschool more of a priority in Hawaii?
- For a 3-year old, home is the child's most natural environment where they have been receiving early intervention, but for the Department, that's actually one of the more restrictive settings. So, it's trying to find a balance that works for the needs that were outlined in the IEP and what is happening for the student.
- Some of our pediatric physicians do not know where to send families.
- Canoe Complex is very fortunate to have an itinerant teacher for preschool who can go out to the community and out to non-DOE sites and service children and families in that capacity.
- Most of the preschool families that LDAH is working with do not know that an EOEL or Head Start classroom exists on their child's home school campus, and it is not part of the LRE discussion in the IEP.
- How does the IEP team resolve the problem of a parent wanting their child in an inclusive setting, but he or she may not meet the eligibility criteria for an EOEL or Head Start classroom?
- The transition process to preschool should be as smooth and pain free for the parents as possible, because it can be challenging to deal with their child's needs at that young age.
- Ensure that evaluations are timely, comprehensive, and thorough in order to identify what the student's true needs are in determining LRE.
- A lot of children are not having their regular doctor visits.

Announcements

- Amanda Kaahanui announced that the Disability and Communication Access Board is hosting Deaf Awareness Day on September 27th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Blaisdell Center.
- Rosie Rowe announced that the LDAH Traveling Mini Conference will be held this afternoon in Kona and on Saturday in Hilo with Amanda Kaahanui as one of the

speakers. The mini conference is focusing on assistive technology and will feature Judith Nomura, an educational specialist for assistive technology and Tierney Barcarse, Hawaii Island District Educational Specialist.

- Jessica McCullum announced that the 2nd Annual Sensory Festival will be happening on October 11th in Hilo and is open to the community.
- Cheryl Matthews announced that the Ho'opono Services for the Blind Branch is hosting its annual White Cane Walk on October 17th at the Capitol Rotunda, and the Hawaii Children and Youth Council Summit is on October 7th.
- Brikena White announced that Deusdedi Merced, Esq. is providing a whole day IDEA Boot Camp on October 13th at Windward Community College for parents and community members. The Monitoring and Compliance Branch is offering airfares for neighbor island parents, and the Boot Camp will also be accessible online. The training materials are the same that are used with school administrators and District Educational Specialists, so that everyone gets the same consistent message.

Review of the Minutes for April 11, May 9, and August 29, 2025

Members reviewed the draft minutes for April and May which had been distributed at the August 29th SEAC meeting but not voted on due to time constraints. They also reviewed the August minutes and Susan Wood offered minor typographical changes.

Action: The minutes for April 11th and May 9th were approved as distributed, and the minutes for September 29th were approved with corrections.

Agenda Setting for the October 17, 2025 Meeting

Prior to suggesting agenda items for the next meeting, Susan Wood reviewed the four priority areas for this school year including: Preschool, Transitions for all Age Groups, Quality IEPs, and Conflict/Dispute Resolution. Members proposed the following items for discussion:

- Preschool information and data
 - Staffing issues (action steps and data from the Hawaii Early Childhood State Plan)
 - Training for families
 - Outreach to pediatricians/medical teams about LRE
 - How DOE is coordinating with other providers
 - Data on placement that includes age groups
- Information on how DOE may be impacted by potential federal funding shortages, and how DOE will pivot to address them

- Follow-up with questions/requests from August and September.

Final Approval of the Positions v. Interests Video

Steven Vannatta reviewed the original purpose of the video: to reduce conflict between home and school by teaching individuals to look for/share interests underlying positions on issues related to special education. It was intended in the first of a series of short videos that would help build skills and contribute to constructive problem solving. Twelve individuals worked on a concise script with a local Hawaii flavor. Create Studio software was purchased to create an animated video, but it took the expertise of a volunteer, Spencer Luther, do the hard work of translating the script into a 4-minute animated movie while honoring the original artwork of Roger Wood who conceptualized what the characters would look like. Susan Wood added that the software posed some limitations, and not all suggestions for revisions to the first draft could be accommodated.

Reactions/suggestions for improvement

- Correct the misspelling of Kalani's name that appears early in the video.
- Have the administrator ask the parent the question about her interests first and hear her out before stating his own position.
- The IEP team members talk about what they're going to do, but is it written in the IEP? Are they going to measure it?
- Is part of the purpose of your video to hone in on parent awareness of how she needs to see improvement as a process of development as opposed to an immediate result?
- In the video, the speech pathologist makes a commitment to weekly check-ins with the parent. If we approve the video, do you think we are setting up an expectation with other parents that their own school team will be as accommodating?

Action deferred: The vote on approving the video with the minor correction of the spelling of Kalani's name was postponed as the group was one member short of a quorum.

Topics for a future video

Suggestions of new topics for SEAC videos included:

- Revisiting Kalani's IEP team 3 months later to see how the plan is progressing;
- Have a video of an IEP meeting that's starting to go bad and then refocus the attention of the team on the child and give them an idea of how to take a step back, review the situation, and try to approach the issue differently.

- Teach families about data-driven decision making—how data is collected, which data points are important, how the data can be shared with families to help them understand progress toward a goal.

Brik White added that the video, the infographics, and all the materials that SEAC and the Department develop together, are not only posted on the SEAC website but also used by the ESB and MAC staff in their trainings, especially the SPP/APR infographics. She thanked SEAC members for helping the Department make important information more accessible to families and staff.

Attachment A New Security Protocols for Monthly Meetings

SEAC cannot require prior registration for meetings and must allow for anonymity of guests under Hawaii's Sunshine Law. However, the following protocols were developed to help secure meetings from malicious interference.

- Different random meeting IDs will be used for each meeting.
- Chat posts will only be visible to the host and co-hosts who will transmit information to the larger audience.
- More than one co-host will monitor individuals in the waiting room, admit them to the meeting, and identify disruptive video feeds.
- Screen sharing will be limited to presenters and co-hosts.
- Advance notice to meeting participants of a contingency plan to utilize a back-up meeting link should the meeting be interrupted.
In the event of an attempted zoom bombing, the host/co-hosts will mute, turn off the camera, and remove the offender(s) from the meeting. If the process takes more than two minutes, the host will shut down the meeting temporarily, and members and guests are directed to go to SEAC's website—<https://seac-hawaii.org/agendas--> for a new meeting link to continue the meeting.

New Meeting Procedures

With all presentations, all questions will be addressed at the end of the presentation with 10 minutes or more allocated for this purpose. If all questions cannot be answered within that timeline, the presenter will receive a list of outstanding questions in writing and be requested to provide answers prior to the next SEAC meeting.

SEAC leadership will maintain a shared record of activities (presentations, small group discussions, products or content development, etc.) for each of the four priority areas selected for the school year.

September 19, 2025 SEAC Meeting

Attachment B – SEAC Input on the Draft Vision of a Public School Graduate

Process questions regarding revising the vision:

How are we creating opportunities and access to students for them to get excited about asking themselves about their own vision of what a graduate is?

Who are the groups that may be interested about a vision of a graduate, and how are we reaching them?

How is the vision of a public school graduate going to be marketed? How will you ensure some kind of uniformity and consistency across the board for who receives the messaging?

How are students with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities participating in the creation of the new vision, and how are students with disabilities reflected in the vision?

How is the vision impacting those kids who are going to be on a CBI (certificate) track rather than a diploma track, and what would that look like?

Related questions:

How is a DOE partnering with other agencies to put on career fairs? Have there been opportunities like career fairs where a lot of different career pathways are presented for students to interact with and experience?

Wording Suggestions:

Reword the section on identity:

- Consider substituting the word “stewardship” for “responsibility” as part of the graduate’s identity. Stewardship conveys a vision of managing and caring for their community;
- Embed cultural heritage and the diversity of all students.

Add a focus of continual improvement to keep up with technology and global expectations.

Other Suggestions:

Provide an analysis of why students are not graduating and receiving a diploma and who is determining whether students with disabilities can extend their education to age 22 to potentially attain enough credits to receive a diploma.

Consider introducing different diplomas in addition to the current BOE graduation requirements, so that more students with disabilities can achieve beyond a certificate of

September 19, 2025 SEAC Meeting

completion. Students who are receiving a certificate will not see themselves in the current vision, and we want everyone to appreciate the gifts that our students with disabilities offer.

Create a job ladder that allows students to become part of the DOE workforce right out of high school where they can become stewards of their communities by remaining in the DOE in a different role rather than just a student.

Ensure more students who receive a diploma have achieved an acceptable rate of literacy.