



SPIN NEWS

The Newsletter for Parents of Children with Disabilities

SPECIAL
PARENT
INFORMATION
NETWORK

June 2025
Volume XL, No. 4

SPIN is co-sponsored by the Disability & Communication Access Board and the Department of Education. Services include a phone line for information referral and support, a quarterly newsletter, an annual conference and community workshops. SPIN is guided by an Advisory Committee made up of parents, educators, agencies serving children with disabilities and their families and people with disabilities. SPIN also provides staff support to the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC).

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Avoiding Summer Learning Loss

Summer learning loss, often called “summer slide,” refers to the tendency for students to lose some of their academic gains made during the past school year after a summer break from classes. Research has shown that students with disabilities are especially vulnerable to learning loss, as well as backsliding on social and behavioral gains. Some of the factors include:

- ▶ less structure and predictability compared to school routines;
- ▶ reduced or missing related services and individualized instruction; and,
- ▶ for some students, fewer opportunities to socialize with peers to maintain social skills.



The good news is that there are a lot of things families can do to prevent summer slide. Here are a few easy suggestions:

Maintain a routine

Having a daily or weekly schedule helps your son or daughter stay organized and better able to handle transitions. Predictability is especially helpful to kids with autism or ADHD. Make sure your child is getting enough sleep.

Head to the library

According to the Colorado Department of Education, reading just 4 to 6 books over the summer can help maintain reading levels

while providing an enjoyable



hobby. The Hawaii State Library system is offering a Summer Reading Challenge through July

31st. When children and teens join and log their reading minutes, they are entered into a drawing for a grand prize of four round trip tickets on Alaska Airlines.

Keep them moving

Take your son or daughter to the beach, on a hike, or try geocaching. It's like a modern day treasure hunt and helps build navigation skills.

Tap into technology

Apps for a phone, tablet or computer that are designed for students with disabilities can maintain a number of academic skills as well as improve communication and organization. Many are free or low cost. Contact the Assistive Technology Resource Centers of Hawaii for ideas.

Pat yourself on the back

You are helping your child be prepared for next school year!

WHAT'S INSIDE

2025 Legislation	2
Supported Decision Making	3
Anxiety Supports for Children	4
Mental Health Resources	5
SPIN Conference Awards	6-7
Calendar of Events	8

TOP 6 BILLS & RESOLUTIONS

from the 2025 Legislature with an impact on students with disabilities

1



ACT 130 - Helmet Requirements for Skateboarders

Requires all skateboard users under the age of 18 to wear a helmet while operating a skateboard on public property. The measure requires helmets that fit the user, are designed to prevent head trauma, and have been tested by a national organization like the Children's Safety Network.

2



ACT 136 - Medication Administration in School

Gives permission for school staff and agents trained by a health care professional to administer medication to students in public schools under certain conditions. This helps ensure that students receive their medications in a timely and consistent manner by making other staff available on campus in addition to the school health aide.

3



ACT 139 - School Meals at No Cost to Students

Expands access to free meals at public schools to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch beginning with the 2025-26 School Year. Family incomes must not be above 300% of the federal poverty level. Authors of the bill wanted to reduce the financial strain on families with lower incomes.

4



ACT 150 - Hawaii ABLÉ Savings Program

Provides incentive payments to ABLÉ account owners, with an emphasis on high school students, as a means of encouraging the participation of eligible individuals and families to save funds. The legislation also funds a full time ABLÉ specialist within the Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities.

5



HR 139 - Planning for Autism Surveillance and Services

Urges the Department of Education, the Department of Health and other stakeholders to partner in developing a strategic plan to pursue funding for and participation in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Surveillance for estimating autism prevalence.

6



HB 320 - Supported Decision-Making Agreements

Allows qualified adults, including adults with a disability, to enter into supported decision-making agreements with one or more members of a supportive community.

Supported Decision-Making

An Alternative to Guardianship

Supported Decision-Making (SDM) is a process that allows individuals with disabilities to make their own choices with help from trusted supporters.

Its purpose is to empower adults with disabilities to have control over their lives while getting the support they need.



Promotes independence and self-determination by keeping control over their own decisions instead of having a guardian make decisions for them.



Encourages inclusion in community life and can be used in along with guardianship, Power of Attorney & other documents.



Supports the individual's rights to make decisions about their health, finances and day-to-day decisions.

How it works in 4 easy steps:



Pick Supporters - individuals choose trusted people who can help them when and where they need it.



Decide How They Help - define what kind of help is needed, like explaining options or help with communication.



Make the Decision - the individual stays in control while their supporters help them.



Make Changes as Needed - the plan can change as the needs of the individual changes over their lifetime.



Hawaii passed a bill in 2025 to allow banks and healthcare providers to recognize notarized SDM agreements.

Scan the QR code for a sample of a Supported Decision-Making agreement from Colorado.

Other Alternatives to Guardianship

A Supported Decision-Making agreement can be one option of an individual's formal and informal choices to make decisions for themselves. Other options can include:

- medical and financial power of attorney
- joint bank accounts
- living wills/special needs trusts
- health care surrogacy
- representative payees
- limited guardianship (for health & personal decisions)
- conservatorship (for money & property decisions)



Anxiety Supports for Children

Anxiety is an emotion described by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like a tummy ache. Anxiety is a normal part of everyday life, but if it interferes with learning and daily activities, parents may need to step in and provide supports for their child to overcome their anxiety.



Know the Warning Signs of Anxiety

Talk to a doctor if they last longer than 2 weeks

- Avoiding school
- Physical complaints
- Restless, fidgeting
- Meltdowns, outbursts
- Late/missing homework
- Repetitive behaviors
- Excessive worry
- Irritable or moody
- Low self-esteem
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Fear of embarrassment
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Frequent nightmares
- Chronic fatigue
- Trembling/shaking
- Racing heart
- Dizzy or lightheaded
- Change in appetite
- Muscle tension or aches

Strategies to Help Your Child



Normalize & validate anxiety

It can help children understand that what they are experiencing is natural. Try saying: "This happens to me too. Want to take a deep breath with me?"



Work through it together

This helps the child know they are not alone, and you care about them. Try saying: "I'm here to help you through this. Here are some choices for how we can work through this together."



Self-Regulation for learning

Break down large assignments and tasks and use a timer to do small tasks, followed by a break. Try this: Consider using a calendar to keep track of assignments & homework.



Self-Regulation to find calm

Consider doing guided imagery, body relaxation, deep breathing and improving self-talk together.



Try this: Help your child identify negative thoughts and replace them with positive affirmations like "I can try my best" or "It's going to be ok."

Sources: 2025 SPIN Conference Workshop "Keep Calm and Conjure On"

<https://spinconference.org/2025-spin-conference-attendee-page/>

SPIN News
June 2025



Special
Parent
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Mental Health Resources for Keiki

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, you can reach out to your child's pediatrician, contact your health insurance provider, or reach out to the school counselors or behavior health specialists. You can also find online therapists, or find local in-person or virtual support groups.



Practical Strategies

For parents to use with their keiki

- Aim for management, not elimination
- Don't accommodate avoidance
- Validate feelings, not fears
- Stay calm yourself
- Listen attentively
- Use open-ended questions
- Maintain Routines
- Plan for Transitions and stressors
- Problem-solve together
- Use distraction
- Praise effort & bravery
- Avoid punishment
- Maintain appropriate expectations
- Watch your cues

Community Resources



Teen Link Hawaii

<https://www.teenlinkhawaii.org/>

A youth empowerment, outreach, and education program that provides evidence-based information and referral services for teens in Hawaii.



Child & Adolescent Mental Health Division (DOH)

<https://health.hawaii.gov/camhd/>

A Department of Health program, they can provide mental health services for keiki through the IEP, juvenile justice systems or Medicaid waiver.



Help Your Keiki

<https://www.helpyourkeiki.com/anxiety>

Provides a wealth of information for parents to understand mental health issues and evidence-based treatments.



Parent Guidance

<https://parentguidance.org/>

A website for parents to receive parent coaching, access live monthly virtual webinars and a video library addressing questions asked by parents.



NAMI Hawaii

<https://namihawaii.org/>

National Alliance on Mental Health HI has several virtual support groups.

Sources: 2025 SPIN Conference Workshop "Keep Calm and Conjure On"

<https://spinconference.org/2025-spin-conference-attendee-page/>

SPIN News
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SPIN Conference Award Winners

SPIN has a 39 year tradition of recognizing and celebrating exceptional parents and professionals who make a difference in the lives and students with disabilities and their families. This lunchtime activity is always a highlight, showcasing parents and professionals who are doing good work in our Hawaii communities. One of the things that make it a extra special is the award winners usually do not know they have been chosen for an award and watching them hear their names called in the ballroom is part of the fun. Please join us in celebrating six amazing parents and professionals in 3 categories: Parent of the Year, Parent Choice and Professional of the Year Awards.



2025 Award Winders: Will Carlson accepted for Elizabeth Johnson, Kristy Arias, Jeff Okamoto accepted for Dr. Christine Walton, Amy Downard, Shyla Gacusana, Amelia Kyewich Kaneholani.

Parent of the Year: Kristy Arias



When Kristy Arias’s son Rylan began showing signs of Tourette Syndrome, Kristy didn’t hesitate. She became a detective, a scholar and ultimately, a champion for his needs. The challenges of navigating 504 plans and IEPs didn’t deter her; instead, they fueled her mission. She immersed herself in learning, not just for her family but for the school and community at large, building bridges of understanding to ensure Rylan—and other children like him—would thrive. Kristy became a voice for the NorCal/Hawai’i Chapter, spreading awareness like a guardian angel of understanding and support. Her tireless advocacy reminds parents they are not alone, guiding them with compassion and wisdom as they navigate the complexities of their children’s diagnoses. She shatters harmful stigmas and replaces them with understanding, showing the world that Tourette Syndrome is not a behavioral flaw but a neurological condition deserving of respect and support.

Parent of the Year: Shyla Gacusana

As the founder of Aloha Minds of All Kinds in Hilo, Shyla Gacusana has created a sanctuary for families with children with disabilities—a place where they can not only belong but thrive. Through her tireless dedication, Aloha Minds has opened doors that were once closed, making community events more accessible and welcoming for all. From securing discounted rates at local movie theaters to reserving parking spaces for special holiday events, Shyla ensures that families have a front-row seat to the magic of connection and community. Outdoor adventures like trips to the zoo have become cherished memories for many families, thanks to her visionary leadership. In the magical space Shyla and her team have created, families find more than resources; they discover friendship, understanding, and a deep sense of belonging. They have woven a community where every child and family is celebrated for their uniqueness, and every moment together is filled with aloha.





Family Choice Award: Elizabeth Johnson

For more than 20 years, Elizabeth has been a surrogate parent. She steps in at moments of vulnerability, following Child Welfare Services intervention, to be the advocate and champion these children need most. She guides them through the processes with a tireless commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes, recognizing the importance of nurturing not only their minds but also their hearts and spirits. Her passion for improvement has been a beacon of hope, reminding us all that change is not only possible but necessary for our children’s future. Beyond her work with children, Elizabeth’s commitment to the broader Moloka‘i community shines just as brightly. Her deep care for this island and its people is nothing short of inspiring—a testament to a life lived with purpose and heart.

Family Choice Award: Amy Downard

Amy is a beloved teacher of learners with visual impairments, and her work has touched countless lives. From students to families navigating vision loss, this amazing teacher’s dedication is nothing short of extraordinary—a guiding light for those she serves. As a teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, Amy provides specialized, individualized instruction in braille literacy, adaptive technology, and academic subjects. These supports are not just lessons—they are keys to unlocking lifelong success. She also empowers adults who are blind or visually impaired to navigate life with confidence and independence. Amy is more than a teacher—she is a friend, a mentor, and a tireless cheerleader, reminding families who face vision loss within their ohana, that they are never alone in their journey.



Professional of the Year Award: Dr. Christina Walton

Christina is the Executive Director of Behavior Analysis No Ka ‘Oī and part of Kapiolani’s Intensive Pediatric Feeding Program. She is a true champion for families, offering guidance and hope to anyone who reaches out for support. Whether providing ABA resources, hosting free workshops, or helping families navigate the often-complex world of services and supports, she has a magical way of turning challenges into opportunities. Her work is a beacon for families and children with autism and developmental disabilities. By tirelessly working to improve systems of care and advocating for accessible resources, Dr. Walton is paving the way for brighter futures across our community with her expertise and compassionate care.



Professional of the Year Award: Amelia Kyewich Kaneholani

Amelia is a Program Specialist for the Hawai‘i State Council on Developmental Disabilities and has made it her mission to champion health initiatives and promote well-being for individuals with developmental disabilities. From pioneering telehealth projects to advocating for mental health, fostering healthy relationships, and bridging aging and IDD resources, she has become a guiding light for our community. Amelia’s contributions do not stop with policy and programs; she’s a cornerstone of her Kaua‘i community. Her work with transition-aged youth, especially through initiatives like the Footsteps to Transition Fair, has brought together parents, organizations, and young people to create pathways of hope and opportunity. Through her dedication, she has sparked positive outcomes that will ripple across generations.





SUMMER

Calendar of Events



6/12 TACA Coffee Talk @ Diet & Nutrition
 6:00 – 8:00 pm FREE In person
 Down to Earth at Pearlridge upstairs
 Come out and hear what other parents have done and get ideas on meals and how to get your kid to try new foods.
 To register, visit: <https://tacanow.org/events/>



6/13 Family Hui HI Parent Support – In person
6/20 10:00 – 11:30 am FREE
6/27 Waialeale Community Park
 We host a warm and welcoming gathering for parents of children with disabilities. It's a safe place to share, connect, and uplift one another. Every Friday in June. More info: 808-230-7112 or email: resources@familyhuihawaii.org

6/14 Special Needs Planning – In person/Virtual
 9:30 am – 2:30 pm \$15 includes bento
 Neal Blaisdell, Pikake Room, Oahu or Zoom
 Hear from 2 of the nationals leading experts on special needs planning. To register, visit: <https://www.heartfeltlegacyfoundation.org/events>

6/16 Art of Conflict Resolution Workshop – Virtual
 4:00 – 7:00 pm FREE
 For parents and community members, sponsored by the Community Children's Council (CCC), this workshop that will Empower you with new ways of addressing conflict and finding agreement. For a Zoom link, visit: www.spinhawaii.org/events



6/17 Housing Accommodations Workshop
 10:00 am – 12:00 pm FREE In person
 200 N. Vineyard Blvd, 5th floor Oahu Room
 Access to Independence is hosting a workshop to talk about requesting reasonable housing Accommodations. Seat are limited. Please RVSP to Caroline Riquelme 808-626-5475.

LDAH: Learning Labs – Virtual
5:00 – 6:00 pm FREE

6/18 Developing the IEP
6/25 Progress Reports
7/2 SpEd: What do I Need to Know?
7/9 Engaging Families to Improve Student Outcomes
7/16 Preparing for Transitions K-12
8/6 Understanding Specific Learning Disabilities
 Call LDAH to register: 808-536-9684



6/21 Assistive Technology 1-Day Camp – In person
 9:00 am – 3:00 pm \$25
 Windward Community College, Hale A'o
 Sponsored by ATRC, this fun camp is for kids 8-13 years old. Kids will explore iPad apps, art projects, coding and more. For more info, visit: <https://atrc.org/events/>

6/25 Cross Disabilities Support Group – In person
 1:00 – 3:00 pm FREE
 200 N. Vineyard Blvd, 5th floor Oahu Room
 Access to Independence offers a support group for all disabilities and ages. For more info, contact Carolina Riquelme at 808-626-5475.

6/26 Yoga for All Abilities – In Person
7/24 5:30 – 6:00 pm First class free, then \$10 each
 Kailua Beach. Meets every 4th Thursday.
 Kakou Club is sponsoring this yoga opportunity. Sign up required. Caregivers are requested to attend with child/adult. To register, visit: <https://www.kakouclub.org/yoga>

6/29-7/27 Maui Hearts on the Green Golf Program
 3–4:00 pm OR 4-5:00 pm \$80 per participant
 Kaanapali Golf Course, Lahaina
 Join Never Quit Dreaming for a golf program designed for children with disabilities. Program runs 5 Saturdays. To register, visit: <https://www.nqdhawaii.org/>



For more events and happenings around the state, be sure to visit our website events calendar at <https://spinhawaii.org/events/> and like us on Facebook!

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