

Policy Council Head Start Program Meeting Minutes

January 28, 2026 • 3:30–5:30 PM • 1001 w. Southern Ave., Suite 106, Mesa, Arizona 85210

1. Call to Order	Toni Sessleman- Chairperson called to order at 3:36pm
2. Roll Call	Toni Sessleman- Chairperson took roll call; 6 in-person and 8 virtual

Policy Council 2025-2026		
Name	Present In-Person or Virtual	Voting
Early Head Start (5 members)		
Alondra Vasquez	In-Person	X
Aria Moore		
Alejandrina "Ali" Gomez	In-Person	X
Kristen McLaughlin		
Crystal Slater		
Early Head Start (5 alternates)		
Angela George	Virtual	X
Destiny Cano		
Shareli Romero	In-Person	X
Edgar Madrid	Virtual	X
Kendall House Madrid	Virtual	X
Head Start Chandler-Gilbert (2 members)		
Andrea Edmonson	Virtual	X
M'Kenzye Reese		
Head Start Chandler-Gilbert (2 alternates)		
Cheyenne Silveria		
Faruk Mohamed		
Head Start Tempe-Guadalupe-Scottsdale-West Valley (2 members)		
Richard Whitmore	Virtual	X
Aysia Gipson		
Head Start Tempe-Guadalupe-Scottsdale-West Valley (2 alternates)		
Jaquelin Meza		
Sarah Yousuf		
Head Start Mesa (5 members)		
Toni Sesselman	In-Person	X
Andrea Ramirez	In-Person	X
Amy Lozano		
VACANT		
Samantha LaFollette	Virtual	X

Head Start Mesa (5 alternates)		
Stephanie Caballero		
VACANT		
Monica Martinez		
Joshua Brannan		
Janira Lopez		
Community Representatives		
Abril Anduaga (non-parent)		
Juan Aristizabal (Molina Healthcare)	In-Person	X
Eddie Casillas (M.A.N.C.A.V.E)	Virtual	X
Alma Ramirez (City of Tempe)	Virtual	X
Board of Supervisors		
TBD		
*9 Members for Quorum	Total	14

Other attendees:

Name	Role	Name	Role
Amanda McKeever	Interim 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	Dr. Samarea Lenore	Mental Health Associate
Deserie Hightower	Child Development Support Coordinator	Lou Anne Liguz	Health Coordinator
Doug Alf	Grant Accountant	Maureen Mason	Consulting Nutritionist
Mara Funke	Community Alliance Consulting	Linda Roldan	ERSEA Specialist

3. Board of Supervisors' Liaison Report- Siman Qaasim- HSD Deputy Director

- a. Siman explained that the Board of Supervisors is still trying to identify a liaison for policy council and Tamara Bridwell is currently covering until one is identified. Siman also explained that Tamara was unable to attend this meeting due to needing to give a budget presentation somewhere else so she would be filling in this evening.
- b. **November 19:** The Board voted unanimously to approve a partnership with the U.S. Department of Defense that provides internship opportunities to service members enrolled in the Skillbridge Program. This program allows service members within six months of retirement to test drive a new career in public service while still employed with the Department of Defense.

- c. **November 24:** The Board accepted Mark Sinclair’s resignation as White Tank Justice Precinct Constable and opened applications for appointment to the position.
- d. **December 2:** Previous Chairman Galvin hosted a Holiday Tree Lighting ceremony in the lobby of the County Administration building to celebrate the holiday season with County employees.
- e. **December 10:** The Board voted unanimously to approve significant updates to the decades-old Zoning Ordinance that will provide more flexibility for housing projects along with detailed guidance for emerging technologies such as data centers.
- f. **December 10:** The Board voted to increase the expenditure authority for Maricopa County Animal Care & Control’s Donation Fund up to \$350,000, enabling them to explore the formation of a new non-profit to support shelter pets. *The Friends of Animal Care & Control* will raise funds to enhance the resources available to pets in the community, while easing the pressure on public resources.
- g. **December 10:** The Board approved the Parks & Recreation Department’s proposed fee revisions, which will help sustain park operations, enhance visitor experiences, and protect natural resources.
- h. **December 11:** The Board appointed attorney Desarae Tucker as the new Justice of the Peace for the North Valley Justice Precinct, which spans across Supervisorial Districts 3 and 4, including the area north of Glendale up to Anthem.
- i. **December 12:** Early Childhood Education students hosted a [toy drive](#) for Head Start families at East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) for the fourth year, with donations collected beginning in October. This year, about 61 Early Childhood Education (ECE) students participated, providing gifts that benefited 38 Head Start families, who were able to choose items for their children for the holidays or other occasions.
- j. **December 18:** The Board took a historic step to end federal oversight of the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office, which is costing taxpayers millions of dollars each year. Outside counsel for the Board filed a “Rule 60” motion which asks a federal court for relief from the injunctions in the *Arpaio v. Melendres* lawsuit, arguing that MCSO has achieved 100% compliance with required policy changes and now has a durable system in place to ensure that the civil rights of Latino drivers are protected.
- k. **January 5:** At the Board’s first meeting of 2026, there was a Passing of the Gavel ceremony in which Supervisor Kate Brophy McGee of District 3 was elected as the new Chair and Supervisor Debbie Lesko of District 4 was selected as the new Vice Chair. Chair Brophy McGee is the first female Chair of the Board in nearly a quarter century and plans to prioritize initiatives like preventing evictions, reducing the backlog of seriously mentally ill individuals needing treatment, ensuring efficient elections, and promoting balanced, sustainable growth.
- l. **January 5:** The Board accepted the resignation of Joe B. Getzwiller, the previous Justice of the Peace for the Ironwood Justice Precinct in District 5 and opened applications for appointment to the position.

- m. **January 9:** Chair Brophy McGee attended and spoke at the 25th anniversary of the Spur Cross Conservation Area, hosted by the Maricopa County Parks & Recreation Department and the Town of Cave Creek.

4. Head Start Directors Report– Siman Qasim– HSD Deputy Director

- a. Siman announced that Cami Foulks is no longer with the Department of Human Services/Maricopa County. Amanda McKeever, Assistant Director of Administration, has assumed interim leadership responsibilities for Cami’s position while continuing to lead her division and support Head Start during the transition. The department is actively recruiting and interviewing candidates for the permanent role. Siman and other HSD leadership members outside of the Head Start division are providing additional oversight and support, meeting at least twice weekly to ensure program continuity and stability. Questions regarding the circumstances of Cami’s departure were addressed by Siman and noted as an HR matter that cannot be discussed further.
- b. Siman provided an update on the FA2 audit follow-up, noting cautious optimism regarding the outcome based on the team’s strong performance during the interview, thorough documentation, and timely, responsive answers to auditor questions. She highlighted the significant corrective actions completed following early December TTA feedback, including development of new policies, a comprehensive data cleanse of FSS notes, and implementation of an ongoing monitoring process with random review of 20% of files. Despite a compressed timeline and the holiday period, Lou Anne and the FSS team worked intensively to complete all requirements and ensure compliance. The final FA2 report is pending and expected within 30–45 days.
- c. Siman reported that the program received confirmation of a non-competitive grant application, allowing the team to proceed with preparation for the April 1 level-funding submission. Amanda is leading the review of prior applications and requirements to ensure timely and accurate completion. Siman also discussed the recent Office of Head Start notice regarding the carryover request, noting that approval is limited to projects previously approved in prior grant years. The team will review eligible facilities projects and provide an update at the next meeting. Siman further explained that minimal health and safety-related repairs will be prioritized and that, if current-year facilities expenses can be applied to the approved carryover, this may help free up funds for supplies and other program needs in response to recent budget constraints.
- d. Siman requested to ask questions of the council and inquired about hearing a member previously mention that Child Care Partnership (CCP) teachers should be attending more professional development training. Siman and Policy Council members discussed concerns regarding disparities in training, oversight, and overall quality between grant-funded and CCP sites. Susie reviewed current CCP training requirements, noting that teachers are required to complete 18 hours of annual training, including pre-service training, child safety and supervision, and policy updates, with additional training needs identified through monthly director meetings and ongoing feedback. Training documentation is maintained in both personnel files and the ChildPlus system, and oversight and monitoring processes are currently being reviewed and strengthened to improve consistency and compliance across CCP sites. Council members expressed

concerns about inconsistent service delivery, communication, and professional development, and emphasized the need for more robust oversight and support for CCP staff. Siman shared that consultant Dana is assisting with the development of enhanced job descriptions, monitoring tools, and best practices for technical assistance, with plans to actively involve Policy Council members, parents, and teachers in reviewing and shaping an improved CCP model. Ali Gomez stated that the Policy Council had been requesting they see the CCP contracts for two months and had not yet received them. Siman stated these contracts are public records and could be provided for them to review immediately as well as Susie providing training records of the CCP teachers.

- e. Siman provided an update on budget modifications and current financial pressures, explaining the reallocation of funds between categories to address personnel cost shortfalls driven by lower-than-anticipated vacancy rates and unbudgeted facility expenses. He noted that personnel costs represent nearly 70% of the overall budget, requiring adjustments to reduce supply and facility spending to the bare minimum while prioritizing investments in education and program quality to maintain financial stability and avoid deficits. Policy Council members requested more detailed, line-by-line information on budget modifications, emphasizing the importance of transparency and their role in reviewing and approving significant financial decisions. Siman acknowledged this feedback and shared that changes are underway to improve clarity in budget reporting and sustainability moving forward. The team also expressed optimism that carryover requests will be approved, which could allow facility expenses to be recouped and free up funds for other program needs.

5. Approvals

- a. November and December 2025 financial statements approved- Quorum was met. First motion by Juan Aristizabal, second motion by Shareli Resendiz. No opposition.
- b. Minutes for November 2025 approved- quorum was met. First motion by Ali Gomez, second motion by Juan Aristizabal. No opposition.
- c. Selection Criteria for 26-27 program year approved. Quorum was met. First motion by Alondra Vasquez, second motion by Andrea Ramirez. No opposition.

6. Presenter

- a. Mara from Community Alliance Consulting delivered a comprehensive community assessment highlighting regional demographics, poverty, service needs, and recommendations for program improvements. Mara presented data on regional demographics, poverty rates, service utilization, and unmet needs, noting disparities in access, increased demand for mental health and developmental support, and the importance of client-centered services.
- b. The needs assessment incorporated three sources of data: primary quantitative data from Head Start parent and caregiver surveys, primary qualitative data from Head Start staff and community members, and secondary data from external sources such as DES, DCS, and Feeding America. Ali noted that while the program serves 726 families, the assessment was based on only 58 survey responses. Mara confirmed that CCP

participation was very low, though the reason for limited engagement is unclear. Regional data for children ages 0–4 show that over 50% reside in the East Valley, with 652 Head Start enrollees and 282 on the waitlist. In contrast, the Southwest region has a waitlist exceeding enrollment, suggesting potential adjustments in capacity or location allocation. County-level regional profiles indicate that the highest educational attainment (high school and bachelor’s degrees) is concentrated in the East and Central regions. Employment is lowest in the Southwest and Northwest regions, with median income lowest in the Central region. Poverty rates and the percentage of uninsured individuals are highest in the Central and Northwest regions. Family structure varies by region, with the Central region having the smallest family size, while homeownership is highest in the Southwest, indicating stability despite financial challenges. Non-English-speaking households comprise nearly 25% across all regions. Countywide, approximately 10% of individuals live in poverty, with higher rates among African American, American Indian, and Hispanic populations. Households headed by single females account for 20%, households with less than a high school education 22%, and households including someone with a disability 18.4%, highlighting populations most at risk. Post-pandemic trends indicate SNAP enrollment has stabilized after initial increases, while WIC enrollment has grown significantly. Population projections estimate approximately 270,000 children ages 0–5 in need across Maricopa County, rising to 300,000 by 2030. Regions with Head Start services demonstrate higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates, supporting teen parents’ ability to remain in school. Despite overall declines in teen birth rates, disparities persist among African American and American Indian populations in prenatal care, infant mortality, low birth weight, preterm birth, and teen births. Children under five with disabilities are most concentrated in the rural Northwest Valley. Heat maps indicate that Mesa has the highest Head Start waitlist intensity.

- c. Key findings from the assessment include:
 - i. **Families struggle to meet basic needs** due to complex benefit systems, depleted resources, and narrowly missing eligibility thresholds.
 - ii. **Mental health and developmental supports are needed**, particularly in West Valley and rural communities, with gaps in appropriate care and specialty providers.
 - iii. **Client-centered services are most effective**, recognizing families prioritize economic survival over enrichment opportunities; linguistic access beyond Spanish and inclusion of grandparents and kinship caregivers are essential.
 - iv. **Relationships are critical to effective family support**, with families rating services highly (4.88 stars), emphasizing trust and consistent engagement.

7. Program Service Overview

A. Grants Account Report- Doug Alf

- a. Formatting updates were made to the report; however, the financial figures remain unchanged. As of December, the program is projected to end the period with a

positive balance of approximately \$331,000, which represents just over 1% of the total budget. Personnel costs account for nearly 70% of expenditure, and efforts are underway to improve long-term sustainability, including strategies related to the CCP model. The program has collected nearly \$2 million in in-kind contributions and is forecasting an additional \$2.8 million, though a projected shortfall of approximately \$800,000 in in-kind hours remains. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) application has now been fully approved by the state and will be reported separately moving forward. To date, the program has served approximately 34,000 breakfasts, 37,000 snacks, and 35,000 lunches. Ali reminded members of the importance of accurately recording Policy Council in-kind hours, as these hours directly translate to funding. In response to a question from Alondra regarding ongoing budget approvals despite concerns, Ali clarified that the total grant award remains fixed at approximately \$22.3 million, while monthly approvals reflect reallocations among budget categories rather than changes to the overall funding amount.

B. Early Childhood Program Manager- Susie Marquez-Munoz

- a. Chairperson Toni announced that the Education overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

C. Early Childhood Services Manager- Maryann Galaviz

- a. Chairperson Toni announced that the Education overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

D. ERSEA Specialist- Linda Roldan

- a. Jackie and Linda presented the updated selection criteria for Program Year 2026–2027, outlining revisions that include new priority categories such as grandparents serving as primary caregivers, families receiving childcare subsidies, and families engaged in Workforce Development. They explained that eligibility continues to be determined by age, income, and other required factors, with specific guidelines for infants, toddlers, and children ages three to five, and that classroom ratios will continue to be maintained to ensure compliance. A point-based system will be used to prioritize applicants and manage the waitlist based on the updated criteria.
- b. Chairperson Toni announced that the remaining ERSEA overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

E. Family and Community Partnerships Manager- Jackie Thatcher

- a. Chairperson Toni announced that the Family Services overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

F. Health Coordinator- Lou Anne Liguz

- a. Chairperson Toni announced that the Health overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

G. Head Start Nutritionist- Maureen Mason

- a. Chairperson Toni announced that the Nutrition overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

H. Child Development Support Coordinator- Deserie Hightower

- a. Chairperson Toni announced that the Disabilities overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

I. Mental Health Associate- Dr. Samarea Lenore

- a. Chairperson Toni announced that the Mental Health overview would be added to the February meeting agenda due to time constraints during the current meeting.

8. Member Reports

- a. Ali read a letter to the group that included the following information: The Board expressed appreciation to the administration staff for meeting with them and providing an opportunity to ask questions, gain clarity on departmental roles, responsibilities, and challenges, and discuss potential program changes. The discussions were described as productive and mutually beneficial, highlighting disparities in support and oversight between grant-funded sites and CCP sites. Key concerns included the need for consistent, ongoing training and professional development for CCP staff, stronger oversight to ensure compliance with Head Start standards, and ensuring children are served by qualified teachers. The Board emphasized that, while the shift to an all-CCP model is not finalized, meaningful improvements to the current structure are essential before moving forward. They reaffirmed the importance of advocating for a model that fully supports children, families, and staff while aligning with Head Start performance standards and mission. The letter underscored Head Start's commitment to providing high-quality early learning, comprehensive health and wellness support, family well-being services, and strong parent engagement to promote equity and opportunity for children facing economic or social barriers. The Board concluded by stressing that the success of this mission relies on fully prepared, supported, and equipped educators.

9. Call to the Public

- a. Angela raised concerns regarding the possibility of unauthorized individuals, including ICE agents, entering school sites. Siman clarified applicable legal requirements, emphasizing that only individuals listed on a child's emergency card are authorized for pick-up and that ICE agents must present a valid judicial warrant specifying the address, date, and time to enter private classroom spaces. Jackie and Siman discussed efforts to connect families with community organizations, such as Aliento, that provide training and resources on legal rights and preparedness for encounters with law enforcement. Angela and Andrea expressed continued discomfort and requested that clear procedures, backup plans, and communication protocols be established and shared with parents to ensure child safety in the event of law enforcement presence on site.

10. Adjournment: Toni Sessleman adjourned the meeting at 5:51pm.

11. Follow Up Tasks:

- a. Provide CCP contracts and training logs for Policy Council Members for review and transparency.
- b. Present the proposed staffing structure, budget, and model for CCP sites including data, rationale to Policy Council for review.

- c. Clarify and document how training funds are being allocated to CCP sites to ensure Policy Council is informed of expenditures and plans.
- d. Share the timeline and allowable details regarding the upcoming CCP procurement process with Policy Council members as soon as permitted.
- e. Examine and address concerns about disparities in service quality, communication, and compliance between grant-funded sites and CCP sites, and report findings to Policy Council.
- f. Discuss and develop a formal procedure or plan for handling ICE visits at CCP and Head Start sites, including communication protocols with parents and emergency contacts.
- g. Increase efforts to encourage CCP site parents to participate in future community assessments to improve data representation.

Next Meeting: Wednesday February 25, 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