

Policy Council Head Start Program Meeting Minutes

February 11, 2026 • 1:00-2:00PM • 1001 w. Southern Ave., Suite 106, Mesa, Arizona 85210

1. Call to Order	Toni Sesselman- Policy Council Chairperson at 1:05pm
2. Roll Call	Toni Sesselman- Policy Council Chairperson

Policy Council 2025-2026		
Name	Present In-Person or Virtual	Voting
Early Head Start (5 members)		
Alondra Vasquez	Virtual	X
Aria Moore		
Alejandrina "Ali" Gomez	Virtual	X
Kristen McLaughlin		
Crystal Slater	Virtual	X
Early Head Start (5 alternates)		
Angela George	Virtual	X
Destiny Cano		
Shareli Romero		
Edgar Madrid		
Kendall House Madrid		
Head Start Chandler-Gilbert (2 members)		
Andrea Edmonson	Virtual	X
Cheyenne Silveria		
Head Start Chandler-Gilbert (2 alternates)		
VACANT		
VACANT		
Head Start Tempe-Guadalupe-Scottsdale-West Valley (2 members)		
Richard Whitemore	Virtual	X
Luisa Santana	Virtual	X
Head Start Tempe-Guadalupe-Scottsdale-West Valley (2 alternates)		
VACANT		
VACANT		
Head Start Mesa (5 members)		
Toni Sesselman	Virtual	X
Andrea Ramirez	Virtual	X
Amy Lozano	Virtual	X
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
Eddie Casillas (M.A.N.C.A.V.E)	Virtual	X
Alma Ramirez (City of Tempe)		
Board of Supervisors		
TBD		
*9 Members for Quorum	Total	13
		13

Other attendees:

Name	Role
Tamara Bridwell	Human Services Director
Jackie Thatcher	Family and Community Partnerships Manager
Maryann Galaviz	Early Childhood Services Manager
Susie Marquez-Munoz	Early Childhood Program Manager
Marcy Flanagan	Assistant County Manager

3. Approvals

- a. **Appointment of new Head Start Director**- was not approved by Policy Council and requested the vote be put on hold until they were provided with more information regarding both candidates.

4. Meeting Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to consider approval of a recommended candidate for Head Start Director. Director Bridwell explained that Head Start programs are currently facing significant challenges, including rising operational costs, staffing shortages, regulatory pressures, and limited resources. She emphasized the importance of strong, experienced leadership to maintain program quality, ensure compliance, and protect services for families across Maricopa County.

Director Bridwell formally recommended Mattie Lord for appointment as Assistant Director of Early Education, serving as Head Start Director, pending approval from the Office of Head Start. She described Ms. Lord’s qualifications, including her experience managing Head Start and Early Head Start programs within a school district, her background in federal grant compliance and fiscal oversight, and her previous role at the Arizona Department of Education overseeing significant Title I funding. Director Bridwell highlighted Ms. Lord’s collaborative leadership style, commitment to transparency, and experience working with Policy Councils and multiple stakeholders.

5. Meeting Discussion

Policy Council members engaged in an extensive discussion about the recommendation. Several members expressed concerns about not having the opportunity to meet the candidate before the meeting and emphasized the importance of shared governance under the Head Start Act. Members wanted reassurance that the Policy Council would be meaningfully involved in fiscal decisions, program changes, and strategic planning.

Director Bridwell responded that Ms. Lord currently works with a Policy Council in her current role and understands the importance of collaboration and transparency. She also explained that the hiring process included multiple interview panels and that Ms. Lord was unanimously selected by Human Services leadership as the strongest candidate.

Members continued to express concerns about the level of information provided and asked for more time to ask questions and better understand the candidate's leadership approach. They also discussed ongoing changes within the Head Start program, including transitions to contracted classroom models, and emphasized the need for leadership that would be sensitive to the impact of these changes on teachers, families, and children.

At the request of Policy Council members, Ms. Lord joined the meeting briefly to answer questions directly.

6. Candidate Questions

During her time in the meeting, **Mattie Lord** answered several questions from Policy Council members.

When asked about shared governance, she stated that communication and transparency would be central to her leadership. She emphasized the importance of maintaining regular meetings with Policy Council, responding to requests for information, and treating Policy Council as partners in decision-making.

When asked about managing program changes and contracted classroom models, Ms. Lord acknowledged that change can be difficult but stated she is comfortable managing transitions and working collaboratively to ensure that quality standards are maintained.

She also discussed her approach to compliance, noting the importance of staff education, monitoring systems, site visits, and ongoing review processes to ensure programs meet federal Head Start Performance Standards.

Members appreciated the opportunity to speak with the candidate but continued to express that they would like more time and information before deciding.

7. Action Item Discussion

As the meeting continued, Policy Council members discussed whether to move forward with the vote. Several members stated they did not feel they had enough information to approve the appointment and requested information about other candidates who had been considered.

Director Bridwell explained that the hiring process was conducted by Human Services leadership and Human Resources and that Policy Council approval was requested for the recommended candidate, consistent with past practice. However, she acknowledged the Council's request for more information.

8. Meeting Outcome

Due to ongoing concerns and the desire for additional information, Policy Council members expressed hesitation about approving the recommendation during this meeting. Members discussed the possibility of holding another meeting to review more information and ensure they felt comfortable with the decision.

No final approval was made during this meeting.

9. Call to the Public

- a. No response

10. Adjournment: Toni Sessleman adjourned the meeting at 1:59pm

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