

Policy Council Head Start Program Meeting Minutes

March 25, 2026 • 3:30–5:30PM • 1001 w. Southern Ave., Suite 106, Mesa, Arizona 85210

1. Call to Order	Policy Council Chair Toni Sesselman called the meeting to order at 3:35pm.
2. Roll Call	Policy Council Chair Toni Sesselman did roll call- 3 members in person, 8 members and 1 BOS Liaison virtual. 12 members, 11 voting members, in total were in attendance. Quorum was met.

Policy Council 2025–2026		
Name	Present In-Person or Virtual	Voting
Early Head Start (5 members)		
Angela George		
Aria Moore		
Alejandrina "Ali" Gomez	In-Person	x
Kristen McLaughlin		
Crystal Slater	Virtual	x
Early Head Start (5 alternates)		
Kendall House-Madrid	Virtual	x
Destiny Cano		
Shareli Romero	Virtual	x
Edgar Madrid	Virtual	x
VACANT		
Head Start Chandler-Gilbert (2 members)		
Andrea Edmonson	In-Person	x
Cheyenne Silveria		
Head Start Chandler-Gilbert (2 alternates)		
VACANT		
VACANT		
Head Start Tempe-Guadalupe-Scottsdale-West Valley (2 members)		
Richard Whitemore	Virtual	x
Merceydes Moreno		
Head Start Tempe-Guadalupe-Scottsdale-West Valley (2 alternates)		
Luisa Santana	Virtual	x
VACANT		
Head Start Mesa (5 members)		
Toni Sesselman	In-Person	x
Andrea Ramirez		
Amy Lozano		

Samantha LaFollette	Virtual	x
Stephanie Caballero		
Head Start Mesa (5 alternates)		
VACANT		
VACANT		
VACANT		
VACANT		
VACANT		
Community Representatives		
Abril Anduaga (non-parent)		
Juan Aristizabal (Molina Healthcare)	Virtual	x
Alma Ramirez (City of Tempe)		
Eddie Casillas		
Board of Supervisors		
Marcy Flanagan	Virtual	
*9 Members for Quorum	Total	11

Other attendees:

Name	Role	Name	Role
Mattie Lord	Head Start Director	Siman Qaasim	Deputy Director Human Services
Jackie Thatcher	Family and Community Partnerships Manager	Susie Marquez-Munoz	Early Childhood Program Manager
Maryann Galaviz	Early Childhood Services Manager	Tamara Bridwell	Human Services Director
Deserie Hightower	Child Development Support Coordinator	Lou Anne Liguz	Health Coordinator
Doug Alf	Grant Accountant	Maureen Mason	Consulting Nutritionist
Marcy Flanagan	BOS Liaison	Linda Roldan	ERSEA Specialist

3. Board of Supervisors' Liaison Report- Marcy Flanagan

Marcy provided an update on current activities of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, including:

- Ongoing budget development process, with departments submitting and presenting above-base funding requests through May.
- Support for the Community Health Needs Assessment, including outreach efforts to increase community participation.

- Continued development and public engagement for the Framework 20/20/40 Comprehensive Plan, outlining long-term county priorities.
- Recognition of county initiatives, including the upcoming 250th anniversary activities and ongoing public health efforts.

4. Head Start Directors Report– Siman Qasim and Mattie Lord

Siman and Mattie provided key program updates and highlighted recent accomplishments and reporting enhancements:

- **FA2 Resolution:**

The program has successfully closed all findings from the FA2 audit, reflecting significant staff effort and sustained corrective action over recent months. Leadership acknowledged the team’s diligence and performance in achieving full compliance within a condensed timeframe.

- **Vacancy Reporting Enhancement:**

Beginning this reporting cycle, staff vacancy data is included in the packet under Education Services. This addition is intended to increase transparency and provide a current snapshot of staffing levels across positions. Members were encouraged to review and raise questions as needed.

5. Approvals

- a. **5-Year Grant Application:** First motion to approve the grant, with the amendment of taking out the second sentence on page 17, made by Luisa Santana and seconded by Juan Aristizabal. All in favor, no opposition. Motion approved unanimously.
 - i. The Policy Council reviewed the Head Start grant application, including both a tracked changes version and a final clean version. Key discussion points included:
 1. Clarification that all program sites are considered center-based, consistent with federal requirements.
 2. Review of substantive revisions on pages 10, 14, 19, 20, and 24, including enhancements related to cultural responsiveness, literacy activities, governance, and program oversight.
 3. Incorporation of feedback from leadership and Policy Council members on pages 5, 20, and 21.
 4. Guidance from the Office of Head Start to submit the application reflecting the current program model, with any future changes to follow a formal change of scope process.

- b. Amanda McKeever provided a comprehensive overview of the grant application including:
- i. **Service Area & Enrollment:** Services provided throughout Maricopa County (excluding Phoenix), with 1,083 funded slots. Recruitment efforts prioritize children with the highest needs.
 - ii. **Community Needs:** Data indicates significant need across the service area, including poverty, homelessness, disabilities, and dual language learners.
 - iii. **Education Services:** Implementation of Creative Curriculum and Conscious Discipline; ongoing child assessment using Teaching Strategies GOLD.
 - iv. **Health Services:** Comprehensive medical, dental, and mental health services, including screenings and support for establishing medical homes.
 - v. **Family Engagement:** Family Support Specialists provide individualized services including goal setting, home visits, and family partnerships.
 - vi. **Disabilities Services:** Collaboration with local education agencies and AZEIP to ensure inclusive services and individualized support.
 - vii. **Transition Services:** Structured transition planning for children entering and exiting the program, including kindergarten readiness.
 - viii. **Governance:** The Board of Supervisors serves as the governing body; the Policy Council meets monthly and maintains active engagement.
 - ix. **Human Resources:** Ongoing recruitment efforts, staff development, and credentialing opportunities; compensation reviewed regularly for competitiveness.
 - x. **Program Management:** Emphasis on data-driven decision-making; prior audit findings have been fully addressed and closed.
- c. **February 2026 Financials:** First motion to approve February financials made by Ali Gomez and seconded by Luisa Santana. All in favor, no opposition. Motion approved unanimously.
- i. The February 2026 financial report was presented and discussed. Key highlights included:
 1. Increased substitute staffing costs, offset through internal budget reallocations.
 2. A 12.2% vacancy rate, consistent with prior reporting periods.
 3. Reallocation of expenses to align with Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) requirements.
- d. **February 2026 Meeting Minutes:** First motion to approve February Meeting Minutes made by Andrea Edmonson and seconded by Shareli Romero. All in favor, no opposition. Motion approved unanimously.

6.

7. Program Service Overview

A. Early Childhood Program Manager- Susie Marquez-Munoz and Early Childhood Services Manager- Maryann Galaviz

- a. Across all development domains in the Teaching Strategies Gold outcomes, there is clear progress from fall to winter, with the notable decrease in children performing below expectations and increase in those meeting or exceeding expectations. The most significant gains are in social, emotional, physical, cognitive literacy and mathematics, where the percentage of children meeting expectations increases substantially, and those exceeding expectations also show modest growth. Overall, the data reflects strong program impact and effective instructional practices supporting children's development across all areas.
- b. Teacher and staff vacancies were discussed and Ali expressed concern about teachers leaving due to being told the program would be changing and they are leaving because they are expecting to lose their jobs. Staff acknowledged this concern and expressed appreciation for the teachers and staff staying on board.

B. ERSEA Specialist- Linda Roldan

- a. The full enrollment initiative was discussed and the program continuing to work towards the full enrollment number of 1,083. Linda discussed the opening of the Best Years second Head Start classroom opening at the end of March, as well as the transition from the ChildPlus desktop app to the online version. She also discussed the digitalization of ERSEA systems which includes putting all forms, policies, and procedures on ChildPlus.
- b. Enrollment numbers reflect the previous week, but the highest income status is public assistance at 45%, then 22% below the 100% poverty guidelines, and 20% homeless families. Enrollment was reported to be at 876 out of the funded enrollment of 1083. Attendance was reported to be at 86%, with 45% of those absences being "sick," 15% "unexcused," and 11% "transportation."
- c. Ali Gomez asked about the process of bus passes being provided to families. Jackie Thatcher explained that if families are in need they can speak with their FSS and obtain a bus pass that will best support getting their child to school.

C. Family and Community Partnerships Manager- Jackie Thatcher

- a. It was reported that there are currently three vacancies in Family Services and recruiting has started to fill the positions. FSS are being reassigned due to vacancies so families were informed to be aware they may have someone new at their site.
- b. Jackie reported that a relationship with Candelen was being built to provide families with the Kith and Kin program which offers parenting classes.
- c. Parents were reminded to log their hours for Policy Council and volunteer to meet the programmatic in-kind requirement.

- d. Jackie let families know that they could still do parent interviews to help provide feedback for the community assessment if interested.
- e. Jackie stated that FSS attended a few days of ChildPlus training to prepare for the transition from the desktop version to the online version.
- f. FSS will continue to follow up on health requirements from families to maintain compliance.
- g. Program staff will be attending the immunization conference in April to stay updated on state requirements.
- h. TutorTime 6081 will be closing in May and families will be reassigned to TutorTime 6084. There will be no lapse in services as the site will close on Friday 5/1 and families will start at the new site on Monday 5/4.
- i. Be aware that FSS are starting to work on the second family assessments and will be reaching out to schedule.
- j. Secretary Ali Gomez will be attending Parents Unite for Head Start in Washington DC in April and will be attending Senate and House meetings to advocate for the program.
- k. March is National Social Worker month. All FSS were acknowledged for their hard work and dedication to the program and families.

D. Health Coordinator- Lou Anne Liguz

- a. Lou Anne reported on all physical, dental, hearing, and vision screening numbers in Head Start and Early Head Start.
- b. It was reported that there is a new dental provider, Smile Zone, that will be able to hold dental appointments on site for children who are unable to get them somewhere else. FSS will be working with Lou Anne to start scheduling these at sites who are in need. Lou Anne will also be working with Alverno nursing students to complete Health Screenings at sites.
- c. Lou Anne presented on the website Healthy Children where there are parent webinars. The webinar scheduled for April will be regarding household hazards and keeping children safe at home. The handout provided in the packet was regarding home safety for children. Lou Anne briefly discussed carbon monoxide detectors, safety plugs on outlets, checking floors for fall/slip risk, and gun/medication safety. The Poison Help Line was provided for information.

E. Head Start Nutritionist- Maureen Mason

- a. Nutrition slide was not included in the monthly packet and was sent out via Learning Genie after the meeting.

F. Child Development Support Coordinator- Deserie Hightower

- a. Deserie presented on the disability concerns in Head Start and Early Head Start. The program currently has 132 children on IEPs and still about 49 in process. 149 children were referred for early intervention services.
- b. The "Tell Us About Your Child" module on ChildPlus has been updated to include some more detailed questions to gain a better understanding of the child.
- c. It was reported that new MOUs were in the process with school districts to offer more services to families.

- d. Families were informed about the Autism Expo on April 11th from 9:00am-2:00pm. It is free to attend and provides attendees with a lot of community resources. Autismexpo.azautism.org.
- e. Deserie discussed parent teacher conferences and discussed how parents can advocate for their child to ensure they are successful at home and in the classroom. There were ideas of things to share about your child and questions to ask the teacher.

G. Mental Health Associate- Maryann Galaviz

- a. Maryann gave this report due to the program waiting on the hiring of a new Mental Health Associate. She discussed Parent Teacher Action Plans (PTAP). Most of them remain open indicating that behavior support plans are still actively implemented across sites. Many are still in progress and require continued monitoring and follow through. The most used strategies focus on social-emotional development, particularly modeling, managing feelings, disengaging stress, and setting clear limits and boundaries.

8. Member Reports:

- a. Policy Council leadership provided updates on efforts to strengthen engagement and governance:
 - i. Development of subcommittees to increase participation and build leadership capacity.
 - ii. Reinforcement of attendance expectations to ensure quorum and effective governance.
 - iii. Encouragement of classroom site visits, with reimbursement available.
 - iv. Establishment of a dedicated Policy Council email address to enhance communication.
 - v. Participation in national advocacy efforts, including representation in Washington, DC

9. Call to the Public

- a. No comments from the public.

10. Adjournment: Toni Sessleman adjourned the meeting at 5:50pm.

11. Action Items:

- a. Amend grant application to remove Board authority reference.
- b. Schedule financial deep-dive sessions for interested members.
- c. Provide update on Surprise location opening timeline and capacity.
- d. Distribute subcommittee interest form and increase participation.

Next Meeting: Wednesday April 29, 2026 @ 3:30pm-5:30pm

- In-person at 1001 W. Southern Ave Suite 106 Mesa AZ 85210 Room 116
- Online via Microsoft Teams
- All parents are invited to attend all Policy Council meetings