



Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

2024-25 Annual Report

June 30, 2025



Department of Education

State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E. 14th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

Administration

McKenzie Snow, Director

Special Education Division

Barb Guy, Division Administrator (through January 2025)

Bureau of Evaluation, Instruction and Services

Betsy Lin, Bureau Chief

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Introduction



Iowa's Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) is a collaborative resource that envisions its role as an advocate for all children with special needs and their families on issues of special education in Iowa. As such, it is committed to representing individuals with diverse and changing educational needs. SEAP shall have, and will perform, functions and duties as specified by law. Responsibilities include offering advice, consultation, and recommendations to the Iowa Department of Education regarding matters concerning special education services.

Mission Statement

The Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel serves as a resource to advise the Iowa Department of Education on behalf of all children with special needs and their families. This Panel engages in dialogue regarding philosophies and policies, including best practices and special education compliance that result in successful outcomes for persons with disabilities (2007).

Purpose

The purpose of the Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel is to provide policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities.

Duties

- (a) Advise state education agency on unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities.
- (b) Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities.
- (c) Advise the Iowa Department of Education in developing evaluations and reporting data to the Secretary of the United States Department of Education Secretary under section 618 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- (d) Advise the Iowa Department of Education in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under Part B of this Act.
- (e) Advise the Iowa Department of Education in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of service for children with disabilities.
- (f) Advise the Iowa Department of Education on eligible students with disabilities in adult prisons.

34 C.F.R. §300.169 (2006)

2024-25 Membership

Membership of the Panel consists of representatives from both public and private sectors who, by virtue of their position, interest and training, can contribute to the education of children with disabilities. A majority (51%) of the members of the Panel must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. The Director of the Iowa Department of Education appoints members to the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP).

Executive Committee

Rhonda Haitz – Chair

Casey Force – Vice Chair

Barb Guy – Director of Special Education
(until 1/25)

Betsy Lin – Acting Director of Special Education

Nancy Hunt – Panel Facilitator

Panel Secretary

Beth Buehler-Sapp

Panel Members: July 1, 2024 -June 30, 2025

Members of the Panel shall be appointed by the Director of the Iowa Department of Education (Iowa Code § 256.9(14)) and serve for a term of three years. The following members were appointed by Director Snow to serve on the Panel in 2024-25. 12 of the 22 members are individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities (54%).

Wendy Anderson	Mary Jackson	Stephanie (Smith) Petrillo
Joy Barlean	Laura Leise/Linda Dettman	Sonia Reyes
Josh Bowar	Pam Litterer	Sandra Smith
Carrie Champine	Amy Llewellyn	Karen Thompson
Casey Force	Lee Longmire	Rebecca Torres
Lori Frieden-Janke	Kim Neal	Joel Weeks
Rhonda Haitz	Sarah Norvell	
Tami Hoffman	Keri Osterhaus	

Panel Meetings

The annual schedule of regular meetings includes at least six meetings each year and an orientation for new members. Meetings are held in accordance with the Iowa Code chapter 21, the state’s open meetings statute.

2024 -25 Meeting Dates

Sept. 20	Jan. 10	April 11
Oct. 18	Feb. 28	May 16
Nov. 22		

Priorities

To ensure that all students with disabilities who are eligible for special education:

- Enter kindergarten ready to learn to read.
- Are proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade.
- Progress at a rate that ensures success across core content areas.
- Are self-determined.
- Are engaged in school and community.
- Graduate from high school.
- Are college and career ready.

Major Topics

The Panel focused on the following topics in 2024-25.



ACHIEVE and the ACHIEVE Family Portal

ACHIEVE is the home to Early ACCESS and special education records for every learner in Iowa. From the date of referral through graduation, educators, service providers, and families have real-time access to the documents generated for that specific individual.

The Panel has been very focused the last few years on preparation for the launch of the ACHIEVE Family Portal. Through the family portal, parents have round-the-clock access to their learner's historical information. The family portal allows parents the ability to view and sign documents electronically, access records for their child as well as view real-time progress on outcomes and goals.

The ACHIEVE Family Portal officially launched in February 2025. Panel members were integral contributors to the launch through testing, participation in task teams and stakeholder groups, feedback on the Portal's tools and functionality, and suggestions for training materials and communication. In addition, some members of the Panel volunteered to participate in the soft launch which provided valuable feedback and information to the Department prior to the full launch. Throughout 2024-25, Panel members were informed of the work the Department team was undergoing to prepare for the launch and were provided data and information about the Portal after the launch.



“The Achieve Parent Portal has been a game-changer for our family. It keeps documents in one place and gives us access to real-time progress whenever we need it—no more waiting.

Knowing that we’re seeing the same information as the staff builds trust and has made communication smoother and more effective.”

- Wendy, SEAP Member

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

The Panel had an opportunity to hear about multiple services available to improve services to deaf and hard of hearing learners and their families.



Deaf and Hard of Hearing Database

Tori Carsrud, Education Program Consultant for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, shared an update on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Database, a tool in ACHIEVE. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Database went live August 2024 and was developed to provide a statewide tool that the educational professionals focused on hearing could use for their daily work with all learners. In addition, the DHH Database meets the requirements of the Lead-K ((Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids) bill signed into law in May 2022. This legislation requires the Department of Education to gather language

achievement data on learners between the ages of 0-8 years who are deaf or hard of hearing and who were administered a particular language assessment.

The database is the first of its kind in the nation. It provides statewide access and data for all learners whose hearing is screened in the schools or tested in the sound booths, for learners who are deaf or hard of hearing, the database can track and monitor their needs and be connected to their IEP/IFSP records, as applicable. The database has already shown an increase in collaboration among team members. For example, the database includes a data field that displays both the expressive and receptive way the learner communicates and this information can now be correlated with the services that learner receives.

In the 2023-24 school year, there were approximately 3,183 learners who are deaf or hard of hearing between the ages of 0-21 years. Of those learners, 1,449 were eligible learners on an IEP and 111 were eligible learners on an IFSP. Additionally, of those 3,183 learners, approximately 983 were in 9th grade or older.

Iowa School for the Deaf

Chris Kaftan, the Superintendent of the Iowa School for the Deaf (ISD) provided history and information about ISD. Iowa School for the Deaf was founded 169 years ago. The school was first founded in Iowa City in 1855 and then in 1870 we moved to Council Bluffs. ISD currently has 98 students with some referrals being processed so it is anticipated that enrollments will reach over 100 students by January. Enrollment continues to increase thanks to outreach efforts. IDS has reached out to more families to spread the awareness of the importance of signed language and has a wonderful coaching program that provides services in school districts across the state.

Family Support Mentors

Anne-Michelle Pedersen, Statewide Family Support Mentor Coordinator, spoke about Family Support Mentors. The program was created by the LEAD-K legislation signed in May of 2022. This bill is designed to ensure deaf and hard of hearing children have access to ASL (American Sign Language), can read and write in English and receive the education and services they need to be independent and successful in life.

Family Support Mentors serve families of children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (birth-21). The mentors give parent resources to provide families with information and guidance on language, communication, and social-emotional development of their child. The services are available to families based on their specific needs, experiences, and wants. The program provides parents with an understanding of ASL and English, including instructional philosophies for both (such as bilingual bimodal, listen and spoken language, total communication, and other philosophies) as well as other forms of communication, deaf culture, deaf community and self-identity.

Continuous Improvement

Several Department staff from the Division of Special Education provided updates on continuous improvement efforts across the division and solicited feedback from the Panel.



- **Division of Special Education:** House File 2612, which was signed into law in March of 2024, reinstated the Division of Special Education at the Iowa Department of Education. The new division has two branches with one being regionally-based in the nine Area Education Agencies (AEAs) and one centrally-based in Des Moines. Angelisa Fynaardt, Division Administrator for Special Education Continuous Improvement & Compliance, provided a staffing update for the recently formed Division of Special Education. As of April 2025, the division is staffed at 44% and are in the process of onboarding 27 newly hired staff and in the hiring process for 35 vacant positions.

- **SDI Coaching Network:** The statewide Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) coaching network will provide an opportunity for practice coaches who are supporting implementation of the SDI Framework in one of the four focus areas to network, collaborate, and refine their SDI coaching skills with other coaches from around the state.
- **Community of Practice:** District and AEA staff participate in monthly Community of Practice sessions to support the implementation of Secondary Transition SDI courses and integrated coaching supports.
- **IDEA-Differentiated Accountability (IDEA-DA) Implementation Plans and Progress Reports:** The team provided a statewide look at IDEA-DA level 1 focus areas. Of the 228 districts designated level 1, 65% focus on K12 literacy, 23% on Secondary Transition, 7% on preschool, 2% on significant disabilities and 3% on other areas. All districts must complete a multi-year implementation plan aligned to the identified needs in their data review process in ACHIEVE that includes their area of focus (plus a sub-area), data summary statement, goals and actions steps. Progress Reports are required for all districts at the end of each academic year. All reports are submitted in ACHIEVE.

Standing Topics

Each year, presentations are provided to the Panel on the State Performance Plan (SPP)/Annual Performance Report (APR), dispute resolution and any new or changed legislation that impacts education and the work of the Department.



Due Process Decisions

Rachel Bosovich, Attorney II, reported that from July 2024-Present (April 2025), there were 25 State Complaints, 20 Mediations and 19 Due Process Complaints. Of the Due Process complaints, 2 were dismissed due to default (party did not attend), 2 are active, 1 has an order (not confirmed) and 14 were dismissed (2 complainant-initiated without reference to settlement; 12 were due to settlement).

Legislative Updates and Changes

The 2024 legislative session included several bills that impacted education and the work of the Department. Thomas Mayes, Legal Counsel, presented to the panel in November to provide updates on the bills that passed during the previous session. In February, Thomas joined the Panel meeting to highlight some of the bills introduced during the 2025 session that would be most relevant to the Panel. After the 2025 legislative session adjourned, Thomas joined the Panel to summarize the bills that passed and were signed into law.

House File 2545 requires the Department of Education to review the state's high school graduation requirements, core curriculum, core content standards, and the social studies standards. There is a committee with representation from the Division of Special Education in each area. Kelsey Teeter will serve on the committee which requires a comprehensive review and recommendations for policy changes related to high school graduation requirements and core curriculum. Tiffany Poage will serve on the content standards and education standards committee and Mary Beilke will serve on the committee for the statewide literacy plan.

State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR)

All states who receive IDEA funds must annually develop a SPP/APR report that evaluates the efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of Part B and Part C of the IDEA. Melissa Schnurr, Part B Data Manager, reported on Iowa's progress against the 18 targets for the compliance and results indicators. The report included an overview of each indicator, including: indicator definition, the previous

year's progress data, the current reporting period set target and current progress data, as well as indicator status (met/not met). In some instances, Iowa closed the gap, and in others the state narrowed the gap and continue to work towards the set target.

Presentations to the Panel

During the year, Department staff and others involved with specific programs or projects were invited to present to SEAP. Panel members are frequently asked to provide feedback or make recommendations on discussion topics. The following is a brief synopsis of the presentations and topics discussed during this past year.



Secondary Transition

There are new post-secondary readiness indicators that are approved through the updated ESSA plan that focus on student's participation in work-based learning, college credit courses, and industry recognized credentials. These improve post-secondary outcomes for all students but are especially important for students with disabilities.

Kelsey Teeter, Education Program Consultant, discussed the Capacity Building Institute (CBI) that Iowa's team attended this past May. The team goals included: 1. Develop a state interagency team that is collaborative and represents our diverse population and needs to address identified state goals, inform practice and support cross-agency collaboration. 2. Increase engagement of students/youth and their families with student-centered policies and practices. 3. Increase capacity of the workforce to provide high quality services to students with complex support needs and/or traditionally underserved or marginalized youth.

The monthly coordination between IVRS, DHHS, ASK Resource Center and the DE is focused on strengthening interagency collaboration. The team supported a redesign to the Local School Plan and provided both a work- based learning webinar and a transition focused webinar series.

Access for ALL: uPar and Read&Write

MeLissa Lawson, Education Program Consultant, provided a presentation on uPar and the availability of Read&Write for Iowa districts. Access for ALL provides tools and materials for all Iowa learners who need them to support literacy skills and access to grade-level content through uPar and Read&Write. uPar is available to every district in Iowa - more than 100 districts have elected to use the uPar tool. Read&Write will be available through an application process to districts who would like to focus on district-wide implementation of both tools. There was discussion among Panel members on how parents can advocate for their district's use of Read&Write.

Family Support Services

The Department entered into a contract with ASK Resource Center to increase the consistency and access to family support services statewide. The family support staff focuses on providing families with the information and support needed to exercise their procedural safeguards and dispute resolution rights. Karen Thompson, executive director at ASK Resource Center, reviewed the Year 1 progress. The presentation included updates on the project and quantitative and qualitative data.

IDEA Equity Requirements

Melissa Schnurr and Nancy Hunt, Education Program Consultants, shared three IDEA Equity Requirements with the Panel: 1. Disproportionate Representation, 2. Significant Discrepancy and 3. Significant Disproportionality. The presentation described the definitions of each requirement, the differences in calculations, the district identification processes and Iowa data for the last three years.

Legal Update - Kass v. Western Dubuque Community School District (8th Cir. 2024)

Thomas Mayes, Legal Counsel, presented an Iowa school district case that involved transition services for a student on an IEP and his placement. The parents alleged that the district violated IDEA when it developed the IEP for their son. Although he had enough credits to graduate, the IEP team determined he had unmet transition needs. The family objected to the proposed IEP and filed a complaint with the Iowa Department of Education. The administrative law judge ruled in favor of the district, and determined there was not a denial of FAPE. The Eighth Circuit affirmed the court's decision.

Dispute Resolution

Jen Cira, Dispute Resolution Coordinator, discussed the facilitated IEP pilot program Iowa is developing. Facilitation is a collaborative process that emphasizes shared responsibility for the development of the most appropriate IEP for the student. A Department team will create a proposal for the Iowa program and present it to stakeholders (including SEAP) for feedback during the 2025-26 school year.

In addition, the Panel learned about the dispute resolution dashboard that will be available in ACHIEVE. The dashboard will provide a single space for all case related information to be shared and stored for all parties and allow for tracking of dates and the completion of action steps. In addition, individuals and organizations will have the ability to file a state complaint using the new dispute resolution system. All parties involved will be able to access the state complaint and file documents, communicate with the parties and DE, and see the final decision in ACHIEVE.

Opportunities for Feedback

Differentiated Monitoring and Support 2.0 (DMS 2.0) System: The United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), conducted a DMS 2.0 System visit of the Iowa Department of Education's System of General Supervision in September 2024. The Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) was invited to participate in a one-hour interview the OSEP team.



- **AEA Accreditation Standards:** Iowa Code section 273.11 outlines the standards for Area Education Agency (AEA) programs. HF2612 amended the standards and specified the role of the Division of Special Education of the Department of Education in the accreditation process. The Panel was asked to provide feedback on the planned approach for the monitoring and specific items the Department should be looking for during the process.
- **Secondary Transition:** The Panel reviewed the priorities for Secondary Transition and were asked if the areas of focus have shifted and what areas should be the focus for next year.
- **Family Support Services:** The Panel was asked the following questions regarding the Family Support Services available through ASK: 1. What have you heard? 2. What would you like? 3. How can you help?
- **ACHIEVE Family Portal:** Panel members provided feedback on the resources and communication tools to support the Portal launch. In addition, members who are parents volunteered to participate in the soft launch. The parents were able to create their account before the official launch and test the Portal as well as provide feedback on their experience.
- **Policy and Practice Webinar Series:** The Iowa Department of Education launched an engaging, new webinar series on special education topics for administrators with special education responsibilities. The Special Education Policy and Practice webinars highlight important and emerging special education policies and how to apply them within Iowa schools. The Panel was asked for feedback on potential topics for the 2025-26 academic year.

Recommendations

- The Panel encouraged the Department to conduct an audit on the coding that is used in Student Information Systems around removals. For example, the Panel shared examples of removals being coded as “parent choice.” In a future meeting, SEAP will revisit this topic and provide recommendations.
- The Panel felt the response rate for Indicator 8 (Parent Involvement Survey) was very low. The members requested we revisit the topic at a future meeting to discuss ways to increase participation.



Panel Reflections

As a closing activity, the Panel was asked to reflect and share highlights from the past year and the hopes for the upcoming year.



Highlights from the Year

- The opportunity to see the ACHIEVE Family Portal go live after having been so integrally involved in the process.
- Updates on the new tools available in ACHIEVE.
- The opportunity to attend the Tri-State Special Education conference as a parent—the learning is invaluable.
- The discussion around Access for All was very appreciated.
- The summaries of due process and state complaints. Appreciate having the information so we can focus on what we need for families.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Database and the Family Support Mentors program are both amazing and helpful.
- The information and focus on postsecondary expectations and Secondary Transition, especially around educating parents on how to navigate transitions.
- The OSEP DMS visit was interesting and helpful.
- The legislative updates regarding proposed and final bills that impact special education.
- Transparency around the data that is presented.
- The opportunity to learn about what is going on in special education so that information can be used for advocacy.
- The ability to understand the system as a whole.
- The information on how the Department is supporting families.

Hopes for Next Year

- Continue work on Secondary Transition and continue raising the bar for learners.
- Learn more about what is working and not working with the Public and Non-Public school collaborations.
- A focus on university level teacher preparation programs.
- Preparation for administrators and training around Special Education responsibilities.
- A focus on how we can better support students with challenging behaviors at a system level.
- Information regarding changes at the federal level that might impact the work of the Department.
- Looking forward to more information on support for families.

Appendix

Student Results and State Performance Plan (SPP) Indicators

Result 1: Enter Kindergarten ready to learn to read

- SPP Indicator 6: Least Restrictive Environment Ages 3 to 5
- SPP Indicator 7: Early Childhood Outcomes
- SPP Indicator 12: Transition C to B

Result 2: Are proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade

- SPP Indicator 5: Least Restrictive Environment ages 6 to 21
- SPP Indicator 9: Disproportionate Representation Due to Inappropriate Identification

Result 3: Progress at a rate that ensures success across core content areas

- SPP Indicator 3: Participation/Performance on Assessments
- SPP Indicator 11: Timely Initial Evaluations

Result 4: Are self-determined

- SPP Indicator 13: Secondary Transition

Result 5: Are engaged in school and community

- SPP Indicator 4: Suspension and Expulsion]
- SPP Indicator 8: Parent Involvement

Result 6: Graduate from high school

- SPP Indicator 1: Graduation
- SPP Indicator 2: Dropout

Result 7: College and Career Ready

- Indicator 14: Post-School Outcomes

Acronyms/Terms

AEA – Area Education Agency

ALJ – Administrative Law Judge

APR – Annual Performance Report (as related to a state’s “State Performance Plan”)

AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress

CIE – Competitive Integrated Employment

District – School District (also referred to as Local Educational Agency or LEA)

ESSA – Every Student Succeeds Act

FFY – Federal Fiscal Year

HQT – Highly Qualified Teacher

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IDEA-DA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - Differentiated Accountability

IEP – Individualized Education Program

IHE – Institutions of Higher Education

IVRS – Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services

LEA – Local Educational Agency (also referred to as school district or district)

LRE – Least Restrictive Environment

MTSS – Multi-Tiered System of Support

NAEP – National Assessment of Education Progress (national standardized assessment)

OSEP – Office of Special Education Programs (Washington, D.C.)

Panel – Special Education Advisory Panel (also referred to as SEAP)

Part B – Special Education Services for Children with Disabilities Ages 3 to 21

Part C – Services for Infants, Toddlers, and their families, Birth through Two Years

Pre-ETS – Pre-Employment Transition Services

SEA – State Education Agency

SEAP – Special Education Advisory Panel (also referred to as the Panel)

SDI – Specially Designed Instruction

SLP – Speech and Language Pathologist

SPP – State Performance Plan (sometimes called the “Six-Year Performance Plan”)

SSIP – State Systemic Improvement Plan

WIOA – Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act