



Mission Statement
Pueblo Early Childhood Council is a diverse, active network that collaborates and advocates to enrich and strengthen the lives of children, families, and the community.

Meeting Minutes

Date:	October 27, 2025
Time:	11:00 AM -12:00 PM
Location:	Hybrid via Zoom (SMC Conference Room on the Third Floor)
Recorded By:	Ryan Montoya

Attendees:	
Alcon, Annette: CPLC	Hopkins, Alyssa: EHS
Appel, Katrina: CO Blue Sky <i>(Virtual)</i>	Johnson, Hunter: Children First/PECC
Arellano, Paula: Children First/PECC	Lopez, Emilee: CPLC
Ascencio, Lycynthia: OJC	Martinez, Raelynn: CPLC
Bellavia, Joe: Children First/PECC	Montano, Leanna: ACPC <i>(Virtual)</i>
Bellavia, Rebecca: Children First/PECC	Montoya, Ryan: Children First/PECC
Chavez Contreras, Maria: CC <i>(Virtual)</i>	Rogers, Angie: ELV <i>(Virtual)</i>
Flores, Pam: PDPHE <i>(Virtual)</i>	Rodriguez, Brenda: ESCCC
Gallegos-Casanova, Gerald: Health Solutions <i>(Virtual)</i>	Samuels, Ben: College Invest <i>(Virtual)</i>
Guy, Matt: SECC	Savage, Jamayka: ELV <i>(Virtual)</i>
Guy-Hazard, Natalie: CPLC <i>(CPLC)</i>	Shehorn, Angie: Children First/PECC
Hall, Darla: Children First/PECC	Torres, Monica: CPLC <i>(virtual)</i>
Hopewell, Christina: PDPHE <i>(Virtual)</i>	

Agenda

Introductions:	Meeting called to order by Angie at 11:00 am.
Additions to Agenda:	None
Approval of Minutes:	Approved

New Business

Ben Samuels: College Invest

1. Purpose of Presentation

- College Invest representative discussed Colorado's 529 Higher Education Savings Plans.
- Focused on encouraging early saving for higher education among families with young children (newborn–8 years).
- Goal: Reduce future student debt and increase awareness of available state incentives.

2. About College Invest

- State agency under the Colorado Department of Higher Education.
- Manages Colorado's 529 Savings Plans, created by Congress ~35 years ago to help families save for education with tax advantages.
- Operates as a nonprofit entity.

3. Overview of 529 Plans

- Purpose: Savings and investment account for postsecondary education.
- Eligible uses:
 - College, community college, technical/vocational school, professional certificates, apprenticeships.
 - It can also be used nationwide (and in some cases internationally).
- Qualified expenses include tuition, fees, housing, food, books, and equipment (computers, software, tools).
- Non-qualified expenses: transportation, student loans, K–12 tuition.
- Ownership flexibility:
 - Anyone 18+ with SSN or ITIN can open an account for any beneficiary (child, grandchild, self, etc.).
 - Account owners retain control, even after the beneficiary turns 18.
 - Beneficiary can be changed at any time.
- Tax Benefits:
 - Contributions grow tax-free if used for qualified expenses.
 - State tax deduction for Colorado residents on annual contributions.

4. "First Step" Program

- Eligibility: Any child born or adopted in Colorado on or after January 1, 2020.
- Requirements:
 - Parent/guardians must open a College Invest 529 account and enroll the child in the First Step program.
 - Child's birth or adoption must be verified.
- Incentives:
 - \$118 initial deposit ("Kickstarter gift") added automatically.
 - Dollar-for-dollar match up to \$500/year for 5 years (maximum match = \$2,500).
 - Potential total savings of \$5,000+ by age 8–9 if fully utilized.
- Participation opens statewide; unclear if matching continues after a family moves out of Colorado (to be confirmed).

5. Available Account Options

1. Direct Portfolio (via Ascensus/Vanguard)
 - Investment-based; offers both flexible and age-based options.

Agency Highlight

	○ Age-based automatically shifts from aggressive to conservative as the child nears college age. 2. Stable Value Plus (via Nationwide) ○ Guaranteed minimum 1.5% annual interest; current (2025) rate: ~1.9%. ○ Rate resets annually. 3. Smart Choice (via FirstBank) ○ Traditional savings or CD-style account. ○ Can be opened in-person at any FirstBank branch or online. 4. Scholar's Choice ○ Advisor-managed plan (not discussed in detail). 6. Account Flexibility • Funds can be moved between account types or investments up to two times per year without penalty. 7. Residency and Eligibility Questions • Account owners do not have to be Colorado residents, but nonresidents don't receive Colorado state tax deductions. • For First Step, the child must be born or adopted in Colorado; parents likely must be a Colorado resident when enrolling. 8. Outreach and Presentations • College Invest offers free informational sessions for: ○ Parents, childcare providers, and early education professionals. ○ Spanish-language sessions available. • Presenter encouraged attendees to connect him with networks or families who may benefit.
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SECC Update	<u>Matt Guy</u> 1. Parent Survey • Purpose: To gather feedback from parents on interactions with early childhood providers across the community. • Status: Currently in testing phase; will be released next week. • Duration: Open for two weeks. • Incentive: Participants entered a gift card drawing. • Data Presentation: Results to be shared in January (not ready for November meeting). 2. Provider Survey Purpose: Annual survey for early childhood providers. • Distribution: Will be sent out next week via Angie, who manages the provider email list. • Duration: Open for two weeks.
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	• Incentive: Also includes a gift card drawing for participation. • Results: To be presented in January alongside parent survey data. 3. Pueblo County Enrichment Program Guide • Description: Comprehensive list of activities and programs for children birth–age 8 in Pueblo County. • Formats: ◦ Hard copies available at the meeting (limited quantity). ◦ Online version hosted on the Children First website with a QR code for easy access. • Access Instructions: ◦ Visit provocc.edu → Menu → Children First → Quick Links → Pueblo County Early Childhood Enrichment Program. • Update Schedule: Guide will be updated annually each summer to prepare for fall programming. 4. Distribution Notes • Parent survey QR code will be distributed through the Parent Coalition to control access and ensure valid data. • Caution shared from last year when open links led to responses from outside the U.S. (e.g., Kenya, Ethiopia). • Children First staff will receive separate internal instructions for survey participation. 5. Questions & Closing • No major questions from attendees. • Matt encouraged attendees to take printed guides or request copies via email.
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UPK Update	<u>Angie Shehorn-Children First</u> 1. Current Application Status • 156 applications submitted but not yet matched — being processed. • 367 applications started but never submitted — difficult to follow up due to disconnected phones or unresponsive emails. ◦ After multiple attempts, incomplete applications are withdrawn. 2. Provider Setup for 2026–2027 School Year • Provider setup form is now live. • Deadline: November 5, 2025.
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	○ Providers who miss the deadline cannot participate in the continuity of care round when family applications open. ○ Late submissions will not appear for families until January 2026. • Family application window opens: December 9, 2025. 3. Matching and Enrollment Timeline • First matching round: February 16, 2026 • Second round: March 16, 2026 • Direct enrollment begins: April 1, 2026 ○ Date changes were made in response to school district feedback to minimize summer workload. 4. Qualification Criteria for Full-Day / Extended-Day UPK • Families must meet two qualifying factors, including a financial qualifier. • Current financial qualifiers: ○ Poverty level: 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) ○ Low-income threshold: currently 270% of FPL, dropping to 265% for 2026–2027. • Change means some families who qualify now may lose eligibility next year. 5. State Budget and Legislative Updates • Governor’s FY2026 budget is expected to be released October 31, 2025 (Halloween) due to November 1 falling on a Saturday. ○ Anticipated \$257 million shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year. • Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) Evaluation Report to be released November 1, 2025. • Universal Preschool Evaluation (Year 1) focused on provider experience; results will be presented during SMART Act hearings in January 2026. ○ Ongoing payment issues remain a major concern; some large providers have indicated reluctance to continue with UPK due to recurring problems. ○ Hopefully improvements will be made to retain and expand provider participation. 6. Next Steps • Updates on budget and evaluation reports will be emailed to stakeholders as soon as they are released. • Providers encouraged them to meet setup deadlines and report issues promptly.
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Provider’s Needs, Concerns, and Celebrations	<u>Angie Shehorn-Children First</u> 1. Provider Achievements • One home provider successfully advanced to Level 2 after extensive work. • Life Center Learning Academy completed its rating and achieved Level 4. • Pueblo County now has 13 programs rated Level 3 or higher, meeting the state’s definition of high-quality programs.
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	2. Coaching Supports • The coaching team (2 coaches) continues to support programs both in Pueblo and surrounding counties. ◦ Currently assisting providers in 4 counties. ◦ 13 providers in Pueblo receive coaching support. ◦ 4 providers outside Pueblo also receiving support. • 7 of the 13 Pueblo programs are undergoing their first-ever quality rating—a major milestone toward increasing local access to high-quality early childhood options. • The 17 programs combined represent 53 classrooms receiving coaching support. • These efforts contribute toward meeting the Governor’s quality improvement targets for early childhood programs. • Recognition given to the “mighty team of two” coaches for their extensive regional impact. 3. Family Support & Food Guidance • The state encourages providers to share surplus or near-expiration food with families—especially given potential federal assistance interruptions in November. • Licensing permits providers to share food with families; nothing prohibits it. • Note: Some food service programs (such as CACFP) have stricter documentation rules and may not allow food sharing—clarification to be sought. 4. Follow-Up • A call will be made to clarify food program policies regarding food redistribution to families.
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Screenings Update	<u>Ryan Montoya: Children First/PECC</u> 1. Available Screenings • Developmental and social-emotional screenings • Hearing and vision screenings • Lead testing (pending partner availability) • Mini speech, occupational therapy (OT), and physical therapy (PT) screenings 2. Partnerships & Future Plans • Efforts underway to create a partnership with area dentist for expanded services.
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	• Resource fair component planned to accompany future screening days, likely launching after the new year. • Organizations interested in participating as a resource partner are encouraged to contact the Joe Bellavia @ 719-549-3412. 3. Parent Participation & Consent • Parents must be present during screenings to sign consent documentation. • For programs interested in transporting groups of children, a process will be arranged to: ○ Distribute consent forms in advance, ○ Collect signed forms from parents, and ○ Provide them on screening day for verification. 4. Contact Information • Ryan offered to share email address for questions or to coordinate participation in screenings or resource days.
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Program Quality Alignment and Access Meeting in November	<u>Angie Shehorn-Children First</u> 1. Purpose of the Subcommittee • The PQAA Subcommittee focuses on program quality, system alignment, and access to early childhood services across Colorado. • It regularly invites voices from the field to share real-world experiences and challenges related to accessing and delivering quality childcare. 2. Pueblo Representation • A grandparent raising grandchildren from Pueblo, named Dharma, will speak at the November PQAA meeting. • She will share her personal experience navigating the early childhood system as a caregiver.
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	• Pueblo will therefore be featured in the state-level discussion and recording. 3. Access to Meeting • The meeting recording and/or live link will be shared with members when available.
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Narcan Training Nov. 5	<u>Joe Bellavia: Children First/PECC</u> 1. Purpose of Training • Narcan (naloxone) is a medication used to reverse opioid overdoses and increase chances of survival. • Training will cover: ○ How to administer Narcan ○ Information on its effects and limitations 2. Participation Details • Free and open to the public — anyone may attend. • Participants will receive Narcan to take home after the training. • To register or share with interested individuals, contact Joe for sign-up information. 3. Questions • No additional questions were raised during the meeting.
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Dashboards	<u>Angie Shehorn: Children First/PECC</u> 1. 1. Early Childhood Workforce Dashboard (2023–2024 Data) • Purpose: Provides statewide and county-level data about early childhood professionals—useful for grant writing and understanding workforce trends. • Navigation: ○ Go to <i>CDEC website</i> → <i>Resources</i> → <i>Reports and Data</i> → <i>2024 Early Childhood Workforce Dashboard</i>. • Key Pueblo County Data Highlights: ○ Retention rate: 84% for early childhood professionals. ○ Child-to-professional ratio: ~21.5 children per one professional (Elbert County has ~40:1).
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	○ Credential status: ▪ 56% of Pueblo ECE professionals hold an active credential (above state average of 54%). ▪ 17% of directors have no credential. ▪ 33% of directors hold a Level 6 credential. • Data Breakdown Options: ○ Sortable by county, role (director, teacher, provider), age, race/ethnicity, and credential level. • Confidential Data: Counties showing an asterisk (*) have small datasets withheld to prevent identification. Aggregated data can be requested directly from CDEC. 2. Universal Preschool (UPK) Dashboard • Location: On the same CDEC "Reports and Data" page, scroll down to Universal Preschool Dashboard. • Features: ○ Data viewable by county or Local Coordinating Organization (LCO). ○ Provides counts and categories of UPK providers: ▪ In Pueblo County: 27 school district-based, 19 home-based, and 19 community-based providers (total 60). ▪ In the Children First six-county region: 84 total UPK providers. ○ Identifies Head Start programs and faith-based providers (faith-based must self-identify). • Usefulness: Valuable for reporting, grant applications, and community data analysis. 3. Discussion & Next Steps • Members agreed the dashboards are valuable tools for grant writing and program planning. • The presenter will share links and any new data resources as they become available. • No further questions were raised.
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Suspension/ Expulsion Guidance	<u>Angie Shehorn: Children First/PECC</u> 1. Background • New guidance introduced following implementation of Universal Preschool (UPK). • Focuses primarily on early childhood through grade 2. • Aims to reduce inequitable disciplinary practices, especially affecting children of color and children with disabilities. • Presenter will share the full slide deck with detailed information after the meeting.
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2. Definition: Abbreviated School Day

- **A day in which a child with a disability receives fewer instructional hours than peers in the same grade or school, whether planned or unplanned.**
 - **Applies when schools limit a child's attendance due to behavioral concerns.**
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3. Informal vs. Formal Removals

- **Informal removals include:**
 - **Asking parents to pick up a child early due to behavior.**
 - **Preventing a child from attending class.**
 - **Unilaterally shortening a child's school day.**
 - **All removals—even short periods—must be documented and count toward cumulative removal time.**
 - **When total removal time equals 10 school days, a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) is required.**
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4. Manifestation Determination Review (MDR)

- **Required when a disciplinary change in placement occurs (over 10 cumulative days of removal).**
 - **MDR determines whether:**
 - **The behavior was a manifestation of a disability, or**
 - **The issue resulted from failure to implement the IEP.**
 - **If behavior *is* a manifestation:**
 - **Conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA).**
 - **Develop or review a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).**
 - **Return the child to their original placement unless special circumstances apply.**
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5. Special Circumstances Allowing Removal

- **Only applicable if incidents involve:**
 - **Illegal drugs,**
 - **Weapons, or**
 - **Serious bodily injury (defined as substantial risk of death, extreme pain, disfigurement, or significant impairment).**
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	6. Recommended Practices • Collect data to identify needs for additional staff or support (e.g., paraprofessionals, one-on-one aides). • Implement evidence-based social-emotional models such as: ○ The Pyramid Model ○ Conscious Discipline ○ Incredible Years • Use documentation to advocate for systemic changes that reduce removals and promote inclusion. 7. Key Takeaway • Every removal counts—partial or full—and contributes to the 10-day threshold. • Accurate documentation and early intervention are critical for compliance and child support.
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CTC (Quality Child Care Subcommittee)	<u>Angie Shehorn: Children First/PECC</u> 1. 1. Current Work • The subcommittee is reviewing progress from the past year, including: ○ Evaluation of goals achieved versus planned outcomes. ○ Planning priorities and objectives for the upcoming year. 2. Grant and Funding Update • The Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment (PDPHE) is applying for the next round of Communities That Care funding. • The new grant cycle is competitive, with only one application funded per region. • As a result, Children First is collaborating with PDPHE on a joint regional application, rather than submitting a separate one. • Background: ○ Pueblo previously received CTC “B” funding, while the Health Department held CTC “A”. ○ The state has since eliminated the A/B model, moving to a single regional funding structure. 3. Next Steps • Continue collaboration on the shared grant application.
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	• Prepare for goal setting and planning for the next program year. • No questions were raised following the update.
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Community Reports/ Other Announcements	<u>Angie Shehorn: Children First/PECC</u> 1. Evaluation Reminder • Participants are reminded to complete and submit the email evaluation once received.
	2. Pueblo Department of Public Health & Environment (DPHE) – Christina Hopewell • Children’s Hospital of Colorado pediatric specialty outreach clinics will relocate as of November 1st to: 4112 Outlook Boulevard (former Centura Center for Occupational Medicine). • DPHE will no longer host or staff these clinics, but: ○ Providers and services remain the same. ○ Children with special medical, behavioral, or emotional needs can still be referred to the Health Care Program for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs at DPHE. ○ Care coordination services remain unchanged.
	3. Other Announcements • Healthy Halloween event occurs tomorrow. • Next meeting: November 24th (week of Thanksgiving), same hybrid format. • Lunch funding update: Current grant ends in June; future funding uncertain. Participants encouraged to take advantage of meals provided while available.

Adjourn
Meeting adjourned at 12:00 PM

Next Meeting
November 24, 2025. HYBRID-Virtually via Zoom
In Person Meeting at TLC @ PCC, 1000 Minnequa Avenue, Pueblo, CO 81004 SMC Conference Room on the Third Floor Join Zoom Meeting https://zoom.us/j/93498195039?pwd=eDJvamY0UkU3Wjdsb3Y5Zm8wMzFKQT09 Meeting ID: 934 9819 5039 Passcode: 570894
<u>Local Resources</u> Children First Childcare Connections – www.childrenfirstco.org Pueblo County Childhood Resources https://county.pueblo.org/public-health/pueblo-county-childhood-resources
<u>Statewide Resources</u> www.coloradoshines.com (Colorado Shines) https://www.coloradoshinespdis.com/s/login/ (Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System – PDIS) https://earlylearningco.org/ (Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines)

Respectfully Submitted,

Ryan Montoya