

Policy Council Head Start Program Meeting Minutes
February 25 , 2026 • 3:30-5:30PM • 1001 w. Southern Ave., Suite 106, Mesa, Arizona 85210

1. Call to Order	Toni Sesselman- Policy Council Chairperson at 3:34pm
2. Roll Call	Toni Sesselman- Policy Council Chairperson. 3 in-person, 9 virtual. 11 voting members present. Quorum met.

Policy Council 2025-2026		
Name	Present In-Person or Virtual	Voting
Early Head Start (5 members)		
VACANT		
Aria Moore		
Alejandrina "Ali" Gomez	In-person	x
Kristen McLaughlin	Virtual	x
Crystal Slater	Virtual	x
Early Head Start (5 alternates)		
Angela George	Virtual	x
Destiny Cano		
Shareli Romero	Virtual	x
Edgar Madrid		
Kendall House Madrid		
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		
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	Virtual	x
Amy Lozano		
Samantha LaFollette	Virtual	x
Stephanie Caballero		
Head Start Mesa (5 alternates)		
Monica Martinez		
Janira Lopez		
VACANT		
VACANT		
VACANT		
Community Representatives		
Abril Anduaga (non-parent)		
Juan Aristizabal (Molina Healthcare)	Virtual	x
Eddie Casillas (M.A.N.C.A.V.E)		
Alma Ramirez (City Of Tempe)		

Board of Supervisors		
Marcy Flanagan	Virtual	
*9 Members for Quorum	Total	11

Other attendees:

Name	Role	Name	Role
Tamara Bridwell	Human Services 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	Deserie Hightower	Child Development Support Coordinator
Linda Roldan	ERSEA Specialist	Lou Anne Liguz	Health Coordinator
Doug Alf	Grant Accountant	Maureen Mason	Consulting Nutritionist
Nicole Forbes	Finance and Budget Manager	Linda Roldan	ERSEA Specialist
Marcy Flanagan	Board of Supervisors Liaison		

3. Board of Supervisors' Liaison Report - Marcy Flanagan
a. No report

4. Head Start Directors Report- Amanda McKeever
a. No report

5. Approvals

- a. Meeting minutes for January 2026 and Special Meeting Minutes from 2-11-26: quorum was met and minutes were approved. First motion Luisa Santana, second motion Shareli Resendiz Romero. No opposition.
- b. Head Start Director candidates: quorum was met, the candidates were approved. Members also approved granting the Human Services Director authority to select between the two candidates. First motion Andrea Edmonson, second motion Juan Aristizabal. No opposition.
- c. January 2026 financials: quorum was met and financials were approved. First motion Andrea Edmonson, second motion Ali Gomez. No opposition.
- d. Vice Chair, Andrea Edmonson, proposed amendments to the meeting agenda to include updates on compliance status, ongoing collaboration between the executive board and Head Start leadership, and a reminder about attendance. First motion Ali Gomez, second motion Samantha LaFollete. No opposition.

6. Presentations and Updates

A. Proposed Consultant Report- Dana Staser

- a. Dana presented a comprehensive overview of the proposed redesign for the Head Start program, detailing a shift toward partnering with external sites for educational services while Maricopa County retains responsibility for enrollment, health, safety, and quality assurance.
- b. Dana explained that educational services would be delivered by partner sites such as childcare centers, churches, or school districts, while Maricopa County would maintain oversight of enrollment, eligibility, health, safety, nutrition, mental health, and services for children with

- disabilities. The county would also introduce a Training and Monitoring Quality Assurance (TMQA) team to ensure compliance and effectiveness at both the partner and county levels.
- c. Dana described the new staffing structure, including units assigned to specific partner groupings, each supported by family support staff, coaches, and quality assurance personnel. The TMQA coordinators would oversee multiple units and facilitate data-driven meetings to monitor trends and ensure program quality. Andrea stated it would be beneficial to see the current organizational chart next to the proposed organizational chart to visualize how certain roles are changing, for example if the TMQA position will be like the current PAS position. Dana explained that the two roles will be very similar, but the TMQA position will have much higher standards in monitoring the education partners. Andrea also expressed concern for the program nurse and mental health associate needing more support and being hopeful those supports are added to the new organizational chart. Dana explained that further support for these positions would be examined more closely. Secretary Ali Gomez requested further details about why the proposed organizational chart showed having 8 TMQA specialists as that seemed like too many. Dana explained that if a TMQA specialist has between six and eight sites it is going to be nearly impossible to visit all those classrooms to provide the depth of coaching that will be needed to maintain compliance.
 - d. When Luisa Santana asked how the program would be sure all teachers at partner sites will be qualified, Dana and Siman clarified that all partner site staff must meet Head Start performance standards, with the county reviewing qualifications and utilizing contracts to enforce compliance. The onboarding process for partners would include detailed expectations and ongoing support, and contractual provisions would allow the county to require corrective action or staff changes if standards are not met. A few parents questioned the ability to retain current teachers during the transition to partner sites, expressing concerns about hiring practices and the potential loss of experienced staff. Dana and Siman clarified that while partner sites have discretion in hiring, the county is working to facilitate opportunities for current teachers to transition and maintain program quality.
 - e. Dana and Siman discussed an estimated transition period of one to two years, emphasizing a phased approach to minimize disruption. Criteria for prioritizing sites include lease status and proximity to existing locations, with efforts to provide advance notice to teachers and maintain transparency throughout the process.
 - f. Dana highlighted the importance of robust systems for health and disabilities support, noting that previous compliance issues were due to system gaps rather than staffing shortages. The new model includes standardized forms, procedures manuals, and monitoring plans to ensure consistency and facilitate ongoing training and data analysis.

B. Amended Program Updates - Siman Qasim- Human Services Deputy Director

- a. **Application and Change in Scope:** Amanda, the interim assistant director, is leading the application process for Head Start funding, following OHS guidance to submit a status quo application and delay the change in scope to reduce funded enrollment until after the award is received. Siman explained that due to the suggestion of not submitting the change in scope until after the application, the program is still required to meet the funded enrollment of 1,083. Chairperson Toni asked if the program would be penalized for being unable to meet that enrollment goal. Siman reassured Toni that because leadership is working with training and technical assistance on the Full Enrollment Initiative and showing a good faith effort to become fully enrolled, being penalized does not seem likely.
- b. **Enrollment and Compliance Efforts:** Siman explained ongoing efforts to meet full enrollment and attendance requirements, including technical assistance initiatives and communication with OHS regarding the pending change in scope, with no immediate indication of penalties for non-compliance.

7. Program Service Overview

A. Grants Account Report- Nicole Forbes : Budget and Finance Manager

- a. Nicole presented a high-level overview of current financials, vacancy rates, and budget allocations, addressing questions about teacher departures and inviting members to a detailed budget information session on Friday February 27th, 2026, encouraging participation for further discussion and clarification of budget categories and financial trends.
- b. Nicole reported on year-to-date expenditures for Head Start and Early Head Start grants, noting an increase in vacancy rates from December to January, which resulted in a higher remaining

<p>program balance, from \$330,000 to \$558,000. The council was informed that overall expenditure was at 56% for the year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Nicole addressed a parent question regarding teacher departures. Nicole confirmed a rise in vacancy rates from 6.24% (11 vacancies) to 12.2% in January, attributed to resignations following changes in program scope. d. Siman discussed the draft budget, highlighting the inclusion of new positions such as a behavioral health technician, and the plan to increase funding for education partners. The council was informed of a budget cushion to allow for future staffing adjustments based on operational needs. e. Siman reported that the carryover request was denied except for facility improvements, which were prioritized and managed within the existing budget by Brian, the facilities manager, ensuring necessary licensing and health and safety upgrades.
<p>B. Early Childhood Program Manager- Susie Marquez-Munoz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ali shared concerns from her perspective as a current Head Start parent regarding student behavior issues affecting classroom safety and learning. She noted that prolonged behavioral challenges in a classroom can negatively impact other children’s well-being and academic progress. She asked what protections and supports are in place to ensure safety for all students while still supporting children with behavioral needs. Susie reported that developmental and behavioral screenings are completed by teaching staff within the first 45-60 days of school starting and these results help identify children who may need additional support. Children with concerning behaviors are referred to the disabilities team and the specialists collaborate with teachers and families to determine next steps. Susie continued to explain that the teachers implement a positive discipline and behavior curriculum, classroom expectations on taught during the first six weeks of school, and ongoing coaching is provided to staff. If behaviors continue, referrals are to be made to local school systems or outside service providers for evaluation and intervention. Susie described the multidisciplinary team review which included program leadership, early childhood specialists, mental health consultants, and coaching staff to review classroom situations. This team observes classrooms, evaluates routines and environments, recommends strategies and adjustments, and supports teachers with implementation. Susie emphasized ongoing communication with families and shared responsibility for addressing behavioral concerns.
<p>C. Early Childhood Services Manager- Maryann Galaviz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Report provided in packet.
<p>D. ERSEA Specialist- Linda Roldan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Report provided in packet.
<p>E. Family and Community Partnerships Manager- Jackie Thatcher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Report provided in packet.
<p>F. Health Coordinator- Lou Anne Liguz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Report provided in packet.
<p>G. Head Start Nutritionist- Maureen Mason</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Report provided in packet.
<p>H. Child Development Support Coordinator- Deserie Hightower</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Report provided in packet.
<p>I. Mental Health Associate- Dr. Samarea Lenore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Report provided in packet.

<p>8. Member Reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Andrea emphasized the importance of attendance for council members, requesting timely communication regarding absences to either Secretary Ali Gomez or Family and Community Partnerships Manager Jackie Thatcher. Andrea reminded parents and members that their voices are important and for them to be heard, attendance, communication, and timeliness are important to complete all tasks each month. b. Andrea discussed the sub-committees that were still in development but stated there would be a governance and finance committee, disabilities and inclusion committee, and school readiness and curriculum committee. Andrea encouraged all parents to reach out if they are interested in joining these committees to meet and learn on a more regular basis.
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9. Call to the Public

- a. Angela George shared personal experiences highlighting the positive impact of Head Start teachers on child development, expressing concerns about the emotional effects of staff changes on children. Toni and Ali acknowledged these concerns and emphasized ongoing efforts, as the board, to support teachers and maintain stability for families.

10. Adjournment : Toni Sessleman adjourned the meeting at 5:37 pm.

Next Meeting : Wednesday March 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