



[EXTERNAL] Testimony NBI 25-41

From Christina Keaulana <ctk8@hawaii.edu>

Date Wed 4/22/2026 12:50 PM

To HTSB <htsb@hawaii.gov>

Testimony

Name: Christina Keaulana, PhD

Position: Special Education Coordinator

Organization: Leeward Community College

Meeting: April 24, 2026

Agenda item: NBI 25-41 HTSB Executive Director's Evaluation Rec for 2025-2026

Position: Oppose with comment

As the Leeward CC Special Education Coordinator, I oppose the performance rating of "commendable" for HTSB's Executive Director Felicia Villalobos for the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026 citing subpar performance in the standards outlined in NBI 25-41 as the basis for evaluation of competency.

Executive Director (ED) Villalobos has failed to facilitate the review process for new programs in an organized, timely and transparent manner. There were extreme delays in response time, assembling of review committees, and review of program proposals in addition to inaccuracies and vague generalized disapproval statements in the review commentary which brings into question the integrity of the review process under the direction of ED Villalobos. I even venture to question whether the exhaustive amount of content-specific information, assessment descriptions, alignment crosswalk tables, and response commentary were actually reviewed at all since the descriptions, links and evidence all specifically addressed/answered the questions raised in the commentary. As someone who serves as a lead on quality assurances for our college accreditation through ACCJC and our Teacher Education Program's national accreditation through AAQEP, the review process facilitated by ED Villalobos was highly disorganized, biased, and prolonged. The program approval process has been under so much scrutiny by the EPP community, that during the January 8, 2026 Board of Education meeting, it was suggested that an audit be conducted to address the handling of program reviews by HTSB. Testimony from UHM's Assessment Specialist, our Kaiapuni preparation programs, UHWO, UHM's SPED faculty and more raise serious concerns about how HTSB has handled program reviews. Ultimately, the individuals who lose in such bureaucratic delays are the children we are charged with serving. As we increase the number of public preschool classrooms to nearly 100 statewide, it is important to note that [priority enrollment](#) is designated for students who qualify for special education services and students from low income families, therefore, our state is in dire need of culturally responsive preparation programs in this area.

The role of the committee and HTSB is to establish and corroborate alignment of a preparation program with the Hawai'i Teacher Performance Standards. Per HAR §302A-805.5 HTSB's primary role is "Approval of teacher education programs; professional development of teachers. The board shall be responsible for approving teacher education programs that meet the standards established by the board." Content and grade-level expertise and curriculum design are subject to review by institutional curriculum committee review and national accreditation bodies. The qualifications for hire by an IHE are extremely rigorous and faculty deemed qualified to design and deliver content-specific curriculum meet the highest standards of academic qualifications and industry-related experience. Leeward CC is accredited by ACCJC and our TEP is accredited by AAQEP. These bodies have comprehensive and OBJECTIVE methods for quality assurance, including curriculum. As an IHE, we undergo exhaustive curriculum committee review, 5-year reviews, Anthology course

learning outcome evaluations, and faculty hiring processes are very rigorous to ensure MQs, DQs ,etc. are met or exceeded prior to hire. All faculty have kuleana to provide a dossier showing how we ensure courses are aligned with current relevant industry standards, that courses are adapted, updated, and improved. We house an Online Innovation Center dedicated to supporting instructor training in distance education, including Quality Matters Training to ensure DE courses are engaging, interactive, and address AI. Conversely, there are no minimum qualifications or desired qualifications for the HTSB review committee. Quite frankly, the curriculum designed for the Leeward CC SPED PK-3 program was a culmination of effort from powerhouses in the ECE SPED community who surpass the foundational and practical knowledge of the assembled committee or HTSB board members in the field of early childhood special education. The curriculum team is an assembly of the cream of the crop of early childhood special educators in the state of Hawai'i and beyond. This group of individuals are dedicated to serving on a 4 year OSEP grant composed of cross-sector partners to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce serving infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities and their families. Through collaboration among state agencies, universities, service providers, and families, CSPD supports the development of a coordinated system of professional preparation, ongoing professional development, and workforce sustainability. The curriculum design is rooted in the [Hawai'i Early Childhood Personnel Clearinghouse Plan: A Strategic Framework for Building Workforce Quality and Equity](#) as well as the [Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan](#).

I should mention, the process for program approvals under the direction of previous HTSB Executive Directors was clearly communicated. On the contrary, the response to our inquiry about a timeline for review, Executive Director Villalobos's response was, "*Since each program review is different, I am unable to give you a specific timeline. The review timeline will be up to the Review Team and their questions and/or the additional information/clarification they may request from LCC.*" Prior to Executive Director Villalobos' appointment, the program review procedures were consistent, clearly outlined and collaborative. After approval of authorization to plan a new program, EPPs have one year to submit the HTSB program approval template. By that time, HTSB would assemble a committee to review the program. The EPP would receive the names and qualifications (bio) of each committee member and HTSB would seek approval of the committee members from the EPP deeming the committee members credible. After approval of the committee, they would have 4 weeks to review and provide feedback and then 2 weeks later (or the next upcoming Board meeting, whichever arrived sooner) the NBI would be voted upon based on the recommendation of the Review Committee and recommendation responses of the EPP proposing the new program. HTSB did NOT request EPP approval of the Review Committee and HTSB did NOT assemble a Review Committee until 3 months after HTSB received the Program Approval Template following approval of [NBI 21-05 Revised](#) and [NBI 21-10 Revised](#). Furthermore, the review committee included partisan members, leaning on a HTSB board member without ECE background, the SPED ECE coordinator at UHM (the only SPED ECE licensure pathway in the state) and an elementary math specialist who finished her graduate degree at UHM degree during this review process, whose specialization and background is math and not ECE. Their duty as a review committee was to determine if the program aligns with the teacher performance standards set by the Board, not to interpret curriculum. Incidentally after the first review, the UHM Teacher Recruitment Specialist recused herself from serving on the committee.

Leeward CC has been in the process of adding SPED PK-3 as a field to the Advanced Professional Certificate in SPED since September 2021. Below is an outline of the extremely convoluted process we have undergone for adding a grade level to a SATEP through HTSB.

Key Concerns:

1. REVIEW TIMELINE:

After the Program Review was submitted to HTSB on 9/1/2024, it took 12 weeks for a HTSB Program Review Team to provide feedback (11/24/24). In less than 2 weeks LCC provided a comprehensive response addressing each concern in extensive detail. It took HTSB another 3 months to complete a second review after which they provided LCC with a "Faculty Response Portrait" on 2/27/25. LCC designed 3 new courses in ECE SPED and provided another consolidated narrative addressing each recommendation in NBI 21-10 and summarizing key program revisions on 11/18/25. After 4 months without a response from HTSB, we were asked a Praxis-related inquiry and I requested a follow up on the status

of our response to the committee's feedback. We were provided with [NBI 25-29](#) on 3/8/2026 citing the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) does not recommend provisional program approval for Leeward Community College's (LCC) Special Education (SPED) P-3 Initial Licensure program.

See Testimony Opposing [NBI 25-29](#).

The Program Review Committee cited they do not recommend the LCC SPED P-3 Initial Licensure program to the HTSB Board for three reasons. Commentary has been provided on each point and addresses inaccuracies as well as discussion.

- **POINT 1:** The SPED P-3 Initial Licensure program has about 22 semester credits. The Program Review Committee expressed concern that post-baccalaureate students require additional courses and training in child development, working with special education students, educational theories, and developmentally appropriate practices, since their undergraduate degrees are likely not in education. Most post-baccalaureate programs are usually 30 semester credits.
- **RESPONSE to POINT 1:**

The [APC in SPED PK-3 initial licensure program has 25 credits total](#). Of those, 21 credits, or 7 courses are special education methodology courses and 4 credits are related to the field practicum/student teaching. UHM's Post Bac in SPED also includes [21 credits of coursework](#), and 12 credits are related to field practicum experience/student teaching.

In addition to the five existing SPED methods courses in the 19cr APC in SPED, the three new Early Childhood Special Education courses were outlined in detail in the November 2025 [LCC Response to HTSB Program Review Committee](#) – A consolidated narrative addressing each recommendation in NBI 21-10 summarizing key program revisions.

NEW COURSE: [Early Childhood Development and Intervention – Theory into Practice](#) – Newly developed ECE/ECSE foundational course with developmentally appropriate, SPED-embedded assignments.

NEW COURSE: [IDEA Part C/Part B \(619\) and IFSP/IEP Development](#) – New early intervention/SPED methods course aligned with IDEA, HAR 11-140, HELDS, and CEC EC/ECSE standards.

NEW COURSE: [Field Practicum: Special Education PK-3](#) (450 hours SPED field hours in PK-3) **[EC/PK-3 SPED Observation Tool](#)** – A streamlined, developmentally appropriate evaluation tool aligned to CEC EC/ECSE standards and Hawai'i's early learning frameworks.

Prior to the development of these three brand new ECE SPED courses, Leeward CC also redesigned all 5 core SPED methodology courses to include early childhood SPED content, which was provided to HTSB in September 2023 after a two-year process of designing and piloting the content that began in Fall 2021. The new SPED ECE curriculum for those 5 SPED methods courses is linked here again for your reference:

Content Standards Matrix	
<u>Sheet Descriptor: This sheet is to provide content standards required by HTSB.</u>	
Program Name	Content Standards
Advanced Professional Certificate in	<u>Early Intervention (EI) / Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Standards</u>

Special Education PreK-3																												
Courses and Assessments	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	5.1	5.2	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5	6.6	6.7	7.1	7.2	7.3	7.4	
ED 330: Special Education Law and Individualized Education Program Development - Key Assessment: IEP Referral Process and Evaluation Determination	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		
ED 331: Special Education Assessment - Key Assessment: Assessing a Young Child's Development and Developing Goals	x	x	x	x							x	x	x	x	x	x										x		
ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and Interventions - Key Assessment: Pre-Reading Activities	x														x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		
ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and Interventions -	x	x	x	x										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		

[illegible]

and Early Learning	1.2 Candidates apply knowledge of normative sequences of early development, individual differences, and families' social, cultural, and linguistic diversity to support each child's development and learning across contexts.
	1.3 Candidates apply knowledge of biological and environmental factors that may support or constrain children's early development and learning as they plan and implement early intervention and instruction.
	1.4 Candidates demonstrate an understanding of characteristics, etiologies, and individual differences within and across the range of abilities, including developmental delays and disabilities, their potential impact on children's early development and learning, and implications for assessment, curriculum, instruction, and intervention.
Standard 2: Partnering with Families	2.1 Candidates apply their knowledge of family-centered practices, family systems theory, and the changing needs and priorities in families' lives to develop trusting, respectful, affirming, and culturally responsive partnerships with all families that allow for the mutual exchange of knowledge and information.
	2.2 Candidates communicate clear, comprehensive, and objective information about resources and supports that help families to make informed decisions and advocate for access, participation, and equity in natural and inclusive environments.
	2.3 Candidates engage families in identifying their strengths, priorities, and concerns; support families to achieve the goals they have for their family and their young child's development and learning; and promote families' competence and confidence during assessment, individualized planning, intervention, instruction, and transition processes.
Standard 3: Collaboration and Teaming	3.1 Candidates apply teaming models, skills, and processes, including appropriate uses of technology, when collaborating and communicating with families; professionals representing multiple disciplines, skills, expertise, and roles; and community partners and agencies.
	3.2 Candidates use a variety of collaborative strategies when working with other adults that are evidence-based, appropriate to the task, culturally and linguistically responsive, and take into consideration the environment and service delivery approach.
	3.3 Candidates partner with families and other professionals to develop individualized plans and support the various transitions that occur for the young child and their family throughout the birth through 8 age span.
Standard 4: Assessment Processes	4.1 Candidates understand the purposes of formal and informal assessment, including ethical and legal considerations, and use this information to choose developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate, valid, reliable tools and methods that are responsive to the characteristics of the young child, family, and program.
	4.2 Candidates develop and administer informal assessments and/or select and use valid, reliable formal assessments using evidence-based practices, including technology, in partnership with families and other professionals.
	4.3 Candidates analyze, interpret, document, and share assessment information using a strengths-based approach with families and other professionals.
	4.4 Candidates, in collaboration with families and other team members, use assessment data to determine eligibility, develop child and family-based outcomes/goals, plan for interventions and instruction, and monitor progress to determine efficacy of programming.

Standard 5: Application of Curriculum Frameworks in the Planning of Meaningful Learning Experience	5.1 Candidates collaborate with families and other professionals in identifying an evidence-based curriculum addressing developmental and content domains to design and facilitate meaningful and culturally responsive learning experiences that support the unique abilities and needs of all children and families.
	5.2 Candidates use their knowledge of early childhood curriculum frameworks, developmental and academic content knowledge, and related pedagogy to plan and ensure equitable access to universally designed, developmentally appropriate, and challenging learning experiences in natural and inclusive environments.
Standard 6: Using Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions, Interventions, and Instruction	6.1 Candidates, in partnership with families, identify systematic, responsive, and intentional evidence-based practices and use such practices with fidelity to support young children's learning and development across all developmental and academic content domains.
	6.2 Candidates engage in reciprocal partnerships with families and other professionals to facilitate responsive adult-child interactions, interventions, and instruction in support of child learning and development.
	6.3 Candidates engage in ongoing planning and use flexible and embedded instructional and environmental arrangements and appropriate materials to support the use of interactions, interventions, and instruction addressing developmental and academic content domains, which are adapted to meet the needs of each and every child and their family.
	6.4 Candidates promote young children's social and emotional competence and communication, and proactively plan and implement function-based interventions to prevent and address challenging behaviors.
	6.5 Candidates identify and create multiple opportunities for young children to develop and learn play skills and engage in meaningful play experiences independently and with others across contexts.
	6.6 Candidates use responsive interactions, interventions, and instruction with sufficient intensity and types of support across activities, routines, and environments to promote child learning and development and facilitate access, participation, and engagement in natural environments and inclusive settings.
	6.7 Candidates plan for, adapt, and improve approaches to interactions, interventions, and instruction based on multiple sources of data across a range of natural environments and inclusive settings.
Standard 7: Professional and Ethical Practice	7.1 Candidates engage with the profession of EI/ECSE by participating in local, regional, national, and/or international activities and professional organizations.
	7.2 Candidates engage in ongoing reflective practice and access evidence-based information to improve their own practices.
	7.3 Candidates exhibit leadership skills in advocating for improved outcomes for young children, families, and the profession, including the promotion of and use of evidence-based practices and decision-making.
	7.4 Candidates practice within ethical and legal policies and procedures. Field and Clinical Experience Standard.
Standard 8: Field and Clinical Experience	N/A

Below is a comparison of three Academic Plans for SPED ECE licensure programs leading to teacher licensure. Leeward CC's curriculum includes the most robust curriculum with regard to preparation in specialized instruction on SPED early childhood educator preparation including:

Leeward Community College Advanced Professional Certificate in SPED

Leads to licensure in SPED PK-3, K-6, 6-12 to add a field; SPED K-6, SPED 6-12 for initial licensure

21 credits of coursework

6cr of SPED ECE specific coursework, 15 cr embedded with SPED ECE curriculum

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Post Baccalaureate in Special Education

Leads to licensure in SPED PK-3, K-6, 6-12

21 credits of coursework

NO credits of SPED early childhood specific coursework in the UHM Post Baccalaureate in SPED.

The only difference in the academic plan for a candidate pursuing a PB in SPED for secondary education (6-12) and a PB in SPED for PK-3 is that a student would take:

SPED 421 (3cr) – for PreK-3 and K-6 candidates

Strategies for Reading Difficulties

instead of

SPED 652 (3cr) – Secondary candidates

Transition/Supported Employment

California State University San Bernardino

Leads to licensure in Early Childhood Special Education with EL Authorization

21 credits of coursework, this program includes 6cr of ECE specific coursework:

ESPE 6637 Seminar on Language and Literacy in EC Special Education

ESPE 6672 Birth to Age Three Methods in Early Childhood Special Education

- **POINT 2:** The Program Review Committee did not find that the newly developed courses would adequately prepare teacher candidates to develop their knowledge and skills regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), working with families, developing and implementing interventions, and early childhood development.
- **RESPONSE to POINT 2:**

The newly developed courses were designed as part of a 4-year long Comprehensive Statewide Professional Development (CSPD) initiative that brings together cross-sector partners to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce serving infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities and their families. Through collaboration among state agencies, universities, service providers, and families, CSPD supports the development of a coordinated system of professional preparation, ongoing professional development, and workforce sustainability. The curriculum design is rooted in the Hawai'i Early Childhood Personnel Clearinghouse Plan: A Strategic Framework for Building Workforce Quality and Equity as well as the Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan. Leeward CC's new SPED ECE curriculum was designed to prepare teacher candidates to develop their knowledge and skills regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), working with families, developing and implementing interventions, and early childhood development capitalizing on the collective expertise of a CSPD work team that consists of early childhood specialists who are amongst the highest caliber in the nation in their respective areas. The group includes special early childhood experts at the local, state and national levels including:

██████████ (CSPD Lead): provided consultation throughout the United States for the past 30 years, focusing on early intervention, professional development, and systems development including: Hawai'i Community Foundation, the City and County of Honolulu, the Early Intervention Training Program (EITP), the Center on Disability Studies at the

University of Hawai'i, KCAA Preschools of Hawai'i, Easterseals Hawai'i. Past Chair of the Division Relations Committee (DRC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), a Past President of the Executive Board of Directors for the Division of Early Childhood (DEC), and one of the founding members of the Early Intervention-Early Childhood Professional Development Community of Practice (EIECCoP).

[REDACTED]: Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health (IECBH) Plan Coordinator

[REDACTED]: Early Childhood Action Strategy, State of Hawai'i Department of Health Early Intervention Section, Evaluation/IFSP/Services

[REDACTED]: UH Mānoa, Human Development and Family Studies

[REDACTED]: Leeward CC, Early Childhood Special Education Instructor

[REDACTED] not only led the course development and curriculum redesign but she is part of the Preservice Personnel Development Workgroup which is a subgroup of this team that has met monthly to work on:

Strategic Focus

Strengthening higher education preparation programs so early childhood professionals graduate with the competencies needed to effectively support young children with disabilities and their families.

Key Goals

- Map and understand the current preservice preparation landscape in Hawai'i.
- Align university preparation programs with EI/ECSE competencies and standards.
- Ensure preservice programs incorporate family engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Major Objectives

- Identify and compile all preservice programs in Hawaii, including:
 - Special Education
 - Speech-Language Pathology
 - Occupational Therapy
 - Physical Therapy
 - Birth-Five preparation programs
- Develop a statewide matrix of programs and competencies.
- Compile core competencies and national standards used by each discipline.
- Map coursework across programs to identify alignment and gaps.
- Crosswalk preservice curricula with EI/ECSE personnel standards.
- Embed family engagement frameworks such as:
 - Dual Capacity Framework
 - Protective Factors Framework
- Develop strategies to address preparation gaps identified through program analysis.

With all due respect to the Review Committee, the rigorous and methodical process undergone to design the new SPED ECE curriculum and the exceptional caliber of the SPED ECE team responsible for its development far surpasses what would constitute as "adequate" preparation for teacher candidates to develop their knowledge and skills regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), working with families, developing and implementing interventions, and early childhood development.

- **POINT 3:** The evidence (e.g., course syllabi, assignments, and activities) did not clearly demonstrate how teacher candidates would develop the knowledge, concepts, and understanding needed to apply assessment and instructional practices that address the developmental and diverse needs of young children. The materials from

LCC's Special Education programs, grades K-6 and 6-12, had not been revised or aligned with the specific requirements for preparing teachers for a SPED early childhood classroom.

- RESPONSE to POINT 3:

The course learning outcomes and assignment descriptions not only directly address how teacher candidates would develop the knowledge, concepts, and understanding needed to apply assessment and instructional practices that address the developmental and diverse needs of young children, but we also provided a crosswalk in a Program-Level Curriculum/Assessment/Standard Alignment Chart showing alignment with CEC Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Special Educators [Early Intervention (EI)/Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Standards]. Again, with all do respect, we do have concerns over the quality and integrity of this review process, as we have repeatedly provided substantial evidence to exceed the expectations established each round of review we have undergone. After careful review of the content we provided (please click on links) we did not receive any explanation of how the content would not address how teacher candidates would develop the knowledge, concepts, and understanding needed to apply assessment and instructional practices that address the developmental and diverse needs of young children.

NEW COURSE: Early Childhood Development and Intervention – Theory into Practice – Newly developed ECE/ECSE foundational course with developmentally appropriate, SPED-embedded assignments.

NEW COURSE: IDEA Part C/Part B (619) and IFSP/IEP Development – New early intervention/SPED methods course aligned with IDEA, HAR 11-140, HELDS, and CEC EC/ECSE standards.

SPED Early Childhood revised curriculum embedded in 5 existing core methodology courses linked:

ED 330: Special Education Law and Individualized Education Program Development - Key Assessment: IEP Referral Process and Evaluation Determination
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ED 331: Special Education Assessment - Key Assessment: Assessing a Young Child's Development and Developing Goals

ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and

Interventions - Key Assessment: Pre-Reading Activities
ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and Interventions - Key Assessment: ELA Standards- Based Goals and Interventions
ED 334: Participating in a Professional Community - Key Assessment: Organizing a Professional Learning Community (PLC)/ Professional Learning Network (PLN)
ED 335: Educational Technology for the Inclusive Classroom - Key Assessment: Low and High Tech Assistive Technology

Furthermore, the curricular preparation for SPED ECE has already been approved by three separate bodies with actual authority to review curricular quality and state/national alignment. The prolonged and redundant review processes as well as vague or unsubstantiated kickback we have experienced during the HTSB review process appears to be an abuse and overreach of authority. As referenced earlier, Institutions of Higher Education such as Leeward CC have their own systems to ensure quality of faculty, curriculum, instructional delivery, resources, and regular evaluation for accountability. Leeward Community College is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges and our Teacher Education Program is accredited by the [Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation](#) (AAQEP), a national Council for Higher Education Accreditation- a recognized agency founded in 2017 that accredits P-20 educator preparation programs. The initial review of the APC in SPED PK-12 back in 2017 stated “Leeward CC’s Advanced Professional Certificate in Special Education’s coursework is appropriate for adding the field of Special Education (PK-3, K-6, 6-12, K-12). The unit may recommend candidates for the following license fields: Special Education PK-3 Special Education K-6 Special Education 6-12 Special Education K-12” only citing lack of

instructional personnel as the reason why Leeward CC could only serve as an initial preparation program in SPED K-6 and SPED 6-12.

- On April 2021, AAQEP reviewed Leeward CC's APC in SPED for licensure in SPED PK-12. AAQEP grants full national accreditation for a 7-year term (effective 4/30/21-6/30/2028). **NOTE: Leeward CC's APC in SPED was granted accreditation by AAQEP as a SPED PK-12 licensure program because the certificate is utilized as an "add-a-field" SATEP in PK-3, K-6, 6-12 and an initial licensure program in SPED K-6, 6-12.
- On December 27, 2016 the Program Approval Request was approved by the University of Hawai'i CCCAO and BOR as a provisional program SPED PK-12 then the program was approved on January 19, 2022 to transition from a provisional to permanently established program for SPED PK-12.
- On June 2, 2017, HTSB stated in NBI-16-40 that the "Leeward CC Advanced Professional Certificate in Special Education's coursework is appropriate for adding the field of Special Education (PK-3, K-6, 6-12, K-12). The unit may recommend candidates for the following license fields: Special Education PK-3 Special Education K-6 Special Education 6-12 Special Education K-12."

Conclusion:

I wholeheartedly love being part of the education community in Hawai'i, I have served on TECC for over a decade, I have been a longstanding member of the Teacher Education Advisory Board for UHWO; I am part of the UH systemwide Education Convenings to work towards more streamlined articulations across campuses. I love collaborating with my colleagues in every sector. I have piloted new programs with HIDOE from the ground up; I have written grants for HSTA to develop new PD for teachers; when HIDOE needed RBTs for children with ASD, we developed the training credential course; when the state needed more sheltered instruction courses, we designed two new ELL courses. When UHM's [REDACTED] asks for help with any initiatives I have answered the call: I volunteered to coordinate and host the "It's Great to Be a Teacher" event; I have judged at the ED Rising competition. Anytime HTSB has asked for volunteers to join workforce committees I have volunteered my time – I was part of the Alternative Pathways Workgroup, I was part of the Hawaiian language, History and Culture Workgroup, and I recently volunteered to be part of the Mentor/Cooperating Teacher Workgroup. I am inspired on a daily basis by our collective impact as leaders in education. We collaborate with our hearts, we create with passion, and we all care deeply about serving the children across Hawai'i, with a special focus on areas identified as high need such as special education and early childhood education. If I can be candid, the only entity I have not felt a spirit of collaboration and collegiality with is with the current leadership of the Hawai'i Teachers Standards Board. The dynamic should be supportive, mutually respectful, and we should always feel as though we are working towards shared visions. Instead, many of us in the EPP community question the overreach of authority and the current relationship between EPPs and HTSB feels more combative and punitive than anything. HAR 302A -805.5 and 6 define HTSB's role: to approve SATEPs; participate in efforts related to teacher quality such as PD and conducting research.

As a side note, both our children have attended or are currently attending public school in the Leeward and Central district of O'ahu, the same community we focus on for teacher preparation at Leeward CC. My son's 3rd grade teacher, Ms. [REDACTED], is an alumnus of LCC's teacher education program and is in the same hula halau as our kids. My other son's middle school counselor is an alumnus of LCC's teacher education program. She attended my online and in person courses and I sat with her multiple times advising her on how to advocate for her little brother in IEP meetings. I am vested in producing teachers who will lead classrooms of my own children, my nieces, my nephews and grandchildren to come. I do not appreciate ED Villalobos' repeated opinions degrading the integrity of online asynchronous delivery formats as they are not appropriate. For over three years, at least once a week, I missed dinner and quality time with my infant and toddler to pursue my PhD in Education. I pumped breastmilk for my new newborn in a Wist Hall bathroom stall instead of holding my baby to feed him. Distance education and asynchronous learning opens access to so many non-traditional students with conflicting responsibilities such as work, family (i.e., caring for children or elderly parents). I

believe ED Villalobos lacks objective, open-minded and forward-thinking leadership and would not deem her performance as Executive Director for HTSB as “commendable.”



Christina Keaulana, Ph.D.

Pronouns: she/her/hers

Special Education Coordinator

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E hāhai i ke ala o ka hana pa'akikī.

Pursue the path of challenging work.



[EXTERNAL] Testimony NBI 25-42

From Christina Keaulana <ctk8@hawaii.edu>

Date Wed 4/22/2026 12:56 PM

To HTSB <htsb@hawaii.gov>

Testimony

Name: Christina Keaulana, PhD

Position: Special Education Coordinator

Organization: Leeward Community College

Meeting: April 24, 2026

Agenda item: NBI 25-42 Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Executive Director Recommendation to the Board of Education

Position: Oppose with comment

As the Leeward CC Special Education Coordinator, I oppose the recommendation to reappoint Felicia Villalobos to the position of Executive Director of HTSB.

Executive Director (ED)Villalobos has failed to facilitate the review process for new programs in an organized, timely and transparent manner. There were extreme delays in response time, assembling of review committees, and review of program proposals in addition to inaccuracies and vague generalized disapproval statements in the review commentary which brings into question the integrity of the review process under the direction of ED Villalobos. I even venture to question whether the exhaustive amount of content-specific information, assessment descriptions, alignment crosswalk tables, and response commentary were actually reviewed at all since the descriptions, links and evidence all specifically addressed/answered the questions raised in the commentary. As someone who serves as a lead on quality assurances for our college accreditation through ACCJC and our Teacher Education Program's national accreditation through AAQEP, the review process facilitated by ED Villalobos was highly disorganized, biased, and prolonged. The program approval process has been under so much scrutiny by the EPP community, that during the January 8, 2026 Board of Education meeting, it was suggested that an audit be conducted to address the handling of program reviews by HTSB. Testimony from UHM's Assessment Specialist, our Kaiapuni preparation programs, UHWO, UHM's SPED faculty and more raise serious concerns about how HTSB has handled program reviews. Ultimately, the individuals who lose in such bureaucratic delays are the children we are charged with serving. As we increase the number of public preschool classrooms to nearly 100 statewide, it is important to note that [priority enrollment](#) is designated for students who qualify for special education services and students from low income families, therefore, our state is in dire need of culturally responsive preparation programs in this area.

The role of the committee and HTSB is to establish and corroborate alignment of a preparation program with the Hawai'i Teacher Performance Standards. Per HAR §302A-805.5 HTSB's primary role is "Approval of teacher education programs; professional development of teachers. The board shall be responsible for approving teacher education programs that meet the standards established by the board." Content and grade-level expertise and curriculum design are subject to review by institutional curriculum committee review and national accreditation bodies. The qualifications for hire by an IHE are extremely rigorous and faculty deemed qualified to design and deliver content-specific curriculum meet the highest standards of academic qualifications and industry-related experience. Leeward CC is accredited by ACCJC and our TEP is accredited by AAQEP. These bodies have comprehensive and OBJECTIVE methods for quality assurance,

including curriculum. As an IHE, we undergo exhaustive curriculum committee review, 5-year reviews, Anthology course learning outcome evaluations, and faculty hiring processes are very rigorous to ensure MQs, DQs ,etc. are met or exceeded prior to hire. All faculty have kuleana to provide a dossier showing how we ensure courses are aligned with current relevant industry standards, that courses are adapted, updated, and improved. We house an Online Innovation Center dedicated to supporting instructor training in distance education, including Quality Matters Training to ensure DE courses are engaging, interactive, and address AI. Conversely, there are no minimum qualifications or desired qualifications for the HTSB review committee. Quite frankly, the curriculum designed for the Leeward CC SPED PK-3 program was a culmination of effort from powerhouses in the ECE SPED community who surpass the foundational and practical knowledge of the assembled committee or HTSB board members in the field of early childhood special education. The curriculum team is an assembly of the cream of the crop of early childhood special educators in the state of Hawai'i and beyond. This group of individuals are dedicated to serving on a 4 year OSEP grant composed of cross-sector partners to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce serving infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities and their families. Through collaboration among state agencies, universities, service providers, and families, CSPD supports the development of a coordinated system of professional preparation, ongoing professional development, and workforce sustainability. The curriculum design is rooted in the [Hawai'i Early Childhood Personnel Clearinghouse Plan: A Strategic Framework for Building Workforce Quality and Equity](#) as well as the [Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan](#).

I should mention, the process for program approvals under the direction of previous HTSB Executive Directors was clearly communicated. On the contrary, the response to our inquiry about a timeline for review, Executive Director Villalobos's response was, "*Since each program review is different, I am unable to give you a specific timeline. The review timeline will be up to the Review Team and their questions and/or the additional information/clarification they may request from LCC.*" Prior to Executive Director Villalobos' appointment, the program review procedures were consistent, clearly outlined and collaborative. After approval of authorization to plan a new program, EPPs have one year to submit the HTSB program approval template. By that time, HTSB would assemble a committee to review the program. The EPP would receive the names and qualifications (bio) of each committee member and HTSB would seek approval of the committee members from the EPP deeming the committee members credible. After approval of the committee, they would have 4 weeks to review and provide feedback and then 2 weeks later (or the next upcoming Board meeting, whichever arrived sooner) the NBI would be voted upon based on the recommendation of the Review Committee and recommendation responses of the EPP proposing the new program. HTSB did NOT request EPP approval of the Review Committee and HTSB did NOT assemble a Review Committee until 3 months after HTSB received the Program Approval Template following approval of [NBI 21-05 Revised](#) and [NBI 21-10 Revised](#). Furthermore, the review committee included partisan members, leaning on a HTSB board member without ECE background, the SPED ECE coordinator at UHM (the only SPED ECE licensure pathway in the state) and an elementary math specialist who finished her graduate degree at UHM degree during this review process, whose specialization and background is math and not ECE. Their duty as a review committee was to determine if the program aligns with the teacher performance standards set by the Board, not to interpret curriculum. Incidentally after the first review, the UHM Teacher Recruitment Specialist recused herself from serving on the committee.

Leeward CC has been in the process of adding SPED PK-3 as a field to the Advanced Professional Certificate in SPED since September 2021. Below is an outline of the extremely convoluted process we have undergone for adding a grade level to a SATEP through HTSB.

Key Concerns:

1. REVIEW TIMELINE:

After the Program Review was submitted to HTSB on 9/1/2024, it took 12 weeks for a HTSB Program Review Team to provide feedback (11/24/24). In less than 2 weeks LCC provided a comprehensive response addressing each concern in extensive detail. It took HTSB another 3 months to complete a second review after which they provided LCC with a "Faculty Response Portrait" on 2/27/25. LCC designed 3 new courses in ECE SPED and provided another consolidated narrative addressing each recommendation in NBI 21-10 and summarizing key program revisions on 11/18/25. After 4

months without a response from HTSB, we were asked a Praxis-related inquiry and I requested a follow up on the status of our response to the committee's feedback. We were provided with [NBI 25-29](#) 3/8/2026 citing the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) does not recommend provisional program approval for Leeward Community College's (LCC) Special Education (SPED) P-3 Initial Licensure program.

See Testimony Opposing [NBI 25-29](#).

The Program Review Committee cited they do not recommend the LCC SPED P-3 Initial Licensure program to the HTSB Board for three reasons. Commentary has been provided on each point and addresses inaccuracies as well as discussion.

- **POINT 1:** The SPED P-3 Initial Licensure program has about 22 semester credits. The Program Review Committee expressed concern that post-baccalaureate students require additional courses and training in child development, working with special education students, educational theories, and developmentally appropriate practices, since their undergraduate degrees are likely not in education. Most post-baccalaureate programs are usually 30 semester credits.
- **RESPONSE to POINT 1:**

The [APC in SPED PK-3 initial licensure program has 25 credits total](#). Of those, 21 credits, or 7 courses are special education methodology courses and 4 credits are related to the field practicum/student teaching. UHM's Post Bac in SPED also includes [21 credits of coursework](#), and 12 credits are related to field practicum experience/student teaching.

In addition to the five existing SPED methods courses in the 19cr APC in SPED, the three new Early Childhood Special Education courses were outlined in detail in the November 2025 [LCC Response to HTSB Program Review Committee](#) – A consolidated narrative addressing each recommendation in NBI 21-10 summarizing key program revisions.

NEW COURSE: [Early Childhood Development and Intervention – Theory into Practice](#) – Newly developed ECE/ECSE foundational course with developmentally appropriate, SPED-embedded assignments.

NEW COURSE: [IDEA Part C/Part B \(619\) and IFSP/IEP Development](#) – New early intervention/SPED methods course aligned with IDEA, HAR 11-140, HELDS, and CEC EC/ECSE standards.

NEW COURSE: [Field Practicum: Special Education PK-3](#) (450 hours SPED field hours in PK-3) [EC/PK-3 SPED Observation Tool](#) – A streamlined, developmentally appropriate evaluation tool aligned to CEC EC/ECSE standards and Hawai'i's early learning frameworks.

Prior to the development of these three brand new ECE SPED courses, Leeward CC also redesigned all 5 core SPED methodology courses to include early childhood SPED content, which was provided to HTSB in September 2023 after a two-year process of designing and piloting the content that began in Fall 2021. The new SPED ECE curriculum for those 5 SPED methods courses is linked here again for your reference:

Content Standards Matrix	
Sheet Descriptor: This sheet is to provide content standards required by HTSB.	
Program Name	Content Standards
Advanced Professional Certificate in	Early Intervention (EI) / Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Standards

Special Education PreK-3																												
Courses and Assessments	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	5.1	5.2	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5	6.6	6.7	7.1	7.2	7.3	7.4	
ED 330: Special Education Law and Individualized Education Program Development - Key Assessment: IEP Referral Process and Evaluation Determination	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	
ED 331: Special Education Assessment - Key Assessment: Assessing a Young Child's Development and Developing Goals	x	x	x	x							x	x	x	x	x	x											x	
ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and Interventions - Key Assessment: Pre-Reading Activities	x														x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	
ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and Interventions -	x	x	x	x										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	

[illegible]

and Early Learning	1.2 Candidates apply knowledge of normative sequences of early development, individual differences, and families' social, cultural, and linguistic diversity to support each child's development and learning across contexts.
	1.3 Candidates apply knowledge of biological and environmental factors that may support or constrain children's early development and learning as they plan and implement early intervention and instruction.
	1.4 Candidates demonstrate an understanding of characteristics, etiologies, and individual differences within and across the range of abilities, including developmental delays and disabilities, their potential impact on children's early development and learning, and implications for assessment, curriculum, instruction, and intervention.
Standard 2: Partnering with Families	2.1 Candidates apply their knowledge of family-centered practices, family systems theory, and the changing needs and priorities in families' lives to develop trusting, respectful, affirming, and culturally responsive partnerships with all families that allow for the mutual exchange of knowledge and information.
	2.2 Candidates communicate clear, comprehensive, and objective information about resources and supports that help families to make informed decisions and advocate for access, participation, and equity in natural and inclusive environments.
	2.3 Candidates engage families in identifying their strengths, priorities, and concerns; support families to achieve the goals they have for their family and their young child's development and learning; and promote families' competence and confidence during assessment, individualized planning, intervention, instruction, and transition processes.
Standard 3: Collaboration and Teaming	3.1 Candidates apply teaming models, skills, and processes, including appropriate uses of technology, when collaborating and communicating with families; professionals representing multiple disciplines, skills, expertise, and roles; and community partners and agencies.
	3.2 Candidates use a variety of collaborative strategies when working with other adults that are evidence-based, appropriate to the task, culturally and linguistically responsive, and take into consideration the environment and service delivery approach.
	3.3 Candidates partner with families and other professionals to develop individualized plans and support the various transitions that occur for the young child and their family throughout the birth through 8 age span.
Standard 4: Assessment Processes	4.1 Candidates understand the purposes of formal and informal assessment, including ethical and legal considerations, and use this information to choose developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate, valid, reliable tools and methods that are responsive to the characteristics of the young child, family, and program.
	4.2 Candidates develop and administer informal assessments and/or select and use valid, reliable formal assessments using evidence-based practices, including technology, in partnership with families and other professionals.
	4.3 Candidates analyze, interpret, document, and share assessment information using a strengths-based approach with families and other professionals.
	4.4 Candidates, in collaboration with families and other team members, use assessment data to determine eligibility, develop child and family-based outcomes/goals, plan for interventions and instruction, and monitor progress to determine efficacy of programming.

Standard 5: Application of Curriculum Frameworks in the Planning of Meaningful Learning Experience	5.1 Candidates collaborate with families and other professionals in identifying an evidence-based curriculum addressing developmental and content domains to design and facilitate meaningful and culturally responsive learning experiences that support the unique abilities and needs of all children and families.
	5.2 Candidates use their knowledge of early childhood curriculum frameworks, developmental and academic content knowledge, and related pedagogy to plan and ensure equitable access to universally designed, developmentally appropriate, and challenging learning experiences in natural and inclusive environments.
Standard 6: Using Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions, Interventions, and Instruction	6.1 Candidates, in partnership with families, identify systematic, responsive, and intentional evidence-based practices and use such practices with fidelity to support young children's learning and development across all developmental and academic content domains.
	6.2 Candidates engage in reciprocal partnerships with families and other professionals to facilitate responsive adult-child interactions, interventions, and instruction in support of child learning and development.
	6.3 Candidates engage in ongoing planning and use flexible and embedded instructional and environmental arrangements and appropriate materials to support the use of interactions, interventions, and instruction addressing developmental and academic content domains, which are adapted to meet the needs of each and every child and their family.
	6.4 Candidates promote young children's social and emotional competence and communication, and proactively plan and implement function-based interventions to prevent and address challenging behaviors.
	6.5 Candidates identify and create multiple opportunities for young children to develop and learn play skills and engage in meaningful play experiences independently and with others across contexts.
	6.6 Candidates use responsive interactions, interventions, and instruction with sufficient intensity and types of support across activities, routines, and environments to promote child learning and development and facilitate access, participation, and engagement in natural environments and inclusive settings.
	6.7 Candidates plan for, adapt, and improve approaches to interactions, interventions, and instruction based on multiple sources of data across a range of natural environments and inclusive settings.
Standard 7: Professional and Ethical Practice	7.1 Candidates engage with the profession of EI/ECSE by participating in local, regional, national, and/or international activities and professional organizations.
	7.2 Candidates engage in ongoing reflective practice and access evidence-based information to improve their own practices.
	7.3 Candidates exhibit leadership skills in advocating for improved outcomes for young children, families, and the profession, including the promotion of and use of evidence-based practices and decision-making.
	7.4 Candidates practice within ethical and legal policies and procedures. Field and Clinical Experience Standard.
Standard 8: Field and Clinical Experience	N/A

Below is a comparison of three Academic Plans for SPED ECE licensure programs leading to teacher licensure. Leeward CC's curriculum includes the most robust curriculum with regard to preparation in specialized instruction on SPED early childhood educator preparation including:

Leeward Community College Advanced Professional Certificate in SPED

Leads to licensure in SPED PK-3, K-6, 6-12 to add a field; SPED K-6, SPED 6-12 for initial licensure

21 credits of coursework

6cr of SPED ECE specific coursework, 15 cr embedded with SPED ECE curriculum

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Post Baccalaureate in Special Education

Leads to licensure in SPED PK-3, K-6, 6-12

21 credits of coursework

NO credits of SPED early childhood specific coursework in the UHM Post Baccalaureate in SPED.

The only difference in the academic plan for a candidate pursuing a PB in SPED for secondary education (6-12) and a PB in SPED for PK-3 is that a student would take:

SPED 421 (3cr) – for PreK-3 and K-6 candidates

Strategies for Reading Difficulties

instead of

SPED 652 (3cr) – Secondary candidates

Transition/Supported Employment

California State University San Bernardino

Leads to licensure in Early Childhood Special Education with EL Authorization

21 credits of coursework, this program includes 6cr of ECE specific coursework:

ESPE 6637 Seminar on Language and Literacy in EC Special Education

ESPE 6672 Birth to Age Three Methods in Early Childhood Special Education

- **POINT 2:** The Program Review Committee did not find that the newly developed courses would adequately prepare teacher candidates to develop their knowledge and skills regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), working with families, developing and implementing interventions, and early childhood development.
- **RESPONSE to POINT 2:**

The newly developed courses were designed as part of a 4-year long Comprehensive Statewide Professional Development (CSPD) initiative that brings together cross-sector partners to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce serving infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities and their families. Through collaboration among state agencies, universities, service providers, and families, CSPD supports the development of a coordinated system of professional preparation, ongoing professional development, and workforce sustainability. The curriculum design is rooted in the Hawai'i Early Childhood Personnel Clearinghouse Plan: A Strategic Framework for Building Workforce Quality and Equity as well as the Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan. Leeward CC's new SPED ECE curriculum was designed to prepare teacher candidates to develop their knowledge and skills regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), working with families, developing and implementing interventions, and early childhood development capitalizing on the collective expertise of a CSPD work team that consists of early childhood specialists who are amongst the highest caliber in the nation in their respective areas. The group includes special early childhood experts at the local, state and national levels including:

██████████ (CSPD Lead): provided consultation throughout the United States for the past 30 years, focusing on early intervention, professional development, and systems development including: Hawai'i Community Foundation, the City and County of Honolulu, the Early Intervention Training Program (EITP), the Center on Disability Studies at the

University of Hawai'i, KCAA Preschools of Hawai'i, Easterseals Hawai'i. Past Chair of the Division Relations Committee (DRC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), a Past President of the Executive Board of Directors for the Division of Early Childhood (DEC), and one of the founding members of the Early Intervention-Early Childhood Professional Development Community of Practice (EIECCoP).

██████████: Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health (IECBH) Plan Coordinator

██████████: Early Childhood Action Strategy, State of Hawai'i Department of Health Early Intervention Section, Evaluation/IFSP/Services

██████████: UH Mānoa, Human Development and Family Studies

██████████: Leeward CC, Early Childhood Special Education Instructor

██████████ not only led the course development and curriculum redesign but she is part of the Preservice Personnel Development Workgroup which is a subgroup of this team that has met monthly to work on:

Strategic Focus

Strengthening higher education preparation programs so early childhood professionals graduate with the competencies needed to effectively support young children with disabilities and their families.

Key Goals

- Map and understand the current preservice preparation landscape in Hawai'i.
- Align university preparation programs with EI/ECSE competencies and standards.
- Ensure preservice programs incorporate family engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Major Objectives

- Identify and compile all preservice programs in Hawaii, including:
 - Special Education
 - Speech-Language Pathology
 - Occupational Therapy
 - Physical Therapy
 - Birth-Five preparation programs
- Develop a statewide matrix of programs and competencies.
- Compile core competencies and national standards used by each discipline.
- Map coursework across programs to identify alignment and gaps.
- Crosswalk preservice curricula with EI/ECSE personnel standards.
- Embed family engagement frameworks such as:
 - Dual Capacity Framework
 - Protective Factors Framework
- Develop strategies to address preparation gaps identified through program analysis.

With all do respect to the Review Committee, the rigorous and methodical process undergone to design the new SPED ECE curriculum and the exceptional caliber of the SPED ECE team responsible for its development far surpasses what would constitute as "adequate" preparation for teacher candidates to develop their knowledge and skills regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), working with families, developing and implementing interventions, and early childhood development.

- **POINT 3:** The evidence (e.g., course syllabi, assignments, and activities) did not clearly demonstrate how teacher candidates would develop the knowledge, concepts, and understanding needed to apply assessment and instructional practices that address the developmental and diverse needs of young children. The materials from

LCC's Special Education programs, grades K-6 and 6-12, had not been revised or aligned with the specific requirements for preparing teachers for a SPED early childhood classroom.

- **RESPONSE to POINT 3:**

The course learning outcomes and assignment descriptions not only directly address how teacher candidates would develop the knowledge, concepts, and understanding needed to apply assessment and instructional practices that address the developmental and diverse needs of young children, but we also provided a crosswalk in a Program-Level Curriculum/Assessment/Standard Alignment Chart showing alignment with CEC Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Special Educators [Early Intervention (EI)/Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Standards]. Again, with all do respect, we do have concerns over the quality and integrity of this review process, as we have repeatedly provided substantial evidence to exceed the expectations established each round of review we have undergone. After careful review of the content we provided (please click on links) we did not receive any explanation of how the content would not address how teacher candidates would develop the knowledge, concepts, and understanding needed to apply assessment and instructional practices that address the developmental and diverse needs of young children.

NEW COURSE: Early Childhood Development and Intervention – Theory into Practice – Newly developed ECE/ECSE foundational course with developmentally appropriate, SPED-embedded assignments.

NEW COURSE: IDEA Part C/Part B (619) and IFSP/IEP Development – New early intervention/SPED methods course aligned with IDEA, HAR 11-140, HELDS, and CEC EC/ECSE standards.

SPED Early Childhood revised curriculum embedded in 5 existing core methodology courses linked:

ED 330: Special Education Law and Individualized Education Program Development - Key Assessment: IEP Referral Process and Evaluation Determination
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ED 331: Special Education Assessment - Key Assessment: Assessing a Young Child's Development and Developing Goals

ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and

Interventions - Key Assessment: Pre-Reading Activities
ED 332: English Language Arts Instruction and Interventions - Key Assessment: ELA Standards- Based Goals and Interventions
ED 334: Participating in a Professional Community - Key Assessment: Organizing a Professional Learning Community (PLC)/ Professional Learning Network (PLN)
ED 335: Educational Technology for the Inclusive Classroom - Key Assessment: Low and High Tech Assistive Technology

Furthermore, the curricular preparation for SPED ECE has already been approved by three separate bodies with actual authority to review curricular quality and state/national alignment. The prolonged and redundant review processes as well as vague or unsubstantiated kickback we have experienced during the HTSB review process appears to be an abuse and overreach of authority. As referenced earlier, Institutions of Higher Education such as Leeward CC have their own systems to ensure quality of faculty, curriculum, instructional delivery, resources, and regular evaluation for accountability. Leeward Community College is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges and our Teacher Education Program is accredited by the [Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation](#) (AAQEP), a national Council for Higher Education Accreditation- a recognized agency founded in 2017 that accredits P-20 educator preparation programs. The initial review of the APC in SPED PK-12 back in 2017 stated “Leeward CC’s Advanced Professional Certificate in Special Education’s coursework is appropriate for adding the field of Special Education (PK-3, K-6, 6-12, K-12). The unit may recommend candidates for the following license fields: Special Education PK-3 Special Education K-6 Special Education 6-12 Special Education K-12” only citing lack of

instructional personnel as the reason why Leeward CC could only serve as an initial preparation program in SPED K-6 and SPED 6-12.

- On April 2021, AAQEP reviewed Leeward CC's APC in SPED for licensure in SPED PK-12. AAQEP grants full national accreditation for a 7-year term (effective 4/30/21-6/30/2028). ****NOTE:** Leeward CC's APC in SPED was granted accreditation by AAQEP as a SPED PK-12 licensure program because the certificate is utilized as an "add-a-field" SATEP in PK-3, K-6, 6-12 and an initial licensure program in SPED K-6, 6-12.
- On December 27, 2016 the Program Approval Request was approved by the University of Hawai'i CCCAO and BOR as a provisional program SPED PK-12 then the program was approved on January 19, 2022 to transition from a provisional to permanently established program for SPED PK-12.
- On June 2, 2017, HTSB stated in NBI-16-40 that the "Leeward CC Advanced Professional Certificate in Special Education's coursework is appropriate for adding the field of Special Education (PK-3, K-6, 6-12, K-12). The unit may recommend candidates for the following license fields: Special Education PK-3 Special Education K-6 Special Education 6-12 Special Education K-12."

Conclusion:

I wholeheartedly love being part of the education community in Hawai'i, I have served on TECC for over a decade, I have been a longstanding member of the Teacher Education Advisory Board for UHWO; I am part of the UH systemwide Education Convenings to work towards more streamlined articulations across campuses. I love collaborating with my colleagues in every sector. I have piloted new programs with HIDOE from the ground up; I have written grants for HSTA to develop new PD for teachers; when HIDOE needed RBTs for children with ASD, we developed the training credential course; when the state needed more sheltered instruction courses, we designed two new ELL courses. When UHM's [REDACTED] asks for help with any initiatives I have answered the call: I volunteered to coordinate and host the "It's Great to Be a Teacher" event; I have judged at the ED Rising competition. Anytime HTSB has asked for volunteers to join workforce committees I have volunteered my time – I was part of the Alternative Pathways Workgroup, I was part of the Hawaiian language, History and Culture Workgroup, and I recently volunteered to be part of the Mentor/Cooperating Teacher Workgroup. I am inspired on a daily basis by our collective impact as leaders in education. We collaborate with our hearts, we create with passion, and we all care deeply about serving the children across Hawai'i, with a special focus on areas identified as high need such as special education and early childhood education. If I can be candid, the only entity I have not felt a spirit of collaboration and collegiality with is with the current leadership of the Hawai'i Teachers Standards Board. The dynamic should be supportive, mutually respectful, and we should always feel as though we are working towards shared visions. Instead, many of us in the EPP community question the overreach of authority and the current relationship between EPPs and HTSB feels more combative and punitive than anything. HAR 302A -805.5 and 6 define HTSB's role: to approve SATEPs; participate in efforts related to teacher quality such as PD and conducting research.

As a side note, both our children have attended or are currently attending public school in the Leeward and Central district of O'ahu, the same community we focus on for teacher preparation at Leeward CC. My son's 3rd grade teacher, Ms. [REDACTED], is an alumnus of LCC's teacher education program and is in the same hula halau as our kids. My other son's middle school counselor is an alumnus of LCC's teacher education program. She attended my online and in person courses and I sat with her multiple times advising her on how to advocate for her little brother in IEP meetings. I am vested in producing teachers who will lead classrooms of my own children, my nieces, my nephews and grandchildren to come. I do not appreciate ED Villalobos' repeated *opinions* degrading the integrity of online asynchronous delivery formats as they are not appropriate. For over three years, at least once a week, I missed dinner and quality time with my infant and toddler to pursue my PhD in Education. I pumped breastmilk for my new newborn in a Wist Hall bathroom stall instead of holding my baby to feed him. Distance education and asynchronous learning opens access to so many non-traditional students with conflicting responsibilities such as work, family (i.e., caring for children or elderly parents). I

believe ED Villalobos lacks objective, open-minded and forward-thinking leadership and would not recommend reappointing Felicia Villalobos to the position of Executive Director for a four-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and concluding June 30, 2030.



Christina Keaulana, Ph.D.

Pronouns: she/her/hers

Special Education Coordinator

University of Hawai'i, Leeward Community College

96-045 Ala 'Ike, ED 210

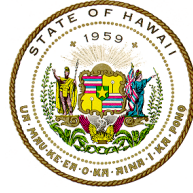
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E hāhai i ke ala o ka hana pa'akī.
Pursue the path of challenging work.



The Senate Ka 'Aha Kenekoa

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

April 22, 2026

Aloha Chair and Members of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on New Business Item 25-42 regarding the Executive Director position.

I am writing to recommend that the Board refrain from taking action on this item at this time.

At its core, this is a question of timing and process. Decisions of this magnitude—particularly those involving long-term executive leadership—carry implications that extend well beyond the present moment. As such, they warrant the participation of the full Board as it is intended to be constituted moving forward, not solely as it exists today.

The Board is on the verge of welcoming newly confirmed members who will soon assume their roles and responsibilities. These individuals were selected through a formal confirmation process to help shape the Board's direction. Proceeding before they are seated effectively excludes them from a foundational decision that will influence the Board's work during their tenure.

Equally important is maintaining public confidence in the Board's decision-making. Acting on a multi-year contract during a period of transition may create the perception that a consequential determination is being made without the benefit of full representation or continuity. Even if unintentional, this perception can undermine trust in the process.

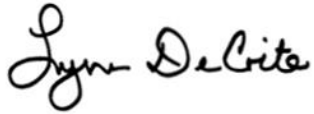
There is also ongoing legislative activity that could modify how the Executive Director role is filled and overseen. Taking action now, ahead of that outcome, risks placing the Board in a position where its decision may soon conflict with or need to be revisited in light of new statutory requirements.

For these reasons, a pause would be the most prudent course. Allowing the new members to be seated and the legislative process to conclude would ensure that this decision is made with full participation, clearer guidance, and stronger alignment with evolving policy.

April 22, 2026
Page 2 of 2

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lynn DeCoite". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and a stylized "D".

Lynn DeCoite
State Senator, District 7
Chair, Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

TO: Hawai‘i Teachers Standards Board

FROM: Rhonda. S. Black, Professor and Chair
Department of Special Education, University of Hawai‘i and Mānoa

SUBJECT: Consideration of the Executive Director’s Evaluation

POSITION: Oppose [NBI 25-41](#)

Esteemed members of the committee,

My name is Rhonda Black, Professor and Chair in the Department of Special Education at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the evaluation of Executive Director Felicia Villalobos. I would like to focus specifically on collaboration with Educator Preparation Programs and the clarity and consistency of communication.

Strong partnerships with Hawaii’s Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are essential to preparing educators for Hawai‘i’s schools. However, there are ongoing concerns about whether collaboration and communication have been sufficiently effective to warrant a “commendable” review rating for the Executive Director.

1. Clarity and Consistency of Communication

EPPs rely on clear, stable expectations to meet state requirements. However, there have been instances where communication lacked clarity and consistency, including shifts in expectations that were not formally documented. This creates uncertainty and makes it difficult for programs to respond efficiently and accurately. At times, reviews have been inconsistent with evaluation standards (e.g., Teacher Leader Standards were not used to evaluate the Teacher Leader Add-a-field program). In addition, uninformed characterizations (e.g., Doctoral-level faculty members who have not been teachers in Hawai‘i DOE in the last five years lack credibility) and inaccurate statements regarding program components (e.g., that we did not collaborate with the Hawai‘i Department of Education, and our program is an asynchronous online program) have been published in publicly available documents (e.g., NBIs).

2. Program Review Criteria and Processes

Of particular concern is that the criteria for program approval have changed without clear, written guidance. Program modification and add-a-field proposals have at times been asked to address questions that are tangential (e.g., whether courses are offered through Mānoa or Outreach College and the cost of tuition) or not directly relevant to established standards (e.g., asking how a master’s program is meeting HTSB’s requests for changes to a different, baccalaureate program). These practices can give the impression of inconsistent review processes, rather than a transparent and standardized system.

Conclusion

Taken together, these concerns indicate that performance in the areas of collaboration, communication, and transparency does not rise to the level associated with a “commendable” rating. While the role of Executive Director is complex and important, such a rating should reflect consistent, clearly communicated, and well-documented practices in working with Educator Preparation Programs. Based on the issues outlined above, I respectfully oppose assigning a “commendable” rating at this time and encourage the committee to adopt an evaluation that more accurately reflects these areas for improvement.

Thank you for your consideration.

Date: April, 23, 2026

Subject: Opposition to NBI 25-42: The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Executive Director's Recommendation to the Board of Education

Aloha Members of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board,

My name is Shawna Nishimoto, and I am a 7th-grade science teacher at 'Ilima Intermediate School. I am writing to formally submit testimony in opposition to NBI 25-42, the recommendation of Felicia Villalobos to the Board of Education.

I am fully aware that this testimony is being reviewed by the current Board, and I am choosing to speak because what has occurred under the current leadership has had direct and measurable impacts on educators, including myself.

For the past four years, I have been teaching in Hawai'i's public schools. Under the Educator Evaluation System (EES), I have been evaluated annually as an emergency hire and have received proficient or higher ratings every year, including distinguished, the highest possible rating, for the past two years. I have completed all requirements for licensure, and last week, I was issued my license. However, the process by which that license was delayed raises serious concerns about consistency, clarity, and accountability.

During COVID, the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board allowed teacher candidates to complete student teaching prior to passing the Praxis exam. The guidance I followed came directly from Chaminade University, my educator preparation program. There was no clearly defined sunset date, expiration, or formal guidance outlining a required timeline for completion. I followed the guidance that was provided at the time. After passing my Praxis in October 2025, I should have been issued my license shortly thereafter. Instead, I was denied on the basis that my student teaching and Praxis were completed "out of order," and I was told I would need to redo 450 hours of student teaching.

Throughout this process, I was not provided with a clear or consistent explanation for why my name could not be added to Chaminade University's completer list, despite having met all requirements. The only justification repeatedly given was that my components were completed "out of order," without further clarification or guidance on how to resolve the issue with something other than redoing 450 hours of student teaching. This decision was made despite strong, documented support from multiple sources, including my principal, curriculum leadership at my school, former students, and the Hawai'i State Department of Education, which formally urged the Board to honor my completed student teaching and issue my license. In addition to inconsistent policy application, the process was marked by significant delays and a lack of responsiveness. My case was not brought before the Board for months, and communication regarding my status and next steps was repeatedly delayed.

These delays had direct consequences. I was not issued my emergency hire permit until mid-February—after the hiring window had effectively closed. As a result, I am forced to continue to work as a substitute teacher without benefits, stability, or summer pay. While I was ultimately issued my license, that outcome does not negate the process that led up to it.

The lack of clear policy, the absence of a defined timeline, the inconsistent application of requirements, and the delays in communication reflect a breakdown in systems that should be designed to support qualified educators, not create barriers for them. Processes that lack clear guidance and are applied inconsistently create uncertainty and inequity for educators navigating licensure. At no point was I provided with a clear, actionable pathway to resolve the issue. Instead, I was repeatedly told what could not be done, rather than being supported in identifying a reasonable path forward to meet licensure requirements.

These issues did not occur in isolation. They occurred under the current leadership and administration of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board. I am not the only educator who has experienced these challenges.

At a time when Hawai'i is facing ongoing teacher shortages, we cannot afford systems that delay, discourage, or destabilize qualified teachers who have met all requirements to serve.

Based on my experience, I do not believe that the current leadership has demonstrated the level of consistency, clarity, responsiveness, and accountability required for this role. For these reasons, I do not support the renewal of the Executive Director's contract.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Shawna Nishimoto

7th Grade Science Teacher

ʻIlima Intermediate School