Supporting Early Childhood Development Through Family-Centered Resources

Alyssa Turman, OTS
Kānaʻi Bento, Site Mentor
Hawai`i Pacific University, Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program, Honolulu, Hawai`i

HAWAIʻI PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
Doctor of Occupational Therapy

Seagull Schools

Introduction

- Seagull Schools Hawaiʻi serves a diverse community of families across Oʻahu and emphasizes cultural relevance, predictable routines, and strong relationships between home and school.
- Seagulls staff and families identified a need for simple and culturally meaningful tools that could support participation in daily routines, transitions, and social and emotional development.
- Evidence based occupational therapy strategies such as visual supports, caregiver education, and routine-based interventions are widely shown to enhance participation within natural contexts (AOTA, 2020; Whiting et al., 2023; Schaaf et al., 2023)

Project Description

This capstone experience and project focused on creating a sustainable collection of family-centered educational resources to support early childhood development at Seagull Schools Hawaiʻi.

Guided by Seagulls staff and family priorities, the project emphasized accessible and culturally relevant materials that promote participation in daily routines, emotional regulation, sensory processing, and early social skills (Case Smith and O'Brien, 2019).

Alignment with OT Curricular Threads:
- **Aloha** honors the cultural identity and values of families in Hawaiʻi.
- **Kuleana** reflects the responsibility to respond to needs identified through surveys and site input.
- **Pono** supports ethical and evidence informed practice centered on children and families.
- **Kokua** provides practical tools that help caregivers support children in everyday routines.
- **Laulima** reflects collaboration with the site mentor and the school community.

Purpose/Aims

To develop sustainable and culturally aligned family resources for Seagulls Schools in Oʻahu. The purpose is to support early childhood development and strengthen communication between parents and Seagull staff.

Aims:
- Identify priority areas through Seagulls staff and family input
- Create simple, accessible, culturally informed resources
- Promote participation in daily routines at home and school

References

Methods

Needs Assessment
- Seagulls staff and family identified priorities (routines, emotional regulation, sensory needs, transitions, communication)
- Observations at the Seagulls Kailua and Downtown Honolulu campuses
- Informal teacher conversations to understand context and barriers
- Collaboration with site mentor to understand cultural values and communication practices

Evidence Review
- Pediatric OT literature informed the development of visual supports, sensory strategies, and routine-based interventions (AOTA, 2024; Whiting et al., 2025)

Evaluation Methods
- A post-survey was originally planned; however, this was not feasible because Seagull Schools planned to distribute resources gradually through weekly Seesaw newsletters based on family needs as they change.
- Resource evaluation occurred through ongoing feedback from the site mentor, who reviewed each set via email and Zoom meetings and recommended revisions to improve clarity and relevance.
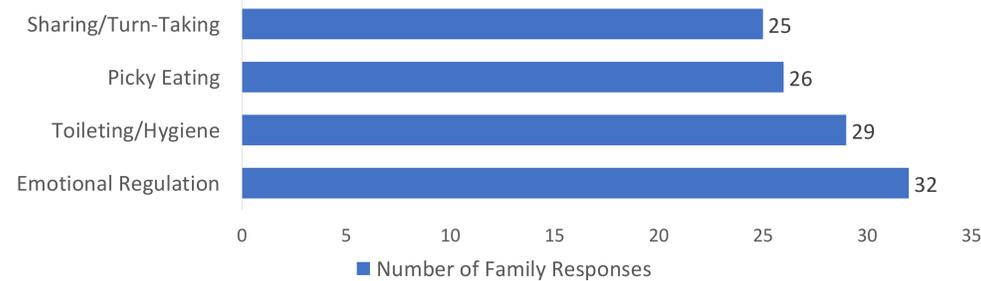
Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics, percentages and frequencies of survey responses

Results/Outcomes

- 44 Families of children 12 months to 5 Years of age completed a survey to identify top priorities.
- Survey results showed strong agreement between staff (n=8) and families (n=44) regarding the areas where children need support.
- Families identified emotional regulation (73%), toileting and hygiene (66%), picky eating/mealtime challenges (59%), and sharing/turn-taking (57%) as the highest-priority areas for additional support (n = 44).

Staff described the resources as *"wonderful, easy to read, and easy to do,"* noting they believed *"our families will enjoy them."*

6 sets of family resource guides were developed:
- Classroom Center Signs
- Developmental Milestones
- Social–Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Self-Care, Independence, & Transitions
- Family Engagement & Activities
- Seasonal & Holiday Activities
- 60+ OT informed resources were created in PDF format for long-term use.
- Seagull Schools plans to distribute resources through their Seesaw mobile application as part of weekly newsletters or in response to family needs.

Figure 1. Top Priorities Identified by Families Whose Children Attend Seagulls School in Oʻahu

Priority	Number of Family Responses
Sharing/Turn-Taking	25
Picky Eating	26
Toileting/Hygiene	29
Emotional Regulation	32

■ Number of Family Responses

Figure 2. Examples of Family Resource Guides

SHARING BURNOUT
Trying New Foods
BENEFITS OF SENSORY ACTIVITIES

Discussion

This highlights the importance of simple and culturally meaningful tools that caregivers can use during natural routines at home. Research supports the use of visual supports and routine-based strategies to enhance emotional regulation and participation in early childhood settings (Burkhart and Dunbar, 2008; Cole et al., 2004). Walkthroughs and collaboration with the site mentor helped clarify environmental and communication needs within the classrooms and guided the decision to add center signs and culturally significant holiday resources.

Limitations: Seagull Schools preferred a gradual and flexible distribution model, therefore resources were not formally piloted with families during the project period. As a result, a post-survey could not be completed, limiting the ability to evaluate short-term impact.

Future Opportunities: It will be important to continue to assess parent's feedback on the family-resources and to translate resources into other languages to increase access to non-English speaking families.