

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE COUNCIL

Meeting Notes

December 11, 2025 | 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Attendance

Steve Schenewerk
Nancy Hauth
Michael Carter
Dena Haudenschild

Maurita Johnson
Heidi McGowan
Julie Hurley
Heather Freiling

Alysha Barraza
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 September 2025 meeting minutes. Michael Carter motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Dena seconded the motion. Steve voted in favor. No further discussion. Motion carried.

Early Learning Hub Update

Steve Schenewerk transitioned the Regional Governance Council to the Early Learning Hub update. Before the first agenda item, a motion was introduced to address Regional Governance Council concerns. Dena presented a formal motion requesting that the Regional Governance Council notify the state of its desire for consideration of a transition to a different backbone organization, citing a lack of confidence in the current backbone organization. Michael seconded the motion.

Steve requested that Nancy or Heidi outline the appropriate next steps. In response, Nancy referenced the relevant administrative rules and read the section of OAR 414-900-0110 addressing Governance Structure. She highlighted the provisions related to governance procedures, notification requirements, documentation needed when there is a stated lack of confidence, and the defined process for the Hub Contract Administrator to coordinate with both the Regional Governance Council and the backbone organization. Nancy expressed that these requirements come from administrative rules rather than statute.

https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/displayDivisionRules.action;JSESSIONID_OARD=nIJAJWh8vEFJLRzpz8dVQT-GOQ_-OGwI8rXHkZgkIGWNcRHvGUw9!99228750?selectedDivision=1919

Following the introduction of the motion and clarification from Nancy, the floor was opened for discussion.

Michael confirmed his understanding of the rules as read by Nancy and summarized the information provided. Currently, the Regional Governance Council (RGC) is raising concerns about Douglas ESD's operations as the backbone organization with the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC). The process moving forward is as follows: the Regional Governance Council will provide written notification to the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) Contract Administrator, who will then coordinate meetings between Douglas ESD and the Regional Governance Council to determine whether the concerns can be resolved. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, the next step would be to consider transitioning to a different backbone organization. Nancy emphasized the need for clear documentation of the basis for the confidence concerns, including today's meeting notes and vote results, and referenced communication expectations with the Hub Contract Administrator. The DELIC Contract Administrator for the South-Central Early Learning Hub is Karla Branson, Karla.BRANSON@delic.oregon.gov. The notice to DELIC can be sent to Nancy, who will ensure that Karla Branson receives the correspondence.

Heidi reported no additions and indicated that the administrative rule language provided clarity on the process.

Heather asked whether any subgroup would be addressing procedural matters outside of the Regional Governance Council. Steve clarified that the Regional Governance Council has three designated voting members: Steve representing Douglas County, Dena representing Klamath County, and Michael representing Lake County. The voting structure is aligned with the Bylaws.

Michael explained the reason for his vote to those colleagues who are not voting members of the Regional Governance Council. The reasons include communication challenges with the ESD including inconsistent communication during administrative transitions, concerns about disproportionate indirect costs compared to other Early Learning Hubs, and missing steps in Regional Governance Council notifications.

Alysha provided background on indirect cost adjustments following feedback from the South-Central Early Learning Hub, Nancy, and the Regional Governance Council. She stated that indirect charges now include computer support, technology rentals, and facilities costs and are fully contained within the federal nine percent allowable rate for indirect costs and no longer handled through additional individual costs.

Michael requested clarification about when the indirect cost changes occurred, and how the Regional Governance Council was notified. Alysha outlined communication issues that occurred during recent transitions and noted that responsibilities among staff were not consistently understood. She stated she accepts responsibility for gaps in communication and committed to ensuring that communication occurs through appropriate channels moving forward.

Steve clarified that the intent of the vote of no confidence in the backbone organization is not to assign blame to any one individual and is intended to ensure clarity moving forward.

Alysha described her understanding of the Early Learning Hub Contract requirements. Julie is conducting due diligence by consulting with other Hubs. She noted that the backbone organization has the authority to hire, terminate, and negotiate employment, but the Regional Governance Council should be consulted on the process of hiring a Hub Director. Alysha has historically understood the Governance Council to be the functional “board” for the Hub.

Nancy agreed, further explaining that the Regional Governance Council directs independent decision-making on investments and strategies for the Early Learning Hub, while the backbone provides fiscal and operational support, including providing timely financial reports to the Regional Governance Council to make strategic decisions, and human resources functions. While DELC does not provide detailed prescriptive requirements on Hub staffing, the expectation is that roles and responsibilities are outlined in the Bylaws. There is no rule requiring the Regional Governance Council to vote on approval for the Hub Director hiring process.

Steve confirmed that the current Bylaws do not address employment of the Hub Director. Revising the Bylaws is already planned as an upcoming agenda item. He explained that the next step, if the motion is passed, would be to work with DELC’s Contract Administrator to explore next steps. The action would initiate a period of discussion and negotiation, rather than terminating the Early Learning Hub contract. If the vote moves forward, the Regional Governance Council will draft a formal letter to the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) and begin discussions to determine next steps.

Michael stated that he appreciates the clarifications provided. He reiterated concerns about indirect costs, communication, and the need for proactive action rather than reactive responses. He noted that the process should strengthen partnerships.

Steve provided context based on his longstanding participation with the Hub. He acknowledged historical challenges related to the Hub’s geographic size and complexity, while recognizing the efforts made to ensure equitable treatment across counties. He described these processes as necessary for strengthening the Early Learning Hub to benefit children and families. Steve noted that the South-Central Early Learning Hub has done a remarkable job in making Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties feel included, and that the Regional Governance Council’s processes are equitable in how funds are expended across the three counties.

Maurita noted that she needed to leave the meeting early due to a conflicting obligation. Before departing, she expressed alignment with Michael’s concerns regarding costs and inequities affecting rural and frontier areas. She

emphasized that her perspective was consistent with the broader discussion; that the issue under consideration was not about an individual, but about system processes. Maurita stated that she was available to provide additional input or follow-up as needed. Steve reiterated that this step is required by administrative rules and is part of strengthening systems.

Before the vote, Heather requested clarification on what the voting members would be voting on. Steve explained that the vote was to authorize filing a letter of no confidence in the backbone organization with the DELC state Contract Administrator. This action initiates a period of discussion between the Contract Administrator, the Regional Governance Council, and Douglas ESD. Steve and Michael clarified that the vote does not affect staffing or service levels.

Alysha described the process as being like mediation; intended to improve operations and support collaboration.

Julie stated that depending on the vote, the hiring processes for a full-time Hub Director may need to pause pending a resolution. Steve confirmed that he had already recommended to the Douglas ESD Superintendent, Analicia Nicholson, delaying the hiring process for the new Early Learning Hub Director until after the new year.

Dena stated her intent to continue with the motion, citing long-standing concerns, lack of resolutions for concerns, and insufficient independent decision-making.

A vote was held. Dena, Michael, and Steve voted in favor. There were no opposing votes. A letter will be drafted and distributed to Douglas ESD Administration, the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC), and all Regional Governance Council members. Steve recommended postponing Bylaw amendments until after the state process concludes, so that updated Bylaws can reflect any resulting structural changes.

Early Literacy Funding

Athena provided an update on the Early Literacy Plan. Early Literacy funding from the Department of Early Learning and Care, for the one-year early literacy initiative has been extended. Early Learning Hub staff conducted conversations at local levels during Professional Advisory Committee meetings and Regional Governance Committee meetings. Recommendations emerging from those discussions include:

- Reissuing the previous Request for Applications (RFA) for early literacy and Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation (KPI) mini grants.
- Continuing to work with Tribal partners to strengthen their early literacy plans.
- Exploring alignment with math literacy efforts through KPI funding, connecting reading/vocabulary literacy to numeracy development and scaffolding funds.
- Continuing expansion and support of Little Free Libraries.

Regarding timelines, there were no preset deadlines. A motion was made by Michael and seconded by Dena to move forward with the proposed plan using the following dates:

- Application Start Date: January 5, 2026
- Application End Date: March 20, 2026
- Budget Committee meeting to make determinations on RFA proposals: First week of April 2026

Steve, Michael, and Dena voted to approve the plan for early literacy fund expenditure as presented. Motion carried.

Strategic Plan Priorities for 2026

Steve suggested that the Early Learning Hub's priorities remain unchanged and should continue as the Hub's priorities moving forward at this time. He inquired about the potential impact of federal funding reductions. Athena reported that some programs have experienced reduced funding or uncertainty regarding federal support, particularly those with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) language in their policies. In response, some entities have opted to revise DEI language to minimize the risk of federal funding cuts.

She noted that the Early Learning Hub's Coordinated Enrollment contract is active through March 2026, with some reduction in funding for this initiative. However, federal funds remain relatively unchanged for this contract period.

Hub staff continue to support communities through non-fiscal means, such as resource sharing, and she highlighted ongoing efforts to address hunger and food insecurity. Steve expressed appreciation for the Hub's food insecurity resources, sharing that the handouts have been shared widely throughout communities.

Steve also noted that the Oregon State Legislative Session is scheduled to begin in February 2026 and mentioned recent changes in budget and forecast projections. Athena added that DELC is reviewing statewide recommendations for potential budget reductions of three percent and five percent, with a current proposal favoring proportional reductions across programs rather than eliminating specific programs or initiatives.

Preschool Promise

Athena reported that an in-home Preschool Promise provider, Nic Nacs Quality Child Care, opted not to continue contracting with DELC for Preschool Promise. Initially, DELC indicated that the nine preschool slots in Klamath County would not be reallocated. However, due to strong advocacy from Analicia and others, the nine slots were ultimately reallocated to Little Learners in Klamath County. The slots were filled the same day the Early Learning Hub received notice of the reallocation from DELC.

Athena also noted that there is one Preschool Promise opening in North Douglas, but the opening is expected to be filled today. There are four openings at Gilchrist Elementary. She observed a possible dip in the population of three and four-year-olds in the Gilchrist area, and that there could be some family safety concerns. Some Oregon schools have reported families expressing a fear of sending their children to school due to the presence of federal officers.

Steve added that Multnomah County's Preschool for All program could also be experiencing reductions due to declining enrollment, suggesting a broader statewide demographic trend.

Community UPLiFT

Danielle shares the Community UPLiFT quarterly reports for July through September 2025.

In the current quarter, Community UPLiFT has received 59 total referrals since October 1, 2025. There have been 24 referrals in Douglas County, 33 referrals in Klamath County, and 2 referrals in Lake County. Referral volume is on track to meet and possibly exceed the same quarter last year.

In Klamath County, Danielle has joined the Resource Marketplace with Cascade Health Alliance (CHA) and participates in rural outreach events. Danielle has been to Malin, Sprague River, Merrill, and Bonanza. Ronda is participating in First Thursday outreach in Douglas County, and a new First Thursday-style event launched in South Douglas County. In Lake County, Take Root distributed Community UPLiFT materials at birthing classes, resulting in at least one Community UPLiFT referral.

The Hub has joined the Klamath Connections case conferencing group, which supports individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness in both Klamath and Lake Counties.

The Klamath/Lake County Resource Directory has been revised and transitioned to Google Docs for real-time updates, with translation to Spanish underway. A Google Form is now available for partners to submit updates and requests to be added to both the Douglas County Resource Directory and the Klamath/Lake County Resource Directory. Pending successful implementation and Spanish translation, this process will be replicated for the Douglas County Resource Directory.

Steve inquired about the low number of Community UPLiFT referrals coming through school districts. Athena explained that Douglas ESD previously had a McKinney-Vento Liaison who worked closely with the districts and communicated how to access Community UPLiFT referrals. Since that staff member's departure, referrals from school districts have decreased. Additionally, Community UPLiFT primarily serves children birth to five, an age range not typically served by school districts, which further limits district referrals. Douglas ESD is exploring the expansion of Community UPLiFT to include K–12, which is expected to increase referrals from school districts.

Julie noted that a proposal for K–12 alignment has been drafted. The Creating Community Resilience group has expressed interest in supporting the expansion, particularly because of their work with homeless youth. The plan is to pilot the program in Douglas County, with the intention of eventually expanding regionwide. Discussions are ongoing.

Alysha added that the Electronic Information and Design (EID) team is prepared to support the Community UPLIFT expansion and has developed a Build Plan to expedite the build once expansion is initiated.

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR)

Heather provided an update on Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) activities. The first Courageous Care Summit with Dr. Amy King was held in Douglas County and will be brought to Klamath County in 2026. Feedback from Douglas County has been positive, particularly regarding tools that CCRR provided to child care owner-operators. CCRR is coordinating training opportunities with Holly Mancebo, the Early Intervention / Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) Director, during the Klamath and Lake County Courageous Care Summit and is integrating Every Child Belongs (ECB) and Inclusive Partners content into the Summit. CCRR was approved to start ECB in Phase Two, which began November 21, 2025.

Heather explained the new CCRR intake and routing structure, which ensures that requests are directed to the appropriate layer of support. This approach aims to increase provider access to resources. She emphasized that supporting providers results in improved support for children. A communication tool to assist providers in connecting to the best available support that meets their needs, is in development. The tool will help child care providers understand what support is available to them in different situations. The Douglas County version is nearly complete; Klamath and Lake County tools will be developed once Douglas County is finished.

Heather highlighted upcoming Courageous Care Summit sessions scheduled for late February and early May in Klamath County. There is higher capacity available for Klamath and Lake Counties than there was for Douglas County, due to venue size. The Courageous Care Summit would benefit anyone who is interested in training about complex behaviors and leadership development.

Steve expressed appreciation that the region is now caught up with state mandates. Heather acknowledged that early planning for ECB with the South-Central Early Learning Hub supported the ability to roll ECB out to the region.

Closing

With no additional business, the meeting adjourned

Next Meeting: March 2026, date TBD at 11:00 am on Zoom.