Early Childhood Policy Council Parent and Workforce Advisory Committees

Meeting Agenda, Attendance, and Summary

Tuesday, June 9, 2026
10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Agenda

Introduction

- Welcome
- Review of agenda

Provide Input to Draft Council Recommendations

- Share draft recommendations under development
- Seek input from Advisory Committee members

General Public Comment

Adjourn

Attendance:

Parent Advisory Committee Members: Deborah Corley-Marzett, Mary Ignatius, Patrick MacFarlane, Patricia Lozano

Workforce Advisory Committee: AnnLouise Bonnitto, Tonia McMillian, Zoila Toma

Early Childhood Policy Council Members: Andrea Fernandez Mendoza, Karla Pleitéz Howell

Summary Report:

Welcome and Introduction

Mary Ignatius, Chair of the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), welcomed members of both committees and the public and acknowledged the difficult national climate in which families and providers are operating. She announced three current PAC vacancies and explained that interested individuals must submit an application through the ECPC webpage to be considered. Ignatius particularly encouraged applications from parents who currently use or are waiting for subsidized child care, emphasizing that their input is essential to making the system work better for the families it serves.

Tonia McMillian, Chair of the Workforce Advisory Committee (WAC), framed the purpose of the meeting: advisory committee members were being asked to give input on draft recommendations the Council is formulating. Council representatives would explain the background and process for developing the recommendations, share the topics covered, ask members to identify the most important issues to highlight, and seek feedback on specific draft recommendations under development. McMillian noted that this was dedicated time for the advisory committees and members of the public to weigh in. The chat feature would be open to invite written public comment on each agenda item as well.

Provide Input to Draft Council Recommendations

The full presentation slides and remarks of the discussion are available:

- Workforce Needs Subcommittee Slides
- Family Access Subcommittee Slides
- WAC/PAC June 9 transcript, pages 4–23

Background and Charge

Karla Pleitéz Howell, ECPC Council Member and co-lead (with Sonia Jaramillo) of the Family Access and Federal Public Policy subcommittee presented the Council's charge to develop annual policy recommendations. She explained that Assembly Bill (AB) 563 directs the Council to produce an annual report that examines opportunities, challenges, and gaps in the state's early childhood education systems and offers recommendations, as well as to develop public policy proposals and budget requests for the Legislature to consider related to facility needs, workforce needs, and family access. The Council has decided to focus their recommendations on priorities already identified in their initial 2026–27 budget letter rather than attempting to take on every issue at once. To carry out the work, two subcommittees were formed: (1) Family Access and Federal Public Policy and (2) Workforce (led by Andrea Fernandez Mendoza and Natali Gaxiola). A third subcommittee on facilities issues had been considered but has not formed at this time.

Guiding Values

Pleitéz Howell described three values guiding the recommendations and the process being proposed by the Access and Federal Public Policy subcommittee:

- **Build on existing work rather than “reinventing the wheel.”** California’s early care and education field does not lack public policy recommendations. Families, advocates, researchers, community organizers, and public-systems leaders have been doing the work for decades. The Council’s task is to thoughtfully lift up and build on those recommendations.
- **Recognize an unstable moment for families.** Young children and families are navigating multiple systems at a time when significant federal policy shifts threaten the safety net, housing security, immigrant families, child care and health care systems-making Council leadership especially important.
- **Build on what is in the room.** The lived experience, public policy expertise, systems knowledge, and community perspective represented across the committees should directly inform the report the Council produces.

Family Access Subcommittee Recommendations

Pleitéz Howell summarized the priorities that surfaced in prior Council discussions. Rather than considering systems such as housing or health care in isolation, Council members urged the subcommittees to coordinate across systems because families do not experience these systems in silos. They also emphasized a focus on specific populations, including children with special needs. Members also stressed the need to make it easier for families to navigate and access services. They encouraged the subcommittees to balance concrete 2027 recommendations against a “bigger picture” vision for the early care and education system over the longer term.

The subcommittee is focused on five priorities drawn directly from the ECPC’s first budget letter:

- funding the promised 200,000 child care slots
- protecting health care access for young children, families, and early educators
- protecting housing security and supports for the unhoused
- protecting the safety and well-being of immigrant children, families, and early educators
- strengthening safety net policies to reduce poverty

Priority Area 1: Child Care Slots (200,000 Spaces)

Pleitéz Howell noted that Governor Newsom promised 200,000 funded child care slots, and with a new Governor entering office in the coming year, the Council should think beyond that specific number. Drawing on Council discussion and meeting chat, she highlighted several considerations: (1) addressing the unique needs of special populations; (2) ensuring tribal families have access to culturally affirming early childhood programs; and 3) assisting families in navigating complex systems to access care. Additionally, recognizing child care facilities as a barrier was mentioned. She invited members to weigh in on whether to pursue a broader ask or a more targeted one, and to share equity insights for this recommendation.

Priority Areas 2-5: Immigration, Health Care, Housing, and the Safety Net

Pleitéz Howell explained that immigration, health care, housing, and safety net policies were elevated in the budget letter because of the impacts of current federal decision-making, including HR 1. The advisory committees were asked for input in two areas: (1) what California can do to break down silos and serve the whole child across these intersecting systems; and (2) what rapid-response strategies the state might adopt to address anticipated federal changes in the coming year. Members were also invited to offer specific recommendations within any of the four areas (immigration, healthcare, housing, and the safety net).

Proposed Process and Timeline

The subcommittee proposed five steps designed to let community input drive the recommendations:

- engaging the Council and both advisory committees
- reviewing existing recommendations to reduce duplicated work
- holding an in-person working conversation on August 27, 2026 to summarize findings and shape draft recommendations
- prioritizing the recommendations together
- using the process as a shared learning opportunity

The proposed timeline includes a summer review of the advisory committees' input (including meeting chats and prior Council annual reports) and relevant literature. Draft recommendations will be shared with the Council ahead of August 27 so that meeting can be reserved for refinement. An updated draft will be brought back to the joint advisory committees on September 10, and a final draft of the recommendations for the annual report will be presented on November 19. Pleitéz Howell asked members to recommend any reports with strong content that should be reviewed as part of the literature review.

Workforce Subcommittee Recommendations

Andrea Fernandez Mendoza, Council member and co-chair of the Workforce Subcommittee, presented two workforce recommendations related to child care rates.

Priority Area 1: Adopting a Flex Factor to Stabilize the Contract Earning Floor for Center-Based Programs.

Fernandez Mendoza explained that before COVID-19, contracts were paid on an attendance basis. When a child stayed home because of illness, transportation problems, or, more recently, immigration-related fears, centers lost revenue even though fixed costs such as teacher salaries, utilities, and rent continued. The state had partially mitigated this through a 5 percent flex factor, which paid centers their full contract amount if met at least 95 percent attendance.

During the pandemic, “hold harmless” protection allowed centers to be paid the maximum contract amount regardless of attendance. That protection ends June 30, 2026. Beginning July 1, the state will reimburse centers based on enrollment rather than attendance—a positive milestone that provides a more predictable revenue stream and allows directors to set realistic budgets and offer salaried positions. However, the new structure includes no flex factor to protect the earning floor. Declining birth rates, staffing shortages, competition from Transitional Kindergarten (TK), and continued immigration-related fears are impacting contractors’ ability to meet full enrollment. Additionally, a large number of providers opened during the Hold Harmless period and now face a learning curve in budgeting for enrollment-based earnings.

The draft recommendation urges the Governor and Legislature to enact a 15 percent enrollment flex factor policy, allowing child care providers who maintain at least 85 percent certified enrollment to be reimbursed at the full contract amount. Fernandez Mendoza emphasized that this maintains accountability—providers must maintain a substantial share of their certified enrollment—while offering a safety net until rate reform takes effect. She noted the policy could be established through regulation with no budget impact, since contract funds are already allocated, and clarified that the recommendation would apply specifically to center-based programs, as family child care homes are already eligible for the maximum certified hours.

Priority Area 2: Advancing Rate Reform

Fernandez Mendoza summarized the background of California’s transition to a cost-based, single rate structure for the subsidized child care system. A 2021 law ratified an agreement between Child Care Providers United (CCPU) and the state. This law required a joint labor management committee (JLMC) to develop recommendations for a single rate structure, along with one-time funding to supplement rates for both family child care and center-based providers to address inequities. To support the transition, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS)—in partnership with Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies—developed a cost estimation model based on provider data across all 58 counties, accounting for staffing, program type, child age, and geographic variation. The JLMC recommendations, released in December 2025, emphasized that the model should inform, but not cap, rate setting. The proposed structure set base rates to support general operations, with rates enhancements for factors such as non-traditional hours and inclusion supports.

Following federal approval of the alternative methodology, the CDSS is required to provide CCPU with an implementation plan, negotiate further on rates and funding, and provide quarterly updates to the Legislature through July 1, 2027. Because rates were not implemented by the July 1, 2025 deadline, CDSS must also provide a transition timeline. According to the CDSS January 2026 update, full implementation is expected to take at least two additional years and remains contingent on budget decisions, collective bargaining, and significant data-system and administrative changes. Fernandez Mendoza summarized progress to date:

- Family child care providers gained the right to unionize and bargain collectively with the state, leading to the formation of CCPU.
- The state developed an alternative-methodology cost model and is formally moving toward a single rate structure.
- The state provided funding for implementation activities and automation infrastructure.
- The state extended and expanded cost-of-care payments as interim financial relief. The state also extended policies allowing reimbursement based on certified enrollment rather than attendance.

She also acknowledged significant challenges and gaps that remain, including delays in full implementation, failure to finalize a statewide rate schedule, uncertainty about long-term funding, ongoing disagreements about geographic regions and cost assumptions, and concerns about data transparency in rate setting. The following recommendations to the state are included in the current draft:

- Require the CDSS to submit a transition timeline by January 31, 2027, and update it annually until implementation is complete.
- Apply cost-based methodology uniformly across center-based and family child care providers, with appropriate adjustments for program type and structure.
- Ensure the rate-setting process explicitly accounts for race- and income-based inequities institutionalized by the regional market rate system.
- Meaningfully reflect geographic variation so providers in high-cost regions are not disadvantaged.
- Update the cost estimation model on a regular, defined schedule so rates address evolving costs.
- Make interim rate increases available to bridge the gap until full implementation.

- Require rate-setting decisions to be based on transparent, reproducible, honest data

Committee Discussion

Family Access and Federal Public Policy Recommendations

The themes that emerged from the advisory committees' comments and chat included the following:

Thinking Bigger Than the 200,000 Slots

Advisory committee members urged the Council to broaden the child care access recommendation beyond the specific 200,000-slot promise, especially with a new Governor taking office. They noted that only about 16 percent of eligible children are currently enrolled, and they questioned whether TK has been prioritized over family child care home and center funding. Several members called for attention to governance across departments and programs serving young children. They suggested advocating for a broadly expanded or universal system. Suggestions included setting enrollment targets over the next Governor's term—for example, incrementally moving from 16 percent to 25 percent—depending on what realistic increments would look like. In response to the focus on TK and state preschool for 4-year-olds, members also called for a legislative priority focused on infants and toddlers (ages zero to 3) in impacted and targeted communities. They asked the Council to clarify which population the 16 percent figure refers to, since participation differs substantially by age and location.

Meaningful Inclusion of Family Child Care

Members repeatedly raised concerns that family child care providers are referenced but not truly included in the "mixed delivery" system noting that family child care operates under the CDSS rather than the Department of Education. They emphasized that a one-size-fits-all approach does not reflect how children develop or how diverse settings serve families, so family home providers must be meaningfully included in policy and funding decisions, not merely counted as part of capacity. Members also observed that policies and regulations not designed for the family child care setting can create undue burdens.

Equity Within Universal Access

Members expressed support for moving toward universal access while ensuring that communities facing the greatest barriers are served first. It was noted that 86 percent of children eligible for subsidized care are children of color, but universal programs do not automatically reach those families first. Members pointed to other states that are further along the path to universal access, such as New Mexico and New York, as sources of lessons learned that California could incorporate.

Data-Informed Recommendations and Tribal Access

Members called for clarifying enrollment figures by age group and location and for data-informed targets, observing that the share of eligible children being served is low across counties and varies significantly by age. Tribal child care was highlighted as an underserved population that the state collects little information on, and it was suggested the Tribal Child Care Association of California should be among the groups providing input and data.

Breaking Down Silos Across Systems

On immigration, health care, housing, and the safety net, members emphasized treating these issues as connected rather than siloed. One proposal was for the Council to frame a “protecting families” legislative agenda. Such an agenda would include recognizing that food security, health care, child care, and housing all affect families in overlapping ways and that pitting these needs against one another harms families. Members also called for connected data systems to simplify eligibility reviews while protecting families’ data.

Technology, Local Coordination, and Preserving Existing Services

Members highlighted opportunities to use technology, including AI, to streamline access, help families understand what they are eligible for, and manage re-certification. They noted that existing local coordination—where family child care providers, resource and referral agencies, schools, health providers, and community organizations help families navigate complex systems—is not always scaled up to the state level. Members urged preserving existing services even as access is expanded, noting that child care programs often provide a child’s first meal and, for children without stable housing, function as a second home.

Early Learning Settings as Hubs for Support

Members described family child care homes and other early learning environments as community “hubs” that serve families in ways that go unrecognized. They asked that the recommendations acknowledge this role. Echoing the Blue Ribbon Commission recommendations, members called for a “no wrong door” approach so families seeking assistance, support, or help are not turned away.

Implementation Over Conversation

Several members stressed that importance of implementing recommendations, expressing frustration with continued discussion without resolution. Members highlighted that much of the progress made has come from providers organizing and speaking up, and they asked the Council to recognize and focus on the difference between “being heard” and “seeing change.”

Workforce and Rate Reform Recommendations

Communicating About and Leveraging Enrollment Flex Factor

Members asked that the flex factor language consistently specify “center-based” programs to avoid implying it covers family child care. Members recommended pairing the short-term flex factor stabilization with long-term solutions such as AB 1981 and the true cost of care.

Addressing Rate Reform Barriers

Members supported the call for data transparency and clear communication of implementation timelines, while cautioning that there was not full agreement between the state and CCPU on the proposed alternative implementation. Prerequisites the state has identified are sometimes experienced by providers as barriers rather than steps forward. Members underscored the urgency of achieving the true cost of care, citing rising operating costs such as fuel.

General Public Comment

The themes that emerged from public comment and chat include the following:

Authentic Parental Choice and Access to Family Child Care

Select Comment:

> “It’s hypocritical for the state to say there’s funding for 4-year-olds in TK that costs more of our tax dollars to fund and is only open part of the year, but not for a 4-year-old to be placed in a family child care that costs less of our tax dollars to fund… Until any 4-year-old can attend a family child care free to them, only then will it be part of UPK [universal prekindergarten]. When UPK is the free one and family child care costs, ‘that choice’ forces them to choose between being able to feed their families or a choice to send their child to family child care versus the TK they would prefer.”

Recognizing the Qualifications of Family Child Care Providers

Select Comment:

> “We’re educated. We’re always doing continuing hours. We put a lot into our work, a lot of effort. We have a lot of passion for it, and we’re treated like we’re not enough-and we are enough…The schools aren’t giving the parents the option, and the subsidized agencies make them think they’re not going to pay for the child care provider if they choose a home daycare provider. It’s just not right. There needs to be more inclusion for home daycare providers, and we’re ready.”

“Mixed Delivery” in Name Versus Practice

Select Comment:

> “I want to push back on mixed delivery and how it exists on paper, because if you keep saying that family child care is a part of mixed delivery and it’s not in the state and we don’t have access around the state, then it’s not really accessible. Equity is an action word, not just a word you say. If I can’t join a family child care home education network in my area, then I’m not part of the mixed delivery system.”

Compensation, Rate Reform, and Honest Data

Select Comment:

> “I’m currently conducting a family child care landscape survey, and I have educators from 27 states… 58.4 percent of respondents identified increased subsidy reimbursement rates as their top priority, and nearly half identified improved infant and toddler funding structures specifically. So this is not a perception problem. This is an issue with how the state looks at family child care and uses us as an afterthought in ECE. Rate reform recommendations need to account for the disparity in how we actually function within our programs, because just because it looks like it functions one way on paper doesn’t mean it functions that way in reality.”

Whole-System Transformation and Provider Partnership

Select Comment:

> “We cannot truly embrace a whole child perspective without committing to a whole system transformation… As providers, we are often viewed only through the lens of capacity and enrollment, but not every provider wants to increase enrollment. What providers consistently need is sustainable compensation, equitable funding, professional respect, and meaningful investment in their expertise… Let’s build a system where providers are not simply participants in the conversation, but partners in the decisions, investments, and innovations that shape our future.”

Adjourn

Chair McMillian thanked members of the public for their input, the advisory committee members for their continued dedication, and the presenters for their work, noting that all comments would be taken into account. She announced that the next advisory committee meeting is scheduled for September 10, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Meeting adjourned.