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**STATE OF HAWAII
BOARD OF EDUCATION
PAPA HO‘ONA‘AUAO
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**

MINUTES

Queen Liliuokalani Building
1390 Miller Street, Room 404
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Thursday, March 12, 2026

PRESENT:

Bill Arakaki, Chairperson
Kahele Dukelow, Vice Chairperson
Elynne Chung
Ken Kuraya
Sylvia Lee
Mary Hattori, Ex Officio
Roy Takumi, Ex Officio

ALSO PRESENT:

Mia Nishiguchi, Board Student Representative
Keith Hayashi, Superintendent, Department of Education
Kinau Gardner, Assistant Superintendent, Office of Student Support Services (OSSS),
Department of Education
Ernest Muh, Complex Area Superintendent, Leilehua-Mililani-Waiialua complex,
Department of Education
Dale Castro, Complex Academic Officer, Leilehua-Mililani-Waiialua complex,
Department of Education
Sam Bennett, Principal, Wahiawā Middle School, Department of Education
Siobhan Ng, Board Analyst
Keli Houston, Board Analyst
Lady Garrett, Secretary

I. Call to Order

Committee Chairperson Bill Arakaki called the Student Achievement Committee (Committee) meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. A roll call vote was conducted to establish quorum.

II. Approval of meeting minutes of February 12, 2026, Student Achievement Committee meeting

Committee Chairperson Arakaki announced that the following agenda item was deferred.

III. Department of Education update on social and emotional learning and student well-being

Committee Chairperson Arakaki called on Keith Hayashi, Superintendent, to provide the Department of Education (Department) update on social and emotional learning (SEL) and student well-being efforts. Hayashi introduced Kinau Gardner, Assistant Superintendent, Office of Student Support Services (OSSS) to present on this agenda item.

Gardner described how SEL and student well-being are embedded in the Department's strategic plan and what the most recent data indicate regarding progress toward academic success and graduation readiness. The Department's strategic plan includes three goals under Priority I: high-quality learning, safe and nurturing environments, and future readiness. The goals are supported by Nā Hopena A'o, SEL, and student well-being, not as separate initiatives, but as conditions necessary to achieve these goals. Gardner emphasized that when students feel safe and connected, they are better able to engage in rigorous learning; when students experience a sense of belonging, they are more likely to persist; and when students can regulate their emotions, they are better able to build positive relationships.

Gardner stated that the Department has stabilized student well-being through the promotion of "Healthy Habits, Healthy Schools" initiatives, and the publication of a school SEL guide to provide schools with a clear implementation roadmap. Aligned professional development, classroom resources, and integrated data dashboards have strengthened the foundation to promote clarity, consistency, and accountability. The Panorama SEL survey measures competencies that directly influence student engagement in learning, including supportive relationships, sense of belonging, perseverance, growth mindset, self-efficacy, and emotion regulation. The ability of a student to regulate emotions affects how the student responds to frustration, and the presence of a trusted adult influences whether the student will seek help. Students in Grades 3 through 12 complete the survey in the fall and winter, and teachers complete a developmentally appropriate version for younger students. The data are incorporated into the student success dashboard and reviewed alongside academic, attendance, and

behavioral indicators to create a holistic early warning system, enabling schools to identify patterns early and respond with targeted interventions.

Gardner reported that favorable responses around growth mindset increased by 7 percentage points among students in grades 3-5 from fall to winter. As students transition from middle to high school, a key factor in persistence is whether students can identify a trusted adult. In the most recent winter survey, 83% of students in Grades 6 through 12 reported having a trusted adult on campus. However, identifying needs is only one component of the Department's efforts. The Department has established "Here to Help" well-being and mental health initiatives across campuses to cultivate a network of adults who are visible and available to engage with students. To ensure statewide access, the Department offers telehealth services to provide quality providers trained in evidence-based practices. Statewide, 383 behavioral health providers delivered more than 71,000 sessions, and the dashboard enables program leaders to monitor service delivery. The primary service focus areas include disruptive behavior, attention challenges, and anxiety. Early identification of anxiety and depression helps reduce the likelihood of crisis escalation. Families have access to free caregiving coaching, and staff have access to trauma-informed professional learning. The Department has partnered with the Casey Foundation and the Hawai'i Interagency State Youth Network of Care (HI-SYNC) to coordinate cross-agency support.

Gardner requested that the Board consider updating Board Policy 101-2, entitled "Character Education," to reflect the integration of SEL, including defined competencies, data monitoring, and tiered supports. She also requested updating Board Policy 101-5, entitled "Guidance, Counseling and Related Services," to reflect the evolution of the school-based mental health system into a comprehensive continuum that includes prevention, telehealth, evidence-based practices, and accountability systems.

Gardner reiterated that growth in mindset, strong supportive relationships, and sustained mental health engagement reflect years of structural investment and system alignment. She emphasized that student well-being is integral to, and not separate from, academic achievement.

Committee Chairperson Arakaki called for public testimony.

Ku'u P., member of the public, testified regarding the update on SEL and student well-being.

Alice Luck, HE'E Coalition, testified regarding the update on SEL and student well-being.

Committee Member Kuraya inquired about targeted efforts for Grade 9 students, noting that it is a significant grade level and that it is important for these students to have a trusted adult at school. Gardner confirmed that ninth grade is a pivotal year and shared that schools implement efforts to support students at this grade level.

Committee Member Kuraya asked if there is a difference in support for students coming in from middle school versus those who are still in elementary school. Gardner said that they haven't disaggregated data on schools that are grades K-6 and those that are grades 7-8, but said that they will look into it as it is a good question.

Hayashi stated that high schools use strategies such as academies and transition centers to support students in transition years. He also recognized Aliamanu Middle School and Makalapa Elementary School for leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to support student transitions.

Committee Member Lee referenced the Panorama SEL survey, specifically the lower scores related to self-management, and inquired whether tracking is available at the individual response level. Gardner confirmed that teachers are able to review detailed data to inform intervention decisions. Committee Member Lee further inquired whether this information is shared with parents. Gardner responded that parents receive a report that includes strategies and noted that aggregated survey results are publicly available, with comparative information by school. She offered to provide the website information to Board members.

Board Member Hattori, Ex Officio, expressed appreciation for the data and inquired whether data can be disaggregated by cultural groups in terms of attendance. Gardner confirmed that attendance data is available for specific cultural groups and offered to provide the link to this information.

Committee Member Kuraya asked whether the SEL survey is administered as a pre- and post-assessment. Gardner clarified that it is administered twice and both administrations are completed by the end of December. Gardner mentioned that the Department has longitudinal data so it is possible to see growth and the student dashboard is used to flag students in need of help.

Committee Vice Chairperson Dukelow referenced testimony relating to Kaiapuni (Hawaiian Immersion), specifically whether specific professional development is provided for these administrators. She also reiterated the need for a Kaiapuni (Hawaiian Immersion) feeder school and referenced the new enrollment system. She stated that she is hopeful that the Kaiapuni (Hawaiian Immersion) strategic plan can support planning for those students transitioning to middle school.

Board Member Takumi, Ex Officio, inquired whether the Department has identified common challenges among immigrant communities. Gardner replied that this might be difficult to track and is unsure whether that is done, but stated that various societal, social, and economic factors may contribute to increased student needs.

Committee Chairperson Arakaki expressed support for integrating SEL and inquired whether there are specific workforce needs around providing SEL support. Gardner replied that maintaining a strong workforce pipeline is necessary and that efforts have been made to attract and retain mental health professionals through incentives and professional development opportunities.

IV. Department of Education presentation on Goal 1.2 (All students experience rigorous, high-quality learning that results in equitable outcomes for all learners): Leilehua-Mililani-Waiialua Complex Area - Creating a sense of belonging through positive behavioral interventions and supports at Wahiawā Middle School

Committee Chairperson Arakaki called on Hayashi to present on Goal 1.2, “All students learn in a safe, nurturing, culturally responsive environment.” Hayashi introduced Ernest Muh, Complex Area Superintendent (CAS), Leilehua-Mililani-Waiialua (LMW), Dr. Dale Castro, Complex Academic Officer, LMW, and Sam Bennett, Principal, Wahiawā Middle School, to present on this agenda item.

Muh outlined the number of schools in the complex area and described the systems of support focused on structural systems, classroom practices, and student outcomes. The complex area’s Response to Intervention (RTI) behavior framework uses positive behavior supports and Panorama data to drive student outcomes.

Castro detailed the theory of action for LMW, which is grounded in research and focused on building capacity from within. A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted to focus on strategies across the following multi-year phases: Phase I, assignment of a school improvement team and commencement of work; Phase II, emphasis on building systems of practice coordinated around middle school teaming practices; Phase III, implementation of a new leadership design, including teacher leaders; and Phase IV, emphasis on continuity and depth to strengthen systems supporting student outcomes.

Bennett shared that the goal at Wahiawā Middle School was for all students to learn in a safe and culturally responsive environment across all aspects of the school experience. He described the support provided to a student experiencing the loss of both parents and highlighted the school’s core values of Mālama, ‘Oia’i’o, and Kuleana. Bennett also shared improvements made to the school’s physical infrastructure, including the addition of awnings, filtered water stations, and renovations to learning centers, all intended to create a standard of excellence and give students a physical space they deserve. Bennett also shared the emphasis on connecting adults with students. As a result, 86 percent of students reported having a trusted adult on campus, and faculty turnover has decreased significantly.

Muh requested that the Board continue to support the Department’s strategic plan, funding for the Panorama survey, and recognition of the importance of SEL and positive behavioral intervention as academic accelerators.

Committee Chairperson Arakaki called for public testimony. No testimony was provided.

Committee Member Lee asked about the academic vice principal role. Bennett explained that the position was created as a dedicated role to oversee learning teams

and instructional consistency, allowing other administrators to focus on behavioral and governance needs.

Committee Member Chung commended Bennett for the presentation and expressed appreciation for the work.

Committee Vice Chairperson Dukelow congratulated the team on the impressive results that show how well the tri-level system works, and the clear passion demonstrated for middle-level learners.

Committee Member Kuraya expressed appreciation for the efforts to support the school, particularly in building a culture in which staff believe in the mission and choose to stay. He also noted the challenge of retaining 70 percent of faculty over a three-year period.

Board Member Takumi, Ex Officio, acknowledged the challenges related to continuity among administrators in small elementary schools and asked what suggestions the Board should consider to encourage administrative stability for a sufficient period of time to yield results at those schools. Castro replied that, beyond compensation, strengthening collegial coaching and personalized support within complex areas is vital for retention.

Hayashi congratulated the complex area and expressed appreciation for the staff's willingness to do what is necessary to engage with students and families in the community.

Committee Chairperson Arakaki expressed appreciation for the presentation and highlighted the staff's willingness to engage with students.

V. Department of Education update on student attendance

Committee Chairperson Arakaki called on Hayashi to present the Department update on student attendance. Hayashi introduced Gardner to present on this agenda item.

Gardner outlined the attendance goal under the 2023–2029 Strategic Plan Implementation Plan; statewide progress trends; the regular attendance performance indicator; the integration of attendance data within the Hawai'i Multi-Tiered System of Supports (HMTSS) for real-time intervention; and the implementation of proactive, trauma-informed prevention and targeted strategies to ensure students are present, engaged, and supported in safe and culturally responsive learning environments. She discussed the shift from tracking chronic absenteeism to a strength-based regular attendance metric, defined as attending 90 percent or more of school days. Gardner reported a 10-percentage-point increase in regular attendance since 2021 and highlighted the “Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow” campaign. Gardner highlighted partnerships with the Department of the Attorney General to focus on a restorative, rather than punitive approach to truancy, as well as partnerships with PREL and

Pasifika for culturally responsive strategies. *Committee Member Kuraya left the meeting at 11:04 a.m.*

Gardner stated that attendance is one of the strongest predictors of student success. She outlined key strategies and plans of action, noting that schools are being trained to use existing data to monitor trends and identify barriers at an earlier stage.

Committee Member Kuraya returned to the meeting at 11:07 a.m.

Committee Chairperson Arakaki called for public testimony.

Alice Luck, HE'E Coalition, testified regarding student attendance.

Committee Member Kuraya expressed appreciation for the programs aimed at reducing absenteeism, noting that they provide strong support for the Department in addressing legislative concerns.

Committee Vice Chairperson Dukelow asked for additional details regarding the EEIP pilot. Gardner clarified that the program is a partnership with the Judiciary and Family Court that works through schools to identify and remove barriers for families. Gardner clarified that they work with the families and the schools help to coordinate.

Committee Chairperson Arakaki expressed appreciation for the efforts to build connections and for the partnership with the Judiciary, including ongoing efforts to foster a school culture in which students want to be present.

VI. Adjournment

Committee Chairperson Arakaki adjourned the meeting at 11:20 a.m.

For written testimony see the following links:

https://boe.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/20260312_SAC_testimony20260310.pdf

https://boe.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/20260312_SAC_testimony20260312.pdf