

**SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL
November 14, 2025 Meeting
Minutes**

PRESENT: Dominique Anders, Kathie Awaya, Virginia Beringer, Will Carlson, Annette Cooper, Nancy Gorman, Martha Guinan, Natalie Haggerty, Stacy Haitzuka, Amanda Kaahanui (staff), Helen “Kupu” Kaniho, Dale Matsuura, Cheryl Matthews, Jessica McCullum, Trish Moniz, Cherine Pai, Christopher Pelayo, Kiele Pennington, Kau’i Rezentes, Susan Rocco (staff), Rosie Rowe, Scott Shimabukuro, Herbert Taitingfong, Steven Vannatta, Lisa Vegas, Jasmine Williams, Susan Wood

EXCUSED: Tina King

ABSENT: Mark Disher, Mai Hall, Wendy Nakasone-Kalani

GUESTS: Tierney Barcarse, Laurie Chang, Kau'i Correa, Allison Eby, Sandy Jessmon, Tricia Lukzen, Michael McGushin, Christine Montigue-Hicks, Elise Matsumoto, Abey Qureshi, Nicole Schmitz, Brikena White

Welcome and Introductions

Vice Chair Susan Wood 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.

Input from the Public

There was no input from the public.

Announcements

Members voted to move this agenda item up in order to give guest presenter Abey Qureshi time to set up his presentation.

- Susan W. announced that the answers to the queries from the October meeting are now posted on the SEAC website under the October minutes. Susan Rocco thanked Chris Pelayo for responding to the largest number of questions about Part C to Part B transitions.
- Jessica McCullum announced that December 17th is the tentative date for a meeting regarding the autism prevalence initiative aimed at establishing a monitoring and surveillance site in Hawai‘i. Vanderbilt University is partnering in the initiative, and a steering committee will be nominated at this meeting.
- Steven Vannatta announced that Ivalee Sinclair’s memorial service will be on November 24th at 10:00 a.m. at Central Union Church.
- Amanda Kaahanui announced that the SPIN Conference on March 28th will be back at the University of Hawai‘i Campus Center. SEAC members are invited to attend as guests of SPIN, and they were asked to let SPIN know of any community organizations who would like to contribute monetarily to parent scholarships.

- Brik White offered information about the upcoming State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) Partner Engagement Meeting on December 5th at Windward Community College.

Gathering SEAC Input on General Learner Outcomes (GLO) and Graduation Requirements

Abey Qureshi introduced himself as the Director of the Curriculum Innovation Branch in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design. The Department of Education is currently in the process of soliciting community input on high school graduation requirements and general learner outcomes (GLOs). The Board of Education will be considering revisions to the current graduation requirements and adopting a new Vision of a Hawai'i Public School Graduate.

General Learner Outcomes

The current general learner outcomes—self-directed learner, community contributor, complex thinker, quality producer, effective communicator and effective and ethical user of technology--are global competencies that the Department of Education has supported students with for several decades. Through the feedback process, the public is encouraged to weigh in on whether they should be revisited and changed.

Current Graduation Requirements

The required courses and electives that add up to 24 credits for graduation were reviewed, including half a credit for the Personal Transition Plan that is also under revision. Recently there has been a lot of interest around financial literacy, and the Department will require all seniors for the class of 2031 to complete some type of financial literacy learning.

Soliciting Input

Members were given a QR code linking to a digital version of a community input form. The form can be completed as many times as folks wish to do so. It asks questions including the following:

1. What should be the number of required total graduation credits?
2. Should basic financial literacy be a requirement for all students before they graduate?
3. Should computer science be a separate graduation requirement?
4. Should Participation in Democracy—currently a 0.5 required credit--continue to be a required civics course?
5. HIDOE offers honors certificates (Academic, CTE, STEM) and a Seal of Biliteracy. Are there other achievements you believe should be formally recognized?
6. Is there a General Learner Outcome recommendation that you'd like to make?

Finally, there is also an open-ended section for any comments, questions, or ideas that that folks have. If individuals suggest adding something new, the Department would appreciate a corresponding comment on what could be eliminated.

Timeline

Community input is being collected until the end of November on graduation requirements and GLOs. In December and January, the Department will analyze the input received (almost 600 submissions so far). In February, the draft recommendations will go out to the public for additional feedback and refinement. Probably in the spring or early summer, the Department will present the recommendations to the Board of Education for their consideration and approval.

Small group discussions

Members and guests formed small groups to discuss issues around graduation requirements. Group feedback is found in Attachment A. In addition to oral feedback, they encouraged all present to consider filling out the [Community Feedback Form](#).

Questions/comments from members and guests

Q. SEAC has been having discussions about alternative graduation requirements since one in four students with IEPs leave school without a regular diploma. Is this a topic you are willing to discuss? A. Absolutely.

Q. As you get to the end of the process, is there an assurance that the graduation requirements then meet entrance requirements to colleges or technical schools? A. We will be getting input from our University of Hawaii system and other stakeholders to determine if these requirements are in alignment with the various post high school options for students. We also have other mechanisms. For example, we currently have a math pathways group (really a P20 group) that is looking at mathematics and trying to explore the best kind of pathways and opportunities for students to be successful in mathematics in their K12 journey as well as post high school.

C. This group of parents, teachers, and administrators are more minded, being in the special needs community with IDEA, that our whole purpose is to further education and independent living. We use your graduation requirements as a benchmark for our students to monitor their progress and their ability to move into post-secondary education. So, we may need to have alternative pathways for our students, but it is critical that this is done right for that further transition into adulthood. A. That is why I'm so glad that we have this opportunity to engage with this group, because this is the prime time to get all that best thinking and ideas, so that those types of things can be considered in terms of reshaping our requirements.

Q. Are you going to be strengthening the personal transition plan (PTP) or the career planning? Are you going to across the board put in more mechanisms for when they are going to go to trade schools, to community college, to a four-year college, or straight into

the workforce? A. I have been part of a work group at the state level of looking at the personal transition plan and conducting a comprehensive needs assessment starting with talking with students. There appears to be a lot of variances in how schools are implementing the PTP process, so we are planning to create Communities of Practice to develop rubrics for schools to follow. We are also working to secure a PTP platform that over the longer term can become support for students that move from school to school.

C. Not every teacher has bought into the PTP, and when it first started out, it did not include a partnership with the IEP teachers of our students, even the ones who are in inclusion. Only a couple years back is when they started inviting the transition teachers to the CTE trainings and included us, but we were always so separate. I think you should include teachers, high school and special ed teachers, when you're trying to figure out this whole PTP thing. A. Thank you for surfacing that. That whole notion of teachers feeling ownership over their involvement of the PTP process came through loud and clear through our comprehensive needs assessment. I also appreciate you highlighting the importance of students learning within the least restrictive environment, and all adults rallying around those students to support them collaboratively as best as possible.

C. The one subject that's never addressed is usually the MedFrag [medically fragile] population. There are no programs for them after graduation, and we have no resources for them for secondary education. We have no nursing at that point, too, because our hours get cut. My child is currently home right now. and it is upon us to have to continue her education at home somehow, but right now she's really missing the socialization portion of it. There are programs out there, but the barriers are that we would have to bring our own nurses and equipment, and there is no transportation. Q. What can we do to address that part? A. (Abey) What I can offer is I am always more than happy to attend a meeting or be part of a conversation where we're really trying to envision and conceptualize how we can improve in that area. (Kupu Kaniho) We are saying that all our graduates will be globally competitive and locally committed and that context looks differently for each student, so I appreciate Kau'i's comments.

Developing and Implementing High Quality Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

Nikki Schmitz, a State Educational Specialist in the Exceptional Support Branch began the discussion by providing the historical context of IDEA, including landmark cases like *Rowley* and *Endrew F.*, which clarified procedural and substantive obligations for providing FAPE.

FAPE Requirements

Nikki emphasized the importance of addressing all three dimensions of FAPE:

- Procedural (adhering to IDEA requirements),
- Substantive (calculated to enable a student to make progress), and

- Implementation (instructional services, amount and fidelity of services, as agreed upon in the IEP meeting).

Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

This is the cornerstone of the IEP, and it includes the following components: the eligibility category, areas of concern, special factors (behavior, assistive technology, communication, etc.), background information, impact of the disability, strengths and needs and input from the student, family and service providers. Strengths and needs should be based on high quality data from reliable sources, include a discussion of the performance gap, and prioritize essential skills.

Measurable goals

The *Andrew F.* decision emphasized the importance of appropriately challenging goals and progress monitoring. Goal setting strategies were discussed that are calculated to enable a student to make progress considering their circumstances:

- Benchmarking – aiming for a level of performance on an assessment that is predictive of proficiency;
- National Norms – average rate of growth per week;
- Ambitious National Norms – same as above with an ambitious multiplier;
- Intra-Individual Framework – based on the student’s last eight data points to determine average rate of growth; and
- Smarter SMART Goals - the ABCD+T format which includes audience, behavior, condition, degree, and time.

Other components of high quality IEPs

Nikki discussed the concept of specially designed instruction (SDI) and its distinction from core instruction. SDI involves intentional instruction to the student via content, methodology and/or delivery to address the unique needs of the student that result from the disability and ensure access to the general curriculum. Students need access to the general curriculum, and the least restrictive environment must be considered when determining student placements. Also essential to the IEP discussion are accommodations and/or assisted technology needed by the student, not only for a specially designed instruction, but also to access the core curriculum.

Efforts to support high-quality IEPs

The Exceptional Support Branch (ESB) is working with the Monitoring and Compliance Branch (MAC) on expanded monitoring and the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design (OCID) on its Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (CLSD). ESB is also providing individualized support to complex areas in relation to IEP development and implementation. Most recently ESB has started providing professional development for administrators.

Small group discussions

Members and guests formed small groups to discuss the following questions posed by Nikki:

- Where do you see the biggest challenges or barriers in ensuring IEPs are meaningful and individualized?
- What supports or tools would help families participate more fully and confidently in IEP meetings?
- How might we make information about high quality IEPs more accessible and understandable to families and students with disabilities?

Group feedback is found in Attachment B.

Questions/comments from members and guests

Q. Is there a timeline for schools to start writing the PLAAFP? A. There is not an official “must start” date. Each of the complex areas are rolling out their trainings in their own way. After they are providing trainings on different components of the PLAAFP, they have that as an expectation moving forward.

C. Schools do not give the names who will attend the IEP meetings, only positions.

Q. Where in the IEP are the SDIs written? A. Within the present levels we should see our instructional strategies or evidence-based practices that a teacher is utilizing to teach a specific skill. Within the services grid there will be a set number of minutes. The discussion that happens when you are determining those service minutes should be around how they are going to be teaching to provide that SDI for various needs.

Q. Does anyone audit IEPs in the [Monitoring and] Compliance Branch (MAC)? A. A year ago MAC implemented our expanded monitoring system where we are reviewing randomized IEPs of schools and complex areas. We observe whether the students were receiving those services in the IEPs, and we also interview staff. We then write a monitoring report to the complex area superintendent with required resolutions, and one of the required resolutions is to implement the training that Nikki just shared.

Q. Does this monitoring fall beneath an indicator? A. No, we are required to monitor beyond the 18 indicators of the State Performance Plan. It is very labor intensive, but it is providing us with a lot of data and evidence to provide to the Exceptional Support Branch to establish trainings and consistency statewide.

Q. Are you only monitoring the transition plan? A. No, the whole IEP. The transition plans are covered under Indicator 13, and we are required every year to randomize a sample at a 95% confidence interval--about 500 to 600 files every year throughout the state.

Review of the Minutes of the October 10, 2025 Meeting

Susan Wood made some minor typographical corrections to the draft minutes.

Action: The minutes were approved as corrected.

Agenda Setting for the January 9, 2026 Meeting

Suggested agenda items for the January meeting included the following:

- A deeper dive into the Personal Transition Plan and how it supports IEP transition planning,
- More discussion about high quality IEPs,
- Options beyond transition—housing or DDD Waiver services, and
- Post secondary options for medically fragile kids.

Report from the CADRE Symposium 2025

Steven Vannatta, Brik White, Allison Eby, Amanda Kaahanui and Jasmine Williams shared highlights of the symposium held in Portland, Oregon and their presentation titled “Enhancing Hawai‘i’s Dispute Resolution System: A Collaborative Journey with Educational and Community Partners.” Key takeaways included:

- Hawai‘i is not alone in our work to help reduce disputes between parents and schools and in improving outcomes for our students;
- There was a lot of emphasis on preservice training where you are teaching our future teachers or administrators;
- We need to be able to have compassion and empathy for one another and do what we can to work together so that our children can be successful;
- Symposium participants were hopeful about going forward to improve dispute resolution despite the challenging changes at the federal level;
- “The right information at the wrong time is the wrong information;”
- We can utilize Artificial Intelligence programs to turn complex documents like the procedural safeguards notice into plain language for parents.
- Collaboration is not just helpful in special education. It is essential. We need to work together with our parents, with our community, with our agencies to make sure that we provide our students with a free appropriate public education, so they can succeed after they leave us.

Brik ended the discussion by encouraging everyone present to attend the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Education and Community Partner Meeting on December 5th at Windward Community College. The Monitoring and Compliance Branch is offering up to \$300 in reimbursement for Neighbor Island parents’ travel expenses to attend in person. Speakers will include Jennifer Wolfsheimer, Tracey Wiltgen, and Principal Medeiros from Mountain View Elementary.

11/14/25 SEAC Dispute Resolution Committee Recommendations

Attachment A – SEAC Ranking of Dispute Resolution Committee Recommendations: Strengthening Family Support in Dispute Resolution

Purpose: To improve outcomes and reduce conflict between families and schools, SEAC recommends a tiered approach to dispute resolution support, beginning with broad awareness and prevention, followed by early conflict resolution, and culminating in targeted, system-level supports for families in formal dispute processes.

A. Intervention & Awareness (Prevention)

Goal: Build shared understanding, early access, and consistent messaging before disputes occur.

Ranking on 1/9/26	Action	Description / Intended Impact
Priority 2	1. Align website information across platforms	Standardize information across DOE central, local schools, and public libraries. Require all schools to include or link to a special education information page.
Priority 3	2. Collaborate with sister agencies (EI, DOE, DOH, etc.)	Develop unified messaging and shared outreach materials across agencies to reduce family confusion during transitions.
Priority 4	3. Leverage Family Engagement Centers (Title I)	Partner with Family Engagement Centers (and PCNCs) to provide special education resources and training through existing family networks.
Priority 1	4. Develop micro-learning and video tools	Offer short, accessible formats (YouTube, social media, a SEAC podcast) to engage families who may not read formal documents. Share success stories.
Priority 3	5. Distribute support materials through IEPs	Provide materials and videos directly during IEP meetings (including a

11/14/25 SEAC Dispute Resolution Committee Recommendations

		welcome pamphlet); extend education to entire family systems, not just parents. Build in time in each meeting for continuous improvement & reinforcement. Have a follow up survey to see if parents still have questions.
Priority 4	6. Strengthen Early Intervention outreach	Integrate early guidance on rights and processes for families transitioning from EI to DOE to prevent later disputes. Establish identified points of contact so families know who to go to.

B. Conflict Resolution (Early / Mid-Level Intervention)

Goal: Build skills and systems to resolve issues at the earliest stage possible.

Ranking on 1/9/26	Action	Description / Intended Impact
Priority 4	1. Promote existing informal and formal processes	Increase awareness and access to facilitated IEPs, mediation, and complaint procedures through family-friendly materials (including “A Parent’s Guide to Partnership in Special Education”).
Priority 4	2. Enhance PTI collaboration	Work closely with Parent Training and Information Centers to align training, messaging, and support pathways for families.
Priority 5	3. Address high-conflict topics	Provide focused information and training on common dispute areas — private providers, related services, parent training, and transition coordination.

11/14/25 SEAC Dispute Resolution Committee Recommendations

C. Dispute Resolution Systems (Direct Family Support)

Goal: Ensure families have equitable access, transparency, and tools during formal dispute processes.

Ranking on 1/9/26	Action	Description / Intended Impact
Priority 4	1. Develop a Pro Se Family Guide	Create a plain-language guide for parents representing themselves in due process or complaints, with timelines, rights, and sample templates.
Priority 4	2. Integrate system-level coordination	Align procedures across DOE, DOH, and EI to ensure consistent handling of overlapping services or disputes.
Priority 3	3. Provide visual process tools	Develop flowcharts, checklists, and templates for staff and families to clarify steps and timelines in dispute processes.

Note: comments in purple indicate additional content added on 2/9/26.

Attachment B – Small Group Feedback on Barriers to Improving Access to High Quality IEPs and Parent Participation in IEP Meetings and Potential Solutions

Challenges/Barriers to Ensuring IEPs are Meaningful and Individualized

- Lack of continuity/consistency across and within complexes in how parents and educators receive support and training;
- Lack of advance training/tools for families and IEP team members on what to expect in the IEP meeting;
- Inconsistent or ineffective explanations aimed for parents regarding how service minutes are calculated, developed and drafted for the IEP;
- Limited time for teachers to draft the IEP;
- Limited time set aside to conduct the IEP meeting resulting in less opportunity for family engagement and in depth understanding of the IEP contents;
- Inconsistency in the development of the PLAAFP from school to school;
- Low expectations for students' potential capabilities;
- Reluctance of school personnel to perform additional assessments that would provide more clarity on the student's strengths and needs; and
- Inconsistency in the implementation of state-recommended protocols and procedures from school to school due to principal autonomy.

Suggestions for Improving Access to High Quality IEPs

- Have the State Office provide the training across the board with transparency and one clear message;
- Ensure training is being implemented well and followed through on all levels, including all the way to parents;
- Ensure that all IEP team members have a good understanding of what LRE means for the student;
- Ensure good progress monitoring data to record accurate present levels of academic and functional performance in the IEP; and
- Bring back summer special education training for all teachers with opportunities to role play.

Suggestions for Making Information about IEPs More Accessible to Families

- Offer night and weekend training options for parents who cannot attend trainings during the workday;
- Ensure that families receive a thorough explanation of where IEP recommendations and thoughts are coming from;

Suggestions for Making Information about IEPs More Accessible to Families (cont.)

- Establish a positive relationship between teachers and parents prior to the IEP meeting to create shared understanding and trust;
- Define Specially Designed Instruction in advance with parents and provide them with work sheets to grow their knowledge prior to the IEP meeting;
- Offer District Educational Specialists the special education differential pay to allow for community events and parent panels and activities which strengthen the relationships between families, district personnel, teachers and service providers;
- Create a short video similar to the Positions and Interests video to describe the IEP meeting ahead of time for parents;
- Offer thumbnail photos of the school and district personnel who will be attending the IEP meeting and describe their role to the parent in advance of the meeting; and
- Create familiarity and predictability around IEP meetings by having schools adopt a consistent process.