REGIONAL GOVERNANCE COUNCIL

Meeting Notes

June 4, 2025 | 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Attendance

Steve Schenewerk
Jennifer Jackson
Dr. Peg Miller, MC, WVMC
Brie Neeley
Michael Carter
David Elliott
Dena Haudenshild
Julie Matthews
Ashley Wells
Lane Stratton
Heidi McGowan
Analicia Nicholson
Julie Hurley
Gillian Wesenberg
Heather Freilinger
Vanessa Pingleton
Athena Wikstrom
Danielle Walker

For ease of member access, Regional Governance Council (RGC) meetings will continue to be held virtually unless otherwise notified.

Welcome and Introductions

Chair, Steve Schenewerk, welcomed members of the Regional Governance Council (RGC) and individuals introduced themselves.

Members of the Regional Governance Council reviewed March 2025 minutes. Michael Carter motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Steve seconded the motion. No further discussion. Motion carried.

Early Learning Council Update – Dr. Peg Miller, MC, WVMC

Dr. Peg Miller, a pediatrician from McMinnville with over 30 years of experience in primary care and hospital-based pediatrics, joined the Regional Governance Council to provide an update on the Early Learning Council (ELC). In addition to her medical background, Dr. Miller has experience in child abuse work, serves on the local Yamhill County Early Learning Hub, which is unique in having a Coordinated Care Organization as its backbone organization, and Dr. Miller is a former chair of the local Head Start board. She has served on the ELC since 2019 and currently co-chairs the Council's Home Visiting Systems Committee, the ELC's only standing committee.

The Governor appoints members to the ELC, and there is currently one vacancy in the council. Members represent urban and rural communities and are employed in various professional disciplines and multiple state agencies. The Council's mission is to lead cross-sector collaboration between health, education, housing, human services, and higher education to strengthen Oregon's early childhood system. The Council oversees implementation of Raise Up Oregon (RUO): A Statewide Early Childhood System Plan 2024-2028. RUO is a statewide strategic plan that focuses on actions state agencies can take in partnership with families, communities, and the private sector to build a comprehensive early childhood system plan. The bold vision of RUO is that all of Oregon's young children, prenatal to age five, experience an early start that results in positive health, education, and life outcomes regardless of zip code, race, and family income. The plan has three overarching system goals:

- System Goal 1: The early childhood system is equitable: integrated, accessible, inclusive, anti-racist, and family-centered.
- System Goal 2: All families with young children are supported to ensure their well-being.
- System Goal 3: All children are thriving in early childhood and beyond.

Early Learning Hubs play a central role in achieving these goals, especially in advancing cross-sector coordination. Hubs are specifically called out in Objective 3: Early Learning Hubs are leveraged and resourced to advance regional early childhood systems that are equitable, integrated, accessible, inclusive, and family-centered. Hubs, however, are

linked and mentioned throughout RUO. There are 16 Early Learning Hubs across Oregon, and the South-Central Early Learning Hub covers a vast geographic area.

The ELC has set several priorities for 2025, including home visiting, housing, behavioral health, education (child care and early learning), and Early Learning Hubs. The Council holds an annual retreat; last year, it took place in Ashland in October.

The Early Learning Hub ruleset, unchanged since 2014, is being updated in two phases. The upcoming yearly retreat will be held in June. The focus of the June retreat is reviewing and finalizing phase one's rule updates. Rules included in phase one are the purpose and scope of Hubs, Hub definitions, Hub functions, and administration of Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation (KPI). The ELC will also be reviewing newly proposed phase two rules that address Hub administration, Hub backbone entity structure, Hub Governance Structure, Hub Director role, as well as data collection and reporting. Future rulemaking will be phased in more slowly.

The public can review ELC materials for rulesets on the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) website (www.oregon.gov/DELC) or by emailing Gabriela Hernandez at Gabriela.hernandez@delc.oregon.gov. The public comment period for Hub rules closed at the end of May.

Following Dr. Miller's update, Steve Schenewerk shared that he was looking forward to the upcoming rules on Hub structure. Steve noted that the South-Central Early Learning Hub coordinates with six Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs), three Education Service Districts (ESDs), three counties, two federally recognized Tribes, and 20 school districts, all of which operate differently. This complexity can make relationships confusing and he expressed hope that the updated rules would bring greater clarity and direction.

Dr. Miller agreed and emphasized that rules are not intended to dictate local priorities, but to set structural guidance that recognizes each Hub and community operates differently.

Heather Freilinger thanked Dr. Miller for her advocacy around workforce development, scholarships, and community college navigator roles. Klamath Community College (KCC) has 48 students enrolled in Early Childhood Education (ECE) pathways, 12 graduating with an ECE associate's degrees and six earning one-year certificates, many from a Spanish-language cohort. Umpqua Community College (UCC) in Douglas County has 55 students enrolled in ECE pathways, with eight graduates and two earning one-year certificates. Heather noted that ECE workforce investments significantly strengthen the child care workforce and site quality. Heather highlighted Child Care Resource and Referral's (CCR&R) role in meeting Raise Up Oregon goals, particularly Objectives 14 and 15. She then asked Dr. Miller about the future of Every Child Belongs.

Dr. Miller expressed personal concern regarding Every Child Belongs, noting that special needs children and children of color are particularly at risk. While she believes the initiative's intent is positive, she worries about whether the necessary personnel and infrastructure will be ready in time. She emphasized this was her personal view, not an official ELC stance.

Steve then raised a longstanding request for improved communication among the 16 regional Hub Governance chairs. He suggested an annual virtual meeting with Hub Governance chairs, ELC, and DELC representatives to share effective practices and better manage regional governance councils. Dr. Miller agreed, stating that Hubs could benefit from sharing effective strategies.

Gillian offered kudos to Nancy Hauth, who was able to visit Douglas County. Gillian shared highlights from the recent visits to Preschool Promise sites, including Wildflower Child Care and Preschool in Myrtle Creek, where an in-home child care provider is renovating a former church into a child care center, and Yimisa Preschool, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians' preschool center. Gillian expressed hope to host visits to the Klamath Tribes and advocated for Hub Managers to have opportunities to visit Preschool Promise sites across their regions. She welcomed any ELC member to visit as well. Gillian also shared about the South-Central Early Learning Hub's strong partnerships with Head Start, with most slots in both programs across the region nearly full year-round.

Julie Hurley commended the ELC's cross-sector work. She asked Dr. Miller for advice on how to connect with the healthcare community and help providers understand the importance of early learning programs, particularly how Dr. Miller, as a physician, became so deeply involved.

Dr. Miller acknowledged the challenge, noting that physicians have limited time during well visits. She explained that frequent changes in leadership and program names can also create barriers. She recommended working closely with Public Health, sharing that her clinic once had an embedded public health nurse, and encouraging Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) funding for social workers or behavioral health staff in clinics. Even if the physician is not aware of some programs or initiatives, other clinic staff may know where to direct families for the services they need. Dr. Miller stressed, however, that physicians' workloads remain heavy, making consistent engagement difficult.

Julie noted that Gillian has been building Community Health Worker (CHW) roles in the region but acknowledged the complexity of navigating relationships and sector-specific requirements across multiple programs.

Dr. Miller closed by reiterating that workforce development, affordable child care, and home visiting remain the most pressing challenges for the ELC in the year ahead.

South-Central Early Learning Hub Update

Heidi opened with a reminder that the Hub's governance structure, developed early in its formation, ensures representation from the chairs in Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties. Leadership roles are reviewed periodically, and Steve, Michael, and Dena have agreed to continue as Regional Governance Council chairs for another term. Regional Governance Council representatives will be formally communicated to the Douglas ESD Board for approval. Gillian added that Douglas ESD, as the backbone organization, maintains the terms of the Regional Governance Council to complete the governance cycle.

Gillian then provided an update on the President's budget. On May 30, the President released his proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget, which will fund the government beginning October 1, 2025. According to the White House, the proposal increases defense spending by 13% and Department of Homeland Security funding by nearly 65%, while cutting non-defense spending by $163 billion (22.6%). Several programs supporting children and families are targeted for reductions or elimination, including Head Start, the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Preschool Development Grants (PDG), Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), Title I, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The proposal then moves to Congress, where the House and Senate will each develop their own appropriations bills. The process will require compromise, particularly in the Senate, where 60 votes are needed to pass the budget.

At the state level, Gillian reported that the Ways & Means Committee of the Legislature is starting to make rapid decisions about the state agency budget. Ways & Means Education Subcommittee is scheduled to vote on the Higher Education budget (Senate Bill 5525) on Tuesday, June 2. They will then move to the Department of Early Learning & Care budget (Senate Bill 5514). Timing for the Oregon Health Authority budget (House Bill 5025) has not been released.

Gillian also highlighted the challenge of block grant funding, noting that at the federal level, the local impact can be difficult for Congress to see, as programs are lumped together rather than evaluated individually.

Julie expressed concern that cuts to Preschool Promise could impact Early Intervention / Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) programs, as well as inclusion efforts, stressing the importance of effective communication so that EI/ECSE programs can prepare for potential program increases. Gillian added that an EI/ECSE bill is on its way to the Governor to explore what EI/ECSE programs need. The bill, however, will not address immediate funding issues.

Gillian reported that the Family Governance Advisory Committee's Little Free Libraries are now in place in Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties. She recently visited the Pioneer Park location in Canyonville with Nancy and was pleased to see it in use. Brie added that the Sutherlin Little Free Library has been moved to Main Street, now located at Sutherlin Drug. Heidi thanked Brie and Ashley for their leadership on the Family Governance Advisory Committee throughout the year, calling it a gift to witness the incredible work they are doing.

Every Child Belongs

Every Child Belongs (ECB), formerly known as Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, is the Department of Early Learning and Care's (DELC) response to the new statute that prohibits the suspension or expulsion of children from child care facilities starting July 1, 2026, regardless of how the care is funded. Programs like Preschool Promise

and Head Start already incorporate this practice and do not suspend or expel children from their programs. DELC, together with the Oregon Infant Mental Health Association (ORIMHA), is leading the ECB efforts statewide.

Within the South-Central Early Learning Hub region, the Hub is currently engaged in the planning phase of the ECB grant. Once planning is complete, Douglas Education Service District (ESD) will begin implementation. Heidi shared that the planning team at Douglas ESD is in the process of submitting required documentation to the state to secure funding for the implementation phase. They anticipate wrapping up the planning phase soon. Gillian expressed appreciation for committee members David Elliott and Jennifer Jackson for their active participation and contributions in the ECB process this far.

Heather explained the transition underway as ECB moves from planning to implementation. She and her colleagues, Athena and Gillian, have been meeting with partner organizations to refine the implementation plan based on insights from recent meetings. Heather detailed that the ECB project will soon be housed under CCRR, which already operates a behavioral health consultation program in Douglas County. This existing infrastructure provides a strong foundation for the work ahead.

Heather noted the challenge of providing support across three counties with only one full-time equivalent (FTE) staff position allocated. To maximize impact, the team is exploring innovative strategies and tools to best support child care programs. Another key focus is facilitating regional conversations among partners to clarify the available services and supports for families and child care providers. Heather emphasized the importance of clear communication to avoid confusion or duplication, noting that there can be significant overlap.

The goal is to establish a streamlined system that allows providers to quickly connect with the right support person without being passed around multiple contacts. Heather underscored the value of ensuring timely access to mental health and other supports that enhance both provider wellbeing and child outcomes.

Gillian added that diverse needs and differences across the region's counties add complexity to planning and service delivery.

Julie contributed by sharing ongoing challenges in understanding the volume of needs across the counties. She also mentioned that The Ford Family Foundation (TFFF) funded program in Douglas County is continuing its work while regional plans are finalized. Data and insights from the Portland State University (PSU) evaluation team are helping to inform the decision-making process for ECB.

Heather described a wellness program offered by CCR&R to child care providers who may not have access to benefits, which includes mental health services through Canopy. The wellness program supports staff wellness, recognizing that healthy providers can better serve children. So far, 122 participants representing 21 programs across the region have engaged in wellness curriculum and webinars. The team continues to encourage participation and seeks additional thought partners to expand support.

Preschool Promise

Athena provided an update on enrollment activities for the 2025–2026 school year, highlighting developments in Lake County. The Klamath Family Head Start (KFHS) Lakeview site determined that families would be better served by expanding Early Head Start slots rather than continuing with Preschool Promise, and therefore discontinued contracting with the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) for Preschool Promise. As a result, KFHS Preschool Promise slots were transferred to Honker Preschool. These changes increase child care and preschool availability in the community by eight children.

Dr. Michael Carter and Honker Preschool are currently renovating classroom space within Honker Preschool to accommodate serving additional children. The renovations will create three classrooms with smaller class sizes and a lower child-to-teacher ratio, improving the quality of care and instruction. Enrollment efforts for these spaces are underway, accompanied by an advertising campaign spanning the region to encourage families to apply.

Athena emphasized ongoing collaboration with K-12 partners and publicly funded programs, focusing on encouraging families to enroll for both preschool opportunities and kindergarten. Schools have reported that families sometimes send children to kindergarten without registering, which presents challenges on the first day of school.

Currently, there are two open Preschool Promise slots—one at Days Creek and another at Yoncalla. However, with the school year ending tomorrow, it is unlikely these openings will be filled this year. Efforts continue to ensure that children are placed appropriately for the next school year, including ensuring that all schools have updated enrollment information available on their websites.

Finally, Athena shared that the Hub is working with Days Creek to create a virtual tour of the site, which will assist families in learning about the program and facilities remotely.

Home Visiting Systems Coordination and Community UPLiFT

Vanessa provided an update on the Home Visiting Systems Coordination (HVSC) program, which is transitioning from grant management under The Ford Family Foundation (TFFF) to the Center for Coordinating Oregon Home Visiting Systems (CCOHVS) housed at Portland State University (PSU). This transition will take effect on July 1, with the final grant report to TFFF due in August 2025. Vanessa noted that while the funding source is changing, reporting requirements will remain largely the same. The transition has proceeded smoothly, and TFFF is expected to continue supporting the program, although not through a formal grant.

In April, HVSC hosted a regional gathering in White City, attended by 25 participants. The meeting focused on reflecting on program successes since 2016, reviewing system data, distributing system surveys, aligning efforts with Raise Up Oregon (RUO), and engaging in action planning.

Vanessa shared that retraining efforts are underway for community partners within the system to ensure consistent collaboration. External Communication is working on creating a public service announcement (PSA) to highlight the benefits of home visiting externally. Internal Communication is working to improve communication with community partners and incorporate memoranda of understanding (MOUs) into partner policies. Professional development remains a priority, with ongoing activities including a regional trauma summit and Connect, Share, and Care initiatives focusing on trauma, domestic violence, home visiting safety, and self-care.

Vanessa highlighted the launch of the Parent Leadership Committee, which held its first official meeting in May. The hybrid regional meeting was attended by 12 parents representing each county in the region. The group is shaping the committee's goals and structure, with members reporting that they feel welcomed and appreciate the shared leadership model. This committee operates in partnership with Take Root, UCAN Healthy Families, and the Douglas County System of Care, with aspirations to involve the Klamath System of Care and Douglas Family Connects in the future. Parent feedback has been positive.

Danielle provided an update on Community UPLiFT, noting the recent additions of new partners: Families Engaging and Thriving Together (FEATT) last quarter and the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians Public Health this quarter, both of which are now receiving Community UPLiFT referrals. From April 2025 to the present, a total of 38 referrals have been received, with 13 in Douglas County and 25 in Klamath County. This quarter, fewer community events have taken place in Douglas County, which could contribute to a lower number of Community UPLiFT referrals.

Preschool Promise applications include an area for families to request a Community UPLiFT referral. With Preschool Promise Enrollment, the Hub anticipates an increase in Community UPLiFT referrals. Danielle also shared that Ronda is currently training to become a Community Health Worker (CHW).

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)

Heather Freilinger provided an update on Care Connections & Education, the South-Central regional CCR&R's current activities and initiatives across Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties. CCR&R recently launched a new advertising campaign that includes promotions in movie theaters throughout Douglas and Klamath Counties, as well as radio spots in Lake County. The Klamath Falls office currently supports families and providers with two Preschool Promise coaches, a quality improvement specialist, and navigators from Klamath Community College (KCC).

Spring Fling conferences in Douglas and Klamath Counties, hosted by CCR&R, saw strong attendance and received positive feedback. Although the Klamath Falls conference date had to be rescheduled due to weather, attendees expressed that the sessions—led by speakers such as Lisa Murphy—were impactful, emphasizing the importance of supporting all children and meeting them where they are.

Heather highlighted ongoing support for new and emerging child care programs, noting growth particularly in Douglas County, where five new sites have opened recently. However, CCR&R also faced challenges when the region's second-largest child care site closed earlier in the month, prompting swift efforts to connect affected families with available slots elsewhere. CCR&R continues to promote the 211 hotline as a valuable resource for families seeking child care.

Heather addressed the evolving nature of the Employment-Related Day Care (ERDC) subsidy program, which remains a critical support for families. Advocacy and promotion of ERDC continue to be priorities.

A significant theme Heather emphasized was the ongoing challenge of sustaining child care programs. Child care settings often experience fluctuations tied to grant funding cycles or business partnerships, which can impact their ability to provide consistent, high-quality services. This instability affects workforce retention and enrollment patterns, leading to stress for providers striving to maintain full enrollment while managing operational realities. Heather framed these challenges as community-wide issues that require collective support and collaborative approaches, noting that child care is a vital pillar for community growth and wellbeing.

Analicia commended Heather and her team for their dedicated response during the recent closure of a major child care center, acknowledging the disruption this caused for providers, children, and families. She noted that while larger education systems may absorb such disruptions more easily, small child care providers face greater strain and financial risk, underscoring the importance of stable funding.

Heather shared that the affected center employed 15 staff members, and CCR&R invested significant effort to connect these employees with other opportunities. Many families had previously experienced similar disruptions when another provider closed a couple years ago, demonstrating the community's resilience and strength.

To recognize the hard work of providers, CCR&R celebrated Provider Appreciation Day on May 9. The team ran advertising campaigns and distributed gifts and additional resources to child care providers across the region.

Partner Updates

Cascade Health Alliance (CHA) - David Elliott, representing Cascade Health Alliance (CHA), reported significant success regarding the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) children's performance measure for Klamath County. CHA had requested eight exceptions to the calculated performance requirements, four of which needed to be approved to meet the benchmark. The state approved all eight, allowing CHA to well surpass the Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) incentive measure. The ODHS children’s performance measure for CCOs carries a high-performance target of approximately 93%. It requires that any child entering the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) custody receives a physical assessment through primary care, a dental assessment (if over the age of one), and a mental health assessment (if over the age of three), all within 60 days. David noted the logistical challenges in meeting these timelines, given the availability of appointments, cancellations, and capacity constraints in rural communities.

Surpassing the ODHS children’s performance measure is a substantial accomplishment, but David emphasized a further impact: the state has decided to revise its specification documents for this measure in 2026. Nearly all the planned changes correspond directly to exceptions CHA has submitted over the past two years, which sought to improve the reasonableness and intent of the requirements. This alignment demonstrates that CHA's on-the-ground experience and advocacy are influencing statewide policy.

Feedback from a state policy analyst specifically thanked CHA for its thorough documentation and constructive input, which helped the state better understand operational realities and challenges. David framed this as a significant win not just for CHA and Klamath County's children, but for communities across Oregon.

Take Root Parenting Hub - Vanessa shared that Take Root classes are currently in session, with the schedule for the next term set to be distributed at the beginning of July.

Closing

With no additional business, the meeting adjourned
Next Meeting: September 10, 2025 at 11:00 am.