Early Childhood Education & Development Committee
May 5, 2026, 12:00 – 2:30 pm
200 College St, Room 310

MEETING MINUTES

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

Guest: Dan Wuori, PhD

Staff in attendance: Rachael Sawyer, Sara Joss, Burnett Walz, Amy Broughton, Tim Love

Minutes

- Approval of minutes from April 14, 2026
    - Stacy Anderson made a motion to approve the minutes. Jennifer Horton seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Old Business

- There was no old business.

New Business

- Initial Conversations
    - Staff explained the difference in Program vs. System level of impact/success in early childhood education and care via available data. Harder to pull data from the system-level of this work.
    - Dan Wuori recommended a standardized funding approach as best practice to help with providing more consistent impact data year-over-year.
    - The committee discussed data and if additional data is needed. Instead of continuing to request more data, it was suggested that the committee hone in on synthesizing data already provided to inform the focus of the committee's work.

- Focused Investment Plan
    - Staff and Dan Wuori reviewed the investment categories & ideas, which were included in the meeting packet:
        - Supplements to State/Federal Programs: Invest funds to augment state and/or federal child care programs to extend and enhance impact
            - NC PreK Enhancement
            - Child Care Subsidy Enhancement
            - Head Start Local Match
        - Subsidized Child Care Models: Invest funds to establish & operate local program(s) to provide subsidized child care for children that don't qualify under existing state/federal programs
            - PreK Slots
            - 3-Year-Old Slots
            - Infant & Toddler Slots

- Behavioral Health: Invest in mental/behavioral health support services to enhance early childhood education and development
  - Teacher Mental Health Support
  - Pyramid Model
- Workforce: Invest in programs that enhance the workforce of professionals in early childhood education, including teachers and staff
  - Grants for Workforce Programs
  - Teacher & Staff Supplements
  - Child Care for Child Care Professionals
  - Community of Professionalism
- Miscellaneous: Invest in ideas not fitting into one of the groupings
  - Child Care Provider Supplements
  - Parenting Support
  - Family, Friend & Neighbor Care
  - Innovation Grants

- The committee divided into small groups for a breakout session and report-out. Each table was assigned a focus area with potential investment ideas to discuss. Each group prepared a short presentation back to the group describing the category and making the case for why this should be a priority area and why maybe it is not the top priority.

- The committee discussed ideas with momentum.
  - Workforce Development (Al Whiteside, Carol Steen)
    - Pros:
      - Recruitment and retention impact opportunities via more enhanced total compensation programs/packages to possibly include collaborative/collective benefits (health insurance, child care resources, mental health, recruitment and retention bonuses)
    - Cons:
      - Expensive
  - Behavioral Health (Jennifer Horton, Sara Lappe, Beth Sherman)
    - Pros:
      - Targets areas identified on childcare survey
        - Trusted relationships with caregivers
        - Value emotionally supportive environments
        - Community connection/support
      - Helps with teacher retention
      - Scalable models
      - Impacts other focus categories
      - Can be measured on mClass (SE learning categories)
    - Cons:
      - Doesn't help with cost

- Supplements to State/Federal Programs (Martin Moore, Sarah Kabourek, Stacy Anderson)
  - Pros:
    - Supporting high-quality programs
    - Targeted to priority populations
    - Closing the gap in subsidies with local funds
    - Audience-based performance
  - Cons:
    - High cost
    - Challenges with subsidy system (eligibility requirements)
- Subsidized Child Care Models (Adrian Sandler, Heather Zanzig, Pat Tuttle)
  - Pros:
    - Earlier intervention = Lower affordability barriers (workforce participation)
    - Benefits of responsive caregiving/interaction = Decreased trauma, increase in SE development, decreased need for behavioral support
  - Cons:
    - Design – no Federal or State money (family share vs. free)
    - Parents who don't qualify for subsidies
    - Needs emotionally responsive workforce and practices
- Miscellaneous (start up + one-time, facilities/capital, curriculum/materials, proof of concept) (Jo Jamison, Maia Sloan)
  - Pros:
    - Low cost
    - Can fully fund small projects
    - Voices still heard from emerging ideas/changes in landscape
    - Launch and measure
    - Flexible
  - Cons:
    - Hard to show data

- Additional Information Requested
  - More refined cost estimates for slots (dynamic is better).
  - What is needed (investment) beyond what this committee can provide and does our community have that infrastructure in place?

- Resource Information
  - Materials provided in the meeting packet and at tables
    - Buncombe County Early Childhood Committee Potential Focused Investments for Early Childhood Funds
    - Buncombe County Child Care Survey: Findings from the 2026 family survey regarding child care, child development & parenting.

    - NC ELI & mClass Overview: Kindergarten readiness data by Asheville and Buncombe County Schools and Buncombe County Strategy & Innovation
    - A Systematic Best-Practice Manual for Funding Touchstones: Master of Public Affairs Capstone Project by Sarah Tisinger
- Next Steps
    - Committee members will reflect on the conversation from this meeting and be ready to come back next month for a conversation about the future state and focus areas.
    - June agenda items: transition considerations, plans for July-December, Committee member terms (looking to fill between 2-6 seats in July).
    - Coming soon: Engagement opportunities to hear from applicants/grantees on potential focused investments & transition plans, future structure for public policy advocacy.

Announcements

Public Comment

- Pepi Acebo participated in public comment.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is June 2, 2026 from 12:00-2:30 at 200 College St, Room 310.