

Testimony

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Organization: Leeward Community College

Meeting: April 24, 2026

Agenda item: TITLE: New Business Item 25-29 Leeward Community College's Special Education P-3 Initial Licensure Program Review Decision

Position: Oppose Review Committee's Recommendation with Comment

Leeward Community College's Special Education Program is seeking approval to recommend completers for initial licensure in the grade band below: Special Education, P-3.

Position: Leeward CC (LEE) strongly supports the proposal and requests HTSB approve the application for LEE's Special Education P-3 Initial Licensure Program.

We urge the Board to approve this application based on the following points:

1. Parity with Existing Accredited Programs

The Review Committee contends LEE's program consists of approximately 22 semester credits, which is insufficient compared to a 30-credit "standard." However, the proposal includes

- Credit Hour Alignment: LEE's program consists of 21 credits of methodology coursework and 4 credits of field practicum. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's (UHM) Post-Baccalaureate in SPED, also requires 21 credits of content study.
- Field Experience: LEE's program requires 450 hours of supervised clinical experience, meeting the strict requirements of HAR §8-54-19 (5)(A).

2. Comprehensive Program Redesign and New Coursework

The recommendation claims the program relies on K-6 and 6-12 materials, thereby not applicable to P-3. LEE has undergone a rigorous two-year process to develop early childhood-specific content, which was shared with HTSB in September 2023:

- Targeted New Courses: LEE developed three brand-new courses specifically for this licensure: Early Childhood Development and Intervention: Theory into Practice, IDEA Part C/Part B (619) and IFSP/IEP Development, and a dedicated P-3 Field Practicum.
- Specialized Content: As explained via submitted syllabi and course descriptions, these courses are aligned with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Early

Childhood Special Education standards, Hawai'i Early Learning Development Standards (HELDS), and/or IDEA Part C/B.

3. Addressing the "Insufficient Evidence" Findings

The Committee cited "insufficient evidence" for various Hawai'i Specific Requirements (HAR §8-54-19). However, the program has already integrated those revisions into its core methodology:

- Literacy and Reading: LEE's ED 332 course was specifically redesigned to introduce candidates to the developmental continuum of literacy and support language development for early learners.
- Aligned with the Hawai'i Early Learning Development Standards (HELDS), LEE's curriculum ensures candidates meet state frameworks through a "Content Standards Matrix" that mandates high levels of cultural responsiveness. Candidates must apply knowledge of "social, cultural, and linguistic diversity" to build partnerships with families and design "meaningful and culturally responsive learning experiences."
- Assessment Tools: LEE created a new Early Childhood/PK-3 SPED Candidate Observation Form to ensure candidates are evaluated on developmentally appropriate practices.

4. Critical Need for Early Childhood SPED Educators

LEE's program is uniquely positioned to address the shortage of qualified P-3 Special Education teachers through its established partnerships with SPED classrooms across diverse communities. Rejecting this program based on perceived credit counts—which align with other state institutions—unnecessarily delays the entry of qualified professionals into Early Childhood Special Education, an area facing critical demand.

Leeward Community College has demonstrated a clear commitment to meeting HTSB standards through extensive course redesign and the addition of specialized early childhood faculty expertise. We respectfully request that the Board overturn the Committee's recommendation and approve the Special Education P-3 Initial Licensure program to support the growth of Hawai'i's teacher workforce.