



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:	April 27, 2026
Time:	11:00 AM -12:30 PM
Location:	Hybrid via Zoom (SMC Conference Room on the Third Floor)
Recorded By:	Ryan Montoya

Attendees:	
Appel, Katrina: CO Blue Sky	Johnson, Hunter: Children First/PECC
Bellavia, Joe: Children First/PECC	Keasling, Cindy: D70 (<i>Virtual</i>)
Bellavia, Rebecca: Children First/PECC	Lopez, Emilee: CPLC (<i>Virtual</i>)
Chavez Conteras, Maria: Catholic Charities	Lopez-Ferguson, Gina: CFC (<i>Virtual</i>)
Duskey, Rhonda: CPLC (<i>Virtual</i>)	Martinez, Raelynn: CPLC (<i>Virtual</i>)
Flores, Pamela: PDPHE (<i>Virtual</i>)	Montoya, Ryan: Children First/PECC
Gage, Justine: PDPHE (<i>Virtual</i>)	Palma, Mari: <i>ECEMES (Virtual)</i>
Gallegos-Casanova, Gerald: Health Solutions (<i>Virtual</i>)	Rodriguez, Brenda: ESCCC (<i>Virtual</i>)
Guy, Matt: SECC	Rogers, Angie: ELV (<i>Virtual</i>)
Hall, Darla: Children First/PECC (<i>Virtual</i>)	Samora, Rita: DHS (<i>Virtual</i>)
Jaramillo, JoAnn: Trinity (<i>Virtual</i>)	Shehorn, Angie: Children First/PECC
Stewart Salazar, Francesca: HIPPY	

Agenda

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

New Business

Francesca Stewart Salazar- Catholic Charities of Southern Colorado (CCSOCO) – HIPPY

Overview of HIPPY

- **HIPPY stands for Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters.**
- **The program is an early childhood education initiative designed to help parents become their child's first teacher.**
- **Serves families with children ages 3–5, especially those without access to traditional preschool programs.**
- **Focuses on strengthening parent confidence and supporting school readiness.**

How the Program Works

- **HIPPY is a home-based program with weekly visits from trained home visitors.**
- **Parents are guided through structured educational activities including:**
 - **Language development – conversations, following directions, answering questions**
 - **Literacy – books, letters, storytelling, sound recognition**
 - **Math – number sense and problem-solving activities**
 - **Motor skills**
 - **Fine motor: drawing, cutting, tracing**
 - **Gross motor: jumping, running, balancing**
 - **Science – curiosity and exploration activities**
- **Home visitors model activities through role-playing, allowing parents to practice teaching skills.**

Agency Highlights

Program Staffing

- **Many home visitors are parents from the local community, helping build trust and relatability.**
- **Home visitors receive training and support from professional coordinators.**

Benefits of HIPPY

For Children:

- **Improved school readiness**
- **Stronger language and cognitive development**
- **Better social-emotional skills**

For Parents:

- **Increased confidence in supporting learning**
- **Greater involvement in education**
- **Stronger connections to community resources**
- **Research shows children participating in HIPPY are often better prepared for kindergarten and future academic success.**

Graduation Program

- **Year 2 participants (4-year-olds) participate in a graduation ceremony in May to celebrate readiness for kindergarten.**

Enrollment Information

- **Eligibility is based on the child's age by October 1 of the program year.**
 - **Age 3 by Oct. 1 = Year 1**

	○ Age 4 by Oct. 1 = Year 2 • Families can participate even if children are already enrolled in preschool programs. • The program is provided at no cost to families. Questions & Discussion • Angela Shehorn asked about enrollment timelines and UPK participation. ○ Francesca explained age cutoffs and noted that while HIPPY does not actively push Universal Preschool (UPK), many families participate in both. • Raelynn Martinez asked about referrals and enrollment deadlines. ○ Referrals can be submitted through: ▪ Flyers with QR codes ▪ Agency website referral form ▪ Direct contact with Francesca by phone or text ○ Home visitors contact referred families within approximately 48 hours. ○ Typical referral cutoff is February 28, though this year referrals are accepted through May 1.
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SECC	<u>Matt Guy-SECC</u> Matt provided an update on the SECC project, sharing that the group is in the final stages of its current cycle with a little over two months remaining. The team is currently focused on wrapping up activities, summarizing work completed, and ensuring all final details and reports are completed. Matt noted that there is one final set of meetings remaining before the project concludes. He also clarified that while this may be the end of the current round of work, there is a possibility of future continuation or another phase at a later time. During discussion, a question was asked about how the parent group involved with the coalition is feeling about the project sunseting and whether there are plans for future involvement. Matt explained that, as with many coalitions, groups sometimes naturally come to an endpoint after completing their work, although future continuation efforts are always possible.
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Angie Shehorn-Children First/PECC

Quality Standards Update

- The UPK quality standards memo has been released and distributed to providers via email.
- The standards will go into effect on July 1 and remain active through June 30, 2029.
- The memo outlines all required quality standards for providers.
- Angela noted that the Regional Advisory Council (RAC) is still determining whether group size and ratio requirements will take effect on July 1.
- The 2026–2027 school year is expected to serve as a transition year, with a focus on education and support rather than punitive enforcement for providers not yet meeting all standards.
- Providers were encouraged to review the memo and reach out with questions.

Approved Curriculum Information

- Angela shared information about the UPK guidebook and the list of approved curricula.
- Providers can access the approved curriculum list through the “Instructional Practice” section of the guidebook.
- If a provider’s curriculum is not currently listed, they may submit it to the state for review and possible approval.

Office Hours Schedule

UPK

Angela shared upcoming UPK office hours sessions:

- General overview of quality standards – tomorrow from 6:00–7:00 p.m.
- School district-specific session – May 5
- Family child care session – May 12
- Community-based provider session – May 19
- General standards Q&A – May 26

Links and documents reviewed during the meeting will be shared following the meeting.

Upcoming Changes to Universal Preschool

- Beginning July 1, the state will assume most responsibilities previously handled locally by Angela and Ryan.
- Families and providers experiencing challenges will likely need to contact the state directly, as local access to the UPK system may be removed.
- Angela noted that changes are still developing and additional information will be shared as it becomes available.

Funding Update

- The local coordinating organization (LCO) received a \$100,000 funding reduction for next year’s UPK operations.
- Due to the cut, the organization is exploring grants and other funding opportunities to continue supporting the community.
- Angela asked attendees to share any potential grant opportunities.

Questions and Discussion

Grant Opportunities

- Brenda suggested exploring funding through the El Pomar Foundation, noting that their criteria may align with leadership and community partnership goals.
- Angela confirmed that contact has already been made with El Pomar's grants department to discuss possible funding opportunities.

Eligibility and Preschool Referrals

- Malinda Davis asked about UPK age eligibility and where families can get information about preschool options.
- Angela explained:
 - Children must be 4 years old by October 1, 2026 to qualify for UPK next school year.
 - Children who are 3 years old by October 1, 2026 and live within Pueblo District 60 boundaries may apply through the school district.
- Angela advised families to contact Ryan, Family Specialist, at 719-549-3407 for assistance with UPK eligibility and preschool referrals.
- Ryan can also provide customized preschool options based on family needs if children are not age-eligible for UPK.

Additional UPK Discussion

Additional discussion took place regarding the transition of Universal Preschool support services to the state level.

- Angela confirmed that the transition of responsibilities to the state is a statewide change.
- She reiterated that as long as local staff retain system permissions, they will continue assisting families and providers; however, once permissions are removed, their role will be limited to advocacy rather than direct support.

IEP and Screening Process Discussion

- A question was raised regarding whether the state has standardized the process and timelines for children seeking an Individualized Education Program (IEP) through UPK.
- Angela clarified:
 - Children who are age-eligible for UPK may still apply and begin services while the IEP process is underway.
 - Children who are 4 years old by the October 1 cutoff may enroll in Universal Preschool while continuing IEP services.
 - Three-year-olds in Pueblo District 60 may apply through the school district and begin the IEP process there.

District 70 Child Find Process

	• Cindy from District 70 explained that families are referred through the district’s Child Find process. • Children complete a screening process to determine eligibility: ○ If eligible, they are placed in their home preschool program. ○ If not eligible, families are advised they may reapply the following year when the child reaches the four-year-old age group prior to kindergarten. Clarification on State Involvement • Angela further explained that Universal Preschool has stated that IEP screening and evaluation procedures are not managed by the UPK program itself. • Instead, those processes remain under the authority of the local Administrative Unit (AU) and each district’s established procedures. • No additional questions were raised regarding UPK.
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Provider Spotlight	<u>Rebecca Bellavia-Children First/PECC</u> Rebecca presented the Provider Spotlight portion of the meeting and noted that her spotlight folder was yellow “to spread sunshine” amid ongoing difficult news and challenges. Center Provider Spotlight – Kinderkirk Preschool • The featured center provider for April was Kinderkirk Preschool. • Ashley Sparks serves as the director for the preschool program. • Rebecca shared the program’s mission: ○ To provide a quality, safe, nurturing Christian educational experience for parents, children, and staff while serving the Pueblo West community and surrounding areas. • The group recognized Kinderkirk Preschool for this month’s spotlight. Home Provider Spotlight – All About Kids Daycare • The featured home provider was Janet and John Bailey of All About Kids Daycare. • Rebecca shared that Janet has been a longtime provider who has stepped away from caregiving at times due to personal circumstances, including medical issues involving her husband. • The Baileys have now returned to Pueblo and reopened their childcare program. Program Highlights • All About Kids Daycare serves children from birth to age 3. • Rebecca noted that the providers prefer working with younger children and have intentionally focused their program on infant and toddler care. • Program features include: ○ Warm and welcoming family child care environment ○ Interactive, play-based learning ○ Strong emphasis on early language development ○ Multilingual environment supporting English, Spanish, and French ○ Activities designed to promote school readiness
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Legislative Update	<u>Angie Shehorn-Children First/PECC</u> Birthday Recognition • Before beginning the legislative update, the group paused to recognize Darla’s birthday and wished her a happy birthday. House Bill 26-1004 – Child Care Contribution Tax Credit • Angela discussed House Bill 26-1004, which would extend the Colorado Child Care Contribution Tax Credit for an additional 10 years. • The program allows individuals or businesses to donate to approved child care agencies or other approved organizations and receive a tax credit equal to 50% of the donation amount, up to \$100,000. • The bill aims to continue the tax credit program before the current law expires. Vision Testing for Pre-Kindergarten Students • Angela highlighted legislation proposing the addition of pre-kindergarten students to the required school vision screening schedule. • Current law requires vision testing in kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th grades. House Bill 26-1260 – Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Updates • This bill proposes delaying several CCAP reforms from August 1, 2026, to August 1, 2028. • Proposed delayed changes include: ○ Capping family co-payments at 7% ○ Paying providers in advance for services ○ Utilizing grants and contracts to improve access for underserved populations • The delay is intended to ease pressure on the current CCAP system. • The bill was scheduled to be heard on April 28 in the Education and School Finance committee. Senate Bill 26-020 – Child Care Provider Licensing and Quality • Angela explained that the original intent of the bill was to eliminate contract licensing and move licensing fully in-house. • Following amendments, the bill now proposes creating a task force to evaluate the effectiveness of contract licensing versus state employee licensing models. • Angela noted the bill has changed significantly from its original form. House Bill 26-019 • Angela shared that House Bill 26-019 has completed the legislative process and is awaiting the governor’s signature. • She testified twice on the bill, once before the Senate Education Committee and once before the House Education Committee. • Angela encouraged attendees to participate in legislative testimony opportunities if possible, noting it was a valuable experience.
Provider Appreciation Day	<u>Angie Shehorn: Children First/PECC</u> Provider Appreciation Day 2026 will take place on June 25, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The event will be held at 140 Ballroom, located at 900 West Orman. Attendees were encouraged to save the date and share the information with others in the early childhood community.

Agencies and organizations interested in supporting the event were invited to partner in planning or contributing door prizes for provider drawings.
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Angie Shehorn: Children First/PECC

Legislation

1. **Senate Bill 26020 – Early Childhood Licensing Cleanup**
 - **Status:** In appropriations; likely to remain until after the long bill is introduced.
 - **Purpose:** Streamline and coordinate regulatory/licensing agencies for early childhood.
 - **Potential Amendment:** Creation of a task force to review licensing models nationwide.
 - **Next Steps:** Updates to be shared as bill progresses.
2. **Senate Bill 26019 – Consolidation of Early Childhood Councils and LCOs**
 - **Status:** Postponed until after the long bill introduction; was scheduled for House Education Committee.
 - **Advocacy:** Coalition member will testify in support (also testified in Senate).
 - **Amendment:** Allows 3-year transition for communities with separate councils and LCOs.
 - **Goal:** Passage hoped for by end of April.
3. **Senate Bill 26135 – K–12 Funding / Positive Factor**
 - **Purpose:** Increase funding for school districts via a “positive factor” (~2% of statewide total program funding).
 - **Potential Impact:** Could also positively affect preschool funding.
 - **Status:** School districts still deciding support; monitored by ECLA.
4. **House Bill 261193 – Vision Testing**
 - **Requirement:** Vision testing for pre-K, K, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th grades.
 - **Families must be informed of results.**
5. **House Bill 261260 – Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Updates**
 - **Clarifies** that ≤5% of county CCAP funds can be used for administrative costs.
 - **Delays** certain cost-increasing implementations from 2026 to 2028.
 - **Goal:** Reduce waitlists and increase service availability for families.
6. **House Bill 261282 – Eliminate Duplicative Regulation for School District Childcare Centers**
 - **Purpose:** Uncouple school district preschool and school-age programs from licensing.
 - **Concerns:** Removing licensing could disqualify programs from CCAP and Universal Preschool funding.
 - **Origin:** Adams School District, Denver metro area.
 - **Status:** Mixed support; ongoing statewide discussion.

Resources:

- **Bill tracker** available from Around Children’s Campaign provides: sponsors, fiscal notes, committees, amendments, and support/monitoring status.

Community Reports	<i>Meeting Evaluation Reminder</i> - Attendees were reminded to complete the meeting evaluation once received by email. - The evaluation consists of rating the meeting from 1 to 5 and providing comments or suggestions to help improve future meetings. <i>Lunch Program Reminder</i> - Participants were informed that next month's meeting will be the final opportunity to receive lunch during council meetings. - The grant funding that currently supports meals for meetings ends on June 30. - There will be no June meeting, making next month the final lunch-supported meeting.
	Agency Reports and Announcements <i>Immigration Legal Specialist Position Opening</i> - An announcement was made regarding an open Immigration Legal Specialist position within the Immigration Legal Services Department. - The position requires a fully bilingual candidate fluent in both Spanish and English. - No prior legal experience is required, as training will be provided. - The department is seeking someone passionate about immigration work. - Attendees discussed possible contacts and referrals for the position. <i>ECEMS Child Care Closure at CSU Pueblo</i> - Rita from ECEMS Child Care shared that Colorado State University Pueblo has decided not to renew ECEMS' contract. - ECEMS must vacate the building by June 30. - More than 50 families will be impacted and displaced by the closure. - Rita explained that CSU Pueblo plans to transition services to a large corporate child care provider. - The new provider was initially expected to open July 1 but is now anticipated to open January 1, 2027. - ECEMS is actively searching for a new location in hopes of reopening services. - Rita asked the community for patience and support and wanted attendees to be aware of the situation affecting families in the area.

	<i>Community Support</i> • Angela expressed support and sympathy for the ECEMS team and affected families. • She encouraged providers with available openings to reach out to ECEMS staff or local coordinators to help place displaced children and avoid interruptions in care and preschool services. • Angela also offered continued support and assistance to Rita and Maddie during the transition.
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Adjourn
Meeting adjourned at 12:00 PM

Next Meeting
May 18, 2026 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://cccs-edu.zoom.us/j/83649820790?pwd=UXeIPStoXkRk2FQBy3m7aIPVM4555u.1 Meeting ID: 836 4982 0790 Passcode: 767195
Local Resources Children First Childcare Connections – www.childrenfirstco.org Pueblo County Childhood Resources https://county.pueblo.org/public-health/pueblo-county-childhood-resources
Statewide Resources 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