

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes

October 23, 2025 | 10:00 a.m.

In Attendance, Welcome, Approval of Minutes

Present: Elise Hansen, Krystal Sanchez, Karissa Bent, Kat Cooper, Heather Sewell, Heather Freiling, Debi Groshong, Shawn Massingale, Jess Hand

Staff Present: Athena Wikstrom, Ronda Osborn, Danielle Walker, Charlee Scheer

With Shawn Massingale initially unavailable, Athena facilitated the opening and roll call. Attendees confirmed they had reviewed the September minutes. A motion to approve was made by Kat Cooper and seconded by Debi Groshong. With no changes requested and no opposition, the motion was approved. The June minutes were later reviewed and approved following a motion by Elise Hanson and a second from Krystal Snachez.

Introduction and Opening Remarks

Athena Wikstrom-South-Central Early Learning Hub:

The Douglas Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting was held on October 23, 2025, and was called to order at 10:05 a.m. Attendees were welcomed and given the opportunity to introduce themselves and their respective organizations and programs.

Hub Update

Athena Wikstrom - South-Central Early Learning Hub:

Athena shared several updates affecting Hub operations. Both the Coordinated Enrollment and Hub contracts have now been executed, though the funding remains level at a service-continuity amount. She noted a positive development regarding the Birth to Five Early Literacy funds. While the amount is reduced compared to last year, the region is still receiving money to invest locally, which she described as “a win” given prior concerns that the funding may end entirely. The Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) has indicated this stream should continue if state revenue remains stable.

Athena explained that DELIC is shifting all contracts to align with Oregon's July through June biennium structure. Because of statewide rule revisions that affect Hubs, this year's agreement only covers one year. Gillian had served on workgroups contributing to those changes.

Athena celebrated the progress of the Family Governance Advisory Committee (FGAC), saying it has been really exciting seeing our FGAC writing grants and preparing to pursue new applications early next year to continue the Little Free Libraries. She emphasized the growing statewide structure for home visiting systems and reported that the regional hub's related funding transitioned successfully from The Ford Family Foundation (TFFF) to Portland State University's (PSU's) Center for Coordinating Oregon's Home Visiting Systems (CCHOVS) without service interruption.

Athena also updated the group on Preschool Promise enrollment strategies. Umpqua Health Alliance (UHA) recently supported a text campaign targeting Oregon Health Plan (OHP) families in Douglas County, which she noted was valuable because most families who qualify for OHP will also qualify for Preschool Promise. Openings remain at North Douglas in Drain, and Athena encouraged referrals to avoid potential loss of slots if vacancies remain too long.

She reported that Community UPLiFT referrals continue steadily, but the Hub anticipates an increased community need if SNAP benefits are disrupted by the ongoing federal shutdown. In response, the Hub is updating resource guides for food assistance, including pantry lists and budgeting/cooking tips. Athena invited members to share any local resources and stated that the Hub would really appreciate it so that we can reach the widest range of families.

Public Health Update

Dr. Bob Danneffer-Douglas Public Health Network (DPHN):

Dr. Bob Danneffer reported that RSV, flu, and COVID levels were currently low with minimal severe illness. Vaccines are widely available at pharmacies without a prescription. He acknowledged ongoing confusion around COVID vaccine guidance but stated the current recommendation is simply to consult with a healthcare provider, and that anyone six months and above can get flu and COVID vaccines.

Athena asked whether reduced vaccination rates have increased outbreak risks. Dr. Bob shared that non-medical exemptions have risen statewide, including in Douglas County. About nine percent of kindergarteners remain unvaccinated due to non-medical exemptions, elevating risk for measles transmission and noting, the need to have vaccine levels above 95 percent to prevent outbreaks.

Dr. Bob also warned of increasing Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, activity in Oregon. Although Douglas County has only had a few cases, he emphasized Pertussis is particularly dangerous for infants and older adults.

Equity Lens Review

Athena Wikstrom - South-Central Early Learning Hub:

Athena facilitated a discussion on the South-Central Early Learning Hub's existing equity lens document, developed by Hub committees in collaboration with Capacity Building Partnerships. She explained it is intended to keep equity central in decision-making by prompting intentional questions such as who might be missing, unintended consequences, assumptions, and ways to reduce barriers.

Athena shared that partners across the state have adopted the tool, including Healthy Klamath. She welcomed updates from partners, stating, "As we know better, we do better."

Krystal asked how the equity lens should be used day-to-day. Athena clarified that it should be used when there is decision-making or where bias could unintentionally play a role. Athena shared that when something requires intentionality, this slows us down in the right ways.

Strategic Plan Discussion

Athena Wikstrom-South-Central Early Learning Hub:

Athena walked the group through the regional strategic plan and plans to align it with Raise Up Oregon 2.0. She described the plan as inclusive of all early learning work in the region, not only Hub responsibilities. The group discussed maintaining priority focus on infants and toddlers despite Preschool Promise serving ages three-years to five-years, because, as Athena noted, it still needs to be called out as a priority population because we have an extreme child care desert for zero to three.

Kat inquired about integrating Unite Us with Community UPLIFT. Athena confirmed that the Hub is already present in the Unite Us platform and can receive referrals there, and highlighted the benefit of warm handoffs and motivational interviewing through Community UPLIFT that require a human conversation.

Early Literacy Messaging and Funding Brainstorm

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

The committee discussed strengthening family-centered literacy supports in the region. Shawn described UCAN's literacy backpacks, emphasizing how they encourage parents to engage at home and later share activities in class. She expressed passion for expanding mathematical literacy and early numeracy practices tied to everyday routines, noting that math data historically trends lower for incoming preschoolers.

Krystal discussed supporting multilingual families, noting that many parents are hesitant to read because they don't know how to read, even when it's in Spanish. She advocated expanded dialogic reading strategies that rely on exploring pictures and storytelling, not decoding text. Athena supported this and noted it aligns with Kids in Transition to School at Home (KITS-at-Home), which builds family skills through play and household tasks.

Jess shared ideas for reaching families through community spaces such as shopping carts, flyer inserts, and movie theater ads, since recent campaigns have boosted Early Childhood Education (ECE) enrollments at Umpqua Community College (UCC).

Elise added that connecting literacy strategies to daily routines may increase parent confidence and consistency.

Supporting Families Through Government Change

Athena Wikstrom-South-Central Early Learning Hub:

Families may soon lack SNAP funding if the shutdown continues. Members shared updates on local safety nets. The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) offices in Roseburg, Klamath, and Lake Counties maintain food pantries; UCAN has updated pantry lists, removing past ZIP code restrictions.

Heather emphasized referral pathways such as Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) and family-friendly public communication tools like Vroom. Partners are committed to sharing updated information widely.

Committee Engagement and Recruitment

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

Shawn shared concerns about fluctuating meeting attendance and asked members for suggestions. Heather recommended reconnecting with organizations experiencing staffing turnover. Krystal recommended onboarding visuals, mapping partner roles to help new attendees understand who does what. Heather S. suggested a one-page Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) overview to support recruitment.

Athena encouraged members to invite new partners directly or provide warm introductions to Hub staff.

Partner Updates

Kat Cooper- Umpqua Health Alliance: Kat shared that CHIP funding will open quarter one of 2026 and the Community Advisory Council (CAC) is actively recruiting UHA-member parents.

Heather Freiling-Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R): Heather shared Care Connections & Education provided information on upcoming professional development opportunities in the region. Heather highlighted the Courageous Care Summit with Dr. Amy King, scheduled for November 14 and 15, with a follow-up session planned in January. The keynote will be repeated both days so participants may attend either date, and sessions will include focused training for early intervention staff, program directors, and supervisors. Participation is free and includes lunch. Registration remains open with approximately half of Saturday's seats filled and additional availability on Friday.

The committee also received an update on the Every Child Belongs initiative, currently in the second phase of the statewide roll-out. A planning group convened by the Hub has been assessing local service needs and strategies for expanding behavioral support capacity in early learning environments. With only one full-time employee (FTE) covering all three counties, CCR&R continues to explore how to best leverage resources while acknowledging Douglas County benefits from an existing early childhood mental health consultant. An informational meeting is planned for October 30, and partners interested in updates were encouraged to reach out for participation details. These efforts are part of Oregon's broader legislative commitment to reduce suspensions and expulsions in early learning, ensuring educators have strong tools for supporting children with complex behavioral needs.

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

Head Start reported that the Glide Preschool Promise classroom, which relocated to Phoenix and reopened on October 6, is now fully enrolled. The program is working with Umpqua Health Alliance (UHA) and The Ford Family Foundation to secure temporary busing support for families who now must travel a greater distance, with hopes of returning to Glide next year as revitalization continues.

Shawn shared that, for the first time in many years, Head Start is not fully enrolled across the region. Enrollment has remained below capacity in both September and October, and staff are actively encouraging referrals through the UCAN website. Winston and Sutherlin currently have the most available slots. One Roseburg classroom was recently closed due to staffing shortages, and hiring certified teachers remains a critical need to reopen those spots. Shawn noted concerns that prolonged under-enrollment could eventually lead to loss of federal or state slots, making recruitment urgent.

In response to questions, Shawn confirmed that Early Head Start classrooms are full, though home visiting services have capacity for additional pregnant parents and children up to age 2½ across the county. Discussion touched on factors contributing to enrollment declines. Possible causes include lower birth rates, family mobility connected to Preschool Promise opportunities, and concerns within rural communities about government participation, particularly among immigrant families. Additionally, partners noted a growing reluctance among parents to leave children independently in classroom settings.

Heather shared that Early Intervention launched a new parent-participation classroom, called *Sprouts*, for newly eligible three-year-olds whose caregivers wish to remain in class to support the transition. Shawn emphasized that families uncertain about separation are also welcome to remain in Head Start classrooms to help children gradually adjust, ensuring access is not limited by comfort level.

Krystal Sanchez-Migrant Education: Krystal offered to provide Migrant Education support training for Preschool Promise and Head Start staff.

Adjournment

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

The next Douglas PAC meeting will be held on November 20, 2025, via Zoom.