

Oct. 17, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel
Location: Grimes State Office Building or Zoom
Time: 12 – 3 p.m.

Present

Joy Barlean, Josh Bowar, Carrie Champine, Linda Dettman, Jennifer Dickey, Casey Force, Mary Jackson, Alissa Mayer, Sarah Norvell, Keri Osterhaus, Kristie Ostrander, Stephanie Petrillo, Ashley Reedy, Rohey Sallah, Karen Thompson, Rebecca Torres, Kristi Updah, Kimberly Van Beek and Joel Weeks

Absent

Wendy Andersen, Tami Hoffman, Jill Johnston, Lee Longmire, Sonia Reyes and Katie Sharp

Department Staff Present

Leisa Breitsfelder, Nancy Hunt, Beth Buehler-Sapp

Public Comment

None

Welcome/Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Casey Force, Chair at 12:03 p.m.

Approve Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda by Joel Weeks. The motion was seconded by Karen Thompson. Motion carried.

Consent Agenda

Minutes were reviewed by the panel members. Karen Thompson asked to clarify a statement in the minutes to reflect accurately reflect practice. ASK *typically* doesn't speak at IEP meetings but the minutes stated that ASK does not speak at meetings.

A motion to approve the May 2025 minutes with the suggested change was made by Joel Weeks. Karen Thompson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Introduction – Leisa Breitsfelder, Iowa Department of Education

Leisa Breitsfelder introduced herself as the new Director of Special Education. She was raised in Illinois and received her undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Special Education from Loras College in Dubuque and her Masters Degree in Child Development Specialist from Nova South Eastern College in Fort Lauderdale Florida. She received her Administration degree from the University of Northern Iowa and her Superintendents degree from Missouri.

Leisa has served in the following positions:

- Linn Mar High School - Special Education Teacher
- Grant Wood Area Education Agency – SPED Director
- Clear Creek Amana CSD - Special Education Director
- Linn Mar CSD - Special Education Director
- She was the joint Superintendent for North Linn and Central City Community School Districts.

Leisa values belonging and making a difference. She believes it is each student’s human right to have access to an education where staff hold high expectations and believe each student can meet them. In addition, each student who walks through our doors should feel they belong in our school and our classrooms.

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Site Visit Report – Leisa Breitfelder, Iowa Department of Education

Leisa provided a summary of the [Differentiated Monitoring and Support \(DMS\) report](#) from the OSEP site visit that occurred in September 2024. As part of the DMS process, States are monitored on their general supervision systems which encompass States’ responsibilities to ensure that States and their subgrantees and contractors meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). OSEP has identified seven findings of noncompliance with IDEA requirements. The Department has 90 days to respond to the findings.

OSEP Findings:

1. General Supervision Timelines – The state is not issuing a finding within 90 days.
 - a) Response included a documentation of our process with a timeline.
2. General Supervision Monitoring – The state has not applied the established monitoring criteria consistently.
 - a) Response included evidence the policies and procedures are being implemented and focus monitoring has occurred.
3. Grant Award Notification (GAN) - The State’s GANs do not include the required information consistent with the requirements.
 - a) The GANs have been updated to include the required information and submitted to OSEP.
4. Fiscal Monitoring Procedures - The State does not have a reasonably designed general supervision system, including policies and procedures for subrecipient monitoring, fiscal management, and internal controls. (The process was not well documented.)
 - a) Response includes updated written policies and procedures and the hiring of a full-time employee for fiscal monitoring of IDEA funds.
5. State Complaint Timelines - The State does not have written procedures to ensure the timely resolution of State complaints and completion of State complaint investigations within the required 60-day timeline.
 - a) Response includes our written internal processes and procedures and how we will meet the 60-day timeline. Tracking and sharing of information between parties will now be done in ACHIEVE.
6. AEA Mediation – The State’s general dispute resolution webpage indicated that families have two options for mediation, an AEA mediation process and the IDEA Part B mediation process. AEA mediation doesn’t provide the IDEA protections for families.
 - a) Response included the removal of AEA mediation as an option from the website and AEAs were notified that AEA mediation was not allowed. ASK Resource was also notified of the change.
7. Informal Removals – The State does not have policies and procedures to monitor informal removals or provide oversight beyond examining significant discrepancies. Informal removals are not documented correctly.
 - a) Response includes written guidance to the field on what constitutes a in school suspensions, out of school suspension, expulsion, and information on what constitutes a manifestation determination.
 - b) The Department requested student handbooks from all districts through the annual desk audit.
 - c) Districts will be required to attend training and must sign off on the participation and verify the handbooks are consistent with the training.

Department Vision & Special Education Division Priorities - Leisa Breitfelder, Iowa Department of Education

Leisa shared the Department mission and educational priorities. The mission is to ensure all students experience a world-class education. The following Department priorities are built on a foundation of vibrant, safe and health learning environments.

1. **Teacher Pipeline** – Supporting a strong teacher pipeline through recruitment, development and retention.
2. **Early Literacy and Numeracy** – Strengthening early literacy and numeracy through evidence-based reading and math instruction.
3. **Narrowing Gaps** – Narrowing and closing achievement gaps through accountability and support
4. **Multiple Pathways** – Empowering students with multiple pathways to postsecondary success and completion.

The Special Education Division, Central Branch has a focus on the following work:

- **Goal 1:** By July 1, 2026, the Division will strengthen internal and external communication by implementing at least three new or enhanced communication practices. Success will be measured by survey feedback and stakeholder engagement metrics.
- **Goal 2:** By July 1, 2026, have improved general supervision activities that include draft items for all steps of the process as well as the federally mandated deadlines.
- **Goal 3:** Support and expand the implementation of IDEA-Differentiated Accountability.
- **Goal 4:** Ensure the provision of high-quality professional learning in special education, especially for administrators
- **Goal 5:** Identify rigorous early learning standards as part of a standards review and revision process with early childhood stakeholders

Special Education Division, Regional Priorities and Classes for Special Education Leaders/Teachers – Angelisa Fynaardt, Iowa Department of Education

Angelisa Fynaardt, Division Administrator, shared the priorities for the regional branch of the Special Education Division at the Department.

- Regional Continuous Improvement & Compliance
 - Program Outcome: To establish effective Continuous Improvement processes across nine regional teams to support general supervision and accountability throughout the state.
 - Performance Measure and FY26 Target: 75% of SDI Practice Coaches in Level 2 and 3 designated districts self-assess as Proficient or Master Coach on all Critical Indicators of the Coach Self-Assessment by spring.

Primary focus of the work for the regional staff includes:

- Implementing continuous improvement processes across nine regional teams to close the achievement gap
- Supporting IDEA-Differentiated Accountability & implementation of evidence-based practices
- Implementing general supervision across the region
- Monitoring compliance of IDEA & supporting corrective action plans
- Completing the special education count process with the AEA and districts
- Supporting implementation of special education policies and procedures

The regional staff are offering the following classes for new special education teachers and special education leaders:

- **Legal and Ethical Foundations & Effective Instructional Practices for NEW Special Education Teachers** - This course provides new special education teachers with a strong foundation in the legal, ethical, and instructional responsibilities of their role.
- **Administrator Professional Learning Framework: Special Education Leadership Series** - This course is designed to strengthen administrators' leadership in special education.

Stephanie Petrillo asked, can a teacher or administrator sign up to do this and how would they do so? Angelisa replied, registration is closed but someone could still email interest to Angelisa.

Goal Setting - Leisa Breitfelder, Iowa Department of Education

Leisa Breitfelder led a goal setting activity. The Panel narrowed down their goals for 2025-26 to the following top three priorities:

1. Inclusion & Universal Design for Learning
2. Waivers, Supports and systems for families
3. Trauma-Informed practices and behavior supports

Announcements

None

Future Agenda Items/Emerging Issues

- Para support and Training
- Updates on impacts at the federal level (staffing at OSEP, funding, US Department of Education etc.)
- IDEA-DA Desk Audits and Determinations
- Increasing Access to the ACHIEVE Family Portal
- SPP/APR Indicators

2025-26 Meeting Dates

November 21, 2025
January 9, 2026
February 27, 2026
April 10, 2026
May 15, 2026

Adjourn

Joel Weeks made a motion to adjourn. Rebecca Torres seconded the motion. Motion carried.