

Feb. 27, 2026 SEAP Meeting Minutes

Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel

Location: Grimes State Office Building or Zoom

Time: 9 a.m.– 3 p.m.

Present

Wendy Andersen, Joy Barlean, Jennifer Dickey, Casey Force, Jill Johnston, Lee Longmire, Sarah Norvell, Keri Osterhaus, Kristie Ostrander, Stephanie Petrillo, Ashley Reedy, Rohey Sallah, Karen Thompson, Rebecca Torres, Kristi Upah, Kimberly Van Beek and Joel Weeks

Absent

Josh Bowar, Carrie Champine, Linda Dettman, Tami Hoffman, Mary Jackson, Alissa Mayer, and Katie Sharp

Department Staff Present

Leisa Breifelder, Betsy Lin, Barbara Lacina, Nancy Hunt, Beth Buehler-Sapp

Public Comment

None

Welcome/Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Casey Force, Chair at 9:04 p.m.

Approve Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda by Wendy Andersen. The motion was seconded by Sarah Norvell Motion carried.

Consent Agenda

Minutes were reviewed by the panel members. Karen Thompson made a motion to approve the minutes. Joel Weeks seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Out of State Placement Process – Elisa Koler, Iowa Department of Education

Elisa Koler, education program consultant, provided an overview of the out-of-state placement process (educational services outside Iowa for students with IEPs). It would not be considered out-of-state placements when the family moves (even temporary stays with relatives), it is a parent decision unrelated to educational needs, it is an Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) for learners in foster care or when a learner attends across state borders due to a border. Currently serving ~120-130 Iowa students out-of-state with some being long-term placements spanning multiple years. The border cities (Omaha, Quad Cities) have the majority of placements

EP Team Decision Process

The team must agree least restrictive environment for FAPE is out-of-state placement. Before placement decisions, the team should consider all appropriate educational programs on their continuum of services and

in-state options closer-to-home. If team disagrees with parents on necessity, parents can make a unilateral decision but then the financial responsibility falls to family (private insurance, Medicaid, personal funds). The district must provide detailed prior written notice explaining reasoning.

Court-Ordered Placements

HHS/JCS focus on overall best interest of child (not just educational). The court order specifies level of care, not specific facility. HHS/JCS should notify district of residence. The facility still requires Department of Education approval.

Facility Approval Process

The IEP team chooses a setting that can administer the learner’s IEP with fidelity. An approved facilities list is maintained on Department website. New facilities can apply via Google form. A facility service agreement required and all facilities must follow Chapter 41 standards. No facility that utilizes aversive stimuli or prone restraint will be approved. Students remain “Iowa learners” regardless of location.

Financial Responsibilities

- Parents (no LEA involvement): Family’s personal funds, private insurance or Medicaid
- IEP team decision: District of Residence pays for residential and educational costs
- HHS and JCS: HHS/JCS pays for residential costs District of Residence pays for educational costs

IEP Team Responsibilities

- Develop an IEP that documents the special education services and supports for the student. The IEP should fit the needs of the individual student rather than be revised to “fit” the placement. If the team believes that a facility *cannot* provide certain entitled services, contact the DE immediately.
- Meet to review data and determine the need for an out of state placement. Create a reintegration plan to prepare for the eligible individual’s transition back to services within Iowa.
- Provide the parent(s) with prior written notice to inform the parent of the proposed out-of-state placement. The notice must document the needs of the student that require placement out of state and the educational options within the state that the team explored, discussed and determined inappropriate.

Special Education Accountability System - Leisa Breitfelder, Iowa Department of Education

Leisa Breitfelder, director of special education, provided the panel with a description of the three options being considered for the special education accountability system alignment and asked for feedback.

- Option 1: Use ESSA District Designations
- Option 2: Modified ESSA with Growth Indicator
- Option 3: Redesigned IDEA - DA System

Stakeholder Feedback & Concerns

- Growth Focus Support
 - Strong preference for including growth measures
 - Addresses concern that districts exit successful students, making cohort appear behind
 - Growth makes sense given special education goals

- **Implementation Concerns**

- Need for maintained rigor and clear recommendations
- Importance of actionable targets and change strategies
- Desire for less confusing, streamlined system
- Federal compliance must be maintained

- **Data Access Questions**

- Current public access: Annual Performance Report on special ed public reporting page
- Data Review Protocol details not publicly available due to small N sizes
- Working toward Iowa School Performance Profile integration

Materials will be shared with superintendents and AEs and the Department will continue to gather stakeholder input. A survey will be distributed for additional feedback.

Legislative Update– Thomas Mayes, Iowa Department of Education

Thomas Mayes, general counsel, provided an update on a number of education-related bills that passed through the funnel

- Teacher Preparation Bill (HF 2230)
- Gifted Education Bill (SF 2220)
- Career & Technical Education (SF 2223 & HF 2610)
- Charter Bill Consolidation
- Teacher Bill of Rights (SF 2044)
- MAHA Bill (SF 2367)
- Special Education Classroom Cameras (HF 2681)

The Department has a legislative information page of the [website](#) with a education bill tracker if members would like to follow the progress of the bills.

Focused Monitoring –Leisa Breitfelder and Betsy Lin, Iowa Department of Education

Leisa Breitfelder and Betsy Lin provided on [overview](#) of the General Supervision Framework updates available on the Department website. The overview included the risk assessment process and the annual risk analysis and monitoring process timeline. Every District is required to submit a risk assessment.

Department Update - Rachel Bosovich and Leisa Breitfelder, Iowa Department of Education

Rachel Bosovich provided an update on due process decisions. 25-27 due process complaints filed so far; 4 decisions issued.

Due Process Case Decisions

- **Case 1: Placement vs Location Issue**
 - Student moved from overcrowded Pacific Elementary to new building with better supports. The parent wanted return to original school after volunteer year ended.
 - **ALJ ruled:** Location issue (district discretion), not placement under IDEA. Even if placement issue, IEP team decision upheld due to better supports at new location
- **Case 2: Specialized Transportation & Dual Enrollment**
 - Student had specialized transport in IEP, parents chose dual enrollment with ABA therapy. District transported to school, then home midday (against policy). Parents requested transport to ABA site instead - district refused, cited boundaries. District discovered they shouldn't have been providing midday transport (parent choice, not FAPE)
 - **ALJ ruled:** No obligation when parent choice involved, multiple 8th Circuit cases cited
- **Cases 3&4: Same Family - Recording Device & IEE Issues**
 - 13 allegations filed across comprehensive due process complaint. Student wore locked recording device to school (live, two-way capability). District removed student to protect other students' privacy. Parent claimed retaliation - ALJ found policy enforcement, not retaliation. IEE request: District failed to either pay or file counter due process
 - ALJ ordered district pay for IEE due to procedural failure. Parent later refused consent for evaluation. 28-page decision noting "complete breakdown in trust". Most claims unfounded - student was making progress, just not linear

Staff Updates & Organizational Growth

The Special Education division was at 44% staffed last year. Currently, 84% staffed. House File 2612 provided 60 FTEs. The Department will have 93 total positions when fully staffed.

- **New Hires by Bureau**
 - Barbara Lacina: New Bureau Chief for Accountability, Data & Finance
 - Bureau staff additions:
 - Sahithi Ankareddi: Data analyst
 - Liz Del Castillo: Monitoring specialist for focused monitoring
 - Jesse Blohm: Early childhood PBIS
 - Denise Kepner: Early childhood special education
 - Rebecca Dodd: Part C data manager
 - Rose Cartee: RTI behavior (returning from California)
 - Jessica Hernandez: Child Find EPC
 - Katherine Hall: IEP development & professional learning
 - Donna Sump McClain: Specially designed instruction (math focus)

- Janelle Danner: Non-public school liaison

In addition, there are multiple offers pending and second-round interviews ongoing.

Announcements

None

Future Agenda Items

None

Emerging Issues

None

2025-26 Meeting Dates

April 10, 2026

May 15, 2026

Adjourn

Joel Weeks made a motion to adjourn. Sarah Norvell seconded the motion. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned.