

# ANNUAL REPORT

## LETTER FROM THE SEAP CHAIR



I am honored to introduce the annual report that highlights the work of Alabama’s Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP). The focus of this panel is to advise the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), Special Education Services (SES) Section, on issues related to special education, and to promote communication and cooperation among individuals involved with children and youth with disabilities. The SEAP has four standing committees: membership,

committees: membership, stakeholder & public engagement, bylaws, and student achievement & performance data. I am quite fortunate to work alongside these committees and SEAP to enhance the learning experience of children and youth with disabilities. Some members of SEAP are parents of children with disabilities, while others either have a disability themselves or work with individuals with disabilities. Some hold doctoral degrees in special education, are disability case workers, or special education educators. All members of SEAP are hard workers and staunch advocates for children and youth with disabilities; I am fortunate to work alongside such an amazing group of people.

During this year, we have heard from parents and students about navigating complex systems and resolving disputes to support their education, informing us of the work we do and helping us make recommendations to the ALSDE. This year, we have had a focus on children and youth with hearing loss thanks to SEAP member Dr. Kameron Carden and her committee on student achievement & performance data. I am grateful to this group and Dr. Carden for their expertise in assisting students with hearing loss. I also appreciate the parents that participate in our quarterly SEAP meetings to share the issues they and their children are facing so we can discuss and look for solutions per state guidelines—this is not always an easy task as there can be conflicting perspectives and opinions, but the SEAP and the ALSDE make it a priority to find a balance, form common ground, and reconcile the needs of students with disabilities to make compromises that are essential if we are to create the kind of educational system that will benefit the students.

The SEAP works to ensure that we remain committed to incorporating what we learn into our recommendations to ALSDE. The people experiencing the special education system are the information pipeline to make education more inclusive and transformative for students with disabilities. We seek to have informed recommendations and practices borne of collaboration with those who are experiencing the education system, whether rural, urban, or suburban; all students with disabilities deserve to learn to the best of their ability. SEAP is here to ensure that happens.

Carin Mayo  
Chair, Alabama Special Education Advisory Panel

## MEETINGS

The SEAP bylaws specify that the panel will meet three to four times a year (August 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025). The panel was convened in August 2024, December 2024, February 2025, and April 2025 to fulfill this requirement. The SEAP held one meeting virtually, while the other three were conducted in a hybrid format, allowing members to participate either in person or remotely. The virtual meeting was livestreamed on the SES YouTube channel to ensure public accessibility.

## DATES

- August 15, 2024
- December 16, 2024
- February 19, 2025
- April 9, 2025

[Meeting Minutes](#)

## INTRODUCTION

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) requires each state to establish and maintain an advisory panel to provide guidance to the state education agency (SEA) on issues related to the education of children who are eligible under the Act.

The SEAP includes parents, individuals with disabilities, educators, administrators, and representatives from both public and private agencies. The SEAP advises the ALSDE, SES, on the unmet needs related to the education of children with disabilities in the State and provides feedback on any proposed rules or regulations concerning special education. The SEAP plays a vital role in developing the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) for Alabama. Additionally, SEAP advises the State Director on improvement activities that can be created and implemented to enhance outcomes for children with disabilities. Each year, members review data on the improvement activities included in the SPP and APR and propose updates to these activities and targets.

## PURPOSE

The SEAP shall provide policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the state (IDEA, 34 CFR §300.167).

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Advise the SEA of unmet needs within the State in the education of children and youth with disabilities (§300.169(a)).
- Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities (§300.169(b)).
- Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary under 618 (§300.169(c)).
- Advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports (§300.169(d)).
- Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities (§300.169(e)).

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## SEAP OVERVIEW OF 2024-2025

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, the State Program Director updated the SEAP regarding the following: 2024 Alabama Achieves Strategic Plan; Academic Growth and Achievements; IDEA Part B Determinations; SPP/APR and slippage; 2019-2024 scores for National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); 2025 Supplemental Funds; 2025 Special Initiatives Funds; and legislative updates related to education and special education.

The public comment process allowed Alabama constituents to contribute feedback on educational enhancements and highlight effective practices for students with disabilities. Reviewing and assessing these comments is a key responsibility of the Panel. During the 2024-2025 meetings, three public comments were received. These comments addressed concerns regarding the Alabama Teacher Bill of Rights (ATBOR), the compensation structure for special education paraprofessionals, and the obstacles Speech Language Pathologists in Alabama schools encounter when applying for a change of teaching field to become certified special education teachers.



## STATUS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ALABAMA

The IDEA requires that the U.S. Secretary of Education make an annual determination as to whether each state meets the requirements of the statute based on the data submitted in the APR and other available information. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (ED, OSEP), makes annual determinations in implementing Part B of the IDEA according to the following categories: “Meets Requirements, Needs Assistance, Needs Intervention, or Needs Substantial Intervention.” This status determination is based on the totality of the state’s data and information, revised SPP, state-reported data, and other publicly available information, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math assessments and the number of students with disabilities who exited an educational program with a regular high school diploma. Each APR submission is based on the most current available data, which includes lag year data (i.e., data from the previous school year).

According to Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023 State Determinations, issued in June 2025, the ED, OSEP, determined that under the IDEA, §616(d)(2)(A)(i), the ALSDE, SES, received a designation of Needs Assistance. The ALSDE, SES, is actively implementing measures aimed at enhancing performance. In response to this designation, the ALSDE, SES, is undertaking a comprehensive series of initiatives aimed at enhancing overall performance. These measures include targeted technical assistance, as well as the formation of the Special Education Leadership Council (SELN), comprised of thirteen special education coordinators from across the state.

## MEMBERSHIP

The 2024-2025 SEAP members represented various knowledge, backgrounds, and insights.

The SEAP had an average of thirty-three members throughout the reporting year. The SEAP membership was comprised of parents of children with disabilities and individuals with disabilities (51%). The remaining members of the SEAP (49%) included representatives who are administrators of programs for children with disabilities, local or state juvenile and adult corrections agencies, the State Director of Foster Care, representatives from institutes of higher education that prepare special education or related service personnel, state agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities, the State Director of McKinney-Vento, other state or LEA members, individuals who provided transition services, teachers, and a representative from a charter school. Four new members were appointed to the SEAP this past year. At the end of the reporting year, July 2025, one parent of a child with disability and one individual with a disability resigned. Active recruitment by the panel resulted in two additions: a parent of a child with a disability and a state agency representative.

### NEW MEMBERS FOR 2024-2025

Kari Balazs            Wanda Dial  
Jennifer Blakely    Mercy Pilkington

### ANTICIPATED VACANCIES

Several members' terms will expire at the end of the upcoming year. New members are being actively recruited.

## SUBCOMMITTEES

The standing subcommittees of SEAP met continuously in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the entire panel and are as follows:

### Membership

**Purpose:** To serve as the nominating committee for the Panel by identifying potential members for the Panel vacancies and submitting names along with resumes/bios to the State Superintendent of Education for his/her consideration.

**Accomplishment:** Reviewed applications and recommended SEAP membership to the State Superintendent of Education. Three new members were recruited, recommended, and approved by the State Superintendent this reporting year.

### Stakeholder and Public Engagement

**Purpose:** To share, communicate, disseminate, and oversee information about operations, membership, student unmet needs, panel priorities, and other applicable areas in accessible formats through the website; annual report, dissemination networks, or other platforms; seek public comment for consideration; and develop communication tools for stakeholders.

**Accomplishment:** Conducted a comprehensive review and discussion of the public comments received.

### Bylaws

**Purpose:** To review the bylaws annually and recommend necessary changes to the Panel.

### Student Achievement and Performance Data

**Purpose:** To identify needed data; what is available, report review of student achievement and outcome data; and provide this data to the Panel on an ongoing and consistent basis.

**Accomplishment:** Participated in training with the ALSDE, SES Data Team on the SPP/APR, and held work sessions to review data outcomes and provide input on the SPP/APR.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS AND FEEDBACK

The Student Achievement and Performance Data Committee submitted the following recommendations to the ALSDE, SES, drawing on Alabama’s FFY23 SPR/APR data, with particular attention to indicators where targets were not met, and performance declined. The committee acknowledged the critical importance of resolving these concerns to enhance outcomes for students with disabilities in Alabama. Accordingly, the following recommendations were proposed:

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION

The Data Committee strongly recommends a multi-faceted approach that includes:

- **Enhanced Communication and Collaboration:** Improved communication with parents and advocacy groups is crucial for increasing understanding and participation.
- **Targeted Professional Development and Training:** Investing in high-quality training for special education personnel is essential for improving instructional practices and student outcomes.
- **Critical Review and Potential Revision of Standards and Assessments:** Ensuring the appropriateness and ambitiousness of alternate academic achievement standards is paramount.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Utilizing data from surveys and other sources to inform strategies for improvement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and post-school outcomes.

### Indicator 3c: Proficiency Rate for Children with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) Against Alternate Academic Achievement (AAA) Standards

**Recommendation:** The ALSDE, SES, in collaboration with educators and stakeholders, should consider revamping the Alternate Content Standards and the corresponding Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) Alternate assessment. This process must ensure the standards are relevant and appropriately ambitious for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, aligning with IDEA requirements.

#### Actionable Steps:

- Establish a dedicated workgroup with expertise in alternate assessment and curriculum development.
- Conduct a thorough review of current alternate standards and their alignment with meaningful post-school outcomes.
- Explore alternative assessment models and best practices from other states.
- Provide intensive training and ongoing support for educators on implementing the revised standards and assessment.

## Indicator 3d: Gap in Proficiency Rate for Students with IEPs Compared to All Students on Grade-Level Academic Standards

**Recommendation:** The ALSDE, SES, should establish a statewide task force focused on improving the quality of special education instruction and support, directly addressing the identified training deficiencies and the need for highly qualified personnel.

### Actionable Steps:

- **Increase Standards for Special Education Training:** Collaborate with universities to elevate the rigor and practical application of pre-service special education programs.
- **Raise Minimum Qualifications:** Examine the potential benefits of a medical model approach, where Tier 3 interventionists possess advanced qualifications, and explore strategies to equip special education teachers to meet or exceed these qualifications.
- **Implement Specialized Training and Certification:** Require special education teachers to obtain certifications in specific, evidence-based instructional approaches (e.g., Orton-Gillingham for reading) and provide financial incentives for acquiring such expertise.
- **Develop Online Resource Centers:** Create accessible online platforms offering specialized Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and resources for various disability-related needs.
- **Invest in Mentorship and Professional Learning:** Implement instructional rounds with intensive mentor support for special education teachers.

## Indicator 5b: School-Aged Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - Percentage of children ages 6-21 served inside the regular class for less than 40% of the day.

**Recommendation:** The ALSDE, SES, should conduct a comprehensive review of the current LRE targets and the factors contributing to the percentage of students served outside the regular classroom for a significant portion of the day. This review should specifically consider the impact of students on alternative standards.

### Actionable Steps:

- Analyze the data to determine the extent to which students on alternate standards contribute to the current percentage.
- Re-evaluate the appropriateness of the current target, considering the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

## **Indicator 6b: Preschool Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - Percentage of children ages 3-5 with IEPs attending a regular early childhood program and receiving most of the special education and related services in that setting.**

**Recommendation:** Like Indicator 5b, the ALSDE, SES, should review the factors impacting preschool LRE.

### **Actionable Steps:**

- Analyze the reasons for the state not meeting the target, considering factors such as the availability of inclusive preschool programs and teacher training.
- Re-evaluate the appropriateness of the current target, considering the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

## **Indicator 14b: Post-School Outcomes - Percent of youth with IEPs who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were enrolled in higher education or some other postsecondary education or training program within two years of leaving high school.**

**Recommendation:** The ALSDE, SES, should critically examine the current parent survey used to gather post-school outcomes data to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in identifying key issues and barriers. Additionally, explore strategies to improve survey completion rates in rural districts.

### **Actionable Steps:**

- **Review and Revise the Parent Survey:** Collaborate with stakeholders, including parents and the State Interagency Transition Team (SITT), to revise the survey questions to gather more specific and actionable information regarding post-school experiences and challenges.
- **Improve Survey Completion Rates:** Investigate effective strategies for increasing survey participation in rural districts, such as utilizing multiple communication methods and providing support to families.
- **Analyze Data Categorization:** Clarify how data is categorized for students for whom survey information cannot be obtained.
- **Engage the State Interagency Transition Team:** Formally task the SITT or another relevant agency by analyzing the post-school outcomes data and developing strategies to improve outcomes in this area.

# CONCLUSION

The Alabama SEAP remains steadfast in its commitment to advocating for the needs of children with disabilities and supporting continuous improvement in special education across the state. Through collaborative efforts, data-driven recommendations, and ongoing engagement with stakeholders, SEAP has advanced meaningful initiatives and provided valuable guidance to the ALSDE. As we look ahead to the coming year, the Panel will continue to champion inclusive practices, promote professional development, and encourage innovative solutions that foster positive outcomes for all students. Together, we strive to ensure that every child receives the support and opportunities necessary to reach their fullest potential.

For more information about SEAP, visit

<https://www.alabamaachieves.org/special-education/special-education-special-education-advisory-panel-seap/>

## SEAP MEMBERS 2024-2025

Name	Representative Group	County	Status
Balaza, Lisa Vice-Chair	Parent	Jefferson	Resigned 6/30/2025
Balazs, Kari	Self-Advocate	Jefferson	Resigned 6/30/2025
Blakely, Jennifer	Self-Advocate	Autauga	
Carden, Kameron	Parent	Jefferson	
Cunningham, Alexandria	Charter Schools	Sumter	
Curry, Valencia	State Welfare Agency/Alabama Department of Human Resources	Montgomery	

Name	Representative Group	County	Status
Dial, Wanda	State Agency Involved in Financing or Delivering Related Services/Fairfield City Schools	Jefferson	
Feely, LeAnna	Transition/United Cerebral Palsy of West Alabama	Tuscaloosa	
Fisher, Jason	Parent	Baldwin	
Harrison-Betts, Tasha	Transition/Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services	Mobile	
Horton, Shanquail	Parent	Tuscaloosa	
Jackson, Evandra	Parent	Jefferson	
Knott, Holly	State Agency Involved in Financing or Delivering Related Services/Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services	Autauga	
Lamb, Jane	Parent	Jefferson	
Marzullo, Jean	Teacher	Baldwin	
Mayo, Carin Chair	Parent	Jefferson	

Name	Representative Group	County	Status
McElvy, Karen	Parent	Jefferson	
McLeroy, Ashley	Self-Advocate	Blount	
Moore, Tiffany	State Juvenile and Adult Corrections Agencies/Lee County Youth Development Center	Lee	
Pelt, Jessica	Teacher	Montgomery	
Pilkington, Mercy	Parent	Calhoun	
Poore, Hank	Self-Advocate	Tuscaloosa	
Poore, Kathy	Parent	Tuscaloosa	
Powell, Lisa	Parent	Lee	
Rudolph, LaDonna	McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act	Montgomery	
Simmons, Kate	Higher Education that Prepares Special Education and Related Services Personnel AUM	Lee	

Name	Representative Group	County	Status
Smith, Shana	Higher Education that Prepares Special Education and Related Services Personnel JSU	Jefferson	
Stuart, Katie	Other	Elmore	
Sylvester, Danielle	Parent	St. Clair	
Templeton, Richard	Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities Muscle Shoals City Schools	Colbert	
Weatherly, Shanika	State Juvenile and Adult Corrections Agencies/Alabama Department of Youth Services	Montgomery	
Williams, Tranesia	Teacher	Bulter	
Zanotti, Rebeccah	Private School	Shelby	

## ADDITIONAL SEAP CONTACTS

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