**Early Childhood Education & Development Committee**
March 10, 2026, 1:00 – 2:30 pm
Ground Floor Conference Room

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Attendees:** Adrian Sandler, Al Whitesides, Beth Sherman, Carol Steen (virtual), Emily Nicholson (virtual), Heather Zanzig, Jo Jamison, Maia Sloan, Martin Moore (virtual), Sara Lappe, Sarah Kabourek, Stacy Anderson (virtual)

**Staff in attendance**: Rachael Sawyer, Samantha Kirk, Sarah Tisinger (WCU MPA Capstone Student), Amy Broughton (virtual), Angelyn Johnson (virtual)

**Guest:** Dan Wuori, Ph.D.

**Minutes**

- Approval of minutes from February 3, 2026
    - The minutes were unanimously approved.

**Old Business**

- There was no old business.

**New Business**

- Conflict of interest disclosures
    - Committee members completed their annual conflict of interest disclosures, and the summary document is included in the meeting packet. A couple of members have children who attend or previously attended some of the child care centers. Jo reported they have a consulting relationship with one of the applicants and will recuse themselves from scoring that application.

- Focused Initiative Discussion: Dan Wuori, Ph.D.
    - Project Context and Timeline
        - The county has engaged a consulting firm to support the committee and staff with the Focused Investment project.
        - The project timeline runs through July of next year (approximately 15 months remaining).
        - The goal is to identify priority strategies this summer that can move forward into:
            - Scoping
            - Planning
            - Implementation concepts
        - Today's discussion is centered on this future state, and committee members are asked to set aside current FY2027 grantmaking for the purpose of the conversation.
    - Early Childhood Care and Education Challenges
        - To set the stage for discussing barriers, committee members first shared ideas for what it looks like for children to thrive in their first 2,000 days. Participants also shared thoughts on what it looks like for all children to have an equal opportunity to thrive, such as the ability to afford quality care no matter who you are and having learning resources in homes for all children.
        - Participants discussed major barriers affecting early childhood systems, including:
            - Childcare Workforce (low wages, turnover, staffing shortages)
            - Low wages make it difficult for childcare workers to live in high-cost communities like Asheville.

        - Staffing shortages contribute to childcare deserts.
        - Lack of access to affordable childcare
        - Families often cannot access available childcare slots, even when programs exist.
        - Structural barriers may limit access to subsidized childcare.
        - Geographic access limitations
        - Members emphasized that home-based childcare can be high quality and should not be overlooked in strategies.
- Early Intervention
    - Participants noted increasing developmental and social challenges among young children, including:
        - COVID-era impacts
        - Helene impacts
        - Reduced social interaction during early years.
    - Early intervention was emphasized as more effective and cost-efficient than later remedial services.
- Holistic Early Childhood Framework
    - The discussion referenced the Nurturing Care Framework, which highlights several core components of early childhood development:
        - Adequate nutrition
        - Responsive caregiving
        - Safety and security
        - Good health
        - Opportunities for early learning
    - Participants discussed the need for integrated approaches, rather than focusing solely on classroom-based programs.
- Data and Research Needs
    - Committee members discussed the importance of better data analysis to guide decisions.
    - Potential areas for research include:
        - Families eligible for childcare subsidies who do not access them
        - Reasons families cannot access preferred childcare slots
        - Community needs and barriers identified through focus groups or surveys
        - Call data from childcare resource and referral organizations
- Summary & takeaways:
    - $4 M is not enough to comprehensively meet all the needs of young children in Buncombe County, yet Buncombe's investment can play a critical role in the early care & education ecosystem.
    - Buncombe County's Early Childhood Education Committee establishing resolution offers a great amount of flexibility:
        - To serve the 0-5 age spectrum from infants through pre-kindergarteners AND/OR prioritize investments for specific aged children
        - To serve the full system equally AND/OR prioritize investments to address inequities and benefit children with the highest needs
        - To make investments specific to early childhood education/childcare AND/OR invest in other types of programs and services to help young children reach their potential.

**Announcements**

- Scoring deadline is March 31, 2026.

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**Public Comment**

- Amy Barry, Corrie Price and 2 anonymous online attendees participated in public comment.

**Next Meeting**

Next meeting will be a virtual meeting on April 7, 2026, 1:00-2:30 pm