KLAMATH PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Notes

January 28, 2026 | 10:00 AM – Noon

Attendance

Dena Haudenshild
Kathleen Walker-Henderson
Karen Cole
Leslie Maxfield
Maurita Johnson
David Lev
Danielle Ganze
Jennifer Jackson
Holly Mancebo
Stephanie Sullivan
Heidi Olivadoti
Sylvia Cox
Jessica McAuliffe
Alysha Barraza
Amber Singh
Athena Wikstrom
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 October 2025 minutes. Maurita Johnson motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Stephanie Sullivan seconded the motion. No further discussion. Motion passed.

South-Central Early Learning Hub Update

Dena provided an update on recent Regional Governance Council activities to ensure the Klamath County Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) had shared context regarding the status of the South-Central Early Learning Hub across Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties. She reported that concerns have been raised related to transparency, operational practices, autonomy, and equitable representation among the three counties within the Hub's current backbone structure, Douglas Education Service District (ESD). In response to these concerns, the Regional Governance Council met with Douglas ESD and the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) and formally submitted a letter requesting guidance and support from DELC. The request seeks assistance in strengthening collaboration with the backbone organization and ensuring equitable representation and shared decision-making across all three counties.

The Regional Governance Council has since met with DELC and is engaged in ongoing discussions, with a follow-up meeting scheduled in February to determine next steps. Current areas of focus include reviewing and strengthening the Hub's bylaws and exploring the development of a memorandum of understanding to clearly define roles and responsibilities. Dena invited questions from PAC members and shared that individuals can follow up directly if additional questions arise after the meeting.

Athena shared that Gillian is no longer with the South-Central Early Learning Hub. During the transition period, Alysha Barraza is serving as Interim Director while leadership works through next steps.

Danielle overviewed the recently released Request for Application (RFA) for Early Literacy and Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation (KPI) grants. This information was previously shared via email to regional Professional Advisory Committees (PACs), and is available on the South-Central Early Learning Hub website at: https://www.scelh.com/kindergarten-readiness-partnership-innovation/request-for-application. The Hub is hoping to receive applications from across the region so funding can be distributed to community partners in ways that best meet local needs. Eligible applicants include nonprofits, government organizations, small businesses, and community partners, with awards of up to $15,000 per entity for the 2025–2027 biennium. Funds are intended to be distributed equitably across the region, depending on qualified applications.

To be eligible, children and families served must reside in Douglas, Klamath, or Lake Counties, and professionals receiving professional development must serve families within the region. Preference will be given to programs serving the Hub's priority populations, including families in geographically isolated areas; children experiencing

displacement such as houselessness, or foster or kinship care; families identifying as African American/Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, or native Spanish speakers; families identifying as Native American or Tribal; children with physical or developmental delays, disabilities, behavioral health concerns, or trauma; and infants and children ages birth to three. Athena is the primary contact for questions, which must be submitted by February 13, 2026 via email (athena.wikstrom@douglasesd.k12.or.us). Applications are due to Athena by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 20, 2025. Members were encouraged to consider applying for or sharing the RFA with individuals who might be interested in applying.

Danielle also provided an overview of the Hub's 2024–2025 fiscal year report. The report includes some background information about the South-Central Early Learning Hub, as well as highlights from the past fiscal year.

Significant work was completed on the Every Child Belongs (ECB) initiative that legislatively eliminates suspension and expulsion in early care and education settings. The South-Central Early Learning Hub partnered with Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE) and Heidi East McGowan to facilitate listening sessions identifying community strengths and needs. Based on community input and a steering committee process, the Hub formally recommended that Douglas ESD, in partnership with Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR), assume leadership ECB initiative, which is now being implemented.

The Hub also continued Coordinated Enrollment work. Staff qualify and enroll students into Preschool Promise sites, with a few exceptions for programs contracting directly with the state. For the 2024–2025 school year, the Hub enrolled for 263 Preschool Promise slots across the region. All Preschool Promise sites are currently full, except Gilchrist in Klamath County. Preschool Promise applications are accepted year-round, and preparations are underway to release both returning and new student applications for the 2026-2027 school year in the coming months. The Hub is also maintaining a list of families interested in applying for the 2026–2027 school year and will contact them once applications open.

Community UPLiFT programming was also highlighted. Community UPLiFT connects expecting families and families with children birth to five, and up to age 21 for those with special needs, to community resources. Staff are certified Community Health Workers (CHW).

At the end of the 2024-2025 fiscal year, Community UPLiFT had received 1,720 referrals across the region since inception in 2017. As of last week, Community UPLiFT received a total of 1,906. Referrals are accepted on an ongoing basis, and staff are available to provide presentations to partners interested in learning more about the Community UPLiFT or receiving referrals.

Additional Hub activities included support of the Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation (KPI) program. During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the Hub offered professional development with Dr. Dawn Bailey and Dr. Amy King and partnered with Kids in Transition to School (KITS) at Home to provide educational resources to parents in rural and underserved communities. KITS at Home programming was offered in both English and Spanish.

The Family Governance Advisory Committee also had a strong year, serving as a voice in decision-making, participating in personal and professional development, and successfully writing a grant for Little Free Libraries. During the reporting period, 12 Little Free Libraries were installed across the region. The Hub also participated in numerous in-person community events to connect with families, share information about Hub services, and promote early childhood programs supporting healthy development and school readiness.

Towards the end of the year, staff expanded outreach efforts by participating in additional rural community events in Klamath County through the Healthy Klamath Resource Market. Outreach activities took place in Malin, Merrill, Bonanza, Chiloquin, and Sprague River, and included participation in a vaccine clinic in partnership with Klamath County Public Health. These events provided opportunities to connect directly with families and share information about Early Learning Hub programs, including Community UPLiFT and Preschool

Promise, in settings where the information was most relevant and accessible. In-person outreach, particularly in rural areas, is an important strategy for strengthening community connections and increasing awareness of available early learning and family support resources.

Dialogic Reading – Learning Beyond Paper

Danielle Ganze with Learning Beyond Paper provided an overview of the organization and its services. She shared that Learning Beyond Paper is an Oregon-based curriculum and professional development provider serving early learning programs statewide, offering comprehensive curriculum and instructional resources spanning infancy through Pre-K and extending into grade 4, as well as after-school and camp curricula. Danielle noted that Learning Beyond Paper recently celebrated its five-year anniversary and emphasized the organization's mission to support educators through "pick-up-and-go" instructional resources and embedded professional development, particularly considering workforce shortages and limited training capacity for administrators.

Learning Beyond Paper's curriculum and professional development offerings are aligned with Oregon state standards and follow evidence-based best practices, including dialogic reading. Professional development funds may be used toward Learning Beyond Paper training opportunities and curriculum partners receive access to curriculum materials, professional development, and live training as part of their participation. Information about accessing additional resources, including a QR code and follow-up opportunities, was shared with participants.

A facilitated discussion followed regarding dialogic reading. Danielle Ganze and Athena explained dialogic reading as an interactive, conversation-based approach that centers children as active participants in shared reading experiences. Athena noted that dialogic reading has been used across the region as a strategy to promote literacy engagement among families with varying literacy levels, emphasizing that caregivers do not need to read every word of a text to support a child's language development. Dialogic reading encourages caregivers to ask open-ended questions and make real-life connections to the book, fostering storytelling and engagement. These strategies support early language exposure and help close the word gap by increasing meaningful adult–child interactions around books and storytelling.

Participants discussed the value of dialogic reading in reducing stigma and increasing accessibility for families, and its role in supporting early literacy, language development, and family connection. The conversation also touched on the importance of aligning early learning practices with K–4 systems. Athena shared the South-Central Early Learning Hub's monthly newsletters include literacy tips for families and educators and highlighted Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation (KPI) as a strategy to strengthen alignment and shared understanding between early learning providers and kindergarten systems.

Members expressed appreciation for the inclusive and relationship-based approach to literacy described and noted the importance of continued collaboration across early learning, K–12, and community partners.

Partner Updates

Take Root Parenting Connections – Laura Barajas shared that Take Root's Valentine's Day Event will be held at the South Suburban Library on February 10 from 4:00 – 5:30 pm and encouraged the Professional Advisory Committee to share the information with families.

Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) -- Maurita Johnson provided an update on the Doris Duke Foundation partnership, highlighting prevention-focused work with families who have been screened out by the child abuse hotline. Through this partnership, and in collaboration with KLCAS, families in Klamath and Lake Counties may receive support for tangible need items, such as vehicle repairs, clothing, and laundry resources, to promote family stability and help remove barriers to school attendance, hopefully addressing some truancy issues. Funding for this initiative is approximately $400,000 per year for the next three years.

Maurita also described coordination with the Klamath Tribes to ensure appropriate support for Tribal families. In addition, she shared a pathway for school personnel to connect with ODHS when there are concerns that do not rise to the level of a child abuse hotline report. Schools may contact ODHS through a designated email at D11truancy@odhs.oregon.gov.

Care Connections & Education, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) – Amber Singh noted that the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) grant remains active for Early Childhood Education pathways, covering tuition and books for college students. She also shared information about a two-day, free Courageous Care Summit, with the first sessions scheduled for February 27 and 28, featuring Dr. Amy. Both days will have the same content, so individuals can select the day that works best for them.

Klamath Family Head Start – Sylvia Cox advised that Klamath Family Head Start experienced a brief challenge at the beginning of the year related to a balloon payment on the main site building, which had been established many years ago. The organization had applied for a federal grant to cover the payment; however, the grant process was significantly delayed due to the federal government shutdown and changes in federal administration. The federal funding was ultimately approved at the last minute, allowing the balloon payment to be made and operations to continue without interruption.

In February, Klamath Family Head Start received an early literacy grant and is working in collaboration with Fred Bartels from Klamath Falls City School District to plan for expenditure of the funds and to strengthen connections between early learning programs and the K–12 system. This year marks the final year of Klamath Family Head Start's current five-year federal grant cycle, and the organization is working on development of the next grant application.

Klamath Community College (KCC) and The KID Center - Kathleen Walker-Henderson reported that Klamath Community College (KCC) has broken ground on its Child Care Center and will soon launch a capital campaign to secure the required match of $1 million tied to the grant funding.

Kathleen also shared that The KID Center is pursuing a grant that, if awarded, will require a $25,000 match. This funding will support classroom expansion through clubhouse remodeling.

The Klamath Tribes – Jennifer Jackson shared upcoming events for Tribal families, including a Scholastic Book Fair in March offering families with children ages zero to five a $100 credit to select books. The Klamath Tribes Education Department will be supporting the book fair for children ages six to ten. Additional events are planned for April and June.

Closing

Dena closed the meeting with a focus reminder of the South-Central Early Learning Hub's Priority Populations both regionally and locally. These Priority Populations include: Children / Families living in areas of geographic isolation; Children who are experiencing displacement (houselessness, foster care, kinship care); Children from families who identify as African American / Black, Asian, Hispanic / Latinx, native Spanish speakers; Children from families who identify as Native American / Tribal; Children experiencing physical or developmental delays or disabilities including children with behavioral health concerns and / or trauma.

Next Meeting:

February 25, 2026, from 10 am to noon.