



# SPIN NEWS

The Newsletter for Parents of Children with Disabilities

SPECIAL  
PARENT  
INFORMATION  
NETWORK

May 2026

Volume XLI, 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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## 3 Big Bills Cross the Finish Line

As the 2026 State Legislative Session comes to a close, SPIN reports on three education-related bills now awaiting the Governor’s decision. Two of these measures offer encouraging support for students with disabilities, while the third has raised important concerns from family and advocacy groups.

**HB 1891** focuses on making sure children with dyslexia or other reading challenges are identified early and receive the right kind of instruction. The bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to screen all students using tools that are accurate and fair for children from diverse language backgrounds. When a student shows signs of reading difficulty, schools must provide teaching approaches proven to help. It also calls for teacher training in structured literacy and strengthens preparation programs so new teachers enter the classroom ready to support students with dyslexia.

**HB 1894** aims to ensure that students who are blind or have low vision receive braille instruction, accessible materials, and other supports that allow them to learn with confidence. The DOE will work with the Department of Human Services to track students’ needs and provide families with clear information about available

services and tools. The bill also reinforces the importance of including braille and assistive technology needs in a student’s IEP or 504 Plan so their day-to-day learning truly aligns with their supports.

**HB 1888** is designed to increase protection for teachers and school staff by expanding what counts as harassment and allowing the Attorney General to help schools seek restraining orders when

necessary. However, parent advocates and the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) worry that the bill’s definition of “disruption” is too broad. They caution that it could unintentionally discourage parents—especially those advocating for children with disabilities—from speaking up, even though federal law protects their right to do so.

These bills highlight the ongoing effort to balance school safety with strong family partnerships and meaningful support for all learners.



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# 5 Things to Teach Your Children

by Mike Fahey



1



People with disabilities are valuable. All people have a purpose.

2



Disability isn't scary. It isn't less. Disability is human.

3



Assistive technology and medical devices are tools. Respect them.

4



We all have similarities and differences. Celebrate and honor them both.

5



Together we must build a more inclusive world.

***"There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more."***

*-- Robert M. Hensel, a man born with spina bifida who holds the Guinness World Book of Records for the longest non-stop wheelie in a wheelchair in history--6.178 miles!*

**SOURCE:** Mike Fahey's keynote remarks to the audience at the 40th Annual SPIN Conference on March 28, 2026.



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# REMINDERS FOR THE 2026 ELECTIONS

## From the Hawaii Office of Elections

Ahead of the 2026 **Primary Election on August 8** and **General Election on November 3, 2026**, the Hawaii Office of Elections has a few key reminders for Hawaii voters.



### 1 HAWAII IS A VOTE-BY-MAIL STATE

Your Primary Election ballot will arrive by mail. Registered Hawaii voters automatically receive a mail ballot for every election.



### 2 CHECK THAT YOUR VOTER REGISTRATION IS CURRENT

Visit [elections.hawaii.org](https://elections.hawaii.org) or call (808) 453-VOTE (8683) to verify that your voter registration is accurate. If you have moved or changed your mailing address, you must update your voter registration to ensure that your mail ballot is sent to your current address. You can update your registration online or by submitting a paper copy of the Voter Registration Application, available at your local library or post office.



### 3 SIGN UP FOR BALLOT NOTIFICATIONS

You can track when your ballot has been mailed and when it's been received through ballot notifications. Sign up to receive alerts by text, email, or a phone message at [elections.hawaii.gov](https://elections.hawaii.gov).



### 4 SIGN YOUR BALLOT RETURN ENVELOPE

You can expect to receive your ballot packet by July 21 for the Primary Election and October 16 for the General Election. Before the ballot arrives, review statements from the candidates using our online voter guide at [elections.hawaii.gov](https://elections.hawaii.gov). You must sign the return envelope for your ballot to be counted.



### 5 YOUR BALLOT MUST BE RECEIVED BY 7 PM ON ELECTION DAY

Voted ballots can be returned by mail or dropped off at a ballot drop box. Visit [elections.hawaii.gov](https://elections.hawaii.gov) for location details. Ballots received after the deadline cannot be counted.



### 6 ELECTIONS ARE ACCESSIBLE

If you need assistance, consider the following:

1. Visit a voter service center to vote using accessible voting equipment.
2. Request an electronic ballot and mark your ballot using your personal compatible device. Learn more and sign up at [elections.hawaii.gov](https://elections.hawaii.gov).
3. If you need assistance through the election process, including registering to vote, or reviewing, marking and returning your ballot, you are allowed to receive assistance, but not from your employer, union or any candidate.



LEARN MORE: [elections.hawaii.gov](https://elections.hawaii.gov)



(808) 453-VOTE (8683)

<p><b>ABA</b> Applied Behavior Analysis Evidence-based therapy for children with autism or other intensive behaviors.</p>	<p><b>AT</b> Assistive Technology Low or high tech tools, apps or devices that help your child access their learning.</p>	<p><b>BIP</b> Behavior Intervention Plan Explains triggers and strategies for support from an FBA assessment, used by the whole school.</p>	<p><b>BSP</b> Behavior Support Plan Created by a school counselor, teachers and parents to support a child's behavior.</p>	<p><b>DES</b> District Educational Specialist A district-level teacher supporting special education in schools</p>
<p><b>EA</b> Educational Assistant School-based staff providing academic, &amp; non-academic support to students.</p>	<p><b>ESY</b> Extended School Year Educational or related services provided during extended school breaks.</p>	<p><b>FAPE</b> Free Appropriate Public Education Special education and related services provided at no charge.</p>	<p><b>FBA</b> Functional Behavior Assessment Done by a licensed professional in the DOE to create the BIP</p>	<p><b>FERPA</b> Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act A law that protects your child's school records and your right to access them.</p>
<p><b>GE</b> Geographical Exception To apply for your child to attend a public school other than the school closest to home.</p>	<p><b>IDEA</b> Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Federal law that protects your child's rights to special education services.</p>	<p><b>IEE</b> Independent Educational Evaluation One or more evaluations by a private party, paid for by parents or the school.</p>	<p><b>IEP</b> Individualized Education Program A legal document with assessments, goals, services and supports.</p>	<p><b>IFSP</b> Individualized Family Support Plan Used by Early Intervention to determine services.</p>

# Top 30 Special Ed Acronyms\*

to help families understand jargon in an IEP and grow their knowledge and advocacy.

<p><b>LBA</b> Licensed Behavior Analyst Administers the FBA, designs the BIP and oversees the RBTs.</p>	<p><b>LRE</b> Least Restrictive Environment The place where your child learns, starting with the gen ed classroom.</p>	<p><b>MD</b> Manifestation Determination Related to suspensions, to see if the behavior is caused by their disability.</p>	<p><b>OT</b> Occupational Therapy A related service that helps with skills like writing, using tools or self-care.</p>	<p><b>PBIS</b> Positive Behavioral Interventions &amp; Supports A school approach that teaches and rewards positive behavior.</p>
<p><b>PLAAFP</b> Present Levels of Academic Achievement &amp; Functional Performance. A summary of your child's needs and strengths.</p>	<p><b>PT</b> Physical Therapy A related service that helps the student with movement, balance and strength.</p>	<p><b>PWN</b> Prior Written Notice A letter from the school explaining decisions about sped services &amp; why they were made.</p>	<p><b>RBT</b> Registered Behavioral Technician Works 1:1 with children to implement ABA and improve skills.</p>	<p><b>SBA</b> Smarter Balanced Assessment Statewide testing in grades 3-8 &amp; 11, for English &amp; math.</p>
<p><b>SBBH</b> School-Based Behavioral Health Mental &amp; behavioral health services provided at school.</p>	<p><b>SDI</b> Specially Designed Instruction Teaching that is changed or adapted to meet your child's needs.</p>	<p><b>SLP</b> Speech-Language Pathology A related service that helps with speech &amp; communication needs.</p>	<p><b>SpEd</b> Special Education Services and supports to teach children with disabilities who have an IEP.</p>	<p><b>SSC</b> Student Services Coordinator Sets up services outlined in the IEP with all needed providers.</p>

\* What is an acronym? A word made from the first letters of other words

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# Spotlight on Support



## Holly's Fountain of Hope by Kammy & Jimmy Chan



Eight years ago our daughter Holly was diagnosed with Rett syndrome, a rare neurological disorder affecting approximately one in 10,000 female births worldwide. It is even rarer in males.



Rett syndrome is caused by mistakes on the MECP2 gene. The gene makes a protein that is important for the normal function of cells. Mutations in the MECP2 gene are usually random and not inherited, and can occur as changes in single base pairs, insertions, or deletions of DNA in the gene. The genetic mutation alters the protein or reduces the amount of protein produced.



For many families, Rett syndrome is devastating because their child's development is normal during the first six to 18 months before they witness a regression or loss of skills. Rett can impact every aspect of life, including speaking, walking, eating, hand use, and breathing. It is not unusual for children living with Rett to use wheelchairs, feeding tubes, eye gaze communication devices, and to need assistance with activities of daily living. The combination and severity of symptoms varies by individual.



Rett syndrome does not affect receptive communication skills, so Holly understands everything. It's only her expressive language skills that are impaired. The biggest game changer for Holly involves learning to use low-tech and high-tech communication. She uses multiple tools to communicate, including a yes/no card, a white board with choices written on it, and a tablet with an app, LAMP Words for Life, which enables her to speak in short phrases and full sentences. It's been such a joy to hear what's on Holly's mind, even if it's at our expense! She is known to give her favorite people nicknames and loves to tease us.



As Holly's parents, advocates, and biggest cheerleaders, continue to learn in this unexpected role we assumed when we received Holly's diagnosis. Openly sharing about Holly and Rett syndrome has helped us find and cultivate community. Local and international parent and family support groups have been valuable places to learn from peers, acquire information, exchange tips and tricks, achievements and milestones, and even vent. We also prioritize developing a partnership with Holly's school team, and try to connect and align her school team with her private providers so that we may effectively work toward the common goal of preparing Holly to live her life as fully and independently as possible.



Holly wants to share this with you: "Children with Rett are smart and we dream." We asked what she meant by "dream," and Holly said "profession." She explained that she wants to be an actor, teacher, and doctor. Although the worry about what Rett may take never goes away, we are excited for her future.



To learn more about Rett syndrome, visit <https://www.rett syndrome.org/about-rett-syndrome/understanding-rett-syndrome/>



To read about work toward a cure, which may open the door to helping other neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and autism, visit <https://reverserett.org/cures/>

# SPIN Conference Award Winners

SPIN has a 40 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. This year, to celebrate 40 years of the SPIN Conference, we were lucky to gather together to celebrate three amazing parents, two parent choice winners and two professionals who are doing excellent work in our communities. Please join us in congratulating all of our winners!



Melanie Lee (far left) filled in for Roz Kia and Tina King (blue shirt) filled in for Regina Corniel.



## Parent of the Year: Regina Corniel

As the mother of three sons, Regina Corniel has navigated the unique experiences of raising children with different paths and different needs. One of her sons was born with bilateral microtia and is Hard of Hearing, and another has been diagnosed with autism. Through these experiences, she has become a powerful advocate—not only for her own family, but for families across Hawai‘i. She works with organizations that support families navigating autism, hearing differences, and learning challenges, and she serves on advisory groups focused on strengthening early learning and family support across the state. Her leadership also extends into policy and community work. She is a graduate Hawaii Children’s Action Network’s Parent Leadership Training Institute and an active advocate with organizations working to improve opportunities for children and families in Hawai‘i.

## Parents of the Year: Jimmy & Kammy Chan

When their daughter Holly was young, they noticed delays and began the process that so many parents know well—evaluations, therapies, doctor visits, and searching for answers. Genetic testing revealed Holly has Rett Syndrome, a rare neurological condition that affects a child’s ability to speak, move, and communicate. But instead of letting that diagnosis define their story, the Chans chose to turn it into a mission. They have worked tirelessly to raise awareness about Rett Syndrome across Hawai‘i. Through media appearances, public education, and partnerships with medical professionals, they have helped shine a light on a condition that many people had never heard of before. They created Holly’s Fountain of Hope, to raise awareness and funds for research and family empowerment programs. Through their company, The Hawaiian Chip Company, they have pledged a portion of sales to support Rett Syndrome research and disability causes, turning their business success into an opportunity to uplift





### Family Choice Award: Roz Kia

Roz has over 20 years of experience working with families of infants and children who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. As Project Coordinator for the Comprehensive Service Center, she is driven by a deep desire to create inclusive environments where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued—no matter their communication style. Roz has a big, warm, and engaging heart for people of all abilities. She has a special way of seeing people—not for their challenges, but for their strengths—and she is always thinking about how to make the blind feel welcomed, the deaf feel empowered, and families feel refreshed and supported. She is like a sponge when it comes to knowledge, especially her love for the rich history of the Deaf community here in Hawai‘i. But what truly sets Roz apart is not just what she does—it’s how she makes people feel. Seen. Heard. Included.

### Family Choice Award: Kahea Ilae

Kahea grew up on the Windward side of O‘ahu and graduated from Castle High School where she now works as an Autism Consulting Teacher. She is the proud mama of Jordan, a 33 years old born with Down syndrome who is also a cancer survivor. While Jordan was undergoing cancer treatment in 2018, families and friends gathered, sharing stories and support. In that moment of challenge and connection, the idea for a parent-led support group was born. That idea became Ho‘omana, and 8 years later, it is a special and safe space where caregivers can talk, connect, and share. A place where families remember they are not alone. As a co-facilitator of Ho‘omana, Kahea’s experience as a parent of a child with a disability and DOE professional, allows her to help families become mindful advocates as they navigate the many transitions of life.



### Professional of the Year Award: Josann Jenks

Josann is an educator at Dole Middle School, a mentor, an advocate, and a leader who constantly reminds her students, and all of us, to insist on hope. In the classroom, this educator creates learning experiences that help students see themselves as active members of their community. Her students are encouraged not only to learn, but to speak their truth and recognize their own power. Families know they are welcomed, heard, and valued as partners in their child’s education. In the community, she mobilizes support for students and their families, organizing food resources, creating opportunities for youth through arts and music programs, and helping build scholarship opportunities for underprivileged students. Her advocacy has reached the national level, where she helped to protect families after witnessing the real impact of immigration enforcement on students in her own school.



### Professional of the Year Award: Randall Higa

Randal worked for thirty-five years as an educator, administrator, and workforce development leader, and has worked tirelessly to support young people who are navigating some of life’s most difficult transitions. From working with students at risk of leaving school, to supporting adults seeking new opportunities, he has consistently focused on helping individuals discover their strengths and build a path forward. His Ready to Work Program has helped countless young adults develop practical job skills, learn responsibility, and gain the confidence they need to succeed in employment and in life, with his wife Alison, and fellow retired educators. Throughout his career he has served in many roles—teacher, counselor, administrator, employment counselor, and principal. In each role, he has brought a deep belief that young people succeed when they are treated with respect and provided with meaningful opportunities for employment.



## 5/15 Crucial Conversations Class - FREE

8:30 am - 4:30 pm In Person  
UH West Oahu, A225

The MCH LEND program is hosting a workshop to develop conversational and relational skills for handling difficult conversations that involve holding people to commitments. Ideas for supervisory roles, including parents and teenagers. RSVP required, email [mchlend@hawaii.edu](mailto:mchlend@hawaii.edu) to save your spot.



## Parent Class: Understanding Stress, Problem Solving, Decision-Making, Negotiation & Compromise FREE



5/19 1:00 - 2:00 pm Virtual

5/26 9:00 - 10:00 am Virtual

Ohana Support Services offers free parenting support classes monthly. For more info, call 808-681-1438. To register, visit [www.spinhawaii.org/events](http://www.spinhawaii.org/events)

## 5/23 Mother's Day Pottery Painting - \$20-\$30

10:00 am - 12:00 pm In Person  
Hilo Bay Pottery 29 Shipman St. #103, Hilo  
Aloha Minds of All Kinds invites you to join them for a painting party for moms. RSVP required, text Shy at 808-333-4440.



JOIN OUR MEDIUM-TERM TRAINING PROGRAM

### Seeds of Disability Leadership Program

★ Attend ALL sessions and complete ALL activities to earn a Medium-Term Training Certificate ★

- 👉 Develop leadership skills for transforming and improving systems and supports for keiki with disabilities and their ohana
- 🌱 Interdisciplinary
- 🌱 Culturally Grounded
- 👉 Live Training Sessions
- 🌱 Asynchronous Activities

Scan above or visit <https://forms.gle/qzSNpbsJdXYGmvEP9> to apply

Fri JUNE 5	Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (NDDs) Across the Lifespan Virtual   8:30 am to 12:30 pm	<p>Application Deadline is Friday, May 22, 2026</p> <p>MCH LEND HAWAII</p>
Fri JUNE 12	M&M (Multi-Media) Party Virtual   8:30 am to 12:30 pm	
Fri JUNE 19	Sexuality, Intimacy, Healthy Relationships Virtual   8:30 am to 12:30 pm	
Fri JUNE 26	Sensory Needs and Supports In-Person   O'ahu, HI 9:00 am to 4:00 pm	
Sat JUNE 27	Bonus/Optional Āina-Based Learning Opportunity In-Person   UH West O'ahu 8:00am to 12:00pm	

University of Hawai'i, John A. Burns School of Medicine, Maternal & Child Health Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (MCH LEND) Program • [mchlend@hawaii.edu](mailto:mchlend@hawaii.edu) • 808-369-1240

## LEVEL UP!

### SOCIAL SKILLS

Though Dungeons & Dragons

Level Up! is a small, supportive group designed for autistic young adults who want to build confidence and connection through Dungeons & Dragons.

This group combines D&D gameplay with practical social skills therapy in a way that feels natural and low-pressure in a small group setting.

We'll work on things like starting conversations, navigating group interactions, and building friendships—with space to practice both during the game and in real life.

Led by a licensed psychologist and an experienced Dungeon Master, Level Up! is a neurodiversity-affirming group where you can be yourself, connect with others, and grow at your own pace. Beginners and experienced D&D players welcome!

- ★ 8 sessions, 3.5 hrs each \$150/session
- ★ Wednesdays, 4:00-7:30 PM
- ★ June 10- July 29, 2026
- ★ In-person in Honolulu

LIMITED SPOTS AVAILABLE!

Sign Up Now!  
[info@mangotreecenter.com](mailto:info@mangotreecenter.com)  
808-556-7708

[mangotreecenter.com/levelup/](http://mangotreecenter.com/levelup/)

Mango Tree CENTER



Hawai'i Maternal and Child Health Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (MCH LEND) Program  
Fall 2026 to Spring 2027 Long-Term Trainee Cohort

## Join Our Program!

### Program Overview

- ★ 300+ hours of in-person and virtual community-based, interdisciplinary disability leadership training
- ★ August 2026 to May 2027
- ★ Paid Opportunity!

Visit our website to learn more and apply



<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/mchlend>

### We are looking for...

- ★ Hawai'i-based applicants from ALL islands
- ★ Current and Post- Graduate and Doctoral Students
- ★ Self Advocates and Family Advocates
- ★ Community Professionals
- ★ People from ALL disciplines and professions
- ★ Dedication to improving services, systems, and supports for infants, children, and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Developmental Disabilities in our community

Questions? Contact us at...

• 808-369-1240 • [mchlend@hawaii.edu](mailto:mchlend@hawaii.edu) •

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 and Instagram!