KLAMATH PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Notes

May 28, 2025 | 10:00 AM – Noon

Attendance

Bryanna Paradice
Mary Ruiz
Melinda Gomez
Kathleen Walker-Henderson
Crystal Lemus
David Elliott
Jane Nicholson
Maurita Johnson
Holly Mancebo
David Lev
Melissa Dorsey
Jill O'Donnell
Connie Venegas
Kay Ortega
Gillian Wesenberg
Vanessa Pingleton
Laura Barajas
Amber Singh
Athena Wikstrom
Danielle Walker

Please note: For ease of member access, South-Central Early Learning Hub – Klamath Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings will be held virtually unless otherwise notified.

Welcome and Introduction

The Klamath PAC reviewed and approved the April 2025 minutes. Members of the Klamath PAC voted to approve the minutes as submitted. No further discussion. Motion passed.

South-Central Early Learning Hub Update

Gillian shared feedback about the Cards for Connections training with Dr. Amy King and requested input from those who attended the training. Mary shared that the training was excellent, with a lot of valuable information. The cards are broken down by age group, supporting children and families from pregnancy through teen and young adult years. Mary found the training informative and appreciated listening to Dr. Amy King, noting that everyone should take Cards for Connection.

Jane noted the tools/cards are user-friendly and adaptable. She has already started using them with clients and was surprised by their versatility, particularly how the same cards used with young children can also support conversations with adults.

Athena added that Dr. Amy emphasizes anyone working with children and families can build therapeutic connections and support resilience. Cards for Connection is a series of three sessions; the first day of the training series is focused on what trauma is, how trauma appears in people's lives, and how to support healing from trauma in healthy ways. The second and third sessions are half-day days focused on how to use the cards Dr. Amy developed. Each card has behaviors on one side and strategies on the other. While each card is designed for a specific age group, they are developmentally appropriate for use with all ages above the specified age group on the card.

Gillian shared that positive feedback was also received about Dr. Dawn Bailey and Spencer's sessions on De-Escalation Strategies and Preschool Life Skills. Attendees expressed interest in bringing Dr. Dawn back for additional trainings and technical assistance related to early intervention and behavior.

Gillian also highlighted the Kids in Transition to School (KITS) at Home program for families whose children haven't had preschool experiences and are geographically isolated. KITS at Home is a virtual, eight-week course. Athena noted that KITS at home is available in English and Spanish, and accounts for cultural differences. Technology support is available for families who need it. Feedback from families has been very positive so far.

Gillian shared updates from the South-Central Early Learning Hub Family Governance Advisory Committee, which applied for and received grant funding to install Little Free Libraries across the region. In Klamath County, the Little Free Libraries are in Merrill, Malin, Klamath Falls, and one will be placed in Chemult. Gillian encouraged anyone in the area to visit them.

She also provided updates from the Hub Administrative Rules Committee, stating the Early Learning Council (ELC) is currently reviewing and processing feedback. Gillian was also appointed to the ELC Home Visiting Committee, which has met twice. The group aims to include diverse cultural representations and will meet again in July.

Gillian provided a reminder that under the Every Child Belongs (ECB) legislation, suspensions and expulsions will be prohibited in all child care settings starting July 1, 2026. The South-Central Early Learning Hub led the grant planning, and the steering committee recommended that Douglas Education Service District (ESD) and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) manage implementation. The legislature created a support system, and the state has designed a Smartsheet referral tool. Concerns have been raised about insufficient funding to support technical assistance for provider needs, especially in more rural regions like ours.

There are several legislative developments underway, many of which are in a "hurry up and wait" phase. The state school fund budget, Senate Bill 5516, is scheduled to be voted on today in the Ways and Means Committee at 1:00 p.m.

Tomorrow, May 29, at 8:30 a.m., the House Early Childhood and Human Services Committee is holding an informational hearing titled Update on Unemployment-Related Daycare Program. Additionally, the House Behavioral Health and Healthcare Committee will host an informational hearing on Behavioral Health Care Provider Experiences this Thursday at 3:00 p.m.

Looking ahead, the Senate Healthcare Committee has scheduled a hearing titled Federal Medicaid Cuts: What's at Stake for Oregon on Tuesday, June 3, at 3:00 p.m.

There is concern in the legislature about potential federal budget cuts, which is causing hesitation to fund new initiatives or even expand existing programs at this time. Much remains uncertain, and we'll continue to monitor the outcomes of these discussions as more information becomes available.

In response to a request for additional updates, Connie with Oregon Child Development Coalition reported that Head Start is operating as usual, with no changes. Melinda with Klamath Family Head Start confirmed there have been no impacts to her program and shared that they submitted a grant for the next year and are awaiting final approval, expecting flat funding.

Danielle shared Preschool Promise is currently accepting new and returning student applications for the 2025–2026 school year. Preschool Promise offers free preschool for eligible families in Klamath County. Participating sites include the YMCA of Klamath Falls, Little Learners, Quality Child Care, Knickknacks, and Gilchrist Elementary. All programs remain active as the school year wraps up, and staff are focused on gathering documentation and preparing for the upcoming selection process.

Gillian Wesenberg shared that Preschool Promise and Head Start are working together to align eligibility criteria. Two recent updates expand access for Preschool Promise families and align with Head Start eligibility: housing costs can now be considered in determining income eligibility, which means that families with high rent or utility expenses may qualify even if their overall income is higher. Additionally, Preschool Promise can now accept SNAP letters with $0 listed as qualifying documentation, aligning with long-standing Head Start eligibility practices.

To promote enrollment, a coordinated advertising campaign is underway. In Klamath County, the Herald and News is running weekly print ads, and digital ads are also being shared. Radio advertising is airing in both English and Spanish, with plans to expand outreach to additional Spanish-language stations. These efforts are part of a larger regional push to raise awareness about early preschool and kindergarten registration.

Preschool Promise applications are available online and in paper form, and families can also complete them over the phone. The online application is translated into over 150 languages, making it accessible to families who speak languages other than English.

Community UPLiFT remains available to connect families who are expecting, have children ages birth to five, or up to 21 with special needs, to a range of local services. Danielle is available to meet with agencies or programs interested in learning more about Community UPLiFT, the referral process, or how to partner in supporting families. For more information, contact Danielle at Danielle.walker@douglasesd.k12.or.us or by phone at (541) 880-4655.

UCAN Healthy Families in Klamath County

Bryanna Paradice joined the Klamath County Professional Advisory Committee to present about UCAN Healthy Families.

UCAN began hosting the Healthy Families home visiting program in 2015. Healthy Families America (HFA) is a nationally recognized, evidence-based program with a mission to strengthen nurturing parent-child relationships, promote healthy childhood growth and development, and enhance overall family well-being. UCAN Healthy Families has a team of 13, including a program manager, two supervisors, and ten home visitors, and serves families across Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties. Funding support comes from both federal and state levels, enabling the team to provide high-quality, relationship-based services to families facing a variety of challenges.

Families are referred to Healthy Families through birthing centers, community partners like Hope Centers, advocacy organizations, and closed-loop referral systems such as Community UPLiFT and CORE (Douglas County). Services ideally begin during pregnancy, though families remain eligible until the child reaches three months of age. A voluntary New Baby Questionnaire (NBQ) is used to assess risk factors that could impact parent-child interactions, and eligibility prioritizes families considered at risk, especially first-time parents, teen parents, and families with multiple births.

From April 2024 to April 2025, the program served 147 families, welcoming 63 new families during that period. Home visitors administered 85 depression and anxiety screenings and completed 2,313 home visits. These visits provide consistent and supportive engagement for family support and success.

One such success story shared by Bryanna highlights the importance of trust and long-term relationship building. A teen parent experiencing unstable housing and homelessness was referred to Healthy Families when she was 12 weeks pregnant. After her child was born, routine developmental screenings revealed developmental delays in some areas. Although the home visitor recommended a referral to Early Intervention (EI), the family initially declined. Still, the home visitor continued weekly visits and re-administered developmental screenings every few months. The child consistently scored low in the same areas, and each time the possibility of an Early Intervention referral was gently revisited.

At the 18-month evaluation, the home visitor used motivational interviewing and reflective strategies to explore the family's concerns. This supportive conversation allowed the parents to acknowledge their barriers to accepting help. They agreed to proceed with the referral, and the home visitor accompanied them to the appointment for added support. The child was given an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP), and the parents expressed deep relief in having a supportive team around them. They felt empowered knowing they were not alone in helping their child thrive.

This story illustrates the role that trust and support play in ensuring families access the resources they need—when they are ready.

There are opportunities to reach families in rural communities and underserved populations with limited resources, alongside the challenge of connecting across a large service area. Maintaining staffing is vital to program longevity because each home visitor undergoes intensive Healthy Families training. Healthy Families continue to grow through new partnerships and collaborations to better coordinate care. State support remains important, but recent leadership changes—since the state program manager resigned earlier this year—have created ongoing challenges.

For more information, please contact Bryanna Paradice, Regional Program Manager for UCAN Healthy Families, at bryanna.paradice@ucancap.org or (541) 440-3623.

Every Child Belongs

Athena provided an update on Every Child Belongs, formerly Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Oregon's response to the July 1, 2026 ban on suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings. Currently, Preschool Promise and Head Start programs already cannot suspend or expel children.

When providers face situations where a child may be at risk of suspension or expulsion, several supports are available depending on the context, including mental health consultation, reflective consultation for providers, Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) services, or provider training in classroom management.

The region has funding for 1 full-time employee (FTE) position to serve the entire area, with an expectation that some services will be delivered virtually. The South-Central Early Learning Hub led the grant planning, and the steering committee recommended that Douglas Education Service District (ESD) and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) manage implementation. The implementation plan is being finalized in collaboration with Douglas ESD, with the region expected to be among the later adopters.

There are unique challenges related to the region's size and geography, including long travel distances—up to 7 hours one way without accounting for weather, wildfires, or road hazards like cattle, and a large number of providers to serve. These factors have been elevated at the state level, emphasizing the need for ongoing funding and capacity to expand services. Listening sessions have gathered valuable regional feedback, and updates will be shared as the implementation process progresses.

Partner Updates

Klamath Family Head Start – Melinda Gomez – Klamath Family Head Start is accepting applications and preparing to do an initial selection the first week of June. This is the final week for the three and a half hour classes and there are two more weeks of class for our duration (full day) students. Early Head Start (EHS) runs through the Summer.

Take Root Parenting Connection – Laura Barajas – Take Root has rescheduled the Potty Training workshop for June 6 at the Klamath County Library. Each family in attendance will receive a free potty seat. Other scheduled events include Fiesta Literacy, and a Nature Scavenger Hunt.

Care Connections and Education / Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) – Amber Singh – Spring term is winding down, with only June remaining. Most upcoming training for June will be virtual. The month of May included 24 hours of in-person training, which was especially rewarding. Many providers appreciated the opportunity to engage face-to-face.

Exciting news from Klamath Community College (KCC): 12 students will graduate from the Early Childhood Education program this spring. There is still ample future grant funding available, and registration is open for both summer and fall terms. Interested individuals can pursue a pathway, certificate, or Associate of Arts (AA) degree in Early Childhood Education. For referrals or more information, please contact Amber Singh.

Klamath County Library– David Lev – The Chemult and Gilchrist Libraries have been combined and relocated to Crescent, OR. The library is now located in the building with the big bear on the roof.

The Summer Reading Program begins on June 16, with events starting the following week. Half-sheet flyers for the main branch and South Suburban branch were shared in chat, and additional branch flyers are available on request. Most library branches offer events Tuesday through Thursday, featuring various performers for little kids, kids, teens, and adults. Teens can choose to participate in either the teen or adult Summer Reading programming. For the kids' Summer Reading program, each child can earn prizes for reaching daily milestones. After reading for 15 days, they get a book; after another 15 days, they get another book; and after 45 days, they receive a t-shirt. The adult program is Monopoly-themed with raffle tickets as prizes.

Next Meeting:

June 25, 2025, from 10 am to noon.