# KLAMATH PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Notes

February 25, 2026 | 10:00 AM – Noon

## Attendance

Dena Haudenshild
Kathleen Walker-Henderson
Karen Cole
Holly Stork
Amanda Holden
Kay Ortega
Melinda Gomez
Lana Raber
Melissa Dorsey
Julie Hurley
Alysha Barraza
Vanessa Pingleton
Laura Barajas
Amber Singh
Athena Wikstrom
Ronda Osborn
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 January 2026 minutes. Kathleen Walker-Henderson motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Kay Ortega seconded the motion. No further discussion. Motion passed.

## South-Central Early Learning Hub Update

Dena Haudenshild reported on ongoing collaboration with Douglas Education Service District (ESD) and the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC), including the regional decision regarding hub leadership structure. After considering multiple models, the Regional Governance Council selected an option to maintain a 1.0 Full Time Employee (FTE) Hub Director dedicated exclusively to core hub responsibilities across Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties.

This decision was shaped by:

- Funding volatility and braided-funding risk (referencing reductions associated with Senate Bill 5514). While local impacts may be less severe than in other regions, the council concluded that fund braiding should be paused to protect services during budget uncertainty.
- The need to ensure equitable services across all three counties and allow a new director to focus on learning and implementing updated South-Central Early Learning Hub Bylaws.

To support Governance updates, the South-Central Early Learning Hub has retained Dr. Janet Carlson, who helped develop the hub's original Bylaws and brings extensive government/nonprofit consulting and budget expertise, to revise the Bylaws. A working draft has been provided; the target for completion is the end of March, with final Bylaws due to DELC by April 1.

Athena shared that the South-Central Early Learning Hub is working on launching the annual registration co-advertising campaign for Preschool Promise, Head Start, and kindergarten, to reduce last-minute enrollments and support smooth fall transitions.

The 2026–2027 Preschool Promise application will also open in March, positioned between Douglas County UCAN Head Start's typical February opening and Klamath Family Head Start's April opening to maximize alignment. Preschool Promise applications for the 2025-2026 school year are still open.

The Kindergarten Readiness Partnership & Innovation (KPI) and Birth to Five Early Literacy Request for Application (RFA) is still open. Awards up to $15,000 are available for the 2025–2027 biennium for activities and trainings that advance early literacy and kindergarten readiness for children ages birth to five in Klamath, Lake, and Douglas Counties.

To be eligible to receive funds through the RFA, 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 (mailto:athena.wikstrom@douglasesd.k12.or.us). Applications are due to Athena by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 20, 2026. Members were encouraged to consider applying for and sharing the RFA with individuals who might be interested in applying.

Danielle shared that the Klamath & Lake County Resource Directory has been translated into Spanish and is available on the South-Central Early Learning Hub website at https://www.scelh.com/parent-resources. A new form for adding/updating listings is linked on the final page of the directory. Partners are invited to submit updates and new programs for inclusion.

Julie advised that the Hub Director position is posted and open across all three counties. The recruitment window is at least two weeks, with a regional interview committee, to ensure balanced representation. Interviews are anticipated in April. The communications team is supporting a social media push and has produced a flyer with a QR code to the application; Danielle will distribute it to the Klamath County Professional Advisory Committee (PAC).

## SMART Reading and Dialogic Reading

Holly Stork provided a comprehensive and engaging presentation on the work of SMART Reading, highlighting both the scale of the program's community impact and the importance of dialogic reading as an evidence-based early literacy strategy. Her presentation blended organizational history, local data, practical reading techniques, and an invitation for deeper partnership across the county.

**SMART Reading: Regional Impact & Community Partnerships**

SMART Reading has a long-established presence in Klamath County and now serves one of the largest geographic regions in the state. Holly described the program's growth from its early years—supported by foundational community leaders and local business sponsors—to a robust regional network involving hundreds of volunteers, site coordinators, school staff, tribal partners, teens, and community organizations.

Key accomplishments from the most recent program year include:

- 695 students served
- 628 volunteers, contributing more than 7,600 hours
- 1,594 hours donated by Site Coordinators
- 18,965 books distributed (≈ 11.2 books per child)

Holly emphasized the importance of book access in a rural "book desert" like Klamath County, where transportation barriers, low population density, and limited retail/library availability can make it difficult for children to encounter books outside of school environments. SMART's model—pairing one-on-one reading time with free books children keep at home—helps close this gap and strengthens home-based literacy experiences.

She also highlighted the program's reliance on creative grassroots fundraising, including the signature annual event, Boots for Books, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this coming August. Holly extended an open invitation for partners to attend or participate in the fundraiser, noting that the 2026 event will be held at the county fairgrounds with an expanded "Country Fair" theme.

**Community Engagement & Volunteer Development**

Holly described ongoing efforts to cultivate volunteers from across the community, including:

- Local businesses and service organizations
- High school leadership classes
- Tribal departments and student groups
- Senior projects
- Parents, grandparents, and community mentors
- College students

She shared several examples illustrating how these intergenerational reading relationships foster connection, support social-emotional development, and strengthen bonds between elementary schools and their feeder high schools.

**Dialogic Reading: Training & Practice**

A major portion of Holly's presentation was dedicated to dialogic reading, a structured, interactive style of reading with children that helps develop vocabulary, comprehension, conversational skills, and early fluency. Rather than reading "to" a child, dialogic reading emphasizes reading "with" a child.

Holly framed dialogic reading as:

- Accessible for all adults—including those who may feel insecure about their own reading skills
- Flexible across cultures, languages, and developmental levels
- Highly effective for children ages birth to five
- A model families can easily implement at home

She summarized the method using the CAR framework:

**C — Comment and Wait:** Adults make an observation about the picture or story and pause long enough for the child to absorb, react, or add their own thoughts.

**A — Ask Questions and Wait:** Questions should be open-ended (e.g., "What do you think is happening here?"). The waiting period—30–45 seconds—is essential to give the child time to think and respond.

**R — Respond by Adding a Little More:** Adults expand on the child's comment to model more complex language (e.g., "Yes, the baby has an owie. Did you ever have an owie on your knee?").

Holly emphasized that dialogic reading is not about perfectly following the written text. In fact, for adults with reading challenges, or for very young children, "pretend reading" (telling a story from the pictures) is a perfectly valid and developmentally appropriate approach.

Other key strategies she highlighted include:

- Helping children learn how to handle a book (front vs. back, turning pages)
- Drawing attention to environmental print (billboards, signs, logos) during daily routines
- Introducing sight words in simple, confidence-building ways
- Naming colors, shapes, adjectives, and action words
- Using both "mirror books" (reflecting the child's identity/culture) and "window books" (offering a view into new worlds, careers, or experiences)
- Allowing time for children to predict, create alternate stories, or connect personally to events in the story
- Ensuring reading time feels positive, unrushed, and relational

Holly also highlighted the importance of adults being fully present with children during reading time—free from distractions—to reinforce the sense that reading is a meaningful shared activity.

**Invitation for Continued Partnership**

Holly concluded by inviting partners to:

- Schedule onsite dialogic reading trainings
- Request book giveaways for family literacy nights or community events
- Consider involving Early Care and Education (ECE) students, teens, or community members as volunteer readers
- Utilize SMART as a partner for broader literacy initiatives across the region

She offered to provide materials, support, and additional resources, and Danielle will distribute her contact information in the meeting follow-up.

## Partner Updates

**Take Root Parenting Connections** – Laura Barajas provided a series of updates on behalf of Take Root, beginning with the continued availability of the Family Check-Up program. This self-paced, phone-based tool is designed to strengthen relationships between parents and their children ages 11–14. Parents can complete modules from home on their own schedule, making it accessible for families with complex routines or limited availability. Flyers and additional information were shared with meeting participants to support referrals.

Laura also highlighted several upcoming family engagement activities. Family Yoga is scheduled for March 7, offering a low-pressure opportunity for caregivers and children to participate in a wellness activity together. She emphasized that yoga mats will be supplied through a partnership with the Klamath County Library, ensuring the event is fully accessible to all families, regardless of equipment.

In addition, Take Root will host a Bird Feeding & Literacy Night on March 19. This event will blend hands-on learning with early literacy by pairing a bird-themed activity with a read-aloud or shared reading component. Juniper from Sage Community Credit Union will attend to greet families and support the event. Holly offered SMART Reading's assistance, including potential bird-themed book giveaways for families attending.

**Klamath KID Center** -- Kathleen Walker-Henderson announced that the Klamath KID Center has officially launched its fundraising campaign to secure a $25,000 match tied to a recently awarded grant to revamp the Clubhouse for additional classrooms. The campaign, hosted on Facebook and shared on the KLAD radio platform, received strong community engagement on its first day, raising $741 within 24 hours. Kathleen encouraged meeting participants to share the campaign within their networks to help sustain momentum and strengthen community investment.

**Care Connections & Education, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR)** – Amber Singh provided an update on the Early Childhood Education (ECE) cohort at Klamath Community College (KCC), which currently includes approximately 45 active students pursuing certificates or associate degrees in early childhood education. She emphasized that the program continues to operate under a grant-funded, debt-free model, removing financial barriers for students who choose a pathway into early learning professions. Amber welcomed referrals from partners who work with individuals interested in entering or advancing within the ECE field.

Amber also shared two professional development opportunities. The first is a two-day session with Dr. Amy King, offered on both Friday March 27, and Saturday March 28, with identical content each day to maximize accessibility for professionals with varied schedules. The second opportunity is a March 14 presentation by Southern Oregon University's ECE program, led by Rebecca Tree, which will provide regional professional development and exposure to further education pathways.

During this discussion, Holly Stork noted that SMART Reading is seeking additional volunteer readers for the KCC Head Start site and that early childhood students would be welcomed and well-supported in these roles. Amber and Holly agreed to connect directly, and Amber provided her email address to facilitate the partnership.

## Next Meeting:

March 18, 2026, from 10 am to noon. ** One week early due to spring break. **