



Early Childhood Policy Council

Meeting Agenda, Attendance, and Summary Report

Wednesday, August 27, 2025

9 a.m.–12 p.m.

Physical Meeting:

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

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introduction
 - Welcome
 - Review of agenda
2. Improving CalWORKs Child Care
 - Presentation
 - Council discussion
 - Presentation - findings from the focus groups
 - Council discussion
3. Overview of Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant
 - Presentation
 - Council discussion
4. Update on Rate Reform
 - Status update
 - Questions from the Council
5. General Public Comment
 - Members of the public are invited to provide verbal comment
6. Adjourn

Attendance:

Council Members: Andrea Fernandez Mendoza, Carola Oliva-Olson, Cheryl Polk, Claire Ramsey, Donna Sneeringer, Janet Zamudio, Kim Pattillo Brownson, Laura (Kay) Ruhstaller, Lissete Frausto, Lupe Jaime-Mileham, Mary Ann Hansen, Mary Ignatius, Mayra E. Alvarez, Miren Algorri, Natali Gaxiola, Paula Merrigan, Robin Layton, Socorro Martin, Sonia Jaramillo, Tonia McMillian.

Parent Advisory Committee Members: Cherie Schroeder, Deborah Corley-Marzett, Lissete Frausto, Mary Ignatius, Patricia Lozano.

Workforce Advisory Committee Members: Ann Bonnitto, Debra Ward, Miren Algorri, Patricia Alexander, Tonia McMillian, Virginia Eigen.

Guest Speakers:

- Erika St. Andre, California Department of Education (CDE)
- Corey Rodda, California Department of Social Services (CDSS)
- Deborah Rawson, CDSS
- Jackie Barocio, CDSS
- Shanice Orum, CDSS

Summary Report:

Welcome and Introductions:

Claire Ramsey, Interim Chair and Chief Deputy Director of the CDSS, opened the third Early Childhood Policy Council (ECPC) meeting of 2025.

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

Improving CalWORKs Child Care

The full Improving CalWORKs Child Care presentation and panel slides and remarks of the discussion are available:

- [CalWORKs Consolidation Presentation slides](#)
- [ECPC August 27 transcript, pages 4–10](#)

Jackie Barocio presented an overview of the CalWORKs Child Care Program and its consolidation project, reviewing findings from family and provider focus groups. As part of California's Welfare to Work program, the CalWORKs Child Care Program provides participants with child care vouchers to support them in seeking employment and education. The program consists of three stages with families receiving different levels

of support based on their status and needs. The consolidation project aims to streamline the program, making it easier for families to navigate and local partners to administer.

Barocio shared insights from focus groups conducted by WestEd, revealing the varied experiences of families and providers due to local administration differences.

Key challenges for families identified include information gaps, difficulties in making changes to vouchers, communication issues, and lack of clarity about program structure. For providers, late and missing payments, communication breakdowns, and unclear policies between stages undermine their ability to provide consistent care. Providers and families also face obstacles due to operational inefficiencies that impact trust and service delivery.

Barocio invited council members to reflect on these findings and share additional concerns regarding the program.

Council Discussion

Claire Ramsey opened the floor for Council discussion on improving the CalWORKs Child Care Program. The full text of the Council discussion is on pages 10–17 of the [ECPC August 27 transcript](#). The following themes emerged from the Council discussion:

- **General Feedback:** Council members expressed appreciation for efforts to streamline CalWORKs Child Care but highlighted ongoing challenges.
- **CalWORKs System Challenges:**
 - Eligibility Information: Families entering CalWORKs are often unaware that they are eligible for child care. In particular, a Council member pointed out lack of information about the continuation of child care eligibility when families are no longer receiving cash aid. Issues around notifying families of continuing and changing eligibility were raised. It was also noted that the varying county-set definitions of stability can create confusion about program stages and progress.
 - Reimbursement: Concerns were raised over reimbursement delays and the impact of such delays on both providers and families.
 - Communication and Education: Program information can be complex, and families and providers do not always get the same information at the same time. Council members advocated for webinars to improve understanding of program requirements. A request was also made for a comprehensive list of county subcontractors, so providers know who to reach out to when questions come up.
 - Case Management: Case managers play a vital role in helping to navigate the program, but they are working under high caseloads and have experienced many changes since the pandemic. There was a question whether families maintain a consistent case manager across stages of the

program. A recommendation was made for more training to support front-line staff to handle high caseloads with empathy.

- **Tribal Outreach:** Council members asked whether Tribal families were represented in focus groups. They suggested outreach to the large Tribal consortiums in California to ensure information is accessible to eligible Tribal families.

Improving CalWORKs Child Care: Continued Presentation on Findings from the Focus Groups

Barocio highlighted the recommendations from child care provider focus groups. Full discussion begins on page 17 of the [ECPC August 27 transcript](#).

Provider recommendations included the following:

- System modernization
 - Implement direct deposit and online payment tracking to reduce payment delays and questions.
 - Establish digital submission processes for increased efficiency.
- Onboarding, training, and partnering with providers
 - Enhance onboarding through comprehensive welcome packets, detailed handouts, and mentorship programs for new providers.
 - Recognize providers as professional partners in the program.

Barocio then shared recommendations from family focus groups, which included the following:

- Improve communication through clearer notices and consistent guidance to families.
- Simplify and streamline paperwork and modernize systems to include online portals and mobile apps.
- Share resources about community services and child care provider options.
- Improve staff training.

Council Discussion

Claire Ramsey opened the floor for Council discussion on the recommendations from the focus groups. The full text of the Council discussion is on pages 18–23 of the [ECPC August 27 transcript](#). The themes that emerged from the Council discussion included:

- **Internal Staffing Continuity:** A Council member highlighted the need for processes to ensure continuity and communication when a family's assigned case manager changes.

- **Support System Clarity:** Council members noted the lack of a clear support system for families and the challenge of finding the right resources. They advocated for a structured guide to help navigate services, especially services and resources for children with disabilities.
- **Stability as a Focus Area:** A Council member proposed focusing on stability across the system to support child care, providers, and families, minimizing transitions and related challenges.

Overview of Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant

The full Overview of Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant presentation and panel slides and remarks of the discussion are available:

- [Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant slides](#)
- [ECPC August 27 transcript, pages 24–30](#)

Erika St. Andre from the CDE provided an overview of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grant, seeking feedback on how to effectively distribute information about the recently awarded grant and opportunities for partnership in upcoming work.

Grant Overview:

The CLSD grant supports literacy instruction from birth through grade 12 by providing federal funding to help states develop or update comprehensive literacy plans. The CLSD grant allows states to subgrant to local education agencies to implement evidence-based programs based on the state literacy plan.

There are four federal priority areas for the CLSD grant: 1) partnerships between state education agencies and higher education institutions, 2) using evidence-based instructional approaches and supports to address COVID-19 impacts, 3) promoting educational equity and opportunity for underserved students, and 4) supporting students and families through educational transitions, with an emphasis on professional development and multi-tiered support systems.

California was awarded this grant in 2019 and 2024.

Key Objectives:

Based on the results of a needs assessment and feedback from internal and external partners, California's is using CSLD grant funds to support the following three goals:

1. **Leverage Partnerships** to ensure teachers and teachers in training have the knowledge and skills to support evidence-based literacy instruction.
2. **Revise the State Literacy Plan** to include updated evidence-based practices and guidance documents, as well as promising practices from the 2019

subgrantees.

3. **Build Local Capacity** to implement literacy initiatives that emphasize family and community involvement, expand education options, and address the needs of California's most vulnerable children.

The State Literacy Plan

The original State Literacy Plan was adopted in March 2021 to align state literacy initiatives, content standards, and state guidance to support teachers. The plan also supports continuous improvement and serves as a model for local literacy plans. The Plan is used as a guide when developing requests for applications for CSLD subgrants. Since receiving the 2024 CSLD award, the State literacy team has worked to revise the Plan to ensure that each section clearly communicates how it serves California's students.

This process also allowed for the updating of statewide literacy priorities to reflect what was learned during the first grant period. St. Andre shared the original priorities and the newly revised priorities, detailing the thought process that went into the changes. She noted that the new priorities better reflect what actually happens in schools. New priorities enfold structured literacy instruction within a multi-tier support system to meet the needs of all students, including dual language learners, multilingual students, and those with disabilities.

2019 CSLD Grant Projects

St. Andre reviewed some of the work that occurred under the 2019 grant award, which was delayed for a year due to the pandemic.

Council Discussion

Karin Bloomer opened the floor for Council discussion on the Overview of the CLSD Grant. The full text of the Council discussion is on pages 31–34 of the [ECPC August 27 transcript](#). The themes that emerged from the Council discussion included:

- **Early Childhood Education and CLSD Grant Alignment:**
 - St. Andre posed a question regarding ways the CLSD grant projects can align with existing work for children birth to age 5. She also asked about opportunities for emerging partnerships and avenues for disseminating information about the California State Literacy Plan.
 - Council member shared insights on shifting age ranges and milestones within early childhood education. They also raised questions about what is addressed in the most current research and curriculum approaches and highlighted the need for enhanced collaboration across educational roles.
 - St. Andre addressed adapting K-12 literacy strategies, such as dialogic reading, for use with children birth through age 5, while emphasizing the

need for active partnership and engagement with parents.

- **Inclusion of Family Child Care Providers**

- Council members shared their concerns around family child care providers being included in grant programs, noting the importance of their current participation in education partnerships. They expressed the need for improved communication and access.
- St. Andre announced plans to expand family child care engagement, with expectations of more widespread inclusion in forthcoming grant periods, backed by existing collaborations with San Bernardino, Fresno, and Orange counties.

Update on Rate Reform

Jackie Barocio shared a rate reform update. Full remarks begin on page 34 of the [ECPC August 27 transcript](#) and the presentation slides are available:

- [Rate & Quality Reform Updates slides](#)

The CDSS complied with the July 3, 2025 federal deadline to submit required documents, including

- detailed cost estimation model report
- rate sheet that reflects current payment amounts compared to alternative methodology cost of care
- timeline for implementing rates under a single rate structure informed by the alternative methodology

The CDSS also submitted its quarterly rate reform update to the Legislature, available online. Barocio clarified that while the alternative methodology has been submitted, the transition to single rate structure is still pending. The 2025-26 budget continues to use the current two rate structure using regional market and standard reimbursement rates. This year's budget maintains the existing rates and allocates approximately \$61 million for cost-of-living adjustments and \$21.8 million in one-time federal funds for necessary automation updates related to rate reform.

Additionally, the state budget includes trailer bill language that establishes goals and components for the single rate structure:

- reimbursing all child care and state preschool programs under a unified framework that accounts for common rate elements,
- establishing rates informed by costs associated with meeting health, safety, and program requirements,
- administering per child base rates,

- allowing programs to claim reimbursement for services delivered consistent with enhanced rates where applicable,
- establishing rates that vary by geography, child care setting, and regulatory requirements, time categories, and ages of children.

Barocio noted that additional focus groups or partner meetings may be required to address remaining questions around the single rate structure. Issues to be discussed include 1) using a prorated weekly rate rather than hourly and daily rates, 2) aligning state preschool and Title V program reimbursements under a single rate structure, 3) defining children's ages for reimbursement purposes, 4) equity evaluations of rates, and 5) impacts of automation on local providers and contractors.

Key upcoming steps include the CDSS submitting amendments to the Child Care and Development Fund state plan by September 1, the next quarterly update report to the Legislature scheduled for October 2025, and the joint labor-management committee submitting rate structure recommendations by November 30,.

Information about rate reform is on the [CDSS Rate Reform and Quality webpage](#).

Council Questions

Bloomer opened the floor to Council questions on Barocio's presentation. The full text of Council questions is on pages 36-40 of the [ECPC August 27 transcript](#).

Themes emerging from the Council questions included the following:

- **Equity-Based Evaluation:** There was a request for clarification on equity-based evaluation of the single rate structure. Barocio explained that it is an ongoing effort to assess impacts on programs and families.
- **Care and Reimbursement Challenges:** Concerns were raised about adult-to-child ratios in state preschool programs due to wide age ranges, noting that broader age ranges change the requirements for quality of care. There was also concern about moving to prorated weekly rates without input from providers. A Council member emphasized that, in order to maintain equity, it's important changes do not reduce reimbursement levels for providers below the current level.
- **Copayment and Rate Increase Concerns:** A question was asked about how rate increase might decrease copayments, noting that the current subsidy rates affect affordability for parents who have to pick up higher copayments. It was also requested that any related information submitted to federal agencies be made public.

General Public Comment

Before the meeting adjourned, the Chair invited verbal public comment. The text of

public comments can be found on pages 41-45 of the [ECPC August 27 transcript](#). Below is a sampling of the public comments.

“...I stopped with a parent going to get child care from a CalWORKs entity and was told that she can't apply for help with child care while the state is paying her to take care of her own child and she's on family medical leave for having a baby. I find this to be disrespectful. It takes six weeks on average to get approved through a provider in my county and she needs to be back to work in four weeks. The message she got is she has to wait until her family medical leave is up before she can even apply. I'm hoping that can be looked at as well.”

“I also wanted to add that centers don't take subsidy reimbursement because of the large amount of time and work it requires to get paid. We're not allowed to charge different tuition, but it takes hours more time to track payments, submit attendance sheets, track certificates expiring, and help parents through the process of having their care extended through recertification.”

“I have approximately 75% of my families on subsidy, so it would be nice. I know CCTR providers are allowed monies for proctoring the program. If that would be something that happened, I bet you more providers would take subsidy.”

“...But my problem is we have two rules, for private pay and the state paid kids. Now, the parents, all of a sudden they ghost on us, they don't come, and they don't even give the two weeks' notice. We are a small center, so it's a big dent on our budget income, so we expect that income to come, and all of a sudden the parents are gone and we don't get the payment. So how can we educate these parents? How can we do that? Because somebody has to pay us.”

“...My concern is on the topic of copayments. As you all know, we as childcare providers, family childcare providers, we are independent contractors who opt to sign up with the subsidy programs because we want to help our community. That is the goal. We could opt to only accept private pay clients, but we don't do that because we are here for the community. So, 90% of my clients are subsidy recipients and they were first with CCRC. They transferred to the FCCHEN program. And so my concern and my question is, is it against CDSS policy for providers to request copayment from our parents?” The certificate says one thing, I implement that, and then I'm stopped from implementing that. Are we allowed to request and collect a copayment from our subsidy families?...”

Adjourn

Chair Ramsey thanked the public, the Council, and Advisory Committee members for attending. The next ECPC meeting is scheduled for November 20.

Meeting adjourned.