Early Childhood Education & Development Committee
June 10, 2025, 1:00 – 2:30 pm
200 College St, Ground Floor Conference Room

MINUTES

Attendees: Adrian Sandler, Al Whitesides, Carol Steen, Heather Zanzig, Maia Sloan, Mark Taft, Pat Tuttle, Emily Nicholson (virtual), Jennifer Horton (virtual)

Absent: Diana Anthony, Linda McDaniel, Martin Moore, Pam Holcombe, Sara Lappe

Staff in attendance: Rachael Sawyer, Amy Broughton, Angelica Tyler, Angelyn Johnson

Welcome

- There was general consensus of the members present to allow Emily Nicholson and Jennifer Horton to participate in the meeting virtually.

Minutes

- Approval of minutes from February 4, 2025
    - Motion to approve by Al Whitesides. Seconded by Mark Taft. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Old Business

- There was no old business.

New Business

- FY2026 Funding
    - Staff outlined the funding amount available for FY2026. The total amount available to allocate is $4,053,265, which includes the FY26 allocated amount of $3,974,691 and the current fund balance of $78,574.
    - Staff reviewed the documents that were included in the packet that outlined current FY2025 funding that is for operational and system support. There was an error in the classification of the AB Tech project. Once the correction was made, the current grant portfolio is 61% operational and 39% system support. It was acknowledged that many projects contact some aspects of both categories.
    - The committee discussed different options for allocating the funds:
        - Option A: Extend current FY2025 grants by twelve months, which would extend the period of performance until June 30, 2026. Staff would work with grantees to obtain an updated budget and scope of work.
        - Option B: Conduct a condensed application process with a shorter 9-month period of performance (October 1, 2025-June 30, 2026)
        - Option C: Consider a 3-month extension of current grants and then conduct a condensed application process as described in option B.
        - There was discussion about considering using the $78,574 current fund balance as gap funding for current grantees if option B was selected.
    - The committee desired more information about community partners' needs. Carol Steen made a motion to hear brief commentary about the impact of the funding cycle from

community partners who were in attendance. Al Whitesides seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Caroline Rodier from Buncombe Partnership for Children indicated that if doing an application process and 9-month grant period, a 3-month extension would be helpful. The Early Childhood system is stretched to the max and she thinks all current projects would likely reapply. She also reminded the committee of the burden it is on the organization to write grant applications.
- Betsie Stockslager from Buncombe County Schools Learning Labs said fiscal year planning is critical. They need funding information before the school academic year in order to plan staffing. Without funding, it would impact personnel.
- Marcia Whitney from Verner stated that timing of funding is critical. Their budget must be approved in July. Option A would be most helpful. An extension could be a workable option, but it would be more difficult. Without confirmed funding, there will be staff cuts.
- Mary Arnold from Community Action Opportunities stated that timing is critical for them to know what classes can be open and which one will have to be closed, and to plan staffing levels.
- Deanna LaMotte from Buncombe Partnership for Children said timing is urgent for the NC PreK Expansion project. They have already lost one NC PreK provider due to the uncertainty of funding and she anticipates they will lose at least one other provider if the funding isn't certain.
- Monnie Wright from Donald S Collins Early Learning stated that the timing is critical. They are a NC PreK provider. Option A would be the best option so centers to know what to tell their staff.

- After a discussion among the committee members, Carol Steen made a motion to continue funding current grantees up to their current levels for another year, with the option to reallocate any unused funding with a condensed application process later in the year. Pat Tuttle seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.
- Al Whitesides discussed the difficult budget process this year. Going forward, the committee needs to evaluate the impact of the funding. The Early Childhood fund was originally developed to increase the number of childcare slots in the community and increase overall early learning/kindergarten readiness; however, due to circumstances including the pandemic and natural disaster, that has not happened. Possible other areas that need focus is evaluating the role of business community support and whether the fund should go away from the county. These topics will be considered in future meetings.

Announcements

- Several committee members' current term ends on June 30. Diana Anthony, Heather Zanzig, Maia Sloan and Pam Holcombe are eligible for reappointment and staff will work with them to verify interest and complete that process. Mark Taft and Linda McDaniel have served their maximum term and will be rolling off the committee. Mark and Linda were recognized and celebrated for their work. Committee members were asked to help recruit new members once the applications are open.

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Public Comment

- Betsie Stockslager and Pepi Acebo participated in public comment.

Next Meeting

Carol Steen made a motion to forgo the July meeting and meet next on August 5. Adrian Sandler seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. Next meeting will be August 5, 2025, 1:00-2:30 pm, 200 College St, Ground Floor Conference Room.