KLAMATH PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Notes

September 24, 2025 | 10:00 AM – Noon

Attendance

Dena Haudenshild	David Elliott	David Lev
Patricia Ortega	Holly Mancebo	Melinda Gomez
Kathleen Walker-Henderson	Mary Ruiz	Colleen May-Weir
Aralia Blackwater	Jessie McClung	Amber Singh
Karen Cole	Kay Ortega	Athena Wikstrom
Leslie Maxfield	Maurita Johnson	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 June 2025 minutes. Kay Ortega motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Kathleen Walker-Henderson seconded the motion. All members agreed, no further discussion. Motion passed.

South-Central Early Learning Hub Update

Athena shared that Gillian will not be joining the Klamath Professional Advisory Committee meeting, as she is currently on leave. Both Danielle and Athena are available to provide South-Central Early Learning Hub support.

The South-Central Early Learning Hub received a draft contract and is awaiting the final version from the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC). DELC has restructured the Hub contracting process to align with other state contracts for July through June fiscal biennium. This will result in two partial Hub contracts for the biennium. There has been limited communication from DELC around Hub funding, but the expectation is that funding will remain relatively the same. Most Hub funding comes from the state, with only limited federal sources. Federal funding remains uncertain in Oregon.

Athena highlighted the continued work around Little Free Libraries in Klamath County. Little Free Libraries have been made possible through a grant from the Regional Governance Council and are funded by Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation (KPI) and Early Literacy funds. There are five Little Free Libraries in Klamath County, which are in Merrill, Malin, Klamath Falls, Chiloquin, and Chemult. Books stocked in the libraries are available in English, Spanish, bilingual, Farsi, Tagalog, and Tribal languages. They also incorporate titles promoting diversity, social-emotional development, neurodivergence, potty training, and other early childhood themes. Suggestions for additional titles are welcomed.

Athena also provided an update on Gillian's participation in the Early Learning Council (ELC) Home Visiting Committee, which is the only standing committee under the ELC. Gillian brings a rural and frontier perspective to the group. She also emphasizes the importance of including Tribal voices in the work, as home visiting programs for Tribal communities may look different than models for other populations.

Danielle provided an update about Preschool Promise. Nic Nacs Quality Child Care decided not to continue Preschool Promise contracting. As a result, families who were enrolled at Nic Nacs either chose to remain at Nic Nacs without Preschool Promise or were successfully placed in other Preschool Promise programs. The Hub submitted a request to DELC to reallocate the nine Preschool Promise slots previously held by Nic Nacs in Klamath County. DELC advised that no decision about slot reallocation will be made until the state budget is finalized, which may be mid-September. There are a few openings at The YMCA of Klamath Falls, which are expected to be filled later this week. There are also openings at Gilchrist Preschool Promise.

Danielle shared updates about Community UPLiFT, which connects expecting families, families with children birth to 5, or up to 21 with special needs, to resources in the community. So far this quarter, Community Uplift has received over 100 referrals, which could be credited to community outreach and awareness.

Anyone can submit a referral to Community UPLiFT. Online referrals can be completed at http://www.community-uplift.com/ or via smart phone by texting the keyword "uplift2" for Klamath County to (541) 351- 3100. Community UPLiFT is open to anyone in the community who may need support or help connecting to resources. Community UPLiFT is not intended to replace existing referral systems but serves as an additional tool to help families who are at risk of falling through the cracks. If organizations are interested in learning more about how they can utilize Community UPLiFT or receive referrals, Danielle is available to provide presentations. For more information, contact Danielle at Danielle.walker@douglasesd.k12.or.us or by phone at (541) 880-4655.

Strategic Plan and Equity Lens Overview and Discussion

Equity Lens - Dena opened the discussion by noting that it had been a while since the group had revisited the region's Equity Lens, and with new members attending meetings, this is a good opportunity to reflect on its purpose and development.

Athena shared that the South-Central Early Learning Hub region covers nearly 20,000 square miles, making it the largest geographic Early Learning Hub in Oregon, though one of the smallest by population. Work leading towards the Equity Lens began in 2016 when the Early Learning Hub partnered with Capacity-Building Partnerships, a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) consulting group. The Equity Lens was co-created by Professional Advisory Committee members, Governance Councils, and the Regional Governance Council. The partnership focused on understanding what diversity and inclusion look like in rural Oregon, where equity considerations go beyond race and ethnicity, to also include differences in ability, culture, generational poverty, and geographic access.

A key question emerged in discussions with Capacity Building Partnerships. How can we ensure our decision-making processes promote equity and do not unintentionally create disadvantages, especially for already marginalized groups? Members of the Hub wanted a way to ensure these considerations were consistently applied in planning and implementation.

Due to unique rural and frontier challenges, local knowledge is critical because official data often suppresses small population groups for confidentiality or labels them as statistically insignificant, thus erasing visibility of certain populations. For example, those experiencing houselessness or children in resource care. The region utilized quantitative data and anecdotal knowledge to develop the Hub's Priority Populations, which include:

- Children/families living in areas of geographic isolation including experiencing poverty.
- Children who are experiencing displacement, including families experiencing homelessness, children in resource care, and children in kinship care.
- Children from African American / Black families, Hispanic / Latinx, including native Spanish speaking families.
- Children from Native American / Tribal families.
- Children who are experiencing physical or developmental disabilities or delays, including those with mental health concerns and / or trauma.
- Infants and children ages zero to three.

By 2019, the Equity Lens, a tool to prompt intentional reflection, was completed. The Equity Lens includes guiding questions for decision-makers to reflect on, a few questions are:

- What assumptions are we making?
- What are the intended outcomes, and what does success look like?
- Do the children and families affected have the resources to participate and succeed?
- How will we evaluate impact and adjust if needed?
- Who holds decision-making power and influence?

Decision-makers are encouraged to use the questions most relevant to a situation, rather than feeling they must use all of them. The Equity Lens has since been adopted by organizations inside and outside of the region, including Klamath Promise, which reflects the strength and impact of the local work.

Equity Lens Discussion - Dena encouraged everyone present to print and use the Equity Lens as a grounding tool to guide work. Applying the Equity Lens consistently can help drive deeper conversations and ensure that all stakeholders, especially those who are often overlooked, are considered. The Equity Lens represents a conscious effort not to be complacent.

Kathleen expressed concern about how demographic data often fails to reflect the true diversity and need within rural communities. This makes it difficult to communicate needs to grant funders, especially when funding is tied to race or ethnicity-based metrics. There is a disconnect between what funders see in data and what communities experience. Athena explained that this disconnect is one of the main reasons the region's Equity Lens intentionally expands beyond traditional race and ethnicity categories. The broader focus helps identify and reach those who are often underserved but may not show up in data.

David echoed the frustration around state-level reporting, which often limits demographic categories to race, ethnicity, age, and language. He pointed out that many critical equity factors, such as trauma, disability, or geographic barriers, are left out of these systems, making it difficult to fully capture and respond to the needs of historically underserved populations. He acknowledged the challenge in changing perspectives and systems but reaffirmed the importance of trying.

Strategic Plan - Athena began the South-Central Early Learning Hub's Strategic Plan review with an overview of the Statewide Early Childhood System Plan, Raise Up Oregon (RUO), which was originally released in 2019 and recently updated to Raise Up Oregon 2.0. The plan outlines how agencies, such as the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC), Health, Housing, Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), Tribes, and others are working in coordination to build an equitable, family-centered early childhood system. The Hub's current Strategic Plan was originally built from the earlier version of RUO, so while the structure of the Strategic Plan may not fully match Raise Up Oregon 2.0, the content and strategies remain aligned. Participants were encouraged to review the Strategic Plan and provide feedback. What still feels relevant? What may need to be updated or removed? Are the right partners still listed, especially considering staffing and leadership changes in programs?

Athena shared the Strategic Plan and highlighted several efforts that are still moving forward, including the creation of a Statewide Hub Director Association, community outreach at local events, and grants to Tribal partners for Early Literacy efforts. The Hub has also provided some family programs such as Kids in Transition to School (KITS) and continues to strengthen authentic family engagement through the Family Governance Advisory Committee. Authentic family engagement is defined as engagement activities for families with opportunities to provide meaningful input into decisions that directly affect them. Authentic Family Engagement goes beyond hosting events and creates spaces where families can influence planning in ways that reflect their lived experiences and priorities.

The Professional Advisory Committee will continue revisiting the Strategic Plan over the coming months, with opportunities for further reflection and opportunities to provide input to ensure the plan remains a relevant and responsive tool for regional collaboration.

Partner Updates

Take Root Parenting Connection – Laura Barajas – Laura shared information and a flyer for the Baby Nutrition Campaign in partnership with Healthy Klamath and Healthy Oregon. The Take Root Falls calendar of events will be released soon.

Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) – Maurita Johnson – Maurita discussed ongoing conversations at the state level about the ripple effects of H.R.1 (https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1), a federal bill, and how it will impact Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for some families. Maurita emphasized that the largest driver into the Child Welfare system is families who receive SNAP, and as benefits are reduced or lost, there may be an increase in families entering the. She also attended a budget meeting and observed that most of the discussion has been focused on funding, with less attention on the ripple effect and

system-level impacts. Maurita will share more information as it becomes available. Additionally, she noted that federal funding connected to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) language and phrasing is under review, and ODHS is making some modifications to wording to ensure they can continue supporting equity work without putting funding at risk. Federal partners have been helpful in navigating this challenge.

Klamath Chapter or the Oregon Association for the Education of Young Children (ORAEYC) – Kathleen Walker-Henderson -- Kathleen announced that she will be presenting at the ORAEYC Early Childhood Conference and encouraged others to attend and take the opportunity to learn something new. The Early Childhood Conference will be held at Klamath Community College on November 1, 2025, from 8:15 am – 2:45 pm. Registration is available online at https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/hadx9k7/lp/fd81977a-f26c-4068-b45b-0945cf4ff02d.

Care Connections and Education, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) – Amber Singh – Amber reported that she reaches out to child care providers quarterly in Klamath and Lake counties to receive updates about program openings. Openings are reported to 211 for Find Child Care Oregon. Amber noted that child care providers have expressed concerns during these outreach efforts about not being able to fill their openings and that a couple of family care providers have recently closed. The inability for child care providers could potentially be linked to the expansion and waitlist of Employment Related Daycare (ERDC).

Amber also provided an update on professional development opportunities. An upcoming training course, Past to Present, will focus on ways to help prevent future cycles of violence and will be worth six hours of professional development. In addition, Southern Oregon University will be offering a workshop on November 15 in Spanish, with hopes of adding English translation. The workshop will cover preparing children for kindergarten, and flyers will be available soon.

Community Baby Shower – Bethany Holmes – The Community Baby Shower, celebrating expecting families and families with children up to the age of one will be held on October 11, 2025, at the Klamath County Fairgrounds in Linman hall from 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.

Next Meeting:

October 2022, 2025, from 10 am to noon.