Early Childhood Education & Development Committee
January 6, 2026, 1:00 – 2:30 pm
Virtual Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees: Adrian Sandler, Al Whitesides, Beth Sherman, Carol Steen, Emily Nicholson, Jennifer Horton, Jo Jamison, Maia Sloan, Martin Moore, Pat Tuttle, Sara Lappe, Stacy Anderson

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

Minutes

- Approval of minutes from December 2, 2025
    - Motion to approve by Stacy Anderson. Seconded by Adrian Sandler. The minutes were unanimously approved via roll call vote.

Old Business

- There was no old business.

New Business

- Panelist Discussion
    - Panelists Included:
        - Durham: Dr. Linda Chappel, Sr. Vice President, Triangle Area Child Care Resource and Referral Services
        - Forsyth: Leslie Mullinax, Pre-K Priority Project Coordinator
        - Mecklenburg: Dr. Mary-Margaret Kantor, Chief Early Education Officer, Smart Start of Mecklenburg County
    - Program Summaries
        - Mecklenburg County – Mecklenburg Pre-K (MECK Pre-K)
            - Program established 8 years ago in response to poor economic mobility outcomes identified in national research.
            - Universal eligibility: all 4-year-olds residing in the county.
            - Operates separately from NC Pre-K but aligned with quality standards.
            - Served over 2,000 children in eight years, and recently expanded with additional classrooms.
            - Uses licensed teachers, school-year calendar, and countywide geographic coordination to avoid service gaps.
            - Strong emphasis on data collection, equity, and workforce quality.
            - FY26 budget $28.2M including $20+ M from County government.
        - Durham County – Durham Pre-K
            - Originated from a multi-jurisdictional task force involving city, county, and school board leadership, also in 8th year.
            - Community goal: serve 75% of the county's 4-year-old population; currently at approximately 42%.
            - Universal access goal with priority given to highest-need children.
            - Braided funding model (local funds, NC Pre-K, Head Start, Title I).
            - Strong workforce investments, including pay parity with public school teachers and enhanced professional development.
            - Universal application system for families across all publicly funded preschool options.
            - $11.5M recurring investment, plus $2.4M ARPA funding, and $400k other philanthropic investments. Not funded with County general funds.
        - Forsyth County – Pre-K Priority Coalition

- Coalition model rather than a specific program with single administering entity.
- Historically limited local investment until use of ARPA funds.
- ARPA funding ($4M over two years) used to enhance quality in existing classrooms rather than expand seats, that investment recently ended.
- Investments focused on:
    - Teacher pay parity and retention bonuses
    - Curriculum enhancements
    - Family engagement strategies
    - Improved assessment tools (Creative Curriculum & Brigance)
- Independent evaluation showed positive gains in literacy, math, and social-emotional outcomes.
- Long-term funding beyond ARPA remains uncertain; coalition continues advocacy and planning.

- Challenges discusses:
    - Teacher shortages and workforce pipeline issues.
    - Wraparound care (beyond the school day/school year).
    - Transportation gaps.
    - Increased special needs among children (developmental & behavioral).
    - Systemic barriers and leadership turnover.
    - Fatigue of advocates and uncertainty about future funding.
- Key Themes & Takeaways
    - Local Investment is Critical: Sustainable, locally driven funding enables flexibility, quality improvements, and expansion.
    - Universal Goals with Targeted Prioritization: Counties emphasized universal access while prioritizing children with the greatest need.
    - Workforce Compensation Matters: Pay parity and retention strategies are essential to program stability and quality.
    - Braided Funding Models Work: Successful programs leverage multiple funding sources while coordinating across systems. Leveraging philanthropic investment & local business engagement is critical.
    - Flexibility Needed: Commitment to the local landscape and ability to pivot to meet needs.
    - Data & Evaluation Drive Support: Robust data collection and third-party evaluation strengthen credibility and community buy-in.
    - Stakeholder Collaboration is Essential: Multi-agency and cross-sector partnerships are foundational to success. The need to build public will and political will.
    - Implementation Lessons Learned: Engage educators early, align professional development with teacher needs, and plan for sustainability beyond time-limited funding.

Announcements

- There were no announcements.

Public Comment

- There were no public comments.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be February 3, 2026, 1:00-2:30 pm, 200 College St, Room 310.