

# Early Learning Board (ELB)

Thursday, February 8, 2024

1:30 pm – 4:00 pm

*The public may attend the meeting in any of the locations specified below:*

**Meeting Chair will preside at CEED Center, KCAA  
2707 South King Street, Honolulu, HI 96826  
Or Via the Zoom Link**

**Board Members in Attendance:** Ka‘iulani Laehā, Mei Ou, Robert Peters (for Director Bossert), Kerrie Urosevich, Megan McCorrison, Matthew Shim (for Director Fink), Nāpua Rosehill (for President Wong), Stephen Schatz (for President Lassner), Mari Uehara, Ben Naki, Erin Henderson Lacerdo, Mari Uehara, Sulma Gandhi, Stephanie Shipton.

**Absent:** Ben Naki, Dayna Luka (for Director Betts), Rochelle Mohoe (for Supt. Hayashi)

**Executive Office on Early Learning staff in attendance:** Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Kevin Kabasawa, Tara Castrovinci, Ian Okamoto, Alohi Maiava Shigeta, Jordana Ferreira, Lane Tsuchiyama, Kelli Vannoy, Mikako Deguchi.

**Public in Attendance:** Aldric Ulep, Angela Miyashiro, Carol Wear, Charis Sole, Christina Cox, Kim Guieb, Kiyohide Noguchi, Malia Tsuchiya, Raya Esteban, Robyn Chun, Terry Lock, Edel Baguio-Larena, Emma Christopherson, Ka’ina Bonacorsi, Keopu Reelitz, Lisa Martinez, Lynette Kamekona, Sonya Zabala

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action
<b>MINUTES:</b>		
<b>Welcome/Introductions—</b> Bob Peters	Chair Peters opened the meeting at 1:30 PM and shared the mission statement. Attendance was taken and quorum was established.	
<b>Legislative Bill Tracking—</b> Jordana Ferreira	Government Affairs Specialist, Jordana Ferreira, shared legislative updates happening around this legislative session. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EOEL staff reviewed bills introduced and introduced those related to EOEL or the early learning field.</li><li>• Priority bills for early childcare include: EOEL’s legislative</li></ul>	

Early Learning Board

<http://earlylearning.hawaii.gov/early-learning-board/>

Thursday, February 8, 2024

Page 1

	<p>priority to expand early learning opportunities through public-private partnerships; implementation of a childcare subsidy and bonus program; amends the POD second application process to administer subsidies timely; establishing a harm to child registry; repeals the sunset date exemption for UH laboratory schools and more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To date EOEL has submitted testimony on 19 bills and attended 10 hearings over the past two weeks.</li> </ul>	
<b>Review and Approve January Meeting Minutes—Chair Peters</b>	A motion was made by board member Kerrie Urosevich and seconded by board member Mei Ou to approve the meeting minutes from January’s meeting.	
<b>Public Comments</b>	Deborah Zysman, Hawai’i Children’s Action Network, asked for support for the paid family leave bills that are going through the legislature. She emphasized that other states have been using a similar model and have seen great success with these paid family leave funds.	
<b>Executive Office on Early Learning Update— Director Arikawa-Cross</b>	<p>Ian Okamoto, Workforce Specialist shared updates on the early childhood educator stipend program for fall 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For fall semester 2023 a total of 53 students received the stipend; Awards paid (tuition/fees) were \$101,196.94</li> <li>Year-to-date 55 recipients have received the stipend and \$125,592.94 has been awarded.</li> </ul> <p>Chair Peters asked at what point in their education are students receiving these stipends? Okamoto answered that students are receiving the stipend at various points in their education, many already working in the field, and will find more information on those numbers and share at a later date.</p> <p>Director Arikawa-Cross added to the legislative update stating that EOEL has supported a number of bills supporting workforce including S.B. No. 2603 and H.B. No. 2964. S.B. No. 3087, H.B.</p>	

No. 2398, and H.B. No. 1903 are priority bills for the Office this session. These bills pertain to the expansion of early learning programs on public properties beyond the DOE campuses.

Lane Tsuchiyama, Institutional Analyst, shared updates on facilities for ECE programs.

- EOEL continues to work with SFA and Bowers & Kubota to move forward in completing 44 new classrooms as part of the state's Ready Keiki Initiative.
- A handful of classrooms have already been completed and several are being renovated or are nearing the beginning of renovation work.

Director Arikawa-Cross also added that the Pre-Plus RFP F24-049 has been evaluated and is currently under review by PCB. She should hopefully have an update at the next meeting.

In addition, Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) and EOEL have connected to submit a joint letter of interest for the Children's Funding Project. The mission of the Children's Funding Project is to help communities and states expand equitable opportunities for children and youth through strategic public financing. Director Arikawa-Cross will update the board next month on whether ECAS and EOEL have been selected to participate.

Lane Tsuchiyama outlined the new Preschool Open Doors (POD) administrative rules that were approved and released last month:

- Highlights of the new rule include increased child care payment rates and increased income eligibility guidelines.
- New child care payment rates (from \$919 to \$1500 for licensed accredited group child care center providers; from \$795 to \$1200 for licensed, non-accredited group child care

	<p>center providers; and \$1500 for Hawaiian medium center-based care providers).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New POD Eligibility Threshold Rules: eligibility up to <b>300%</b> of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; Updating the Federal Poverty Guidelines each Jan. 1st for the upcoming program year).</li> <li>• Chair Peters asked for clarification on the maximum amount that could be received. Tscuhiyama explained the maximum cap amount possible was likely responding to the market rate and would depend on the individual child care provider selected.</li> </ul> <p>Director Arikawa-Cross stated that they will be supporting H.B. No. 2683 and S.B. No. 2937. This bill repeals the sunset date for the exemption of laboratory school programs of the Hawaiian language college at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo from state English-medium standards, assessments, performance ratings, staff qualifications, and staff training requirements.</p> <p>Mikako Deguchi, Institutional Analyst, gave updates on the kindergarten enrollment form survey in which data was presented to the P-20 Council. Deguchi also shared that EOEL met with Hawai‘i DOE leadership to discuss making modifications to the current form based on recommendations.</p> <p>Director Arikawa-Cross shared that the last day for two new FCIL proposals will be on February 21st. Board member Kerrie Urosevich asked if FCIL’s are permitted to operate on non-DOE campuses. Director Arikawa-Cross answered that these particular FCIL programs will be on DOE campuses; however it is possible that non-DOE options will be looked at in the future.</p>	
--	--	--

	<p>Director Arikawa-Cross also shared a document policy statement on inclusion for students with disabilities in early childhood programs. She emphasized the importance of expanding access to these programs.</p> <p>Alohi Maiava Shigeta gave an update on the PDG B-5 grant progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four sets of the four-workshop series <i>Embracing Your Journey</i> were completed; 48 families were recruited and 31 of these families attended at least one workshop session.</li> <li>• Parent Leadership Training Institute is ongoing; 23 families recruited and 17 of these families attended the initial retreat event.</li> <li>• They attended the DHS infant-toddler workgroup and shared information about the Infant Toddler Caregiver Certificate Pathway. In addition, the Hawai'i team attended the National Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce Center's Community of Practice (CoP).</li> <li>• Additionally, they worked with DHS to develop infant and toddler center staff draft waiver requirements for the caregiver.</li> <li>• Board members Napua Rosehill and Kerrie Urosevich asked if payments have been received as federal funds can often times be delayed. Director Arikawa-Cross stated that EOEL does not issue payments; however she would check with partners to determine if these payments were being received in a timely manner.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>ELB Legislative Advocacy: Policy Priorities Framework—</b> Chair Peters</p>	<p>Chair Peters suggested that the board continue to utilize the framework used last year to help determine which bills the board would be supporting this year.</p> <p>Chair Peters made a motion to continue to utilize this framework, to help inform which bills would be supported. The motion was seconded by Board member Megan McCorriston. Motion passed (Y-</p>	

	<p>9; N-0) Chair Peters also asked the board to consider other bills that have not formally been supported, but have been recently tracked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board was asked to support the paid family leave bill</li> <li>• Chair Peters made the motion to support the family leave bill. The motion was seconded by Erin Henderson Lacerdo.</li> <li>• Several board members raised concerns over not having ample time to review the bill and in addition had questions regarding the bill.</li> <li>• Motion did not pass. Board members “support the intent” of the bill and agree to revisit it at the next meeting. (Y-0; N-9)</li> <li>• Board member Kerrie Urosevich shared that the 3 supported bills will be supported by the Early Intervention Coordinating Council related to children with special needs ages 0-3. Chair Peters will be adding this to the agenda for next month.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Public Pre-K Toileting Training</b>—Bob Peters</p>	<p>Chair Peters introduced concerns that were raised during the course of the WAM/EDN briefing regarding 3 year olds in public pre-k and toilet training. He outlined the four concern areas that were brought up by legislators: (1) Teachers having difficulty attending to toilet training matters in the classroom while also managing the needs of other students; (2) Children being bullied/teased as a result of not being toilet trained; (3) Where the responsibility of toilet training lays (4) potential lawsuit concerns particularly around the issue of sexual abuse. As a result the WAM Chair suggested that ELB have a conversation on policy surrounding 3 year olds and toilet training.</p> <p>Director Yuuko Arikawa-Cross shared the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and assistants must currently have education credentials in order to be a public pre-k teacher. Director Arikawa-Cross had conversations with these credentialing programs and was ensured that this is part of their practicum and state approved teacher education. In addition, the early</li> </ul>	

	<p>learning state office teachers have given support to teachers and are readily available to give support to teachers who may be struggling with this or any other classroom issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 3 and 4 year olds in classrooms that need toileting support.</li> <li>• Regarding bullying, Director Arikawa-Cross reached out to the complex area superintendent and principals to inquire about the subject.</li> <li>• Director Arikawa-Cross shared that a child not meeting a developmental milestone is not necessarily the result of a parent not doing their job. The priority categories that EOEL focuses on encompasses a range of families and accepts children as they are.</li> <li>• Regarding liability, she stated that all teachers are DOE staff, union members, and must adhere to protocols and background checks. EOEL also supports the national registry to protect children from harm.</li> </ul> <p>Chair Peters opened up for member discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board Member Urosevich asked if there was a specific program policy in place for this or if EOEL could create a policy to suffice. She also stated that the state would be at greater risk of liability by not including children based on the ADA.</li> <li>• Board member Megan McCorriston was in agreement with Kerrie Urosevich’s comment and also added her concern with the government’s role in 3 year old education and the prevalence of this type of thinking and certain attitudes about it.</li> <li>• Board member Mei Ou stated that toilet training is part of early learning and those who work with young children know that 3 and 4 year olds need the guidance to succeed. She expressed that toilet training is part of early learning development and that support should be given to these children. She also stated that</li> </ul>	
--	--	--

	<p>the current EOEL plan in place is what should be supported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Board member Mari Uehara shared that, as a Developmental - Behavioral Pediatric doctor, that children develop on their own time and that toilet training is a task that must be taught. She emphasized that children do not all learn at the same time. She shared that harm can be done by forcing a child to toilet train when not ready. She also stated that if children are being bullied for wearing a pull-up or diaper that should not be on the child, but rather an issue that is addressed by the adults.</li><li>• Board member Erin Henderson Lacerdo also agreed with previous comments and added that it is important to remember the mental health aspect of this. Requiring children to be potty trained at a certain age/point could potentially add unnecessary stress that could be detrimental to further development. She stressed the importance of having an inclusionary stance when it comes to toilet training. In addition, she stated that this is a “skill” and that we could be opening ourselves up for issues if we use this “skill” as a reason for denial of entry into the program.</li><li>• Board member Sulma Gandhi also agreed with other board members' statements. She added the importance of offering support to the teachers as needed but not forcing a developmental milestone to be met.</li><li>• Board member Napua Rosehill commented that this issue must be approached as a developmental skill. Potty training should be approached as a milestone. She added that those who go into early childhood education as a profession do so because it's a passion and see child development as a continuum versus a definite timeline of skillset.</li><li>• Board member Kerrie Urosevich made the suggestion that the board come up with a clear, firm statement in anticipation for if/when this should be brought up in the future.</li></ul>	
--	---	--



	<p>Chair Peters made the recommendation, based on this discussion and testimony received, that EOEL share the following with WAM: <b>Maintain current state policy regarding enrollment in public prekindergarten and provide the professional support needed to foster inclusive environments respectful of children’s developmental needs.</b></p> <p>Motion was made by Chair Peters and seconded by Board member Kaiulani Laaha. Motion was approved (Y-9,N-0)</p>	<p>EOEL share the following with WAM: <b>Maintain current state policy regarding enrollment in public prekindergarten and provide the professional support needed to foster inclusive environments respectful of children’s developmental needs.</b></p>
<p><b>Maui Updates</b>—Ka’ina Bonacorsi</p>	<p>Ka’ina Bonacorsi gave updates from Maui:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head Start classroom opened for 20 children</li> <li>• The first licensed child care to open in Lahaina since the fire will be opening shortly.</li> <li>• Ka Pa’alana program looks to opening their doors in about 2 weeks</li> <li>• Imua Discovery Gardens will be opening in Wailuku and will be able to take 20 students.</li> <li>• She has been working on networking and focus groups as well.</li> <li>• \$75,000 was also awarded by the Health Surge Grant</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Public Comment</b>—Bob Peters</p>	<p>Malia Tsuchiya, who has 20 years in the early childhood education field, provided her support for the policies of inclusion and accepting children as stated by board members. She stated that within the community child care programs (she has worked in) that the standards and competencies do clearly address the need for developmentally appropriate activities and that toilet training, from a teacher's perspective, is also a skill. There's no curriculum designed around potty training. It is individualized and culturally specific. She also added that we need to be cognizant of our facilities as well. Are the facilities set up and equip to allow successful potty training?</p>	

<b>Member Updates</b>	Board member Stephen Schatz shared an update on Hawai'i's new " <i>Hawai'i Graduates for Hawai'i's Future</i> " goal. The new goal will be inclusive of early care and education. The early education data is not available yet, however K12 and higher goals are available now. Workforce data will also be available at a later date.	
<b>Review Agenda Outcomes/Announcements/closing—Bob Peters</b>	<p>Agenda outcomes for this meeting include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Approved the framework of policy priorities for the 2024 legislative session to guide advocacy and testimony;</li> <li>● Will revisit the paid family leave bill;</li> <li>● Include in the next agenda consideration to support early intervention funding requests, a bill to increase Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) rates, and a bill to form a focus group within the Dept of Health to better support keiki that are blind and deaf; and</li> <li>● Approved the submittal of a recommendation to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means to maintain the current state policy regarding enrollment in EOEL public prekindergarten and provide the professional support needed to foster inclusive environments respectful of children's developmental needs.</li> </ul> <p>Board member Kerrie Urosevich concluded the meeting with a quote from Star Wars, "We had each other and that is how we won."</p>	

Submitted by Tara Castrovinci

Chair Peters and Members of the Early Learning Board,

My name is Ka'ina Bonacorsi providing public comments as a Maui County resident/private citizen. First and foremost, thank you for the opportunity to provide public comments on an important matter.

As everyone on the board is aware, Maui was recently devastated by wildfires. Although we are a strong and resilient community, continued support will be necessary for our residents to recover, especially our youngest keiki.

I have witnessed the trauma children in my community are dealing with, which for some, has resulted in difficulty regulating emotions and behaviors, and even regression. Current state policy is clear that eligibility into a public prekindergarten program is based on age; not mastery of a skill set, and I am in strong support for ensuring those policies remain as is.

If the State changes these policies, many keiki impacted by the wildfires, or any other traumatic situation for that matter, may no longer be able to access a high-quality program. The EOEL public prekindergarten program was designed with the full understanding that each child is unique and aims to address the wide range of skills and abilities children demonstrate. Furthermore, it was designed with equity at the center, ensuring children and families who have historically been denied or barred entry into quality programs can now have that access.

Accepting children regardless of their skillsets or mastery of a skill fosters inclusive environments, which has positive implications for development and educational outcomes. Understanding and respecting where children are, as they are, and supporting their growth and development with that in mind, teaches children invaluable skills such as empathy, compassion, and respect. Academic outcomes can be taught anywhere, empathy, compassion, and respect can only be taught through the relationships we foster and nurture directly with children and each other.

To address the valid concerns raised by stakeholders, the better solution is to ensure classroom staff who work directly with children understand child development and learning at the youngest years and can effectively implement classroom environments that foster respect, decency, and empathy. In the past, EOEL has made significant investments into professional learning support for teachers and administrators, and I hope EOEL and the ELB will continue to prioritize that.

Date: February 8, 2024  
To: Early Learning Board  
Bob Peters, Chair  
From: Early Childhood Action Strategy  
Vivian Eto, Strategy & Project Management Lead  
Re: Comments on Agenda Item Related to Public Pre-K and Toilet Training

---

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments related to the Board's meeting agenda item on toilet training in EOEL's public pre-k program.

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

ECAS strongly urges the Board to affirm existing, inclusive EOEL policies regarding criteria for child enrollment.

Currently, eligibility for EOEL's public prekindergarten program is based on child age, not on achievement of specific developmental milestones. We are confident in Board members' understanding that children's development and mastery of skills is unique to each child, and urge members to ensure that EOEL policies and practices based on this principle are upheld.

Just as first steps and first words emerge on different timelines for each child, every child achieves toileting skills at their own speed, depending on their physical development and level of understanding. The role of an early care and learning professional is to meet children where they are in their development, and support and facilitate their ongoing growth and mastery of new skills. It is entirely developmentally appropriate for three and four-year old children to sit along a spectrum in their ability to independently toilet. High quality, inclusive preschool environments, such as those of EOEL's pre-k classrooms, embrace the diversity of children's abilities and implement developmentally-appropriate practices to differentiate care and support for children based on their unique needs and stages of development.

It is also important to note that EOEL's pre-k program is instrumental to addressing issues of equity and increasing access to high-quality early learning opportunities for our most vulnerable, under-served, and marginalized children. Instituting additional barriers to accessing EOEL pre-k services will undermine the intent of the program to strengthen developmental and educational outcomes for these children, including, for example, children with special needs or children impacted by the Maui fires who have experienced trauma and are particularly vulnerable to developmental setbacks and in critical need of supportive learning environments.

Concerns about the toileting needs of children are best addressed by working closely with classroom staff to ensure they have the appropriate knowledge, guidance and support to implement best practices for building children's toileting skills and fostering classroom environments that embrace children at all developmental stages. To this end, we strongly encourage the Board and EOEL to prioritize ongoing professional development, coaching and other technical assistance strategies for staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this matter.

[Early Childhood Action Strategy](#) is a project under Collaborative Support Services, Inc.



*Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.*

Chair Peters and members of the Early Learning Board,

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on the Board agenda item pertaining to EOEL's toilet training policy. Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! supports maintaining the current state policies regarding entry into public pre-kindergarten in place.

Public pre-kindergarten programs play a pivotal role in shaping the educational foundation for our children. They are a place where children can develop essential cognitive, social, and emotional skills that form the basis for future academic success. The existing policies governing entry into these programs have proven effective in ensuring equitable access for all children, irrespective of their abilities, strengths, and skill sets, upon entering early learning programs, fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

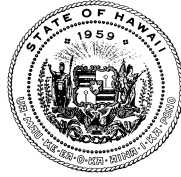
In addition, the provision of classroom staff support for toileting assistance is a critical component of the overall health, well-being, and comfort of young children in pre-kindergarten settings. The early years of education are a crucial time for children to develop self-care skills, and toileting is an essential aspect of their daily routine. The presence of trained staff members who can provide necessary assistance ensures that children can focus on their learning experiences without distraction or discomfort, and provides additional reinforcement for parents when transitioning keiki to toileting.

We urge the committee to carefully consider the long-term benefits of maintaining these policies, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a supportive and inclusive pre-kindergarten environment. By doing so, we not only invest in the educational success of our children but also contribute to building a more equitable and compassionate society.

Thank you for your time and consideration and your continued commitment to the well-being of our young keiki.

Mahalo,

Deborah Zysman, MPH  
Executive Director



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE**  
**KE KE'ENA KŪPA'A MAULI OLA**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**  
415 S.BERETANIA ST. #415  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024

From: Tia L.R. Hartsock; Director of Office of Wellness and Resilience  
Re: Agenda item VI: Toilet Training

To members of the Early Learning Board,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide public comments on this very important topic. My name is Tia Hartsock and I am the Director of Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) in the Governor's Office. The OWR is of the opinion that children of all skill levels should be allowed to enroll in EOEL Public Prekindergarten classrooms, including children who have yet to master toilet training skills.

Established through Act 291 (Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022) the overall aim of the OWR is to make Hawai'i a trauma-informed state. The OWR is focused on breaking down barriers that impact the physical, social, and emotional well-being of Hawai'i's people. Under this umbrella, the OWR is dedicated to addressing adverse childhood experiences from keiki to kupuna.

The EOEL public prekindergarten program prioritizes at-risk and underserved children that are known to be in vulnerable situations. Children with such backgrounds are more often exposed to trauma. Childhood trauma can have far-reaching and long-lasting impacts on children's physical and mental health. According to National Institute of Health 2019 study on Early life exposure to violence: Developmental consequences on brain and behavior, children are more prone to regressions with behaviors including toilet training<sup>1</sup>. Denying entry for children who may be experiencing regression due to trauma, could deny opportunities to programs and services that can build and enhance their resilience.

Supporting children's development of skills, including the very important and necessary skill of toileting, sets them up for life-long success. All children in our state, regardless of their background or their exposure to trauma should have access to environments that support and encourage them.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments.

Mahalo

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tia L.R. Hartsock".

Tia L R Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA  
Director, Office of Wellness & Resilience  
Office of the Governor

<sup>1</sup> Mueller I, Tronick E. Early Life Exposure to Violence: Developmental Consequences on Brain and Behavior. Front Behav Neurosci. 2019 Jul 9;13:156. doi: 10.3389/fnbeh.2019.00156. PMID: 31338031; PMCID: PMC6629780.



Supporting Hawaii's Child Care Needs

**Oahu Main Office**

560 North Nimitz Highway  
Suite 218  
Honolulu, HI 96817  
Tel: (808) 839-1988  
Fax: (808) 839-1799  
Patch@Patch-hi.org  
www.PatchHawaii.org

**Preschool Open Doors**

Tel: (808) 791-2130  
Toll-Free: 1-800-746-5620

**Kauai**

4485 Pahe'e Street  
Suite 124  
Lihue, HI 96766  
Tel: (808) 246-0622  
Fax: (808) 246-0069

**Maui**

1063 Lower Main Street  
Suite C-217  
Wailuku, HI 96793  
Tel: (808) 242-9232  
Fax: (808) 242-4672

**East Hawaii**

26 Waiuanue Avenue  
Hilo, HI 96720  
Tel: (808) 961-3169  
Fax: (808) 238-3232

**West Hawaii**

75-5995 Kuakini Hwy.  
Suite 521  
Kailua-Kona, HI 96740  
Tel: (808) 322-3500  
Fax: (808) 322-0100

**Member of:**

Child Care Aware  
National Workforce Registry Alliance  
Aloha United Way  
Kauai United Way  
Maui United Way  
Hawaii Island United Way



Agency Partner

BBB of Hawaii, Accredited Charity

February 5, 2024

Chair Peters and members of the Early Learning Board,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments related to the Board agenda item about EOEL's toilet training policy. People Attentive to Children (PATCH) is the State-designated child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R) dedicated to supporting Hawaii's child care needs. PATCH supports keeping current State policies on entry into public pre-kindergarten programs in place.

Presently the only eligibility criteria for enrollment into public pre-kindergarten programs is age and the State does not deny children based on skill-level. The EOEL public prekindergarten program requires prioritization for at-risk children, including those we know are in vulnerable situations, many of whom often experience the most difficulty in accessing a high-quality early learning program.

An inclusive approach to pre-kindergarten programs has positive implications for child development and educational outcomes, particularly for those facing more significant challenges. Current State policies, such as Chapter 302-L of the Hawaii Revised Statutes, address some of the systemic inequities and historical barriers that prevent certain families from accessing high-quality programs. These policies ensure all children across the State, especially those historically underserved, can have access to inclusive classrooms.

Like many early learning programs, EOEL's public pre-kindergarten program was built from the recognition that children enter programs with varying abilities, strengths, and skill sets, and fostering understanding and respect for each child's unique being is paramount for future success. Supporting children's development of skills, such as toileting, is necessary for life-long success and provides an incredible opportunity for adults to bond with children, foster stronger and more meaningful relationships, and teach children necessary soft skills such as compassion, empathy, and respect.

EOEL has the resources and capacity to provide more intensive professional and ongoing support to classroom staff. Should classroom personnel express difficulty in understanding or implementing toileting support, we encourage ELB, EOEL, and other stakeholders to work closely with those classrooms to design support plans that prevent adverse effects, such as bullying, teasing, or even stigmatization.

As adults, we need to ensure we are protecting programs that support marginalized communities and continue to advocate for equitable access for all of Hawaii's youngest learners. We encourage the ELB to provide feedback to legislators that supports the sustenance of current policies already in place.

Mahalo again for the opportunity to provide public comments. Should the board have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 808-550-3848.

Sincerely,

*Carol Wear*

Carol Wear  
Interim Executive Director

To: Members of the Early Learning Board  
From: Malia Pimentel  
Re: Agenda item VI: Toilet Training

To members of the Early Learning Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comments on a very important topic. My name is Malia Pimentel and I am an early childhood educator and will be providing testimony as a private citizen.

Pursuant to Chapter 302 L-7, the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) Public Prekindergarten Program accepts children based on age, with priority to at-risk and underserved children. A child being toilet trained is not an eligibility determinant, which is a policy I am in strong support of.

Most three-year-olds show up to school already potty trained, but there's a small bunch who aren't. It's not because their families are lazy or don't care – in fact, many have been trying hard to potty train. The thing is, some kids just aren't ready yet, and that's okay. These are the kids who could really benefit from the school environment and kickstart their learning journey early. But if we make potty training a must before they can attend, we might end up leaving out the very kids who need school the most. Potty training at school is usually a breeze once a kid hits that developmental sweet spot. And you know what? It's totally normal for three-year-olds to be learning how to use the toilet. It's even part of the Health and Personal Care standards we follow every day in school. I had three keiki in pull-ups at the beginning of the year, and guess what? They're all using the potty now. But let me tell you, managing a classroom full of little ones trying to use the bathroom – even when they're all potty trained – is not easy. So, insisting on kids being potty trained before coming to school might sound good on paper, but it doesn't always make sense in the real world. Let's keep things flexible and understanding for the sake of all our families, little learners, and their unique needs.

Inclusive environments are critical to support children's growth and development, and I strongly encourage advocating to keep the State's current policy intact. If classroom staff are having difficulty responding to children's toileting needs, the solution is to enhance the support being provided to teachers and educational assistants, not to implement broader policy that then penalizes children for their unique developmental timelines.

Mahalo again for the opportunity to provide comments on this very important matter.  
Malia Pimentel



To the members of the Early Learning Board,

My name is Charnelle Yap and I am a parent raising a young son on the island of Oahu. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments and allow parents to have a voice at your meetings. I am commenting on Agenda Item VI related to toileting.

As my son gets older, we've started looking at early learning programs to enroll him in, including child care settings, public prekindergarten options, and family child interaction learning groups. My son thrives in supportive, nurturing environments and enjoys being able to interact with other children around his age. He's a very observant child and we appreciate every opportunity he gets to interact with, and learn more about, others.

As we've started this journey, we've come across a diverse array of policies that we've learned impact enrollment. One of the many things I've come to appreciate about EOEL public prekindergarten programs specifically is that skill is not an eligibility criterion. Many programs deny children, or charge an additional fee, if they are not potty-trained. Although I understand why that may be the case for some programs, it does place extra hardship on families and children.

Like many skills, toileting is a natural part of a child's development. And also like many other skills, development and mastery of toileting is unique to each child. Because we firmly believe that my son will learn those skills when he's ready, with appropriate support and encouragement, we have intentionally decided not to make toileting a big deal to avoid putting unnecessary pressure on him that we know so many children face because of policies like that. Many of my friends have recounted putting so much pressure on their child/ren because the program they want does not accept children who are not potty-trained or have additional fees that make tuition even more out of reach. Having programs like EOEL's that accepts all children of varying abilities and skills, help families tremendously.

As adults, it is our job to support children and to advocate for inclusive and nurturing environments for our littles. As a parent, I appreciate the State's current policy and I would prefer it stay that way.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments on this very important matter.