# Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council

**Executive Leadership Strategic Planning**
**Ad Hoc Committee**
Public Meeting
Monday, January 05, 2026
9:00 am-11:00 am

**This is a Virtual Meeting** held via Zoom.com, join **HERE**
**Meeting ID:** 876 2844 7120 **Passcode:** 620835 **Phone**: 1.346.248.7799 **Zoom Directions**

**MINUTES**

**1. Welcome and Roll Call**
*Denise Tanata and Abbey Bernhardt, Ad Hoc Committee Co-Chairs*
- Abbey Bernhardt called the meeting to order at 9:04 am
- Brandi Hearst conducted roll call

**Members' Present**
**1.** Tiffany Alston, Director of Programs, Sunrise Children's Foundation
**2.** Abbey Bernhardt, The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Nevada Chapter
**3.** Brianna Cambra, Provider Support Director, The Children's Cabinet
**4.** Patrice Gardner, M.Ed, ECAC Vice Chair, Office of Early Learning and Development, Nevada Department of Education
**5.** Amanda Haboush-Deloye, Associate Professor, The Nevada Institute for Children's Research and Policy, UNLV
**6.** Brandi Hearst, ECAC Administrative Coordinator, Office of Early Learning and Development, Nevada Department of Education
**7.** Dr. Dianne Nicolet, Trustee, Washoe County School District
**8.** Tiffany Olivas, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Manager, The Children's Cabinet
**9.** Rachel Stepina, PDG B-5 Grant Manager, Office of Early Learning and Development, Nevada Department of Education
**10.** Denise Tanata, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Advisor, The Children's Cabinet
**11.** Brooke Yarborough, Social Services Chief 2, Department of Supportive Services, State of Nevada

**Members Absent**
**1.** Dr. Jamelle Nance, Early Childhood Policy Director, Children's Advocacy Alliance

**Public in Attendance**
**1.** Lela Gonzales, The Children's Cabinet
**2.** Crystal Jones, CEO, Crystal Clear Academy
**3.** Sabrina Jones, ECAC System Specialist, Office of Early Learning and Development, Nevada Department of Education

**2. Public Comment #1**
Public Comment was not given during this agenda regarding any item appearing on the agenda.
- No Comment

**3. Approval of a Flexible Agenda** *(Discussion for Possible Action)*
The Committee approved a flexible agenda.
*Denise Tanata and Abbey Bernhardt, Ad Hoc Committee Co-Chairs*
- Dr. Diane Nicolet motioned to approve a flexible agenda

- Tiffany Olivas seconded the motion.
- Members voted, motion passes, flexible agenda approved.

**4. Approval of Minutes from December 15, 2025** *(Discussion for Possible Action)*
The Committee will vote on the approval of the minutes from the December 15, 2025, meeting.
*Denise Tanata and Abbey Bernhardt, Ad Hoc Committee Co-Chairs*

- Diane Nicolet motioned to approve the minutes from the December 15, 2025, meeting
- Denise Tanata seconded the motion.
- Members voted, motion passes, flexible agenda approved.
- Brianna Cambra abstained
- Brooke Yarborough, via chat, requested a title change from CCDP Agency Manager to Social Services Chief 2

**5. Discuss and Review Goals within Drafted 2026-2030 ECAC Strategic Plan** (*Discussion for Possible Action)*
The Committee to review goals within the drafted Public Works Strategic Plan to revise language as needed, and to incorporate Key Priorities discussed during the ECAC Strategic Plan Retreat.
*Materials: Public Works Draft Strategic Plan, pages 20-33; ECAC SP Goals Crosswalk*
*Denise Tanata and Abbey Bernhardt, Ad Hoc Committee Co-Chairs*

- Denise introduced the topic and explained that she had reviewed and started to make changes to the goals, keeping the language applicable to the Early Childhood System (ECS) and achievable for ECAC to accomplish
- Rachel Stepina asked Denise Tanata to confirm that the document shared on the screen is the document that was by Public Works that you (Denise Tanata) had typed into and activated track changes, so we can cross-reference
- Densie Tanata confirmed
- Rachel Stepina suggested changing the heavy emphasis on early learning and care and pre-K, and less of an emphasis on some of the whole child approach, as well as reviewing the "Norrh Star" concept and revisiting the verbiage

**Proposed Revisions to Goal 1: Workforce Development**
**Overview:**
*The Nevada ECAC embraces the principle that a strong early childhood workforce is foundational to Nevada's success in supporting children from birth through age eight. A [qualified/well prepared], respectfully compensated, and a diverse workforce ensures high-quality services and provides consistent relationships vital for a child's development.*
*ECAC will foster collaborations to strengthen career pathways, compensation parity, and amplify the voices of the early childhood workforce to shape statewide decisions and policies addressing the workforce crisis across the range of sectors within the Early Childhood System.*
**Statement:**
*Promote the growth and sustainability of a qualified and well-prepared, respectfully compensated, and diverse early childhood workforce.*

- Addition of "respectfully" to the compensated and diverse workforce sparked conversation.
- Tiffany Olivas asked what the workforce changes and compensation discussed were, and what that would mean.
- Denise Tanata asked if anyone knew who was in the Retreat group who came up with this idea
- Rachel Stepina mentioned Jamie (Mendez) being a part of this group and that the compensation piece also goes along with the education and bringing respect to the Early Childhood System, any of the sectors, to make sure that respectable compensation matches the jobs they're actually doing.
- Dr. Diane Nicolet explained she had researched this and had a better understanding of the word "Respectfully" regarding compensation, as it includes respecting the field and respecting the system

• Rachel Stepina reminded members what Respectful was intended to cover, explaining that when we look at our goal of being respectful, compensation encompasses credibility in the field, acknowledging more behind the scenes of what we want our early child care, learning, and health workforce, as well as workforce in any of the sectors to really make to ensure that they receive a respectful compensation.
• Brooke Yarborough announced the new rule change from the federal government related to child care subsidy payments. The 2024 CCDF Final Rule would have required states to pay providers prospectively and by enrollment. The new changes remove that requirement, and it looks like we are going to be rolling those parts back. Brooke provided a link in the chat.
• The members continued discussing verbiage and words that are not allowable due to federal funding, specifically "Diversity," and how to replace that word.
• Denise Tanata changed the word *Diversity* to *Representative* and put it in a highlight as something that may change the wording later. Members agreed.
• When discussing the DEI words our funding can't support, Amanda Haboush-Deloye asked how the DEI restrictions work when the funding won't be connected to this plan after June?
• Tiffany Olivas brought up the fact that we also have to remember that we have multiple funding sources, not just one, but ideally, let's just pick other terminology so it's easier for those in federally funded programs and won't make it harder for others.
Patrice Gardner doesn't want the requirement to hinder their progress or work and supports rewording with alternate words.

**Revised Overview:**
*The Nevada ECAC embraces the principle that a strong early childhood workforce is the foundation for Nevada's success in supporting children from birth through age eight. A qualified and well-prepared, respectfully compensated, and representative workforce ensures high-quality services and provides consistent relationships vital for a child's development.*

**Revised Statement:**
*Promote the growth and sustainability of a qualified and well-prepared, respectfully compensated, and ~~diverse~~ representative early childhood workforce.*

**Goal #2** Connected Services System
**Overview Statement included in Draft Strategic Plan:**
*Improving the navigation of early childhood learning and services became a resounding theme among community member survey responses. In response, this goal advances an integrated, family-centered Early Childhood System by strengthening coordination across agencies, programs, and data systems serving children and families. It promotes clearer program roles, shared planning, and improved service navigation through one-stop access points, aligned eligibility tools, and shared data systems. These efforts aim to reduce fragmentation and support smoother transitions from early learning through third grade.*

• Denise Tanata shared that she had already rewritten the overview and wanted members to read through it for feedback. The members discussed various additions with RED font, noting the changes:
*The Nevada ECAC supports the development of a comprehensive, connected early childhood system that aims to provide a seamless, unified, and coordinated approach to early childhood development and education, recognizing how various factors (health, safety, ~~learning,~~ education, etc.) influence a child's well-being and potential, and must work together. This approach is critical in setting the stage for a child's future success by addressing their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development during these formative years. A high-functioning, coordinated early childhood system includes a well-organized network of programs, services, and resources designed to support children and families prenatally through their early years - providing a holistic approach to child development. To achieve this goal, it is critical to align governance structures, policies, fiscal support, and data systems across the various sectors of the early childhood system, including:*
*(Sectors added)*

- Dr. Diane Nicolet requests that the word education be included, as it needs to be seen as educational by legislators to take it seriously
- Rachel Stepina suggested removing Learning and adding Education and suggested listing out the ECS Sectors in the overview, providing a website link to the chat: https://www.first5nevada.org/what-is-an-early-childhood-system/
- Amanda Haboush-Deloye suggested adding the word "families" to " resources designed to support children and families...."

**Proposed Goal Statement:**

*Promotes an integrated, aligned, and family-centered early childhood system that strengthens coordination across agencies ~~and data systems~~ to support the delivery of services that meet the needs of children and families.*

- Denise Tanata removed "and data systems" and added "to support the delivery of services that meet the needs of children and families." To the statement
- Members agreed to keep the statement with the above-suggested changes.

**Goal #3** Funding and Affordability

**Overview Statement included in Draft Strategic Plan:**

*The most frequently cited need voiced throughout the community engagement process is the lack of affordable early care and learning in Nevada. Survey respondents encouraged ECAC to champion a dedicated state funding stream to support universal pre- K for four-year-olds, expand early childhood services, and incentivize employers (e.g., through tax credits) to businesses that offer child care benefits. Many emphasize the need for the state to view early care and education as a public good, similar to providing Nevada's children with an education through its support of K-12 schools.*

- Denise Tanata changed the overview to reflect ECAC beliefs and removed "and improve affordability of early care and learning programs from the original statement. With very little discussion, the members stuck with the new versions of the overview and statement for Goal 3, noted below:

**Revised Overview**:

*The Nevada ECAC recognizes that the early childhood system must be sustainably funded at a level sufficient to provide high-quality programs across all sectors to ALL children and families, prenatal through age eight. This includes funding to expand access to needed services, ensuring funding is adequate to support high-quality services, and that funding sources are sustainable to support ongoing, seamless service delivery. Nevada's early childhood system is heavily reliant on federal funding streams to support essential services for children and families. While these resources are critical, they are often time-limited, restricted in use, and insufficient to meet the full scope of need across the state. This reliance creates instability in program availability, limits the ability to scale high-quality services, and contributes to gaps in affordability and access, particularly for families with infants and toddlers, children with special needs, and those living in rural or underserved communities.*

**Revised Statement:**

*Promote sustainable funding streams at levels that are adequate to provide high-quality early childhood services across sectors of the early childhood system.*

**Overview Statement included in Draft Strategic Plan:**

ECAC's unique mandate and mission are to strengthen state-level collaboration among early childhood sectors by making strategic recommendations that increase participation of children in early childhood programs and enhance the systems and services that support them. This goal leverages ECAC's position to drive policy change, influence decisions at the state level, and ensure that early childhood is embraced as a leading priority in Nevada.

**Proposed Revision to Overview Statement: (**black font shows Denise Tanata's additions before meeting_)

*The Nevada ECAC's primary purpose, as defined in NRS 432A.076, is to "strengthen state-level coordination and collaboration among the various sectors and settings of early childhood programs." This includes the development of recommendations to increase participation of children in early childhood programs; establish or improve core elements of the early childhood system; develop or improve a statewide professional development system; and establish statewide standards for early childhood programs.*
*This goal leverages ECAC's position to drive policy change, influence decisions at the state level, and ensure that early childhood is embraced as a leading priority in Nevada, championed by well-informed decision makers.*

- Members suggested bulleting the overview, agreeing it is an easier read:
  *The Nevada ECAC's primary purpose, as defined in NRS 432A.076, is to "strengthen state-level coordination and collaboration among the various sectors and settings of early childhood programs." This includes the development of recommendations to:*
  - *Increase participation of children in early childhood programs*
  - *Establish or improve core elements of the early childhood system*
  - *Develop or improve a statewide professional development system*
  - *Establish statewide standards for early childhood programs.*

  *This goal leverages ECAC's position to drive policy change, influence decisions at the state level, and ensure that early childhood is embraced as a leading priority in Nevada, championed by well-informed decision makers.*

**Proposed Goal 4 Statement**:
*Elevate the visibility and value of early childhood policies and fiscal strategies, at the local, state, and federal levels, that are grounded in early childhood development science and best practices.*

- Members decided on one edit, adding "Grounded in the science of" in place of "ground", making the statement for this goal more high-impact.

**Revised Statement** :
*Elevate the visibility and value of early childhood policies and fiscal strategies at the local, state, and federal levels that are grounded in the science of early childhood development and best practices.*

**Goal 5 Organizational Capacity**
**Overview:**
*The Nevada ECAC is committed to building a sustainable operational foundation that strengthens its ability to represent and elevate the voices of families, providers, and community partners with lived experience. This goal establishes stable administrative capacity, streamlining governance, enhancing communication, and cultivating strategic partnerships that position ECAC as a trusted voice for Nevada's early childhood system.*

- Members had very little conversation and had one edit to the overview, noted in red, below.
- Denise Tanata suggested moving this to the Connected Services goal 1 (currently sitting at goal 2). Explaining that to have a high-functioning, coordinated early childhood system, we must have a sustainable infrastructure, and we need to have a governance structure in place for our early childhood advisory council
- Members liked this idea, and having only 4 goals instead of 5 seems more manageable.
- Rachel Stepina pointed out an opportunity to place the organizational piece within Goal 2 as an objective: to integrate that phrasing, organizational capacity, into the leading part of the objectives, for example:
  - *To strengthen the organizational capacity of the Early Childhood Advisory Council*
  - Then the strategies beneath that could be derived from the overview in relation to the workforce, connected to governance, utilize that language, and preserve its intention, while we combine the two goals

- Denise Tanata confirmed we are going to move Goal 5 under the Connected Systems Goal and then integrate the organizational capacity language into that overview statement.
- Goal 5's Overview and Statement Language moving to Goal 2:
  - **Overview** with minimal revisions in red font:

    *The Nevada ECAC is committed to building a sustainable operational foundation that strengthens its ability to represent and elevate the voices of families, ~~providers~~, the early childhood workforce, and community partners with lived experience. This goal establishes stable administrative capacity, streamlining governance, enhancing communication, and cultivating strategic partnerships that position ECAC as a trusted voice for Nevada's early childhood system.*
  - **Statement:**

    *Establish a sustainable operational infrastructure to fulfill the mission and mandate of the Early Childhood Advisory Council.*
- Denise Tanata also recommends switching Goal 1 and Goal 2, reading in this order:
  - Goal 1 Connected Service System
  - Goal 2 Workforce Development
- There is no objection to this change
- Brianna Cambra asked how we can include families, as that has been a big topic.
- Amanda Haboush-Deloye suggests adding it to the objectives in Goal 1 to keep the family voice part as it reads strongly (previously in Goal 5)
- Tiffany Olivas brings up the stipend aspect of reimbursing families for their time, and that those funding sources are sunsetting soon.
- Patrice Gardner responds that while we don't know what it will look like once funding streams are dried up, all we can do is make sure families who want to be involved and want to take the time to participate have access to do so. So, not just the funding piece, keep evening meetings, help them feel welcomed and that they belong, educating them when they do join us, let's focus on those types of objectives.
- Rachel Stepina added that the administrative manual prohibits compensating formal council members, so the parent who fills that seat cannot be compensated or incentivized to participate in that seat.
- Denise Tanata points out that the 2 pieces missing from the Public Works draft are ECIDS, the data, as well as the family engagement piece.
  - Sees both of these as objectives within the 4 goals
  - Suggests changing the goal name Connected Service System to something including the Comprehensive Early Childhood System
  - Suggests a subcommittee for Family Engagement and sees this as more of a crossover between all goals and not just one specific goal
- Brianna Cambra agrees and says that the Connected System Goal is getting beefy and may be too much for one group to take on.
- Denise Tanata discussed the possibility of this Connected System Goal as the "north Star" as it encompasses everything.
- Rachel Stepina asks for clarification on how that would look. Is Goal 2 the North Star statement and then…?
- Denise Tanata explained a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system. That is our North Star. To achieve, we need:
  - Have the workforce development piece in place.
  - Funding
  - Affordable programs and services.
- To accomplish this, we need:
  - Advocacy and influence.
  - Family engagement.

- Organizational capacity.

- These can be the goals under the broader north star
- Rachel Stepina asked how it would work with the 4 goals. Do we still have those goals?
- Denise Tanata shared her vision as ECAC data system, the family engagement, which would probably need to become goals.
  - Suggests a change to the goal name from Connected Service System to Governance and Infrastructure
  - Better aligns with objectives to have a coordinated governance structure: An early childhood integrated data system
    - Infrastructure to support family leadership
    - Organizational capacity for the ECAC.
- Rachel Stepina liked it better phrased as the Comprehensive Early Childhood System, noting that it would be above governance and infrastructure, which is how we get there, and those would be parts of the goal and the objective.
- Dr. Diane Nicolet steps in and explains it as the Unifying Vision. This is big; it's the vision bringing everything else into the light. She shares her thoughts on having this as the main vision with the 3 goals underneath it, and possibly a chapter book, navigating where to go from here every 3-6 months.
- After a back-and-forth discussion between members, the following are the proposed goal titles:
  Goal 1: Comprehensive Early Childhood System
  Goal 2: Workforce Development
  Goal 3: Funding And Affordability
  Goal 4: Advocacy And Influence
- Rachel Stepina asked to do a review of Goal 3, as Affordability may not be a big enough piece to hold the title.
- After review and discussion, Denise Tanata suggested Funding and Fiscal Policy.
- Patrice Gardner suggested Fiscal Policy and Sustainability.
- After a back-and-forth discussion between members, the following are the agreed-upon goal titles
  **Goal 1:** COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM
  **Goal 2:** WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
  **Goal 3:** FUNDING AND AFFORDABILITY
  **Goal 4:** ADVOCACY AND INFLUENCE

**6. Review Objectives and Key Implementation Strategies** (*Discussion for Possible Action)*
The Committee reviewed the Objectives and Key Implementation Strategies
*Materials: Public Works Draft Strategic Plan, pages 20-33*
*Denise Tanata and Abbey Bernhardt, Ad Hoc Committee Co-Chairs*
- Tabled due to time

**7. Meeting Agenda Items** *(Discussion, Informational)*
**Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 20, 2026, 10:30-12:30 pm**
The Committee discussed items to add to the meeting agenda for the next scheduled meeting on January 20, 2026.
*Denise Tanata and Abbey Bernhardt, Ad Hoc Committee Co-Chairs*
- Make updates with all of the edits, put together with suggested objectives under each goal, and share with the group before the meeting on the 20th, and share with the members for review.
- Brianna Cambra is concerned with the amount of work left for only one more meeting.
- Denise Tanata responded that we will revise the objectives under each of those goals and will discuss the subcommittee structure recommendation based on those goals and objectives, as well as the outline for the strategic plan. Everything else is sent back to Executive Leadership.
- By early next week, goal statements, draft objectives for each goal, proposed draft subcommittee structure based on the objectives will be sent to members, posted online, and Denise Tanata will create.
- The final items for the January 20th agenda will include:

- Finalize Objectives
- Recommend a Subcommittee Structure
- Develop Strategic Plan Outline

- Abbey Bernhardt to update the Executive Leadership Subcommittee on today's achievements.

**8. Public Comment #2** *(Discussion, Informational)*
Public comment not given during this agenda item on any matter within the Council's jurisdiction, control, or advisory power.

- No comment taken

**9. Adjournment**

- Abbey Bernhardt adjourned the meeting at 11:02 AM