

**Special Education Advisory Council
April 24, 2026**

Meeting Minutes

PRESENT: Will Carlson, Annette Cooper, Mark Disher, Martha Guinan, Mai Hall, Melissa Johnson, Amanda Kaahanui (staff), Helen “Kupu” Kaniho (liaison to the Superintendent), Tina King, Mark Heu (for Dale Matsuura), Cheryl Matthews, Trish Moniz, Kau’i Rezentos, Susan Rocco (staff), Herbert Taitingfong, Jasmine Williams, Susan Wood

EXCUSED: Dominique Anders, Kathie Awaya, Natalie Haggerty, Stacy Haitsuka, Dale Matsuura, Steven Vannatta, Lisa Vegas

ABSENT: Virginia Beringer, Jessica McCullum, Wendy Nakasone-Kalani, Cherine Pai, Christopher Pelayo, Kiele Pennington, Rosie Rowe, Scott Shimabukuro

GUESTS: Daniela Bond-Smith, Willie Cadena, Patty Dong, Jackie Jackson, Sandy Jessmon, Trisha Luzken, Michael McGushin, Lori Morimoto, Keana Chan Wa, Brikena White

Welcome and Introductions

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

Input from the Public

Amanda Kaahanui brought up a [Civil Beat article](#) entitled “Hawai’i Slashes Pay For Autistic Student Aides On Neighbor Islands” discussing the state Department’s decision to reduce contract funding for Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) on the neighbor islands. SEAC member Jessica McCullum and former member Shana Cruz were quoted, along with others. The neighbor island RBT rate is being reduced from 75 dollars per hour to 60 dollars per hour. Meanwhile, Oahu rates will increase from 50 dollars to 60 dollars, bringing all islands to the same rate. The main concern raised is that lowering the rate for neighbor islands—where it is already difficult to fill RBT positions—may make staffing challenges even worse.

Announcements

Amanda Kaahanui thanked SEAC members who attended the 40th Annual SPIN Conference on March 28th which drew close to 500 participants and announced a Malama da Mind Resource Fair for children’s mental health on May 16th at Kuhio Mall in Hilo. Willie Cadena shared a flyer of Keiki Mental Health Matters events for May. Tina King announced a “Lei of Literacy” event on May 7th from 4 – 8 pm at the Nanakuli Public Library and an Early Language Screening and Intervention available to children in the Nanakuli-Waianae Complex.

Developing a Framework for Non-Mandated Transition Planning

Helen “Kupu” Kaniho explained that the purpose of this discussion is to gather feedback on non-mandated transition planning—the important student transitions that are not governed by law or regulation. In August, SEAC discussed how mandated transitions, like Part C to Part B (early intervention to DOE) and postsecondary transition planning (starting at 14–16) get most of the attention because they are required by statute. However, many other transitions—such as preschool to kindergarten, elementary to middle school, and middle to high school—are also critical for students and families, especially students with IEPs. Without legal requirements, schools rely on consistent practices or “industry standards,” but these can vary widely. These transitions often create strong emotions because families want stability and continuity as their child moves from year to year.

Building a framework on HIDOE core values

Kupu emphasized the importance of grounding this work in the department’s values—HĀ, the Vision of a Hawai’i High School Graduate, and the strategic plan (all of which focus on supporting autonomous, self-determined students from an early age), as well as Leading by Convening.

Transitions under discussion and associated themes

- Preschool to kindergarten: readiness, belonging, changes in communication between school and family, and the increased challenge for students with more intensive needs.
- Elementary to middle: independence, organization, belonging, puberty, and growing expectations for autonomy.
- Middle to high: self-advocacy, pathways and future planning, more complex schedules, organizational demands, and cultural and social changes.

Small group discussions

Members and guests divided into small groups to discuss the resources and supports needed for students with disabilities during key transition periods. The first session focused on preschool to kindergarten and feedback can be found in Attachment A. The feedback for the second session focusing on elementary to middle school is found in Attachment B.

Questions/comments from members and guests

C. I just a curriculum from the District of Columbia School District on supportive decision making for preschool all the way through 12th grade. It would be great to add to our transition framework about learning to be your own self-advocate.

C. Leadership will be critical in ensuring that all complex areas can consistently support their principals and teachers with student transitions.

C. It is also important that the District Educational Specialists and Resource Teachers are aware of all the curriculum options and can support the teachers. A. (Michael McGushin)

The curriculum used is part of each school’s academic plans, so we are aware of core curriculums for different subjects.

Update on School Resource Officer (SRO) Pilot Program

Kupu provided more information regarding the ongoing School Resource Officer (SRO) pilot initiative. She provided a link to an [article regarding the partnership between HIDOE and the Honolulu Police Department](#) dated January 14, 2026 for reference. Prior to the release of this statement, letters were sent to families outlining the purpose of the SRO positions--

to enhance campus safety and support while fostering positive relationships between students and officers. SROs are expected to serve as mentors and trusted adults, with a focus on relationship-building, student well-being, and engagement in school programs and activities.

Training for SROs

SROs participate in a 40-hour training program offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers. In addition, HIDOE's Office of Student Support Services provided training covering multi-tiered systems of support, restraint and seclusion, safety care (QBS), behavior intervention plans, the Here to Help initiative, and an overview of eligibility categories. Kupu is still seeking clarification regarding whether officers received Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, a separate 40-hour program offered through partnerships involving HPD and mental health organizations.

Timeline for the Pilot Program for Waianae, Kapolei and Kaimuki High Schools

The Safety Branch confirmed that the SRO pilot program is scheduled to conclude July 31 of this year. The decision to continue or expand the program will depend on the results of the program evaluation. Answers to questions regarding the level of SRO engagement with families are still pending and can be addressed in future discussions, particularly if the program continues.

Questions/comments from members and guests

Q. Is that the training with HPD in the schools for the special needs students or is that with the entire school?

C. I think exposing the students to police on campus can be a good thing, because over 30% of those who get arrested have an intellectual disability. If a police officer has been sensitized to how these students may react to sirens and lights, they would better understand and respond to these kids who might run because of their anxiety.

C. I am familiar with the Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) because I give the civil liability section of that training in Kona. It is a week-long training for police officers (not specific to school resource officers) who may interact with a person who has a mental illness. I would highly recommend that the SROs attend that training as well.

C. The CIT training is organized by NAMI and is intended for agencies that support people with disabilities and mental illness in any capacity, not the general public.

C. Because the CIT training is not disability specific, I think it would be really important to expose SROs to training on behaviors and situations they may find themselves in on campus as well as communication for students who are Deaf, intellectually disabled or autistic.

Q. Do the SROs get training on the discipline procedures under IDEA? Do they understand about manifestation determination or behavior intervention plans? A. The training that OSSS provided encompassed positive behavioral interventions and supports, and making the SROs aware of staff on campus who are trained in safe holds and physical interventions, but also de-escalation techniques.

C. We have had SROs on our campus on the Big Island for over a decade. They are not utilized as part of our discipline but rather like a counselor or BHS walking around campus. At the elementary level they do the DARE program, and at our high school they provide a

presence during recesses. They are available to talk with and mentor all kids, including our kids with disabilities.

C. I understand these officers are armed, and for me as a parent, that is a substantial concern, even when they are not supposed to be used in that way. I would like to know how much advance notice is given to parents when these programs are being instituted. It should be given as soon as possible and not when it is happening, to allow families to consider other options, if they are not comfortable with the police presence.

Membership Committee Report

Susan Rocco stepped in for Steven Vannatta and the Membership Committee to review current council membership, members with expiring term and unfilled required positions (see Membership table in Attachment C).

Addressing member vacancies

Fortunately, the four members whose terms are expiring in May have expressed an interest in continuing their service. Three new parent applicants—Daniela Bond-Smith, Shana Cruz and Jackie Jackson—and possibly a fourth parent from Maui will be brought forward for a vote at the May meeting. The Committee would like help in locating representatives for private schools, children experiencing housing instability and the incarcerated adults 18-22 who are eligible for IDEA services.

Selection of SEAC Chair and Vice Chair for SY 26-27

Leadership elections for one-year terms of Chair and Vice Chair will also occur in May. If no new nominees step forward, the committee proposes switching the current Chair and Vice Chair roles between Susan Wood and Martha Guinan to allow Susan an opportunity to serve as Chair with Martha's support.

Questions/comments from members and guests

C. (Mai Hall) My son just got accepted into Kamehameha Schools, and I am willing to serve as a private school representative, if needed.

Priority-Setting Related to the Development of Micro-Learning and Video Tools for Families on Options for Resolving Conflicts

Members and guests were encouraged to express their opinions regarding a future SEAC Micro-Learning tool aimed at helping families understand and resolve conflicts with school staff related to their child's special education. 45% chose podcasts, 27% chose a short video with actual stakeholders, and 18% preferred a short video with animated characters acting out the role of stakeholders. The top four topics were as follows:

1. How to advocate successfully
2. Early mediation
3. Communication
4. Parent tips on effective strategies for conflict resolution.

Other suggestions regarding developing micro-learning tools included 1) ensuring they are widely shared, 2) get students involved, 3) find a way to have them translated into other languages, 4) use AI to help draft resources to be more efficient and manage SEAC members' workload, 5) use plain language and accessibility features (closed captions, etc.), and 6) partner with SPIN and LDAH.

Review of Minutes from the February 13, 2026 SEAC Meeting

The review of the February meeting minutes was deferred until the May meeting.

Agenda Setting for the May 8, 2026 SEAC Meeting

Martha reminded members that the last meeting of the school year will be a hybrid meeting with those who can attend in person encouraged to do so. The meeting location is the Office of Student Support Services at 475 22nd Avenue in Kaimuki. Suggestions for agenda items were as follows:

- Membership
 - Election of Officers
 - Nominations of New Members
- Due Process Report
- Review of Annual Report Recommendations
- Middle to High school Transition Discussion
- 2026-27 School Year Schedule announcement
- Certificates of Appreciation Presentation.

Legislative Committee Report

Susan R. provided an update on the six bills listed in the agenda as SEAC priorities. (See Attachment D – 4/24/26 SEAC Legislative Update).

Attachment A

Summary of Group Discussions: Building a Framework for Supporting Students with Disabilities Transitioning from Preschool to Kindergarten

Celebrate Differences and Build Inclusive Culture Early

- Historically in Hawai'i, children with differences were valued; this cultural lens should shape early education practices.
- Begin celebrating and normalizing differences *at the very start* of a child's school journey.
- Provide shared bonding experiences for families, siblings, and educators that reinforce belonging.
- Promote a culture where:
 - Parents' expertise is respected.
 - Educators' expertise is respected.
 - Everyone approaches collaboration with kindness and humility.

Early, Thoughtful, and Ongoing Pre-Planning

- Start transition planning **before spring break**, not at the end of the school year.
- Students with complex needs require *extended preparation windows*.
- Receiving schools should be involved *as early as possible* to ensure a "warm handoff."
 - Early assignment of kindergarten teachers.

- DOE evaluators attending EI meetings when requested.
- Planning access needs early (e.g., sensory room availability, mobility pathways, specialized equipment).

Build Relationships: Warm Handoff Between Adults and Schools

- Receiving school staff should attend final preschool IEP meetings whenever possible.
- Provide more than just student data—share meaningful insights, such as:
 - What motivates the student
 - Important interpersonal dynamics
 - Specific strategies that work (and don't work)
 - “Do not pair with X student”—type critical information
- Encourage families to create a “Meet My Child” document or use a communication notebook to share personal details not found in the IEP.

Multiple Opportunities for Students to Experience the New Environment

- Provide **two rounds of visits** to the kindergarten environment:
 - In the spring, while preschool is still in session.
 - Just before school starts, when campus is quiet.
- Activities and experiences may include:
 - Meeting the teacher and exploring the classroom
 - Walking common routes (cafeteria, playground, restrooms)
 - Experiencing the school bus
 - Practicing transitions between spaces
 - Peer mentorship (pairing with older or same-age classmates)

Use of Visual Supports and Predictability Tools

- Use social stories for:
 - New classrooms
 - New routines
 - New adults
 - Bus riding, recess, lunch, etc.
- Include photos of the actual classroom, teacher, and campus if possible.

Ensuring High-Quality, Prepared Teachers and Staff

- Teachers must be trained in inclusive practices and understand how to meet diverse needs.
- Teachers should be assigned early enough for meaningful involvement in transition activities.
- Training should include:
 - Supporting peer-mediated interactions
 - Embedding communication supports
 - Responding appropriately to behaviors or sensory needs
 - Implementing accommodations from day one

Support for Families Throughout the Transition

- Families need opportunities to:
 - Share information about their child
 - Ask “What can you provide for my child?”
 - Understand what kindergarten routines and expectations look like
 - Recognize that transitions can be emotionally challenging for parents.
 - Provide ongoing, relationship-centered support beginning as early as Part C.

Consideration for Access and Environment Changes

- Access is not only physical (ramps, bathroom location) but also:
 - Sensory access (quiet spaces, sensory rooms)
 - Social access (supports to build peer relationships)
 - Routine access (knowing bell schedules, transitions)
- Teachers and staff need time to prepare the physical environment.

Continuity for Medically Fragile and High-Needs Students

- Complex-health students require specialized planning that varies by school.
- Programs and services need to be clearly mapped in advance.
- Transitions may need additional collaboration across complex areas.

Emphasis on Connection, Joy, and Belonging

- Learning should feel fun.
- Schools should intentionally create environments where students want to attend each day.
- Peer mentorship and social opportunities can support belonging, confidence, and long-term friendships.

Attachment B

Summary of Group Discussions: Building a Framework for Supporting Students with Disabilities Transitioning from Elementary to Middle School

Across discussion groups, participants emphasized that successful transition requires early preparation, coordinated communication, and intentional support that addresses students’ academic, social, emotional, and logistical needs.

Early, structured planning

- Transition planning must begin early—ideally before spring break or even earlier for students with complex needs.
- Receiving schools should participate in IEP meetings to help build a “warm handoff,” ensure continuity of supports, and prevent last-minute surprises.

- Transition discussions should occur within formal IEP meetings so decisions and responsibilities are documented.

Orientation, familiarity, and access to the new environment

- There is value to multiple visits to the new school—once during the school year and again shortly before school starts, when campus is calmer.
- Opportunities to walk routes, experience classrooms, see bus procedures, and practice navigating the campus significantly reduce anxiety.
- Some students benefit from even more intensive transition experiences, such as summer preview programs or periodic visits during the spring quarter.
- Access issues go beyond physical mobility: students may need sensory rooms, quiet spaces, or safety plans that do not yet exist at the receiving campus. Early planning is needed to adapt the environment.

Sharing meaningful information—not just data

- Beyond electronic records, receiving schools need practical insights such as the following:
 - important social dynamics
 - behavior triggers or safety concerns
 - strategies that work
 - interpersonal considerations (for example, which peers a student should not be placed with)
- Aides, RBTs, SLPs, and other support personnel who know the student well should also be involved in information-sharing. This group is often overlooked despite being essential to continuity.

Student skills: organization, independence, and self-advocacy

- Elementary-to-middle-school transitions significantly increase demands on students.
- Teaching and practicing skills is important, including:
 - navigating multiple classrooms
 - managing materials and schedules
 - communicating needs and asking for help
 - self-advocacy and decision-making
- Many students arrive in middle school without these foundational skills, making proactive skill-building essential.

Peer support, belonging, and sense of place

- Peer mentorship or escort programs—when school-supported, structured, and guided by staff—are powerful tools for safety, confidence, and social connection.
- Long-lasting friendships can result from such programs.
- Some schools offer creative practices like branding items (stickers, folders) with middle-school logos to create early identity and connection.
- Belonging must be intentionally cultivated, not left to chance or to the goodwill of individual teachers.

Teacher preparation, training, and consistency

- Families want teachers who understand inclusion, have strong training in supporting diverse learners, and can implement accommodations effectively.
- Inconsistency across districts, schools, principals, and even individual teachers is a major concern—some years practices are strong; other years, supports disappear.
- There is a need for complex-area and district leadership to promote consistency, share resources across schools, and ensure schools aren't working in silos.

Family involvement and partnership

- Families want meaningful opportunities to meet teachers before school starts, share insights not captured in the IEP, and participate actively in planning.
- Many families use tools such as one-page profiles, notebooks, flyers, or social stories to introduce their child to staff.
- Recognizing parents, educators, and service providers all having essential expertise results in respectful partnerships.

Extracurriculars, transportation, and broader access

- Often there is a lack of support for extracurricular activities, which are key for belonging and identity formation.
- Transportation barriers, especially in areas with dangerous walking routes, are equity issues that affect access to school and activities.

Attachment C- 26-27 Prospective SEAC Members

Source	SEAC Stakeholder Group	Current and Proposed SEAC Members
IDEA	Parents of children with disabilities (CWD) aged birth through age 26	Dominique Anders, Virginia Beringer, Annette Cooper, Mark Disher, Mai Hall, Melissa Johnson, Tina King, Jessica McCullum, Trish Moniz, Cherine Pai, Kiele Pennington, Kau‘i Rezentes , Herbert Taitingfong, Daniela Bond-Smith , Shana Cruz and Jackie Jackson
IDEA	Persons with disabilities (PWD)	Martha Guinan , Jasmine Williams
	Total parents/persons with disabilities	18
IDEA	Teachers	Dale Matsuura
IDEA	Teacher preparation program rep	Dr. Natalie Haggerty, UH SPED Department/Nancy Gorman, Designée
IDEA	State and local education officials	(Helen Kaniho), Will Carlson
IDEA	Homeless children & youth rep	
IDEA	State agency reps who finance or deliver related services to CWD	Dr. Kurt Humphrey, CAMHD/Dr. Scott Shimabukuro, Designée Christopher Pelayo, EIS
IDEA	Administrators of programs for CWD	Stacy Haitsuka, Developmental Disabilities Division
IDEA	Private school rep	
IDEA	Charter school rep	(Mark Disher), Innovations
IDEA	Vocational/transition services rep	Cheryl Matthews , DVR
IDEA	Child welfare/foster children rep	Kathie Awaya
IDEA	Adult corrections rep	
IDEA	Juvenile corrections rep	Lisa Vegas
Bylaws	Community rep	Steven Vannatta, CCCO, Susan Wood, Hilopa‘a
Bylaws	Parent Training & Information Program	Rosie Rowe
	Total professionals (who are not parents)	15 (with vacant positions filled)

NOTE: Parentheses indicate that the member was counted in another category.

KEY: **Red** – vacancies
Blue – members whose terms are expiring
Green – prospective new members

IDEA	Liaison to the Superintendent	Helen Kaniho
Bylaws	Liaison to the Military	Wendy Nakasone-Kalani
	IDEA Team Leader	Brikena White

STAFF: Susan Rocco and Amanda Kaahanui, SPIN/DCAB

As of 4/24/26

Attachment D - April 24, 2026 SEAC Legislative Update

[HB1888 HD3 SD2](#) - Relating to the Safety of Educational Workers.

Part I: Requires the Department of Education and public charter schools to take certain steps to report incidents of harassment and implement procedures for handling harassment of educational workers, including sports officials. Authorizes the Attorney General to assist educational workers who have been subject to harassment or intentional bodily injury in obtaining a temporary restraining order. Part II: Clarifies that a sports official includes a school or league administrator. Clarifies that a sports official's duties cover sports events at public schools and private schools. Makes intentional bodily injury of an educational worker or a sports official engaged in the lawful discharge of their duties a class C felony.

SEAC Position: Support original bill and SD2. Oppose other House drafts.

Status: Awaiting a Conference Committee hearing.

[HB1891 HD1](#)- Relating to Education.

Requires the Department of Education to implement dyslexia sensitive linguistically appropriate universal screenings, and evidence-based interventions, offer professional development on structured literacy and evidenced-based interventions, and support pre-teacher programs in training candidates in structured literacy instruction

SEAC Position: Support

Status: Awaiting a Conference Committee hearing.

[HB 1780 HD 1 SD 1](#) - Relating to Student Transportation.

Requires the Department of Education to establish a student bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students who qualify for a free school meal.

SEAC Position: Support

Status: Not heard in WAM. Dead for the session.

[HB1894 HD1 SD1](#) - Relating to Education.

Requires the Department of Education to include the instruction of braille and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances; provide braille literacy support services; provide comprehensive information about braille literacy services, assistive technology devices, and assistive technology services, including educational programming options; and participate in the development of section 504 plans and individualized education programs.

SEAC Position: Support

Status: Awaiting a Conference Committee hearing.

[HB2296 HD1 SD2](#) - Relating to School Meals.

Reduces the amount the Department of Education is required to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools from half to not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meal.

SEAC Position: Support

Status: House notice of disagreement is being reconsidered.

[HB1562 HD1 SD1](#) - Relating to Youth Mental Health.

Establishes and appropriates funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project that will enable the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health to develop and make publicly available a digital platform designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges.

SEAC Position: Support

Status: Not heard in WAM. Dead for the session.