Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council

Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council
Policy and Finance Subcommittee Public Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 24, 2026, Time, 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting ID:867 0730 7682, Passcode: 851310

Attendance

Members Present 11 of 14

- Tiffany Alston, ECAC Chair, Policy and Finance Co-Chair, Director of Programs, Sunrise Children's Foundation
- Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod, Policy and External Relations Director, The Children's Cabinet
- Abbey Bernhardt, National Alliance on Mental Illness
- Andrew Clarke, Battle Born Progress, Policy Manager
- Jerek Hough, Founder, Abbreviated Learning
- Octavia McLaurin, Owner, Licensed Family Childcare Provider
- Diane Nicolet, Trustee Washoe County School District
- Rachel Stepina, PDG B-5 Grant Manager, Office of Early Learning and Development, Nevada Department of Education
- Denise Tanata, Policy and Finance Co-Chair, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Advisor The Children's Cabinet
- Stephanie Vega, Teacher, Washoe County School District
- Patty West, Subsidy Coordinator, The Children's Cabinet, Subcommittee Member

Members Absent from 3 of 14

- Lela Gonzales, Family Engagement Specialist, The Children's Cabinet
- Kenneth Shackleford, Vice President, Acelero Learning Head Start Clark County
- Brooke Yarborough, Nevada Department of Human Services, Division of Social Services

Public in Attendance

- Sabrina Jones ECAC System Coordinator, Office of Early Learning and Development, Nevada Department of Education
- Dr. Jamelle Nance, Early Childhood Policy Director, Children's Advocacy Alliance
- Krystal Van Delden, The Nevada Registry

Minutes

1. Welcome, Call to Order, Roll Call, Introduction

- Denise Tanata called the meeting to order at 3:33 p.m.
- Stephanie Vega conducted roll call

2. Public Comment #1

- Tiffany Alston provided public comment regarding the Head Start Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.
- Tiffany Alston encouraged individual and group participation in the Head Start Notice for Proposed Rulemaking Comment Period. The deadline for open public comment is October 6, 2026. Tiffany Alston expressed concerns over the elimination of many Head Start Performance Standards. She explained that the changes would significantly affect the quality of Head Start early learning environments, including reducing services for children with disabilities, increasing child-to-staff ratios, reducing the administrative cap to 5% from 15% and more. Tiffany Alston provided her contact information tiffany@sunrisechildren.org for organizations interested in commenting or those who need the comment link.
- No additional public comments were offered.

3. Approval of a Flexible Agenda (Discussion for Possible Action)

- The Subcommittee approved the flexible agenda.
- Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod moved to approve the flexible agenda.
- Abbey Bernhardt seconded the motion.
- All in favor, none opposed.
- Members voted unanimously. The motion carried.

4. Approval of August 27, 2026, Minutes (Discussion for Possible Action)

- The Subcommittee approved August 27, 2026, meeting minutes with edits (actions steps 3rd bullet reflecting date, update to goal 1 statement.)
- Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod moved to approve the minutes.
- Tiffany Alston seconded the motion to approve the minutes
- All voted in favor
- Abbey Bernhardt and Jerek Hough abstained.
- The motion carried.

5. Nevada Legislative Updates (Information and Discussion)

- Denise Tanata presented updates on emerging bill draft requests and policy developments affecting Nevada's early childhood system. Denise Tanata shared the subcommittee's Bill Draft Tracker, noting that Bill Draft Requests (BDR) contain limited general descriptions. The goal is to begin tracking to see what is potentially on the horizon for the 2027 legislative session that is relevant to Nevada's early childhood system. She invited other members to share any specific or detailed information with the committee.
- Dr. Jamelle Nance referenced BDR 293 HOA Bill and stated that there is a very promising sponsor for this bill. Dr. Jamelle Nance also brought attention to Perinatal Quality Bill, but the fiscal note attached to bill may pose challenges.
- Denise Tanata referenced BDR 443 from the Joint Interim Standing Committee on Education. This BDR might be focused on early childhood governance. This will be confirmed once more language comes out.
- Rachel Stepina asked if the Bill Draft Tracker document should include additional details at the top. Rachel Stepina suggested referencing the subcommittee, adding a comment on how the document is updated and including contact information.

- Dr. Jamelle Nance asked if BDR 185 Boards and Commissions had any implications for the ECAC if Head Start Programs are no longer a federally funded entity.
- Denise Tanata responded that a state statute established Nevada ECAC, and it would need to be removed from the Nevada Revised Statute.
- Tiffany Alston added that the ECAC is under the Head Start Act.

6. Early Childhood Governance in Nevada (Information and Discussion)

- Denise Tanata reviewed the evolution of early childhood governance nationally, highlighting the shift from individual programs toward coordinated systems. Service integration gained momentum in the 1990s, and brain science research in the early 2000s deepened understandings of how the different sectors of the early childhood system are connected and rely on one another.
- Denise Tanata reviewed national milestones towards early childhood-focused departments, efforts/ successes from various states and Nevada-specific milestones.
- Denise Tanata emphasized that Nevada's discussions on early childhood governance have spanned approximately 20 years. Legislative proposals in 2023 and 2025 to establish an early childhood office within the Governor's Office did not advance. Federal funding has played a major role in Nevada's program organization and current early childhood governance structure. Because Nevada's early childhood programs are highly reliant on federal funding, there are many divisions within departments and the programs that they operate.
- Nevada has governance issues that need to be addressed. Current efforts focus on creating a department or division to improve coordination, address fragmentation, improve administrative efficiencies, increase access to programs, engage caregivers/families, address funding and workforce needs, etc.
- Denise Tanata shared a policy proposal by the Kids First Nevada Coalition to build a unified early childhood system in Nevada. This includes the development of a transition committee/plan to determine the actual structure and programs. The transition plan would mitigate disruptions in service delivery for families.
- Denise Tanata stated that an objective for this subcommittee is to develop recommendations and to advocate for an integrated early childhood governance structure that supports alignment and coordination across agencies and supports shared oversight of program service funding and administration. Denise Tanata asked the committee what key activities are needed to meet this objective. One key activity is to create a policy recommendation regarding early childhood governance structure from the perspective of the ECAC.
- Tiffany Alston asked about the involvement of other partners and entities, such as Head Start.
- Denise Tanata stated that the role of ECAC is to include various partners to represent the interests of the full early childhood system, including determining their policy priorities or issues they are working on at the state level.
- Rachel Stepina brought attention to the immediate usage of the ECAC Partner Report Updates and crosswalking policy priorities. Rachel Stepina also suggested the cross-subcommittee collaboration for these proposed activities.
- Sabrina Jones noted that the next ECAC Executive Leadership meeting has an agenda item on alignment opportunities for subcommittees on the master work plan.

7. Early Childhood Funding Needs and Fiscal Resources (Information and Discussion)
The detailed discussion of funding needs and fiscal resources was deferred to the next meeting. Denise Tanata briefly referenced funding history and the existing funding map during the early childhood governance presentation.

8. ECAC Policy Priorities & Recommendations Discussion 2026 (Review, Discussion, Public Comment)

- Denise Tanata outlined the process and timeline for the annual ECAC report to the Governor and Nevada Legislature. The Policy and Finance Subcommittee will gather input from other subcommittees and members of the ECAC and discuss recommendations on October 22, followed by Executive Leadership Subcommittee review on November 3 and full ECAC consideration on November 18. Denise Tanata asked about the best process for subcommittee members to prepare potential policy recommendations for the next meeting. An electronic survey format was proposed and members brainstormed ideas on survey administration and format.
- Dr. Jamelle Nance suggested referencing the recommendations in the governor's Workforce Development Child Care Group.
- Rachel Stepina suggested reviewing the raw data from the survey during Strategic Planning for potential recommendations.
- Dr. Diane Nicolet shared issues discussed by the Nevada Association of School Boards Legislative Committee. A prominent issue was school funding and the pupil centered funding plan. Diane Nicolet raised concerns that preschool funding is not built into the per pupil funding plan. This affects the state and counties, including Washoe County School District. Additional issues discussed by this committee were student health, student behavior and modernizing Special Education.

9. Member Share-Out (Information and Discussion)

- Rachel Stepina announced the release of the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Strategic Measurement Analytics and Results using Technology (SMART). The grant could support early childhood integrated data efforts, including fiscal alignment, fiscal data, and feedback loops. The proposed focus aligns with an early childhood data goal in the current strategic plan. Check the PDGB5 online platform: https://ndeoeld.instructure.com/courses/5 for details. There are also webinar opportunities, a survey, and community input opportunities.

10. Discuss Items for the Next Meeting and Future Agenda Items Requests (Discussion)

- Review of the early childhood fiscal map with a focus on current funding.
- Revisit the funding matrix.
- Review prior cost modeling.
- Review prior funding needs assessment and analysis work
- Review ECAC 2026 Policy Priorities and Recommendations for the Annual Report
- Review progress related to Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Strategic Measurement Analytics and Results using Technology (SMART) federal funding opportunity.

11. Upcoming Meeting Schedule (Review and Discussion)

- Family Leadership and Engagement: October 1, 2026, 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
- Executive Leadership: October 6, 2026, 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
- Data: October 15, 2026, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
- Policy and Finance: October 22, 2026, 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- Workforce Development: November 10, 2026, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- General ECAC: November 18, 2026, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- Communication & Engagement: November 24, 2026, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

12. Public Comment #2

- No public comment was offered.

13. Adjournment

- Denise Tanata adjourned the meeting at 4:33 p.m.

Action Step Summary and Follow-Up

- Revisit the early childhood fiscal map, funding matrix, cost modeling, and previous funding needs assessments at the October 22 meeting.
- Gather 2026 policy priorities and recommendation input from other subcommittees and members of the ECAC and discuss recommendations on October 22.
- Develop and implement survey to collect input from members of ECAC and ECAC partners.
- Use reports and raw survey data from Strategic Planning to inform policy priorities and recommendations for annual report.
- Denise Tanata and Subcommittee support: Add a brief purpose statement, update information, and Subcommittee contact or meeting reference to the Bill Draft Tracker, as suggested by Rachel Stepina.
- Denise Tanata and Policy and Finance members: Review new information on 2027 Bill Draft Requests as language becomes available; confirm whether BDR 443 addresses early childhood governance.
- Policy and Finance Co-Chairs and ECAC support: Collect and organize policy-priority input through the survey and other ECAC Subcommittees for the October 22 discussion. Proposed recommendations are scheduled for Executive Leadership review November 3 and General ECAC consideration November 18.
- Policy and Finance members: Consider relevant recommendations from the Governor's Workforce Development Board Child Care group, the strategic-planning survey, partner reports, and other early childhood partners.
- Policy and Finance Co-Chairs: Bring the early childhood fiscal map, funding matrix, cost modeling, and previous funding needs assessments forward for a future discussion; the September 24 detailed funding item was deferred.
- Rachel Stepina: Share or direct members to PDG B-5 SMART grant information and engagement opportunities, as available.

Meeting Summary

The Policy and Finance Subcommittee reviewed emerging legislative proposals and efforts to establish a coordinated early childhood governance structure in Nevada. Members discussed gathering input from ECAC subcommittees and partners to develop policy recommendations for the 2026 annual report.