

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

May 8, 2026

Minutes

PRESENT: Dominique Anders, Kathie Awaya, Will Carlson, Annette Cooper, Mark Disher, Nancy Gorman, Martha Guinan, Melissa Johnson, Helen “Kupu” Kaniho (liaison to the Superintendent), Amanda Kaahanui (staff), Tina King, Dale Matsuura, Cheryl Matthews, Jessical 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: Mai Hall, Stacy Haitsuka

ABSENT: Virginia Beringer, Wendy Nakasone-Kalani,

GUESTS: Arlene Agoy, Grace Akau, Tierney Barcarse, Daniela Bond-Smith, Brian Burk, Willie Caden, Laurie Chang, Verna Chinen, Shana Cruz, Chad Domingo, Patty Dong, Kinau Gardner, Jackie Jackson, Sandy Jessmon, Andrea King, Trisha Lukzen, Michael McGushin, Lori Morimoto, Drew Saranillio, Lillian Segal, Brikena White

Welcome/Introductions

Chair Martha Guinan opened the meeting at 9:03 a.m. Members and guests introduced themselves and the office or stakeholder group they are representing.

Due Process Report on Written Complaints and Mediations from SY 24-25 to Present Brikena White began the annual due process report to members by providing an overview of written complaints and mediations utilizing data from SY 24-25 and SY 25-26. She reminded members that her office is also in the process of securing the services of the Mediation Center of the Pacific to provide IEP facilitation to parents in the coming year.

Comparing Written Complaints to Mediation

State Written Complaints can be filed by any individual or organization that suspects a violation of IDEA regulations has occurred within one year of filing and are investigated by the Monitoring and Compliance Branch. *Mediation* can be requested by a parent or the Department over any disagreement related to special education. The process is free, voluntary and facilitated by a neutral third party.

Mediation Trends

Historically, mediation numbers were very low (below the federal reporting threshold of 10). In SY 24-25 15 mediation requests were filed, 8 mediations were held and 4 binding agreements were reached. Through May 4th of 2026, mediation requests have increased to 20. 11 have been held with 5 agreements reached. Trend: **Mediation usage is increasing, and more sessions are resulting in agreements.** Increased outreach and training from the Mediation

Center of the Pacific appears to be helping.

State Written Complaint Trends

During COVID, the number of written complaints peaked at around 47, and since then numbers have stabilized. 24 written complaints were filed in SY 24-25 with 15 involving a finding of non-compliance and 6 dismissed or withdrawn. Numbers for the current school year to date are similar: 14 complaints filed, 7 with non-compliance findings and 2 dismissed or withdrawn.

Trend: **Complaints remain moderate, with roughly half resulting in findings of non-compliance.** Many issues are resolved through mediation or local action before decisions are issued.

Non-Compliance Required Actions

When a school has been found to have violated special education regulations, it must 1) fix any issue relating to the individual student immediately (for example, reconvening an IEP), and 2) Address possible systemic issues through professional development or technical assistance. District Education Specialists play a key role in follow-up. Brik assured members they can also call the Monitoring and Compliance Branch, if issues remain after talking with the school and district staff.

Questions/comments from members and guests

C. I know we were placing more of an emphasis on mediation prior to written complaints or due processes, but another potential area of opportunity is considering independent outside evaluations um so that we get ahead of potential FAPE violations or other things.

Q. Why is it often hard for a school to agree to pay for an independent educational evaluation (IEE) when a child is not progressing rather than file for a due process hearing? Is it because they must pay for it out of their funds? Is it because they must go somewhere else and justify that decision to fund an IEE? A. Each situation is different, so it is difficult to answer. If the parent feels a strong need for additional assessments, the first step is to discuss the purpose of the IEE at the IEP meeting, and secondly to contact the DES to problem solve with them.

C. Many parents don't understand that asking for an independent evaluation might result in the school filing for due process against them—especially when there are no attorneys available to help the parent through that process. Schools need to think about whether it is worth losing the communication and the relationship with the parents.

FFY 2025 SPP/APR Engagement Meeting

Briken^a asked members and guests to put Friday, December 4, 2026, on their calendars as the next State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) Engagement Meeting. It will be both an in-person and virtual meeting from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. with a physical site of Windward Community College's Hale 'Ākoakoa.

Due Process Report on Due Process Hearing Requests and Decisions from SY 24-25

Susan Rocco reminded members that SEAC reviews due process hearing decisions each year because IDEA requires states to share all due process outcomes with their advisory panels. Historically, SEAC received decisions but did not actively analyze them. In 2005, when Hawai'i shifted from independent hearing officers to a state agency (DCCA), SEAC began examining the decisions more closely to understand trends and support system improvements. A central goal of reviewing these hearings is to promote earlier dispute resolution and avoiding the high-conflict, court-like atmosphere of formal hearings where outcomes become unpredictable and stressful for families and schools. National guidance from the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Education (CADRE) supports this approach, emphasizing a continuum of dispute resolution that prioritizes early solutions.

Key Data for SY 2024–25:

42 hearing requests were filed. 10 resulted in hearing decisions, including one expedited hearing related to student discipline. Prevailing parties were evenly split: 5 decisions favored parents, and 5 favored the Department. In the parent-prevailing cases, hearing officers required corrective actions such as additional IEP meetings or reimbursements. One Department-prevailing case involved an independent educational evaluation (IEE), where schools typically prevail when they file first.

Key issues raised in hearings

The core issues raised in the 10 hearings were consistent with prior years and included:

- Least restrictive environment,
- Compensatory education,
- Insufficient IEPs, and
- Reimbursement for private services or placement.

Timelines for hearing decisions

Federal rules require 30 days for resolution efforts, then 45 days for the hearing and written decision, for a total of 75 days. If the Department files over a request for an Independent Educational Evaluation, the timeline is shortened to 45 days. Only **2 of the 10 cases** met these timelines. Even after the hearing concludes, issuing of the written decision often took much longer than the required window, with delays ranging from **35 to 105 days**. SEAC wants to investigate the causes of these delays—whether they stem from family requests, complexity of cases, or the length of decisions—to improve timeliness and compliance.

Stakeholder Engagement Session – Hawaii High School Graduation Requirements

Abby Qureshi, Director, Curriculum Innovation Branch, and Melly Wilson, Instructional Practices Officer, gathered input from SEAC members and guests on the upcoming revision of statewide high school graduation requirements. Participants included families, advocates, educators, and

community members, with a strong focus on the experiences and needs of students with disabilities.

Discussion categories

The session introduced the BOE's new vision for public school graduates—lifelong learners who are globally competitive and locally committed—and invited attendees to reflect on how current graduation requirements support students in three areas: applying academic knowledge, charting next steps, and fulfilling kuleana. Stakeholders contributed live feedback through discussion, chat, post-its, and a Lucid virtual whiteboard. (See attachment A).

Financial Literacy Requirement Update

Starting with Class of 2030, financial literacy standards will be a graduation requirement. DOE is preparing supports and training for schools.

Project Timeline for Graduation Requirement Revision

The timeline for revising the graduation requirement began last Fall and will be presented to the Board of Education early in 2027.

- Phase 1 (Fall 2025): Initial input gathered statewide.
- Phase 2 (Current): Deeper design questions; stakeholder engagement sessions.
- Summer 2026: Draft “straw man” model of revised graduation requirements.
- Fall 2026: Broad public solicitation of feedback on proposed plan.
- Feb 2027: DOE presentation to Board of Education for approval consideration.

Next Steps

Participants were encouraged to continue sharing ideas through the Lucid board and a feedback submission link and were informed of additional upcoming listening sessions. The presenters closed by inviting future engagement when the draft graduation requirement revisions are ready for community review.

SEAC Member Nominee Introductions

Steven Vannatta asked for the Council's approval in recommending four outstanding individuals to Superintendent Hayashi for consideration of appointment to a 3-year term on SEAC. He asked the three member candidates present at the meeting to introduce themselves.

Dr. Daniela Bond-Smith – Parent Representative, Honolulu District

Daniela introduced herself as a parent of two young sons with autism and ADHD, one who is also deaf, and as an autistic and ADHD adult. She works at the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization, conducting research on disability across education, health, employment, and related areas. Originally from Germany, she has lived in multiple countries and has resided in Hawai'i for the past five years. She expressed enthusiasm for contributing to SEAC and continuing her collaboration with members.

Lillian Segal – Representative for Children with Disabilities and Unstable Housing

Lillian shared that she works with the Hawai'i DOE's Education for Homeless Children and Youth program and recently became a COFA Care Navigator. As a member of the Micronesian community, she noted that many families migrate to Hawai'i seeking special education services not available in their home countries. She views her role as serving as a bridge between Hawai'i systems and Micronesian families, helping them access information and navigate educational

processes. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn and serve on the Council.

Shana Cruz – Parent Representative, Kauaʻi

Shana reintroduced herself as a returning SEAC member and parent of two children on the autism spectrum. With over 11 years of experience navigating services, she highlighted the value of peer connection, shared resources, and celebrating incremental progress. She described her grassroots parent support efforts—Be the VOICE! Autism Acceptance--emphasizing her commitment to sharing information freely and fostering strong relationships among families. She expressed appreciation for the opportunity to rejoin SEAC and continue contributing as a resource for others.

Jackie Jackson – Parent Representative, Windward

Steven spoke on behalf of Jackie who was unable to attend the meeting today but has been a guest at most meetings in the last year. She is a certified Family Peer Support Provider working with Hawaii Families as Allies and has both an adult son and teenage daughter with disabilities. She serves on the State Council on Mental Health, the Oahu Service Area Board on Mental Health and SPIN's Advisory Committee. She wants to serve on SEAC to learn more about support systems for students and to work to continuously improve their outcomes.

Action: Members voted to recommend to Superintendent Hayashi the appointment of these four individuals for a 3-year term on SEAC.

Election of Officers for School Year 2026-27

Steven shared the Membership Committee's nomination of Susan Wood to serve as Chair of SEAC and Martha Guinan to serve as Vice Chair for the next school year. No other nominations were received.

Action: Members voted to elect Susan Wood Chair of SEAC and Martha Guinan as Vice Chair of SEAC for a one-year term.

Review of Minutes from the February 13, 2026 and April 24, 2026 Meetings

No changes were offered for the February minutes. A minor edit of a date change was made for the April minutes.

Action: The February 13th minutes were approved as disseminated and the April 24th minutes were approved as corrected.

Agenda Setting for the August 14, 2026 Meeting

Suggestions for agenda items included the following:

- OSEP Determination
- DDD presentation (include Home & Community Based services for transition)
- Middle to High School Framework Discussion
- Priority Setting

Susan Wood shared the dates for future meetings as follows: August 14, September 11, October 16, November 13, January 8, February 12, March 12, April 9, and May 14.

Announcements

Amanda Kaahanui made two announcements:

- Kauai will be holding its Footsteps to Transition Fair on October 21st at the Kauai Convention Hall from 2:00 – 6:00 p.m.
- The Pac Rim 2026 Conference hosted by the Center on Disability Studies will be held at the University of Hawaii Manoa Campus Center on May 28th and May 29th. More information on the conference can be found at prinfo@hawaii.edu.

Presentation of Certificates of Appreciation

Kupu Kaniho presented each SEAC member present with a Certificate of Appreciation signed by Superintendent Hayashi in recognition of a year of volunteer service serving on the Council. Members who were attending via Zoom and those unable to make the meeting will be receiving their certificate by mail.

Recommendations for Inclusion in the SY 25-26 Annual Report

One of SEAC's key responsibilities is to advise the Superintendent and the Hawaii Department of Education on the unmet needs of students with disabilities and their families. Members were asked to divide into small groups and come up with suggestions for recommendations to the Superintendent based on discussions during the school year related to four priority areas—preschool, dispute resolution, transition for all ages and quality Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)—and additional topics such as the Vision of a High School Graduate, General Learner Outcomes, graduation requirements, school resource officers, and DOE backed legislation and budget. The recommendations were captured in Attachment B.

Attachment A

SEAC Member Feedback on Hawai'i High School Graduation Requirements

Alignment with Current Graduation Requirements

1. Charting Their Next Steps

Alignment:

- Some schools strongly support individualized future planning from elementary through high school.
- Students get volunteer experiences, tailored course sequences.

Misalignment:

- Hard conversations around post-high-school planning often occur too late.
- Students with significant disabilities may not be adequately supported in transition planning.

2. Applying Academic Knowledge

Alignment:

- Academic knowledge includes soft skills and general curriculum access.
- Increasing college readiness indicators.

Misalignment:

- Concern that students with disabilities are assumed to have lower expectations.
- Advocacy that disability should not equate to limited academic pathways.
- Need to ensure students with disabilities can graduate meaningfully, not simply "exit."

3. Fulfilling Kuleana

Reflections connected kuleana with:

- Developing identity
- Self-advocacy
- Mental health
- Belonging (referencing Norman Kunc's work)

Key Themes Raised by Participants

Equity & Expectations

- Danger in assuming disability equals reduced potential
- Maintain high expectations, and
- Provide different ways to access learning.

Identify, Belonging and Mental Health

- Need explicit support for:
 - Disability identity

- Disability pride
- Understanding personal strengths
- Advocacy for accommodations
- Belonging as foundational (Maslow's framework mentioned).

Differentiation & Access

- Ensure pathways (college, career, certificates) are meaningful.
- Ensure diplomas vs. certificates are not treated as "graduation vs. exit."
- Expanded Core Curriculum concept for all students with IEPs.

Uniquely Hawaiian Experiences

Key concerns:

- Genuine Hawaiian cultural experiences should not be tokenized (e.g., "just doing lo'i").
- Emphasis on acceptance as a core Hawaiian value.
- Ensure all students can access Hawaiian curriculum, including students with disabilities.
- Collaboration with Office of Hawaiian Education (noted Pōwehi Sang's involvement).

Mentorship for Students with Disabilities

- Strong request for mentors *with disabilities* who work in various fields.
 - Helps students imagine realistic paths and see accessible role models.
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Attachment B

Draft Recommendations for SY 25-26 SEAC Annual Report

1. Fix Systemwide Communication Breakdowns

Families consistently report not receiving information despite materials being distributed at the state and district levels.

Recommendations:

- Investigate where communication breaks down (state → district → school → staff → families).
 - Issue a Superintendent directive requiring distribution of the “Support for Families” infographic at all IEP meetings.
 - Require every school to maintain a Special Education resources link on its homepage linked to a state-maintained hub.
 - Expand communication channels to include email, SMS, Instagram, and Facebook, and provide digestible microlearning tools.
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2. Establish Consistent, Equitable Practices Across Schools

Wide variability in school-level practices—driven largely by principal discretion—leads to inequitable experiences for families.

Recommendations:

- Set statewide minimum expectations for core special education practices.
 - Establish accountability mechanisms so schools cannot opt out of required initiatives or directives.
 - Monitor compliance and follow up on required distribution of resources and materials.
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3. Implement a Statewide Parent Resource System (Binder/Package)

Families lack a centralized, organized place to manage IEPs, assessments, and guidance.

Recommendations:

- Develop a standardized statewide Family Special Education Binder/Package.
- Pilot with preschool entry families, military families, or selected cohort schools.

- Ensure long-term sustainability beyond reliance on SPIN, LDAH, or individual schools.
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4. Strengthen Secondary Transition Services

Schools lack consistent training and infrastructure to build meaningful work-based learning opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Provide statewide training on work-based learning, business engagement, compliance, and agency collaboration.
 - Support district-level convenings of local businesses and develop sample MOAs to address liability.
 - Increase transparency in the use of transition funds and align transition planning with broader workforce development priorities.
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5. Improve Dispute Resolution Transparency and Superintendent Engagement

SEAC recommendations often receive no formal response, and resolution rates remain low without explanation.

Recommendations:

- Require timely, written responses from the Superintendent to SEAC recommendations.
 - Hold an annual Superintendent–SEAC Leadership meeting.
 - Increase transparency regarding systemic IDEA issues identified through dispute resolution processes.
 - Examine factors contributing to low resolution-session agreement rates.
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6. Strengthen Inclusion, Early Identification, and Staffing Quality

Inclusion, early ID, and staffing expertise remain inconsistent across the state.

Recommendations:

- Reinforce inclusive practices across all grade levels, including preschool.

- Expand early screening systems and clarify criteria for determining preschool IEP services.
 - Review hiring practices for special education positions to ensure staff expertise and quality.
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7. Ensure Appropriate and Equitable Preschool Service Hours

Many preschoolers with disabilities are being offered only 2–3 hours of services per day—far fewer than the six-hour day provided in traditional HIDOE and Ready Keiki classrooms—limiting access to play-based learning, social-emotional development, and inclusive opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Clarify the official HIDOE policy for determining preschool IEP service minutes and expectations around specially designed instruction.
- Provide data on how many of the state’s ~2,000 preschoolers with IEPs attend fewer than six hours per day.
- Collaborate with SEAC in SY 26–27 to ensure preschoolers with disabilities consistently receive developmentally appropriate, play-based learning and equitable access to full-day environments as Ready Keiki and community partnerships expand.