

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes

May 22, 2025 | 10:00 a.m.

In Attendance, Welcome, Approval of Minutes

Present: Shawn Massingale, Elise Hansen, Debi Groshong, Krystal Sanchez, Abby Drummond, Hannah Horvath, Karissa Bent, Dr. Bob Dannenhoffer, Kyle Riege, Colleen May-Weir, Heather Freilinger, Jen Reid

Staff Present: Gillian Wesenberg, Athena Wikstrom, Danielle Walker, Charlee Scheer

Debi Groshong motioned to approve the minutes from April. Abby Drummond provided a second. The motion carried with no opposition.

Public Health Update

Dr. Bob Danenhoffer-Douglas Public Health Network:

Dr. Bob Dannenhoffer provided a public health update, reporting that the flu season had been particularly harsh, while norovirus activity had been moderate but was improving. Pertussis remained a concern across Oregon, although Douglas County had seen a decrease in recent cases. Dr. Bob also noted ongoing concerns about the rising number of non-medical vaccine exemptions, which now account for approximately 10% of the student population. This trend increases the community's risk of potential measles or pertussis outbreaks. Fortunately, no measles cases have been reported locally or statewide so far.

Hub Update

Gillian Wesenberg & Athena Wikstrom-South-Central Early Learning Hub Update:

Gillian shared that the Cards for Connection training, led by Dr. Amy King, was highly successful, with participants praising its practical tools for strengthening family relationships. Shawn was able to provide input as a training participant and shared that she felt the training provided practical tools that will help herself and United Community Action Network (UCAN) staff connect with families.

Gillian also shared that the Kids in Transition (KITs) parent group, which focuses on rural areas, has been well received, and parents are enthusiastic about the support it provides.

Additionally, Dr. Dawn Bailey's recent preschool behavior and de-escalation training was also very well received, aligning closely with Pyramid Model practices and offering educators helpful strategies.

Gillian presented an overview of Oregon's economic forecast, noting significant financial uncertainty due to federal budget cuts, tariffs, and reduced projected growth. Oregon is expected to collect \$755.7 million less than previously estimated, leaving lawmakers with a minimal amount of new funding to allocate. As a result, the group emphasized the importance of advocacy, encouraging early learning supporters to contact legislators to protect and expand essential programs.

Athena provided updates on Community UPLIFT and Preschool Promise. Community UPLIFT continues to connect families with local resources, using motivational interviewing to support family engagement. Additionally, Hub team member Ronda is currently training to become a certified Community Health Worker, which will enhance her skills and capacity.

Preschool Promise is now accepting applications for both the current and upcoming school years, and Days Creek Charter School is preparing for its first full year participating in the program. Athena also highlighted a regional effort to promote early enrollment in preschool and kindergarten to reduce the risk of families being waitlisted at the start of the school year.

Letter to Legislators-Review

Shawn Massingale, United Community Action Network (UCAN) Early Head Start/Head Start:

Shawn shared that she and Karissa worked on drafting the letter that was discussed at our last meeting to send to legislators on behalf of this professional advisory committee. Gillian and Athena also reviewed the letter. Shawn noted she would like to thank Heather Freiling and her team for taking the letter to Washington, D.C., a few weeks ago. Heather shared the first draft with legislators there, with permission from Julie Hurley, who oversees the Early Learning Department at the ESD.

The initial draft has already been shared with two legislators, and Shawn will be sending it to the remaining state legislators in our county today or tomorrow. The letter encourages legislators to increase funding for Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) due to the extensive waitlist. Shawn noted that currently, over 100 people are waitlisted, highlighting the urgent need for additional support, especially given local childcare closures. Shawn discussed the challenges families face while on these waitlists, noting that without access to care, families are forced to make difficult decisions, sometimes placing children in less ideal situations. As a childcare desert, our area has a high demand for care, and many families living in poverty cannot afford it without the ERDC subsidy. Shawn also addressed concerns about the unintended financial consequences of the "Every Child Belongs" suspension and expulsion law, expressing doubts that the planned consultation method with one consultant for the whole region will provide adequate support to childcare providers managing children with significant behavioral challenges. Based on recent updates from the Child Care Division, the consultation process may not offer practical, actionable support and seems underfunded. Shawn raised concerns about provider burnout, safety risks, liability issues, and the potential for unintentional profiling of children during intake processes. This could result in children with higher needs not being accepted into care and missing early identification opportunities before kindergarten.

The Douglas Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) emphasized the need for more accessible and affordable mental health supports, recognizing that while some bills are in process, they are unlikely to meet the immediate need before the new law begins rolling out this summer, with full implementation scheduled for January 2026. Finally, Shawn shared that the letter urges legislators to fund initiatives supporting the early childhood workforce, particularly in making training on managing challenging behaviors more available and affordable. Although our local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) and Hub are doing excellent work in providing training, a statewide shortage of challenging behavior trainings persists. Even highly trained Head Start teachers are struggling with the complexity of today's behavioral challenges. Shawn noted that the letter concludes with gratitude for the legislators' time and consideration and was signed by the committee. Shawn welcomed any questions, concerns, or thoughts regarding the letter before it was officially sent.

The committee expressed thanks for the work done to generate this letter, and no further feedback was provided.

Every Child Belongs Update

Shawn Massingale, United Community Action Network (UCAN) Early Head Start/Head Start:

The committee discussed the Every Child Belongs (ECB) initiative, focusing on the challenges and opportunities in its implementation. Heather shared that she, Gillian, and Athena have been working closely to plan what ECB will look like in their region, especially given the limited resources currently available. Heather recounted attending the Child Care Aware Conference, where she learned about California's approach to engaging unlicensed family childcare providers. She found California's incentive-based model particularly interesting and suggested that similar strategies could be considered for Oregon in the future. Heather acknowledged that while the current ECB pilot has engaged some family childcare providers, widespread participation remains difficult, partly because providers are often hesitant to have outside professionals enter their home environments.

Gillian added that she and Athena recently attended a Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) information session at Brasada Ranch. It became apparent that the state is still working to develop the ECB framework fully. While there is a clear intention to provide support, the program currently lacks meaningful enforcement mechanisms, often referred to as "teeth." Gillian emphasized that with only enough funding to support one full-time employee (FTE) to cover the extensive Douglas, Klamath, and Lake County region, it will

be challenging to deliver consistent, high-quality support. She and the team continue to advocate for creative solutions while encouraging the state to pursue additional funding.

Athena provided context on ECB, explaining that it is the new name for the former Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program. The legislation, which will take effect in July 2026, prohibits childcare providers from suspending or expelling children for behavioral reasons, except in cases of administrative issues such as non-payment. Athena noted that although a recent bill sought to add enforcement measures, it did not pass. As it stands, if a provider suspends or expels a child, they may receive technical assistance or coaching, but there are no formal consequences. The state is in the process of developing ECB Connects, a referral system for providers seeking consultation when a child is at risk of being suspended or expelled. The region will only have one full-time consultant to manage this work, creating significant capacity challenges.

Karissa, a member of the ECB advisory committee, expressed her concerns about the program's sustainability and practicality. She pointed out the irony that while the state expects providers to supply success data to justify future funding, providers are not currently resourced to deliver services at scale. Karissa recommended creating monthly feedback meetings with CCR&R to provide touchpoints for providers and alleviate the burden on the single full-time employee (FTE). She also emphasized the importance of licensing staff recognizing and encouraging providers rather than focusing solely on regulation. Karissa shared that when licensing staff visits, the experience can feel adversarial, even when relationships are generally positive. Providers often hesitate to ask questions, fearing they might inadvertently expose themselves to regulatory issues.

Dr. Bob expressed his concern that the approach of eliminating the personal connection between licensing staff and providers was counterproductive. He pointed out that in other regulatory environments, such as public health, inspectors work collaboratively with businesses to address issues and ensure continued operation. Karissa agreed, emphasizing that providers need support and encouragement, not just oversight. She added that as a center director, she feels unsupported by the state and often hears the dismissive response, "running centers is hard," when raising concerns.

Shawn supported Karissa's comments, noting that each licenser approaches their work differently. While some are supportive and approachable, others focus primarily on finding faults. Shawn emphasized the need for consistency and a more strength-based approach. Heather added that many regulations feel open to interpretation, which further complicates communication and trust between providers and licensing staff.

Heather confirmed that Summer Swan, who has been providing behavioral health consultation in Douglas County, will likely continue her work under ECB. Although the ECB model differs from Summer's current role, efforts are being made to extend her contract and maintain continuity of service. Heather noted that Summer's work has always involved collecting feedback from providers, which she hopes will continue under ECB. However, there is some uncertainty about whether the state will prioritize provider feedback in future evaluations of the program.

The group discussed the possibility of having both Summer Swan and the new ECB consultant working concurrently in the community, which could help prevent service gaps. Heather also clarified that although the state had previously considered using classroom cameras, known as "owls," to support remote consultations, this is no longer being pursued. If video support is used in the future, it will be at the provider's discretion and not mandated. The program's design still prioritizes in-person classroom visits as the primary method of support.

Athena shared that Douglas ESD has been recommended to continue leading the ECB implementation in the region, with Heather's team taking on a larger role moving forward. Participation in ECB will remain voluntary for providers at this time.

Abby raised an important question about whether ECB includes any family support services when a child's behavior significantly disrupts the classroom. Unfortunately, the group confirmed that there is currently no direct support planned for families in these situations, which was widely seen as a significant gap in the model. Shawn and others emphasized that this is a key advocacy point moving forward, as the lack of family engagement undermines the initiative's potential success.

The group collectively agreed that supporting the whole child requires community-wide, wraparound services that include families, not just providers. Shawn encouraged those interested in continuing this advocacy to attend an upcoming virtual town hall hosted by Representative Chris Boice. Gillian added that Deanna Hawkins-Child had recently provided public testimony at the Ways and Means Roadshow, highlighting early childhood issues, including those related to the ECB initiative.

The discussion concluded with an agreement that while the ECB's goals are well-intentioned, the program, in its current form, lacks adequate support structures, especially for families, and fails to foster collaborative relationships between licensing staff and providers. The group emphasized the need for continued advocacy, stronger provider support, and meaningful family engagement as the program evolves.

Child Care Resource & Referral Update

Heather Freiling-Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R):

Heather provided an update on recent activities and challenges within the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) network, beginning with the closure of Roseburg Professional Childcare's Walnut Street location. Families were notified on short notice, with only about eight working days to make alternate arrangements. This closure is expected to displace approximately 70 children, leading to an urgent need for childcare placements in the area.

In response, Heather's team quickly developed and distributed a list of local childcare providers with recently confirmed openings, segmented by age group, to help families identify suitable options. The list was delivered directly to Roseburg Professional Childcare for distribution to the families. Heather noted that while the state maintains the 211 referral system, the urgency of the situation required direct outreach and updated information beyond what 211 could immediately provide. The lists were based on recent spring 2025 data, though Heather reminded everyone that childcare openings could shift rapidly due to the nature of the field.

Additionally, CCR&R created informational sheets to help families understand the licensing requirements and qualifications of different types of childcare providers, aiming to dispel common misconceptions about these providers. For example, many families mistakenly believe that only center-based care provides certified education and first aid/CPR training, but licensed family childcare providers also meet these standards. The goal is to help families feel more comfortable considering all types of care that could meet their needs.

Heather emphasized that while some displaced families may prefer center-based care, options remain limited, and many may need to consider family childcare programs that can provide the flexibility and support they require. CCR&R is also actively working to support displaced childcare staff by identifying employment opportunities within local centers and programs that are currently hiring or expect to hire soon. Several staff from Roseburg Professional Childcare have already begun interviewing at other locations.

On a positive note, Heather shared that a new center, Quiet Wonders, is scheduled to open soon on Diamond Lake Boulevard. The center's open house is planned for Saturday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, and the owner is awaiting final licensing approval. Quiet Wonders will offer approximately 50 new childcare slots, which provides some hope for families seeking care. However, its opening timeline does not directly align with the immediate needs resulting from the recent closure.

Heather reflected on lessons learned from previous extensive childcare closures, such as Wellspring, which allowed the CCR&R team to act swiftly in this situation. She expressed hope that these coordinated efforts would lead to positive outcomes for both families and displaced childcare workers.

In a follow-up discussion, Athena inquired about the current availability of childcare spots across Douglas County, particularly in light of the significant childcare desert, which is especially pronounced for infants and toddlers. Heather confirmed that, according to their most recent list, approximately 133 childcare openings remain; however, some are located in more rural areas, which may not be ideal for all families. Heather emphasized that families often prefer center-based care but may need to reconsider their preferences or commute distances to secure placements.

Heather advised that families should join all relevant waitlists as soon as possible, even if wait times seem long, and encouraged them to check in periodically to maintain their position on these lists. She clarified that she had been misquoted in a recent media article, which incorrectly suggested she recommended weekly follow-ups; instead, she advised periodic check-ins to express continued interest. She also emphasized that parents should be flexible with their schedules and willing to adjust their expectations to better align with the realities of local childcare availability.

Karissa shared that within the last 48 hours, her program's waitlist had grown by approximately 25 families, adding to the already substantial wait of 2.5 to 3 years. She echoed Heather's advice that families should accept whatever openings are available, as doing so may offer them priority for additional days or slots as more space opens. Karissa also noted that her center is currently seeking a floater position and may hire for further roles in the fall. She encouraged anyone interested to apply.

Shawn added that Head Start is also planning to hire for the fall and confirmed that the Walnut Street site is the only Roseburg Professional Childcare location that will be closed while the county site remains open. She clarified that despite recent rumors, Head Start is only closing for the summer, not permanently.

Heather also shared updates on several CCR&R initiatives. The Wellness Alliance continues to grow, now offering wellness resources and activities to support the mental health and resilience of childcare providers. She highlighted the recent Spring Fling event featuring Lisa Murphy, which was a resounding success, drawing more than double the typical number of participants. Held at the Jacoby Auditorium, the event offered a highly engaging day of professional development. Lisa Murphy challenged many common misconceptions about early childhood practices and provided strategies that resonated deeply with attendees. Thrive Umpqua started the day with a well-received wellness activity, contributing to a positive and energetic atmosphere. Shawn, who attended the event along with many of her staff, praised Lisa Murphy's dynamic and practical approach. She noted that Lisa's strong advocacy for sensory play and true creative art left a lasting impression. Shawn also appreciated that the event attracted a wide range of participants, including public school teachers, Preschool Promise providers, and behavioral health consultants like Summer Swan. She expressed interest in acquiring more copies of the activity books distributed at the event, which were curated and published by CCR&R staff member Anna Eason. Heather confirmed that the books are a valuable resource and will be made more broadly available.

Heather further reported that the Strong Start program continues to support new early childhood educators by offering foundational training and peer learning opportunities. The program, now entering its second year, provides participants with two one-hour trainings per month, regular visits from CCR&R staff, and consistent, context-specific support. Despite a slightly leaner summer staffing model, CCR&R will continue offering a range of training and support opportunities throughout the season. The CCR&R team remains committed to supporting families, providers, and the broader early learning community in the face of ongoing childcare challenges.

Partner Updates

Head Start - Shawn provided the Head Start update, noting that classes will begin closing on June 4th, with the full-day class concluding on June 18th. Head Start will resume classes on September 2nd, which is one week earlier than their typical start date. Shawn emphasized that the "Littles" (infants and toddlers) will continue receiving services throughout the summer. Enrollment for the 2025-2026 school year is already at approximately 75% capacity, though it is expected that families moving to different locations and other changes will create some additional openings before September. Shawn encouraged anyone aware of families seeking care to have them contact Head Start to complete an intake and join the waitlist, even if they believe they may exceed income guidelines. Specific categories, including families experiencing homelessness, families doubling up with others, and foster children, are categorically eligible for prioritized placement. Additionally, recruitment continues for Glide Preschool Promise, which still has openings for the coming school year. Shawn reminded everyone to continue advocating for early learning with legislators. She shared that Umpqua Community Action Network (UCAN) has a new interim Executive Director, Jordan Jungwirth, following the retirement of Shawn Pritchard.

Cobb Street- Karissa shared updates from Cobb Street, reporting that their new \$40,000 playground fence, funded by a fall fundraiser, has been completed. Cobb Street is preparing for its pre-K graduation, which has generated significant interest, with over 130 attendees expected to attend. Karissa also noted she will be participating in the Oregon Community Foundation's panel discussion on June 10th and plans to present the group's advocacy letter during the meeting.

Family Relief Nursery- Kyle and Hannah provided updates from North Douglas. Both classes are currently at full capacity and are operating four days a week. Outreach and family enrollments are ongoing. North Douglas is hosting several upcoming community events, including the Kids Heritage Fair in Cottage Grove, in collaboration with Bohemia Mining Days. Additionally, there will be a summer carnival on June 14th and a fire safety event featuring local firefighters who will engage children with hands-on demonstrations, as well as a family BBQ. Hannah requested assistance in identifying diaper resources, as their regular diaper supplier's funding has ended. Colleen suggested contacting Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices, food pantries, Salvation Army, and Fish for potential diaper supplies.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) - Colleen provided further WIC updates, reminding participants to refer pregnant individuals and families with children aged 0 to 5 to WIC for nutritional support. She noted that Healthy Families is currently full, but referrals are still encouraged, as families may be redirected to other services such as Early Head Start or Family Connects Oregon. Family Connects offers up to three free nurse home visits starting when the baby is around three weeks old, regardless of insurance type. Colleen shared that WIC is working on expanding insurance partnerships and that the food bank's summer "Pouring Generosity" campaign is kicking off, now including coffee shops in addition to wineries and breweries. Locations and updates are available on the UCAN Food Bank Facebook page.

Elise added that Farm Direct vouchers will be distributed at local farmers' markets and during WIC appointments, though the supply has been reduced this year due to low redemption rates last season. Colleen stressed the importance of redeeming these vouchers to maintain funding levels, as the program significantly benefits both families and local farmers. Food Hero will also be present at the Umpqua Valley and Canyonville farmers markets this summer, offering children a \$3 voucher for fresh produce as part of their programming.

Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) - Abby shared that ODHS is preparing to relaunch its First Thursday summer series, starting in June, which will be held outdoors to accommodate more partners and attendees. A special back-to-school event is planned for August (held on the second Thursday due to the Douglas County Fair) and will feature gift cards for shoes, haircut vouchers, and special raffles for children and incoming high school seniors. Abby encouraged donations and partner participation for the August event, mentioning that they are coordinating with the ADAPT Mobile Clinic to offer free sports physicals on-site. Additional activities will include backpack giveaways and the distribution of school supplies to support students returning to school.

South-Central Early Learning Hub- Athena shared additional low-cost and free summer activities compiled by Charlee and the Hub team. These include free bowling for kids (families pay for shoes), free access to Safari Village, summer Movies in the Park featuring new films like Moana 2 and Mufasa, Music on the Half Shell, Roseburg Public Library programs, Riverbend Live concerts, free admission for children under 12 at the Douglas County Fair, discounted entry at the Douglas County Museum, and affordable skating and swimming opportunities throughout the county.

Before closing, Shawn reminded everyone to share any additional summer resources with the group. The meeting concluded with a reminder of the next meeting date, scheduled for June 26th.

Next Meeting Date

June 26, 2025, from 10:00 am-12:00 pm