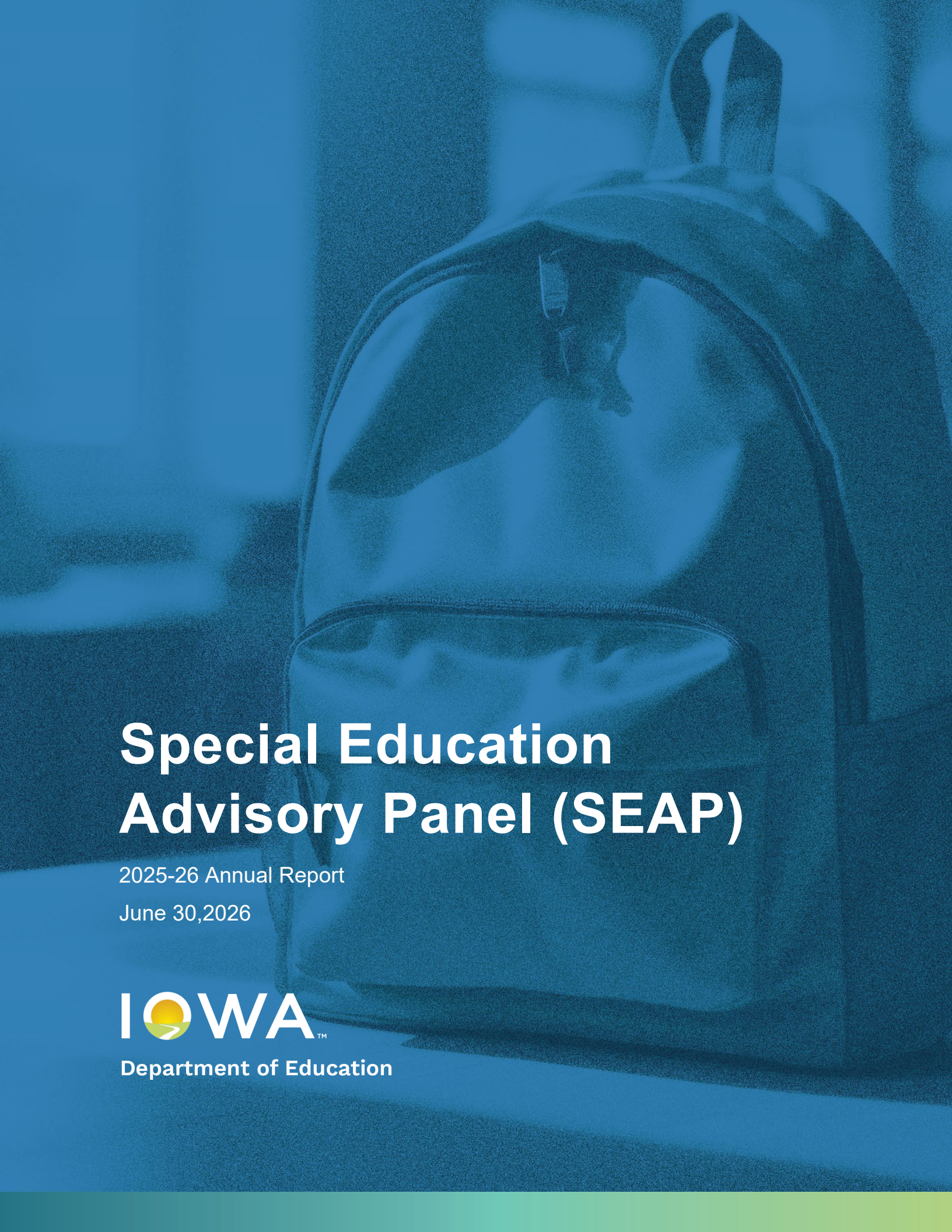




Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

2025-26 Annual Report

June 30, 2026



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Introduction

Iowa's Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) is a collaborative group that envisions its role as a voice 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 the Iowa Department of Education 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 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)

2025-26 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).

Required Members

Membership required by the Code of Federal Regulations (34 C.F.R. § 300.168):



- Parents of children with disabilities (ages birth through 26)
- Individuals with disabilities
- Teachers
- Representatives of institutions of higher education that prepare special education and related services personnel
- State and local education officials, including officials who carry out activities under subtitle B of title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, (42 U.S.C. §§ 11431 et seq.)
- Administrators of programs for children with disabilities
- Representatives of other State agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities
- Representatives of private schools and public charter schools
- Not less than one representative of a vocational, community, or business organization concerned with the provision of transition services to children with disabilities
- A representative from the State child welfare agency responsible for foster care
- Representatives from the State juvenile and adult corrections agencies

Executive Committee

Casey Force – Chair

Betsy Lin – Bureau Chief

Wendy Andersen – Vice Chair

Nancy Hunt – Panel Facilitator

Leisa Breitfelder – State Director of Special Education

Panel Secretary

Beth Buehler-Sapp

Panel Members: July 1, 2025 -June 30, 2026

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 to serve on the Panel in 2025-26. 13 of the 24 members are individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities (54%).

Wendy Andersen (vice chair)	Mary Jackson	Ashley Reedy
Joy Barlean	Jill Johnston	Sonia Reyes
Josh Bowar	Lee Longmire	Rohey Sallah
Carrie Champine	Alissa Mayer	Karen Thompson
Linda Dettman	Sarah Norvell	Rebecca Torres
Jennifer Dickey	Keri Osterhaus	Kristi Upah
Casey Force (chair)	Kristie Ostrander	Kimberly Van Beek
Tami Hoffman	Stephanie (Smith) Petrillo	Joel Weeks

New Special Education Director

The Panel was introduced to Leisa Breitfelder. Leisa began her career as both a special education and general education teacher, building a strong foundation in meeting the needs of all learners. She later served as an AEA special education consultant before transitioning into district leadership. Leisa was a special education director for 10 years - two years at Clear Creek Amana Community School District and eight years at Linn-Mar Community School District - where she led system-wide efforts to strengthen services and outcomes for students with disabilities. She then served for two years as a shared superintendent for North Linn Community School District and Central City Community School District.

Leisa currently serves as Iowa's State Director of Special Education, where she continues to champion high expectations and equitable access for students with disabilities. She holds a master's degree as a Child Development Specialist, along with administrative and superintendent licensure. Her passion centers on closing the achievement gap for students with special needs and creating school environments where every student feels a true sense of belonging.

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.

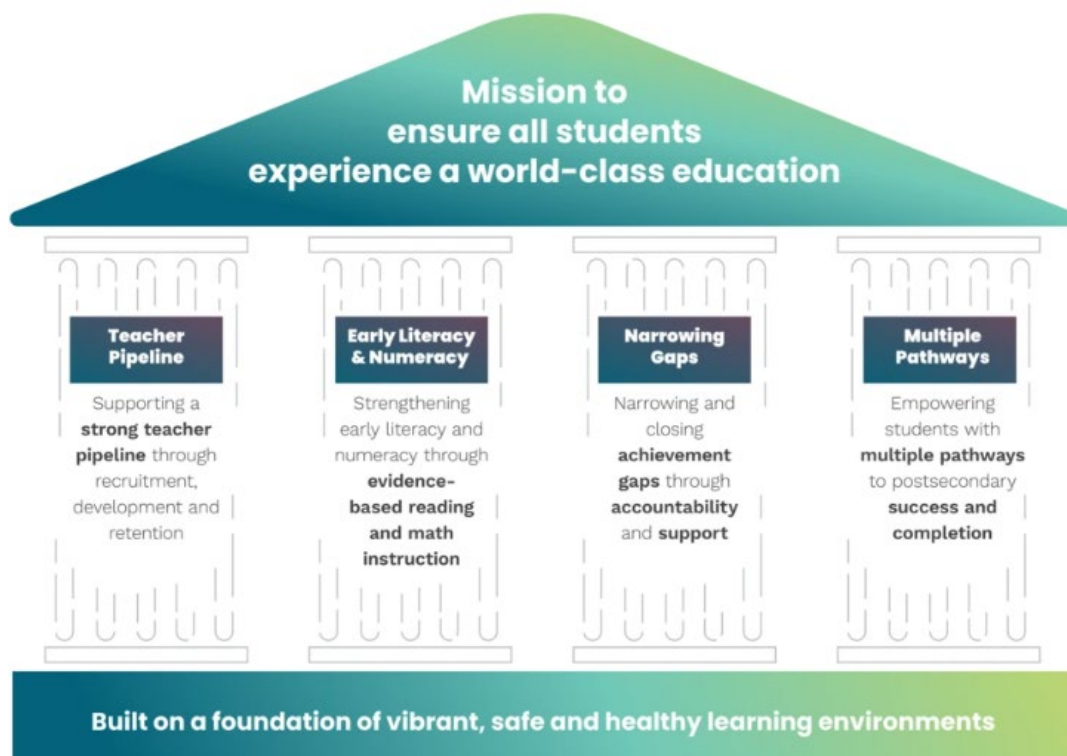


2025 - 2026 Meeting Dates

Oct. 17	Jan. 9	April 10
Nov. 21	Feb. 27	May 15

Iowa Department of Education Priorities

Department priorities are built on a foundation of vibrant, safe and healthy learning environments.



Special Education Division Goals

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.
- Have improved general supervision activities that include draft items for all steps of the process as well as the federally mandated deadlines.
- Support and expand the implementation of - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - Differentiated Accountability (IDEA-DA).
- Ensure the provision of high-quality professional learning in special education, especially for administrators.
- Identify rigorous early learning standards as part of a standards review and revision process with early childhood stakeholders.

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-DA and implementation of evidence-based practices.
- Implementing general supervision across the region.
- Monitoring compliance of IDEA and supporting corrective action plans.
- Completing the special education count process with the area education agency (AEA) and districts.
- Supporting implementation of special education policies and procedures.

Panel Activities

Goal Setting



The Panel narrowed down their goals to the following top three priorities:

- 1) Inclusion and access to general education curriculum
- 2) Resources around services for families
- 3) Behavior and trauma-informed care

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Site Visit Report

Director of Special Education Leisa Breitfelder provided a summary of the Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) report (received July 17, 2025) resulting 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 had 90 days to respond to the findings.

OSEP Findings:

- General Supervision Timelines – The state is not issuing a finding within 90 days.
 - Response included a documentation of our process with a timeline.
- General Supervision Monitoring – The state has not applied the established monitoring criteria consistently.

- Response included evidence the policies and procedures are being implemented and focus monitoring has occurred.
- Grant Award Notification (GAN) - The State's GANs do not include the required information consistent with the requirements.
 - The GANs have been updated to include the required information and submitted to OSEP.
- Fiscal Monitoring Procedures - The State does not have a well-documented, reasonably designed general supervision system, including policies and procedures for subrecipient monitoring, fiscal management, and internal controls.
 - Response includes updated written policies and procedures and the hiring of a full-time employee for fiscal monitoring of IDEA funds.
- 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.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - Response includes written guidance to the field on what constitutes an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and information on what constitutes a manifestation determination.
 - The Department requested student handbooks from all districts through the annual desk audit.
 - Districts will be required to attend training and must sign off on the participation and verify the handbooks are consistent with the training.

By-Laws Update

Panel members reviewed and approved changes to the SEAP By-Laws. See Appendix A for details on the proposed changes.

Required Training

Iowa law requires newly elected or appointed public officials who serve on governmental bodies to complete mandatory training on the Open Meetings and Open Records laws. This training must be completed by any public officer who takes office after July 1, 2025, whether by appointment or election. The entire Panel was provided the opportunity to complete the training in January.

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

Annually, the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) releases state determinations on implementation of IDEA Part B and C. All states who receive IDEA funds must annually develop a SPP/APR report that evaluates the progress made in meeting the established targets. IDEA details four categories for determination: meets the requirements

and purposes of IDEA, needs assistance, needs intervention, or needs substantial intervention. In the most recent federal assessment issued by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Iowa received a determination of "Needs Assistance" for its IDEA Part B implementation.

Part B Data Manager Melissa Schnurr 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 continues to work towards the set target. The current SPP/APR cycle is set to conclude in 2026. In preparation for the next cycle, the process of setting new targets will begin in the fall of 2026.

Due Process Decisions

Attorney II Rachel Bosovich reported on four due process case decisions:

- Case 1: Placement vs Location Issue
- Case 2: Specialized Transportation & Dual Enrollment
- Cases 3 and 4: (Involved the same family) Recording Device & Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) Issues

Opportunities for Feedback

- **Informal removals:** In coordination with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, all districts in Iowa are required to complete Department training on discipline procedures for students with disabilities. The Department is preparing guidance for the field and providing training to the field regarding the definition of and proper documentation of informal removals.
- **ACHIEVE Family Portal:** The Department would like to increase participation in the family portal. The Panel members were asked for personal experiences with the portal, feedback on barriers families may face in creating an account and ideas for promotion.
- **Special Education Accountability System:** The Department is considering three options for the alignment of the special education accountability system. The options include:
 1. Use ESSA District Designations;
 2. Modified ESSA with Growth Indicators; and
 3. Redesigned IDEA - DA System.
- **Parent Involvement Survey (Indicator 8):** The current survey asks a single yes/no question via ACHIEVE through an email with a link to the survey. The single question provides insufficient data to improve student outcomes, which the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) now prioritizes over sample representativeness. The Department is proposing to expand the survey to nine statements plus an open-ended question, and an updated scoring method. SEAP members were asked to complete a feedback form on survey clarity, relevance to parent involvement, and open-ended question utility.
- **Reevaluation Changes:** The Department recently made changes to the reevaluation form due to feedback from the field. Panel members were asked what families and/or the field might need to better understand this process, the anticipated questions that might arise and how the Department can support meaningful participation from the full IEP team.



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.



Legislative Updates

The 2026 legislative session included several bills that impact education and the work of the Department. Thomas Mayes, general counsel, presented to the panel in February to highlight some of the bills introduced during the session that would be most relevant to the Panel. After the legislative session adjourned, Thomas joined the Panel to summarize the bills that passed and were signed into law.

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) & Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) Updates

Bureau Chief Betsy Lin and Administrative Consultant Wendy Trotter summarized the major FBA and BIP ACHIEVE changes that were launched September 2025 after 2+ years of development. The needed enhancements were identified by a stakeholder task team. There were two main focus areas: improved user functionality and supporting comprehensive processes with better alignment between FBA and BIP.

Out of State Placement Process

Education Program Consultant Elisa Koler provided an overview of the out-of-state placement process (educational services outside Iowa for students with IEPs). An out-of-state placement from Iowa depends on the purpose of the move, primarily guided by whether it is for child welfare (foster care/adoption), special education, or juvenile justice. In rare situations, an IEP team may need to consider placement options outside of Iowa in order to provide FAPE to an individual learner. However, an out-of-state placement may be considered only when appropriate services to meet the learner's needs are not available within the state, or when services in an adjoining state are closer than those available in Iowa.

Accredited Nonpublic Schools

Nonpublic School Liaison Janelle Danner provided information on her work. The state liaison role was created through House File 2612 and is a brand-new position. Students with disabilities parentally placed in accredited nonpublic schools are entitled to special education provided by public agencies. Public agencies, districts and AEAs, are responsible for ensuring a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Iowa Code guarantees full FAPE for these students.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Special Education

Thomas Mayes, general counsel, presented information from a published article he authored¹ titled "Artificial Intelligence, Special Education, and the Law: Risks, Rewards, and Opportunities for Leadership." *J. Bus. & Tech. L.*, 20 (2025), which discusses how AI may be used or misused in special education practice. Attorney Mayes offered recommendations for acceptable uses and prohibited uses as well as the need for policy and training around the appropriate use of AI in special education.

Health Care Update

Administrative Consultant Melissa Walker provided an overview of health services. A school nurse toolkit was launched in December 2026 to help school nurses train others to safely meet students' health needs. Administrative Consultant Melissa also discussed the parent role in health service delivery. A new one-page Medicaid consent form was created in parent-friendly language to address common parental concerns about benefit impacts.

¹ This article was written by Mr. Mayes in his personal capacity, and not as a Department of Education employee. All opinions expressed in it are solely his.

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

A new six-year cycle for State Performance Plans/Annual Performance Reports (SPP/APRs) covering FFY 2026 through FFY 2031 has been proposed and was posted for public comment. Director of Special Education Leisa Breitfelder covered proposed changes to the information collection. The changes proposed to the present Information Collection Request (ICR) aim to more closely align Federal monitoring mechanisms (such as the SPP/APR) to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA's) statutory requirements and increase transparency. The proposed changes also reflect priorities to collect and disseminate meaningful data, improve outcomes and increase parent choice.

Reevaluation Changes

Education Program Consultant Jessica Hernandez provided an overview of the changes to Reevaluation. The changes were a result of feedback from the field and were intended to address three main concerns. First, ensure consistency across the state on how to determine the appropriateness of an agreement that the reevaluation is not necessary, per IDEA, and in completing the documentation of this decision. Second, to reiterate the importance of parent participation in the reevaluation and easily document how teams are engaging parents in the process. Lastly, to address concerns around the comprehensiveness of reevaluations that were being completed.

IEP Facilitation

Education Program Consultant Jen Cira 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. IEP Facilitation is an optional process. In April, three school districts were invited to participate in the Facilitated IEP Pilot Program.

Focused Monitoring

State Special Education Director Leisa Breitfelder and Bureau Chief Betsy Lin provided an 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 participate in the risk assessment process.

Appendix A

Proposed Amendment to the SEAP By-Laws

Update 1: Introduction

1. **Description of the Change:** Replace Bureau of Learner Strategies and Supports with Bureau of Student Evaluation, Instruction and Services.
Justification: Nancy Hunt is currently located in the Bureau of Student Evaluation, Instruction and Services
2. **Description of the Change:** Replace Dr. Barbara Guy's contact information with Leisa Breitfelder's information
Justification: Dr. Guy retired. Division Administrator Breitfelder is the new state special education director.

Update 2: Appointments and Selection, Section 2

1. **Description of the Change:** Remove reference to the Bureau of Student and Family Special Education Services and replace it with the Special Education Division.
Justification: Due to reorganization, the Bureau of Student and Family Special Education Services no longer exists.
2. **Description of the Change:** Remove "the chairperson will be responsible for organizing the pursuit of nominations."
Justification: The Director of the Department of Education will review all applications and nominations and appoint new Panel members within the required parameters.

Update 3: Officers, Terms and Duties, Section 6

1. **Description of the Change:** From the list of executive committee members, replace Chief of the Bureau of Student and Family Special Education Services with the Chief of the Bureau of Student Evaluation, Instructions and Services
Justification: Bureau of Student and Family Special Education Services no longer exists.
2. **Description of the Change:** Remove Administrative Consultant from the list of executive committee members.
Justification: The Bureau Chief and Special Education Director positions were held by the same person in the past. Those positions are now two separate individuals and will represent Department leadership on the Panel.

Update 4: Officers, Terms and Duties, Section 7 & 9

1. **Description of the Change:** In section 7, Powers and duties of the Chair, move the duty "To organize nominating efforts to assist in filling vacancies on the Panel." To section 9.
2. **Justification:** The Panel will not review applications. The Panel facilitator will organize the application and recommendations for the Director's review.

Update 5: Panel Procedures, Section 7

1. **Description of the Change:** Replace "The new member orientation meeting shall be held in September." With "The new member orientation meeting shall be held prior to the first meeting."
Justification: This change is suggested to allow for greater flexibility in scheduling.

Appendix B

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

Appendix C

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

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