



Early Childhood Policy Council

Meeting Agenda, Attendance, and Summary Report

Thursday, August 27, 2026

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Physical Meeting:
1000 G Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
WestEd, 5th floor, Capitol Room

Agenda

Welcome and Introduction

- Review meeting protocols
- Introduce new Council members
- Review of agenda

Workforce Needs Subcommittee Discussion

- Subcommittee shares draft letter
- Council feedback

Family Access and Federal Policy Subcommittee Discussion

- Subcommittee shares draft content
- Council discussion

General Public Comment

- Members of the public are invited to provide verbal comment

Attendance:

Council Members: Andrea Fernandez Mendoza, Catherine Brozowski, Claire Ramsey, Diana Ramos, Donna Sneeringer, Elizabeth Simons, Karla Pleitéz-Howell, Maéva Renaud, Mary Ann Hansen, Mary Ignatius, Matilda Soria, Miren Algorri, Natali Gaxiola, Ristyn Woolley, Stephen Propheter, Sonia Jaramillo, Tonia McMillian, Tony Jordan, Wendy Sims-Moten, Socorro Martin

Summary Report:

Welcome and Introduction:

Karin Bloomer, meeting facilitator for the Early Childhood Policy Council (ECPC), opened the second meeting of 2026.

Claire Ramsey, Council Chair and Chief Deputy Director of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), welcomed members to the Council's second meeting of 2026.

Full welcoming remarks and introductions are recorded on pages 2-4 of the [ECPC August 27 meeting transcript](#).

New Council Member Introductions

Rather than conducting a full roll call, **Ramsey** introduced the Council's newly appointed members and invited each to share a brief introduction.

- **Liz Simons** introduced herself as Chair of the Board of the Heising-Simons Foundation and highlighted the Foundation's long-standing commitment to early childhood education and care. She also noted her work with systems-impacted youth through her involvement with the Marshall Project and stressed the importance of considering foster care and justice-system connections when developing early childhood policies.
- **Wendy Sims-Moten** joined later in the meeting due to technical difficulties and shared her interest in understanding how statewide policies intersect with local early childhood systems. She expressed particular interest in Transitional Kindergarten implementation, reimbursement reform, and strengthening relationships among service systems that support children and families.

Ramsey next acknowledged the departure of Council member Mary Ann Hansen and thanked her for her service. She informed meeting attendees of three vacancies on the Council and three vacancies on the Parent Advisory Committee and interested individuals can apply for appointment and information on how to do that can be found on the ECPC website.

Federal Head Start Rulemaking Update

Before reviewing the agenda, **Ramsey** shared information about a federal Notice of Proposed Rulemaking entitled [Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs](#). While no changes are currently in effect, the proposal would significantly reduce and replace existing Head Start Performance Standards. **Ramsey** shared that the CDSS is currently reviewing the proposed rule to assess its implications. She also encouraged interest holders to participate in the public comment process, which is open through October 6, 2026.

Review Agenda

Ramsey reviewed the meeting agenda and described the process for incorporating Workforce Needs Subcommittee and the Family Access and Federal Policy Subcommittee recommendations into the Council's annual report. She reminded members that the Workforce and Parent Advisory Committees will continue to review recommendation before the Council's formal vote in November. **Ramsey** thanked the subcommittee members for their considerable work preparing draft recommendations. She emphasized that this meeting was the final opportunity for substantive discussion before recommendations moved toward final approval.

Workforce Needs Subcommittee Discussion:

Subcommittee shares draft content

Workforce Needs Subcommittee members **Andrea Fernandez Mendoza** and **Natali Gaxiola** presented two major recommendations related to provider sustainability and reimbursement reform. The first recommendation focuses on creating a temporary 15 percent flex factor to support center-based child care programs transitioning to enrollment-based reimbursement. **Fernandez Mendoza** and **Gaxiola** explained that providers previously operated under attendance-based reimbursement structures, which created financial instability whenever children were absent. Although the change to enrollment-based reimbursement in July 2026 represents a significant improvement, providers continue to face serious enrollment challenges and therefore require temporary stabilization support.

Fernandez Mendoza described multiple factors contributing to enrollment instability, including declining birth rates, staffing shortages, Transitional Kindergarten expansion, and family fears related to immigration enforcement. **Gaxiola** emphasized that the proposed flex factor should be viewed as a temporary bridge strategy while California completes implementation of broader reimbursement reforms.

They then presented recommendations related to California's ongoing rate reform process. **Fernandez Mendoza** reviewed accomplishments such as development of the state's alternative methodology cost model, movement toward a single-rate

reimbursement structure, provider unionization efforts, and temporary Cost of Care Plus payments. **Gaxiola** identified significant unresolved issues, including implementation delays, disagreements regarding cost assumptions, insufficient workforce benefits, limited facility capacity, and concerns about collaboration and transparency.

The recommendation package for reimbursement reform called for accountability in implementation timelines, transparent and verifiable data, stronger Tribal consultation, support for facilities expansion, regular updates to cost models, and interim reimbursement increases while the state continues working toward full implementation.

Council discussion

Council members engaged in extensive discussion regarding both recommendations. The full text of their discussion and recommendations is on pages 7–23 of the [ECPC August 27 meeting transcript](#).

Stephen Prophter expressed support for the subcommittee's goal of stabilizing providers during the transition period and acknowledged that enrollment fluctuations can create significant challenges for programs managing ongoing fixed costs. Speaking from a technical-assistance perspective, he offered implementation considerations intended to strengthen the recommendation and ensure consistency with existing reimbursement practices. His feedback focused on preserving the recommendation's underlying purpose while clarifying how reimbursement would operate under current fiscal and administrative rules. The discussion that followed explored both accountability considerations and strategies for maintaining provider stability and family access.

Sonia Jaramillo raised a question regarding whether a flex factor would reduce the incentive for providers to reach full enrollment. **Fernandez Mendoza** and **Gaxiola** stressed that many providers have conducted extensive recruitment efforts but continue to struggle with enrollment due to factors beyond their control. **Liz Simons** voiced her general support for the flex factor and advocated for larger efforts to address the issues that impact enrollment. She highlighted that it is important child care providers not carry the burden of recruitment alone.

Mary Ignatius supported efforts to stabilize providers and questioned whether unused contract dollars would be returned to the state when programs continue struggling financially. She argued that child care resources should remain available to support families and providers whenever possible and emphasized the importance of preserving system capacity.

Tony Jordan focused on reserve-account policies and suggested greater flexibility for contractors to retain funds locally.

Additional discussion included the role of family child care networks, contractor capacity building, and technical details of reimbursement structures. Throughout the discussion,

members repeatedly emphasized that provider sustainability, enrollment, and family access are closely connected.

Turning to the rate reform recommendations, **Donna Sneeringer** urged greater integration of Cost of Care Plus payments into long-term reimbursement structures and argued for simplifying administrative processes. **Maéva Renaud** suggested treating the recommendation for interim reimbursement increases as separate from rate reform, emphasizing the importance of addressing real-time needs in the field. **Mary Ignatius** raised concerns regarding regional cost classifications and emphasized the need for a transparent process to correct inaccurate data. **Miren Algorri** encouraged inclusion of disaster preparedness and recovery supports, noting that providers affected by fires and floods continue to struggle. **Wendy Sims-Moten** emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum and ensuring regular reassessment of reform implementation.

Overall, discussion reflected broad support for the direction of the draft proposals. Council members generally agreed that providers continue to face significant financial and operational challenges associated with enrollment fluctuations, workforce shortages, and ongoing implementation of reimbursement reforms. Council feedback focused primarily on refining the recommendations, clarifying technical language, and strengthening implementation strategies.

Several members offered suggestions to improve accountability, transparency, and fiscal flexibility while maintaining the intent of the recommendations.

Council leadership reminded members that the recommendations would undergo additional review by the Workforce and Parent Advisory Committees before returning to the Council for the final decision regarding inclusion in the annual report.

Family Access and Federal Policy Subcommittee Discussion:

The full text of Council discussion on the family access and federal policy recommendation is on pages 25–50 of the [ECPC August 27 meeting transcript](#).

Subcommittee shares draft content

Sonia Jaramillo and **Karla Pleitéz Howell**, on behalf of the Family Access and Federal Policy Subcommittee, presented draft recommendations focused on family access, universal early learning opportunities, and federal policy considerations. They explained that the recommendations build upon years of prior work, including the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission, and previous Council reports. Rather than introducing an entirely new policy framework, the subcommittee sought to establish a clear long-term vision for California's early childhood system and identify strategies for achieving that vision.

The first major component of the proposal was the establishment of a statewide universal access goal. The subcommittee proposed that by 2034, every child in

California should have access to culturally affirming birth-to-five services that meet the needs of children and families. **Pleitéz Howell** described this goal as a "north star" for future policymaking, explaining that California does not lack recommendations or ideas for improving early childhood systems. Instead, she emphasized the need for a shared destination that can guide future investments, policy decisions, and system building efforts. The universal access goal was intended to provide that common direction and establish a long-term vision for what California hopes to achieve for children and families.

The second major component of the proposal focused on adopting a targeted universalism framework as the strategy for achieving the universal access goal. **Pleitéz Howell** explained that while universal access is the desired outcome for all children and families, implementation efforts should intentionally prioritize those who are currently furthest from opportunity. The proposal identified populations that experience significant barriers to access, including low-income families, multilingual families, Tribal communities, children with disabilities, families experiencing housing insecurity, and families involved with child welfare systems. To further explain the concept, **Pleitéz Howell** invited **Nancy Strohl** to provide additional context. **Strohl** described targeted universalism as a framework that combines broad, universal goals with targeted strategies designed to address structural inequities and ensure that progress reaches communities facing the greatest barriers. Council members subsequently discussed additional populations that should be explicitly considered within the framework.

The subcommittee also presented recommendations related to federal policy and family safety-net programs. These included protecting Medi-Cal and CalFresh access, preserving Head Start funding, maintaining federal child care funding streams, expanding legal supports for immigrant families, and resisting punitive approaches to fraud prevention that create barriers for families seeking assistance.

Council discussion

Council members generally expressed support for the universal-access vision. **Liz Simons** asked for clarification regarding the meaning of "culturally affirming" services and whether it includes language access and linguistic inclusion. **Wendy Sims-Moten** inquired about whether the proposed goal aligns with broader efforts among agencies that support families beyond early care and education. **Donna Sneeringer** highlighted the consistency between the proposal and recommendations previously developed by the Blue Ribbon Commission and stressed the importance of a strategic approach to the sequence of the work. **Tonia McMillian** supported the goal and described the importance of having a shared statewide vision supported by many interest holders rather than any single organization or group.

The discussion regarding targeted universalism generated robust conversation. **Maéva Renaud** suggested military families and residents of child care deserts. **Simons** advocated for immigrant families and individuals affected by immigration enforcement to be recognized directly. **Fernandez Mendoza** highlighted grandparent caregivers and

other informal caregivers supporting children when parents are unavailable. **Catherine Brozowski** raised concerns regarding workforce capacity and facilities limitations, questioning whether California currently possesses the infrastructure required to achieve universal access by 2034. **Natali Gaxiola** emphasized challenges associated with teacher preparation and compensation, particularly in relation to Transitional Kindergarten implementation.

The federal policy and immigration discussion generated additional feedback. **Sneeringer** emphasized the importance of protecting Head Start program integrity and preserving bilingual services. **Fernandez Mendoza** advocated for a "one-door" approach that would simplify access to multiple supports and benefits. **Ignatius** recommended broader integration of TANF, CalWORKs, and related systems to create more seamless experiences for families. Council members broadly supported efforts to protect immigrant families and strengthen family access to public supports.

Throughout the discussion, recurring themes included universal access, equity, systems integration, immigration concerns, workforce capacity, facilities development, and the importance of designing systems that are responsive to family realities rather than administrative convenience.

General Public Comment:

Before the meeting adjourned, verbal comments were invited from the public. Full record of public comments is on pages 51–56 of the [ECPC August 27 meeting transcript](#). Public comment provided important perspectives from providers, advocates, and community interest holders. Selected comments capturing several of the meeting's central themes can be found below.

Several speakers focused on the mixed delivery system. A speaker challenged agencies to move beyond discussing the concept and instead provide a concrete explanation of how mixed delivery functions and where family child care providers fit within the model. Similar concerns were raised throughout public comment as providers sought greater clarity regarding statewide strategies and implementation plans.

A commenter expressed support for targeted universalism and emphasized the importance of preserving family choice. She spoke about her personal experiences navigating multiple child care systems and stressed that families often require services from numerous providers and programs simultaneously. She also highlighted mentorship as an important workforce strategy.

Several family child care providers described concerns about representation and inclusion. A speaker argued that equity must be reflected in who participates in decision-making and urged the Council to involve providers earlier in policy development. Another speaker emphasized the role family child care plays in supporting women-owned businesses and expressed concern that providers often feel excluded

from broader system planning. A third commenter discussed terminology and licensing structures affecting family child care homes and encouraged policymakers to use language that reflects actual provider experiences.

A comment was raised about the concerns regarding Transitional Kindergarten policies and their potential impact on family child care enrollment. This commenter expressed concerns about provider sustainability and urged policymakers to focus on preserving family child care programs as part of the mixed delivery system. Another comment was made that encouraged providers to pursue educational advancement and leadership opportunities, emphasizing the importance of provider participation in policy discussions.

Collectively, public comments reinforced themes of provider sustainability, representation, family choice, mixed delivery systems, workforce development, and the need for stronger communication between policymakers and practitioners.

- "We wanted to imagine a California where access to child care is not determined by zip code, where access is not determined by your income, your language you speak, disabilities that might exist, but it is really a California that provides universal access for all, and we start with those furthest from opportunity." – Universal access to early childhood services
- "We believe that by 2034, every child in California should have access to birth to five services, and that needs to be culturally affirming and it needs to meet family needs." – Targeted universalism and equity
- "It's not that the effort isn't there to enroll, there is no one to enroll." – Provider enrollment challenges
- "Because of immigration, we found a lot of families are not willing to access social services because of the fear that their information is going to be reported elsewhere." – Immigration-related barriers to family access
- "Equity is an action word. It cannot be something that we simply say that we value. It must be reflected in who is at the table, whose knowledge is respected, and whose reality is shaped by the decisions that are made." – Meaningful interest holder representation in policymaking
- "You shouldn't have to prove why you need care. This is the right of the child to access it." - Children's right to access early care and education
- "Nothing about us without us." – Meaningful inclusion of families, providers, and affected communities in policymaking
- "We need all of it. We need the TK, we need the mixed delivery, we need every single part of it." – The importance of maintaining a robust mixed-delivery system that includes Transitional Kindergarten, centers, and family child care providers

Adjourn:

Before adjourning, Council members discussed opportunities to ensure stronger alignment between workforce recommendations and family-access recommendations.

Pleitéz Howell raised questions regarding how the Council could better reflect the connections among access, workforce needs, and facilities within future recommendations. **Bloomer** suggested that feedback regarding these intersections could be incorporated into the Family Access and Federal Policy Subcommittee recommendations and cross-referenced in the Council's annual report, noting that this would be the cleanest approach from a Bagley-Keene perspective. **Ramsey** added that the upcoming joint Workforce and Parent Advisory Committees meeting could provide an additional opportunity to discuss and align these issues.

Council members also discussed how the joint Workforce and Parent Advisory Committees meeting could serve as an opportunity to hear more directly from providers and families. Referencing themes raised during public comment, **Ignatius** highlighted the importance of understanding the experiences and challenges faced by those directly affected by child care policies. **Bloomer** noted the importance of balancing those perspectives with the advisory committees' responsibility to provide formal feedback on the draft recommendations. The discussion reflected a shared interest in ensuring that future recommendations continue to be informed by the lived experiences of providers and families.

Ramsey shared that the Parent Advisory Committee and Workforce Advisory Committees meeting was scheduled for September 21, 2026, and the final Council meeting of the year would take place on November 19, 2026.