

MINUTES

Meeting Objectives:

- Learn about the impacts of recent Federal policy changes on programs serving children and families in Colorado
 - Discuss potential solutions to challenges for the early childhood workforce created by recent state and federal higher education policies
 - Learn about current topics at CDEC including Universal Preschool Year 3 and the Independent Evaluation
 - Hear highlights from the ECLC Subcommittees and Working Groups, including the status of the ECCS Fiscal Map project
 - Advance the goals of the [ECLC Strategic Plan](#)
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Virtual Attendees: Jake Williams, Jasmin Ramirez, Maria Tarajano Rodman, Minna Castillo, Susanna Snyder, Vanessa Fewell

In Person Attendees: Adeeb Khan, Happy Haynes, Chelsea Carver, Heather Craiglow, Joanna Bruno, Liz Denson, Mary Alice Cohen, Michael Cooke, Nicole Riehl, Sam Fogleman, Shelley Smith, Sue Renner

Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair Michael Cooke called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. She welcomed everyone who joined in person at the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance in Arvada as well as those online, and she reviewed the meeting objectives. She welcomed the new Commissioner, Liz Denson, President and CEO of Early Connections Learning Centers. Liz introduced herself and shared her excitement for joining the ECLC. Micheal also introduced Mathangi Subramanian, Director of Early Childhood Policy at Colorado Children's Campaign, a key partner of the ECLC. Commissioner roll call was taken. Michael then asked for a motion to approve the June 26, 2025 meeting minutes. Nicole Riehl moved, Shelley Smith seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

State Agency Updates: Impacts of Federal Legislation, Policy, and Guidance

Co-Chair Happy Haynes shared that the ECLC co-chairs held meetings with the leadership of the state agencies that sit on the ECLC over the summer. They plan to build off of these meetings to create stronger connections with these state agencies and to foster greater interagency collaboration on early childhood topics.

At these meetings, they heard about the impacts of new federal legislation, policy, and guidance on the work of the agencies. Today, the agencies will share updates on these impacts with the full Commission. In the future, the ECLC will discuss how to address any challenges created by changes.

Statewide Fiscal Impacts

Anders Shropshire, Office of State Planning and Budgeting, shared an overview of federal policy impacts, particularly the House Reconciliation Bill (H.R. 1), on the state budget. He shared that the

tax policy changes are expected to reduce revenues by \$1.2 billion in FY 25-26 and increase state expenditures by up to \$1 billion in coming years. A special legislative session was held in August to address the shortfall. Anders shared the bills that were passed and changes to the Governor's authority to make cuts if needed. There were no large impacts to early childhood programs based on the special session. A Commissioner asked for more details on the Child Affordability and Earned Income Tax Credit. He explained that it may be turned off for tax year 2026 and future years in order to save funding.

Department of Health Care Policy and Financing

Commissioner Susanna Snyder shared how H.R.1 is impacting the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing. Provisions include prohibited entity funding, changes who qualifies for Medicaid, changes to Medicaid eligibility including workforce requirements, and retroactive coverage rollbacks. She provided details about the rule changes, the timeline for implementation, and current legal or legislative efforts to address challenges. She provided additional information about the process that HCPF will need to take in order to implement workforce requirements, which will include challenges of tracking work status as well as whether individuals are exempt from the rules. Finally, she shared that the Rural Health Transformation Program is a grant program providing funding to improve rural health programs, and HCPF will apply for the grant when it is released. She provided several resources in the slide deck for people to learn more.

Department of Human Services

Commissioner Minna Castillo shared the impacts of H.R.1 on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. There will be a loss of federal funding for administering SNAP benefits and increased requirements for verifying eligibility. CDHS will be implementing changes to ensure higher accuracy of people meeting eligibility requirements. Commissioner Heather Craiglow shared that SNAP eligibility is used to automatically qualify for Head Start, so changes to SNAP eligibility can impact how families become eligible for Head Start. Minna Castillo also shared that there is an increased age range for individuals who will need to meet work requirements to receive SNAP benefits. She provided a [Fact Sheet](#) with more information.

Department of Early Childhood

Commissioner Mary Alice Cohen shared early childhood impacts based on H.R.1. She shared three key challenge areas: early childhood professionals may see a reduction in benefits such as SNAP and Medicaid; there will be changes to how qualified aliens can enroll in programs; and higher education policies may have impacts on the early childhood workforce. She shared a [resource](#) with more information. She also shared the leadership from the US Department of Children and Families visited Colorado and praised our work on local administration, fatherhood initiatives, mixed delivery childcare system, and home visiting.

Mary Alice also shared an update on the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) waiver that has been submitted to request an extension with implementing new federal rules. There has been a delay in approving the waiver, but CDEC is hopeful the waiver will be granted by October 1. Commissioner Heather Craiglow shared that Colorado is waiting to hear more before implementing any changes regarding how immigration status will impact eligibility for Head Start.

Higher Education Policies and the Early Childhood Workforce

Commissioner Sam Fogleman shared there are higher policy changes at both the state and federal level that have potential impacts for the early childhood workforce. Today, there will be two

presentations aimed at giving Commissioners a shared understanding of the topics so that they can consider how Colorado can address challenges moving forward.

Colorado's Minimum Value Threshold

Michael Vente, Colorado Department of Higher Education, shared details of Colorado's Minimum Value Threshold (MVT) plan, which is part of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education's Strategic Plan. MVT is a method to measure Return of Investment (ROI) of higher education. He shared the methods developed for measuring the ROI and the MVT. In brief, it is calculated by subtracting the cost of receiving a degree from the increases to earnings received based on that degree; the result should be net positive to meet the MVT. CDHE will be collecting data to understand MVT and will create the ability to disaggregate the data by a variety of factors. Currently, 86% of students are meeting the MVT threshold. Early Childhood degrees may be among the degrees that do not meet this threshold. This information will be used to have collaborative conversations about how to improve the rate of students meeting the threshold.

Federal higher education policy overview

Mary Harrill, National Association for the Education of Young Children, shared an overview of federal policies, including H.R. 1, funding freezes, executive actions, and FY26 appropriations. H.R. 1 included several higher education provisions. It consolidates existing income driven federal students loan repayment programs; increases the number of years before a loan can be forgiven in a repayment program; eliminates the GRAD Plus Program; changes the Parent PLUS program, and reduces loan limits for part-time students. The provision that may have the greatest impact on the early childhood workforce is the low earnings outcomes provision, which states that the wages earned by students in a degree program must be higher than wages for those who solely hold a high school diploma in order for students receiving that degree to be eligible for federal student loans. This does not apply to Pell Grants. Because early childhood education wages are low, this could mean that many programs may become ineligible for federal student loans, which could incentivize institutions to close their program and could have impacts on the quality and supply of child care in communities. She shared the next steps that NAEYC is taking to advocate for the early childhood workforce in continuing discussions about these provisions.

Discussion

Commissioners discussed the implications of these presentations and what next steps should be taken. Commissioner input included:

- Institutes of higher education (IHEs) should consider how to recognize and differentiate cost based on the differences in income between an early childhood degree and higher wage degrees. IHEs should collect data to explore the cost of offering degrees to students and consider adjustments based on that information.
- There is a need to share information about how the child care industry has constrained revenue; parents cannot pay the amount that it would cost to provide higher wages to the workforce. Public investments are needed in order to increase wages. There are other industries, such as agriculture, where this model is used.
- There is a need to share the importance of early childhood education on skills, such as critical thinking, that will be increasingly important as artificial intelligence expands.
- There is a need to use data that has already been collected in Colorado regarding the importance of the early childhood workforce and strategies that work for recruitment and retention.

Colorado Department of Early Childhood Updates

Dawn Odean, Colorado Department of Early Childhood, shared updates regarding the launch of the third year of implementation of Universal Preschool. There are currently over 45,000 applications submitted, which is more than enrollment for the full 24-25 school year. There are also around 200 more providers in the system for this year. There have been several process enhancements over the past year including ensuring families understand age eligibility and eligibility for supplemental hours; streamlining services for children with an Individualized Education Plan by working with Administrative Units; and beginning a partnership with the Colorado Action Lab to explore the implementation model and ensure continuous improvement. The Colorado Action Lab is leading four evidence building efforts, including a process evaluation, quality monitoring and provider support, blending and braiding of funding, and data capacity building.

Mary Alice Cohen shared updates about the Independent Evaluation of CDEC. She shared that there are two new vendors supporting the evaluation, which is due November 1. Child Trends will support the data analysis, and Watershed Advisors will support the writing of the report. Three members of the steering committee will review the deliverables as they are developed, including Commissioner Sue Renner.

ECLC Subcommittee and Working Group Action Items

Sue Renner shared the [Subcommittee and Working Group Written Updates](#). She reminded Commissioners that there is an expectation for Commissioners to serve on one of the Subcommittees or Working Groups. Commissioners can also attend any meeting when a topic of interest is being discussed.

Commissioner Shelley Smith shared updates from the CCCAP Rule Rewrite Committee. She shared the current [Rule Status Overview](#), which includes details of UPK and CCCAP stacking rules.

Mary Houlihan, Illuminate Colorado, shared an update on the Early Childhood Comprehensive Services Working Group's effort to create a fiscal map of early childhood spending in the state. They are nearing finalization of the map and developing a webinar explaining how to use the map. She reminded the group about the goals and the scope of this project, highlighting that the map will include data from 2023-2024 with information about which of those funding streams no longer exist. The map is meant to be a starting point to understanding prenatal to three funding in the state, and they hope to continue to build on the map going forward. The final map will be shared with the ECLC when complete.

Commissioner Updates and Public Comment

- Commissioner Joanna Bruno shared several updates from the Colorado Department of Education. They are meeting with CDEC to improve data sharing agreements. They are working with CDEC's UPK team on quality standards alignment. They released the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant, which can be used for work with birth through grade 12, and 33 grants have been awarded. They have received federal funding for the Migrant Education program, which includes funding for birth through age 20.
- Nicole Reihl shared that EPIC is tracking the impacts of H.R.1, including increases to the Child Tax Credit and changes to the tax credit for employers providing family leave and a tax credit for employers who provide funding for child care. She also shared that EPIC has partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation to streamline employer access to information about child care solutions by creating [this resource](#).

- Shannon Wilson shared that there will be a Boards and Commissions Training required for ECLC Commissioners as well as members of ECLC Subcommittees and Working Groups. All Commissioners and members should plan to attend training on one of the following dates.
 - Friday, Sept. 26- 9:30-10:30
 - Tuesday, Oct. 7, 12:00-1:00
 - Thursday, Oct. 23, 8:00-8:50

Visit from Governor Jared Polis

Governor Jared Polis visited the meeting and gave remarks. He thanked Commissioners for their work and welcomed new Commissioners. He shared early childhood successes including beginning the third year of Universal Preschool and becoming third in the nation for preschool enrollment; improved test scores showing a recovery from the pandemic; and maintaining funding for early childhood despite the current budget shortfall. In the coming year, he hopes to see an increase in the hours available for Universal Preschool. He shared the [Let's Get Ready Initiative](#) of the National Governor's Association, which is focused on school and career readiness and alignment from early childhood through K-12 and beyond.

Next Steps and Final Thoughts

The next ECLC meeting will be held on October 23, 2025 and will be fully virtual.

Note: Any presentation requested by the ECLC does not constitute or imply an endorsement of the product, process, service, or organization by the ECLC.