SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL
August 14, 2026
Minutes

PRESENT: Daniela Bond-Smith, Will Carlson, Annettee Cooper, Nancy Gorman, Martha Guinan, Mark Heu (for Dale Matsuura), Jackie Jackson, Amanda Kaahanui (staff), Helen "Kupu" Kaniho (liaison to the Superintendent), Tina King, Cheryl Matthews, Jessical McCullum, Trish Moniz, Wendy Nakasone-Kalani, Cherine Pai, Christopher Pelayo, Kiele Pennington, Kauʻi Rezentes, Susan Rocco (staff), Rosie Rowe, Lillian Segal, Lisa Vegas, Jasmine Williams, Susan Wood, Dane Yonamine (for Kathie Awaya),

EXCUSED: Dominique Anders, Chris Pelayo, Herbert Tatingfong, Steven Vannatta

A**BSENT**: Virginia Beringer, Shana Cruz, Mark Disher, Stacy Haitsuka, Mai Hall, Kiele Pennington, Scott Shimabukuro

GUESTS: Grace Akau, Noor Al-Saleh, Michelle Arakawa, Aleena Ashton, Willie Cadena, Sherilyn Carlson, Laurie Chang, Verna Chinen, Elaine Daly-Rath, Chad Domingo, Patty Dong, Allison Eby, Kinau Gardner, Jamia Green, Beth, Higashi, Sandy Jessmon, Trisha Lukzen, Michael McGushin, Christine Montague-Hicks, Lori Morimoto, Meghan O., Carolyn Sakata, Brikena White, Jennifer Wolfsheimer, Tiffany Woynaroski

Welcome/Introductions
Chair Susan Wood opened the meeting at 9:01 a.m. Members and guests introduced themselves and the office or stakeholder group they are representing.

Opening Activity
Members and guests were asked to reflect on one word which describes why they either serve as a member of SEAC or attend SEAC meetings. A list of the contributions and resulting word cloud assembled by Amanda Kaahanui can be found in **Attachment A**.

Input from the Public
There was no input offered.

Refresher on SEAC Security Protocols
Susan Wood reviewed SEAC security protocols in the event there are technical issues or unwanted interruptions to the meeting. Should the hosts not be able to resolve the issue within a few minutes, we will close the meeting, and we ask that you come back on in 10 minutes using the same Zoom link as we are not allowed to change the link.

Update on Special Education from a National Perspective

Jennifer Wolfsheimer, Senior Program Associate at WestEd, provided an update on the national special education landscape and emphasized why SEAC's voice is increasingly critical.

Changes to the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR)

A new six-year SPP/APR cycle is coming, covering FFY 2028–2031. Significant proposed changes include removal of three discipline-related indicators (4A, 4B, and 10). Additional adjustments to other indicators were proposed. The package is not final. A second 30-day public comment period is expected. Jennifer encouraged SEAC members to look beyond the numbers and ask what data truly reflect about children's and families' experiences, especially those who fall into the "other 5%."

Importance of SEAC's Role

Jennifer expressed her view that federal policy shifts do not lessen SEAC's value--they increase it. SEAC provides crucial community perspectives that federal and state agencies cannot get from data alone. She urged members to question, interrogate, and probe the meaning and impact behind indicator results. SEAC's role is not simply to receive reports but to actively question, represent families, and elevate underrepresented voices. Members should not only ask "Who is at the table?" but "Who is missing?" Inquiry and advocacy from advisory panels can significantly shape outcomes for students with disabilities.

ED–HHS Reorganization

The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) have an agreement that may shift Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) federal functions (particularly funding distribution) to DHHS. Compliance, monitoring, and technical assistance under IDEA are expected to remain unchanged, though future impacts are still unclear. Jennifer emphasized distinguishing between confirmed information and speculation, and she encouraged vigilance in reading updates and asking questions.

Data Fragmentation Risks

With special education functions moving to DHHS and general education functions moving to the Department of Labor, questions arise about how student data will be integrated. It has yet to be seen how that data being fragmented will be played out in relation to our data collections and the reports to Congress. Ensuring special education students remain visible within general education data systems is a concern.

Questions/comments from members and guests:

C. The risk in moving OSEP to DHHS is that children with disabilities begin to be treated primarily as patients receiving services rather than students entitled to an education. A. That's a very good point and something we are continuing to watch. The Center for Exceptional Children has been doing updates on the move and the impact for children with disabilities.

Q. You have impressed us with the ability to raise our voices, but when I see public comments in the Federal Register, it just feels like they're counting noses-- not really giving

a lot of credence for individual comments. So, should we be trying to comment as 30 members of SEAC individually or should we write a joint letter? A. One mass-signed form letter counts as a single comment. Individualized comments carry more weight. If multiple organizations or individuals agree, each should add personalized remarks rather than all submitting identical text.

Q. Is it true that the civil rights enforcement functions of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) are being shifted from the Department of Education (DOE) to the Department of Justice (DOJ) ? A. Yes, DOJ will be taking over OCR. Possible impacts include complications for families navigating ADA, 504, and discrimination complaints because DOE's regional offices historically played a key role. Another resource you could look at is COPAA (Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates).

C. The transition of services to health and human services could present opportunities, such as improved coordination and communication across health and education sectors.

2026 Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Determination

Kupu Kaniho began the discussion by acknowledging the Department's Nā Hopena Aʻo (HĀ) framework which demonstrates the outcomes we want to see, if we behave according to our core values--belonging, responsibility, excellence, aloha, total-well-being and Hawaiʻi. When Kupu attends state director of special education meetings, she is proud to share how Hawaii, and other sped leaders from the various territories and states have chosen to honor the place they are in. She also reshared the Vision of a Hawaii Public School Graduate that the Council contributed to as something that anchors educators to working together to achieve this outcome for all special education students.

2026 IDEA Part B Hawaiʻi Determination Documents

Members and guests were directed to the Department's webpage that contains documents regarding the Office of Special Education's determination based on the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) submitted in February 2026.

Determination Status

Hawaii remains in **"Needs Assistance"** for 2026. However, the state made measurable gains and is no longer hovering close to the "Needs Intervention" threshold. The previous score was **60.68%** (very close to dropping into Needs Intervention).while the current score is **67.95%**--not at the desired level yet but showing upward movement.

National Context

In the most recent determination, 33 states are Needs Assistance. Hawaii's goal is to move into the group of 21 states meeting requirements.

Compliance Indicators Review

Compliance improved from **86.36% to 90.91%**. Hawaii earned strong scores in:

- Suspension/expulsion disproportionality (4B).
- Disproportionate representation in identification (9 & 10).
- Timely evaluations (Indicator 11).
- Part C to Part B transition (Indicator 12).
- General supervision.

The main compliance challenge is Indicator 13 (secondary transition), where any missed criterion results in a non-compliant IEP. Some gains have been made, and more analysis is coming.

Results Indicators Review

Results improved from **35% to 45%.** Targets for participation in statewide assessments and the National Assessment of Educational Performance (NAEP) were met in most areas except 8th-grade reading, which missed by 1%. Hawaii did not meet the thresholds for NAEP performance and received no points. On a positive note, the dropout rate improved from **13% to 12%** and is now below the most recent national average (13.9%). Additionally, the graduation rate increased from **70% to 76%**, aligning with national averages. Despite positive results, there remains a large gap between compliance performance and results outcomes.

Next Steps

More detailed root cause analyses will be shared (particularly on 8th-grade participation, Indicator 13, dropout, and graduation trends) at the annual SPP/APR Engagement Meeting on Friday, December 4, 2026 at Windward Community College.

Department of Education Priorities

Department priorities are shaped by SPP/APR data, OSEP determination factors, monitoring and compliance findings, complaints, due process matters, and stakeholder feedback. Kupu Kaniho and Brikena White shared the following three focus areas for the current school year:

1. **Expand Access and Educational Opportunities**

Early Childhood

The Department is working to improve the Child Find system and broaden inclusive early childhood opportunities by strengthening interagency collaboration and aligning definitions and practices across partners. Current work includes engagement with national technical assistance centers (DaiSy, ECTA, and the Waters Center for Systems Thinking) and expanded coordination with the Department of Health Early Intervention Section, home visiting programs, Head Start, University of Hawai‘i partners, Hawai‘i P–20, and private preschools. A key insight from the Preschool Interagency Work Group is that agencies have been operating with inconsistent definitions of “inclusion,” creating a systemic barrier. Efforts now focus on establishing a shared understanding, using data to identify gaps, and building capacity across agencies to ensure children are identified early and transition smoothly into DOE services.

Learning Environments

DOE is committed to fostering safe, supportive, and inclusive environments through all settings, ensuring high-quality supports across the entire continuum of placements. This work emphasizes moving beyond what is “available” to what is genuinely “appropriate” for each

student. The Department is examining culture, environmental factors, and instructional delivery using tools such as OASIS (Observational Assessment of Student Instructional Settings). Ensuring access to viable curriculum for all students—regardless of need severity—is a major focus area.

2. Improve Quality and Outcomes

IEP Quality and Transition Outcomes

IEP quality is a major priority due to implementation concerns identified through state complaints and due process hearings. The Department is working to strengthen the quality and consistency of IEP development, ensuring alignment between how staff are trained and how parents are supported. Parent participation and empowerment in the IEP/IDEA process remain central elements. DOE is also focusing on postsecondary readiness, high-quality transition planning, and improving statewide assessment participation and proficiency rates to better support long-term student outcomes.

3. General Supervision and Collaboration

Compliance & Dispute Resolution

The Department is continuing implementation of its strategic action plan for dispute resolution. Key goals include increasing the use of mediation and early resolution strategies so concerns can be addressed before they escalate to formal complaints or due process hearings. DOE is focusing on both compliance and preventing disputes by strengthening IEP implementation quality, improving communication, and providing ongoing mediation/conflict-resolution training for parents and DOE staff.

Community Partnerships

DOE aims to expand and deepen collaboration with engaged community stakeholders and agency partners. This includes co-developing resources and moving toward co-training with organizations such as LDAH, SEAC, Community Children's Councils (CCCs), SPIN, and the Hawai'i PTI. Additional interagency collaboration includes Department of Health programs, Department of Human Services (including Child Welfare Services), CAMHD, Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and other partners. Strengthening these relationships will support broader family engagement and improved outcomes across the state.

Parent Involvement Survey Reminder

Brikena reminded the members and guests about the important of continuing progress on the Parent Involvement Survey (Indicator 8). The survey was recently revised, with significant input from Jasmine Williams and Leadership and Disabilities Achievement of Hawaii, to make it shorter, less cumbersome, and easier for families to complete—especially on mobile devices. Early data from the revised version looks strong, and the MAC team is excited about the improvements. Families are encouraged to provide feedback whenever they attend IEP meetings. If they are not offered the survey, they should ask for it. Updated survey data will be shared with the SEAC at a future meeting.

Refresher on Leading by Convening (LbC)

Susan Wood gave a brief overview of the LbC process which serves as SEAC's chosen means of solving complex problems around special education issues, emphasizing that the process brings together diverse stakeholders and shifts from the traditional top-down leadership to a more collaborative style and inclusive model for moving forward. Modeling LbC, SEAC members and guests coalesce around issues--such as the priorities (buckets) -- with relevant participation from diverse stakeholders that allows the Council to do the work of solving complex issues together. Sometimes it is necessary to bring in other folks that are not part of the SEAC ohana to get more information. convene with the stakeholders and translate complex challenges so that all can contribute.

Review of Priority Areas in School Year 25-26

The four areas receiving priority attention this past school year were preschool, high quality IEPs, transition and dispute resolution. Dispute resolution involved the most discussion followed by transition of all age groups.

Priority Setting for SY 26-27

Susan W. began the discussion by offering the same four priority buckets from SY 25-26 as a starting point of discussion. Participants reviewed last year's priority "buckets" and worked collaboratively—both in-person and virtually—to decide whether to continue, revise, or add new focus areas. Because groups were split between online and in-room participants, the Council agreed to conduct the brainstorming together.

Several new or emphasized focus areas were proposed:

- **Student Achievement**: Strong concern was expressed about persistently low proficiency rates and the need for focused attention on academic outcomes, including growth measures, literacy, and monitoring implementation of evidence-based instruction.
- **Inclusion**: Members noted Hawaii's low inclusion rates and advocated for dedicating a full bucket to meaningful access to general education, least restrictive environments, and universal design for learning.
- **Literacy / Student Outcomes**: This is part of student achievement, with emphasis on State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) goals, progress monitoring, fidelity of implementation, and assessing outcomes beyond test proficiency.
- **Parent Engagement**: Identified as a critical cross-cutting issue, members noted the need for better communication, training, and meaningful engagement beyond the IEP process. Ideas included surveys, better outreach, and clarity on how HIDOE defines and measures engagement.
- **Student Voice and Engagement**: Proposed as essential for achievement and quality IEPs; importance was placed on advocacy, participation, and ensuring students are active contributors to planning.
- **High-Quality IEP Implementation**: Discussion included ensuring IEPs are implemented with fidelity, retraining staff when needed, improving interagency collaboration, and ensuring adequate qualified personnel.

- **Transition**: Continued focus recommended, particularly secondary transition, non-mandated areas, early resource access, cross-agency collaboration, and stronger post-school outcome alignment.
- **Preschool / Early Identification**: Members emphasized the need for more inclusive preschool options, stronger early identification practices, and the anticipated increase in children entering DOE without autism diagnoses due to DOH policy changes.

After group discussions and combined voting from SEAC members and guests, **four final priority buckets** were selected for the year:

1. **Transition (non-mandated and high school)**
2. **High-Quality IEPs**
3. **Student Achievement/Literacy**
4. **Preschool / LRE (Least Restrictive Environment**

Parent engagement and student voice are to be **embedded across all buckets**. For additional sub-topic suggestions, see **Attachment B**.

Membership Committee Nomination of Parent Representative for Maui

Susan Rocco announced that Melissa Johnson stepped down this summer as the parent representative from Maui, and the Membership Committee is recommending that SEAC forward Regina Corniel's nomination to the Superintendent for consideration as Melissa's replacement. Regina received the Parent of the Year award at the SPIN Conference in March in recognition for her volunteerism in helping other families on Maui and around the state, including organizing an inclusive sports team. She has two sons with disabilities ages 8 and 10.

Action: Members voted unanimously to forward Regina's nomination to Superintendent Hayashi for consideration of appointment to SEAC.

Review of the Minutes of the May 8, 2026 Meeting

Susan Wood offered minor edits to the minutes for grammar or spelling.

Action: Members approved the minutes as corrected.

Agenda Setting for the September 11, 2026 Meeting

Two suggestions for consideration for the September meeting were 1) a deep dive into the data for the most recent Parent Involvement Survey, and 2) a presentation on the Drop Out and Graduation Rate data. Suggestions for future meetings included the following:

- secondary transition (Indicator 13),
- a Developmental Disabilities Division (DDD) presentation on home and community based services, how they relate to transition and how kids can qualify for services, and
- literacy progress monitoring from CDS (student achievement).

Attachment A – SEAC Member and Guest Reflection on "Why I Serve SEAC or Why I Am Here Today"

Susan Wood – "Voice"
Will Carlson – "Community"
Nancy Gorman – "Collaboration"
Jennifer Wolfsheimer - "Impact
Carolyn Sakata – "Resilience"
Christine Montigue-Hicks – "Support"
Michael McGushin – "Knowledge"
Lillian Segal – "Bridge"
Cherine Pai – "Representation"
Trisha Lukzen – "Legacy"
Sandy Jessmon – "Health"
Jessica McCullum – "Access"
Cheryl Matthews – "Alignment"
Rosie Rowe – "Parents"
Jasmine Williams – "Children"
Martha Guinan – "Education"
Daniela Bond-Smith – "Happiness"
Trish Moniz – "Believe"
Susan Rocco – "Optimism"
Jamia Green – "Reimagine"
Laurie Chang - "Growth"
Kinau Gardner – "Equity"
Verna Chinen – "Communication"
Sheralyn Carlson – "Partnerships"
Willie Cadena – "Commitment"
Grace Akau – "Consistency"
Chad Domingo – "Flexibility"
Tiffany Woynaroski – "Innovation"
Mark Heu – "Unbelievable"
Dane Yonamine – "Informed"
Beth Higashi – "Listen"
Tina King – "Empower"
Allison Eby – "Sharing"
Michelle Arakawa – "Grace"
Lori Morimoto – "Determination"
Aleena Ashton – "Community"
Brikena White – "Belonging"
Patty Dong – "Kuleana"
Kupu Kaniho – "Aloha"

WORD CLOUD OF "WHY I SERVE SEAC"

August 14, 2025



Attachment B – SEAC Priority Issues for SY 26-27
(In order of preference by vote)

1. **TRANSITION** (non-mandated and high school)
   - Focus on secondary transition and how other agencies can assist DOE statewide with achieving results and empower teachers and families/students with resources earlier rather than the last year of high school
   - Medically Fragile transitions
   - Increase inter-agency collaboration.
   - Include training re: early intermediate and post-secondary.
   - High schools in the same complex/district should have their own meetings to share resources and ideas.
   - Encourage consistent student participation/voice/advocacy
     - Quality transition plan/services prior to graduation
     - In school programs/opportunities.
   - Educate parents/students on transition resources starting at 9th grade.
   - Ensure parents/students understand how to accomplish this.

2. **HIGH-QUALITY IEPS**
   - Increase interagency collaboration/training
   - If IEPs lack quality, then retrain the care coordinator and admin.
   - Need high-quality teachers to implement
   - Implementation – monitoring of effectiveness of plan and student success.
   - What are the metrics for implementation with fidelity?
   - Retraining of admin and CC

3. **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT/LITERACY/STUDENT OUTCOMES**
   - Progress monitoring of implementation
   - 12% proficiency in reading at 4th grade when children need to be reading to learn is VERY CONCERNING and will impact broader academic achievement
   - Access to grade-level content
   - Growth rate, proficiency and progress monitoring of literacy

4. **PRESCHOOL**
   - Need to focus not only on finding children who need SPED services early, but on properly identifying their disability and comprehensively characterizing their profiles.

- Changes to Early Intervention Section of DOH policy are likely to lead to students matriculating into DOE without an autism diagnosis.
- Screening at preschool level is likely to facilitate ID as early as possible and promote more optimal education planning and social, academic, and vocational success.
- Increase child find. More supports needed in between Early Intervention to preschool, identification of children needing supports prior to attending preschool/Kindergarten (assessments/evals/eligibility).
- More campuses for inclusion

STUDENT VOICE/ENGAGMENT/ADVOCACY (embedded across all buckets)

- Implementation of high-quality IEP
- Can be folded in across all priorities
- Need for training for IEP team members on how to include a child in the meeting/discussions
- Mandatory student engagement (starting with education and engagement with students)
- Implementation looks to assist students with being able to self-advocate and encourage voice.
- Develop goals/exploration = student success
- Teacher training of SPED students

PARENT ENGAGEMENT (embedded across all buckets)

- Increase opportunities for families to engage statewide and in smaller county groups.
- Bridge collaborations/opportunities for parents and families in their communities.
- Every school website should/must have a section/page for special education. It should include vetted training (HIDOE/LDAH, etc.) regarding all IDEA topics, processes, school/state information, etc.
- One message to every school on every island. List of resources accessible to all parents, teachers, others 24/7. Free.
- Parent education.
- Consistent opportunities provided at the district, complex, and school level for parent meetings, training, etc. Increase parent updates/information regarding SPED. Increase input/concerns.