

Rocky Mountain Development Council, Inc.
Board of Directors' Meeting
January 16, 2025, 3:30 p.m.
Neighborhood Center Card Room/Zoom Conference Call

Rocky Board Members present: Kate Anderson, Dannai Clayborn, Susan Geise, Debbie Havens, Andy Hunthausen, Paula Jacques, Charlie Lane, Lana Larson, Teri Lilletvedt, Erin Lyndes, Dan Rispens, Jesse Swenson

Rocky Board Members absent: Bruce Day, Trever Kirkland

Head Start Policy Council Members present: Katelyn Buck, Ana Canuel, Susan Geise, Sadie Gooch, Dan Harris, Ashley Johnston, Lana Larson

Head Start Policy Council Members absent: Maureen Bjerke, Mariah Hall, Andrea Hoeger, Shayla Morrow

Others present: Hayden Behm, MacKenzie Chatriand, Cassie Drynan, Diane Edgar, Joanna Halland, Jaymie Hazel, Taya Hovan, Lori Ladas, Jean Leischner, Angela Lunda, Samara Lynde, Jim Marks, Kathy Marks, Liz Mogstad, Kelley Moody, Angela Nelmark, Phyllis Oliver, Ashley Peña-Larsen, Tom Robel, Nichole Silverthorne, Dave Sorenson, Lizzie Thompson

Call to Order/Roll Call: The joint meeting of the Rocky Board of Directors and Head Start Policy Council was called to order at 3:32 p.m. and a quorum was present. No public comment was received.

Head Start Update

Jaymie Hazel presented an introduction to ERSEA – Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance. She noted that the ERSEA process begins by determining the community's strengths and needs, and that is done through a Community Needs Assessment. She referenced the 2021 Community Needs Assessment included in packets and noted that an updated assessment will be completed in 2026 in partnership with Rocky. Updates to the assessment were provided, and Jaymie asked for any questions or comments regarding those updates.

For the Policy Council, Dan Harris made the motion to approve the Community Needs Assessment Update. Susan Geise seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Debbie Havens made the motion to approve the Community Needs Assessment Update. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Jaymie noted that Head Start's eligibility selection criteria has not changed since last year, as it is in alignment with the community needs assessment. She then spoke about Head Start's recruitment plan, which is broken down by month with staff responsibilities noted throughout. She emphasized that the best recruitment tool for the program is word of mouth promotion from Head Start families, the Policy Council, and the Rocky Board of Directors.

For the Policy Council, Susan Geise made the motion to approve the 2024-2025 Recruitment Plan. Dan Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Susan Geise made the motion to approve the 2024-2025 Recruitment Plan. Dannai Clayborn seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Jaymie provided ERSEA training, where she reviewed the process for determining, verifying, and documenting eligibility of Head Start students. The process begins with an in-person interview with each family, or a telephone interview if circumstances dictate. Program staff verify the child's age and eligibility and create a record for enrolled participants. The program strives to treat every family with dignity and respect during the interview process, which is the first step in forming a relationship with the family. Connections to community resources are often a result of these initial meetings. To be age-eligible for Head Start, a child must be three years old by September 10th of the incoming school year or be at least three years old and no older than kindergarten age. Families may be eligible to participate in the program if they meet one of four categorical eligibility criteria. These include an income equal to or below the federal poverty line, approval for public assistance such as SNAP or TANF, homelessness, or a foster care placement. Jaymie explained how each category is verified. The program may fill up to 10% of its enrollment with children whose families are over 130% of the poverty guidelines, and an additional 35% with participants whose families fall between 101%-130% of the poverty guidelines, as long as the program ensures eligible children are enrolled first. Once a child is determined categorically eligible for Head Start, he or she remains eligible for 2 years. If an enrolled child is over-income, their eligibility needs to be re-verified each year. Records are kept while the child attends Head Start, and for three additional years.

Following the training, Jaymie explained the update to the Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment and Class Placement Policy and Procedure, which allows Head Start to adjust family's gross income calculations to account for excessive housing costs.

For the Policy Council, Ashley Johnston made the motion to approve the Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment, and Class Placement Policy and Procedure. Dan Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Erin Lyndes made the motion to approve the Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment, and Class Placement Policy and Procedure. Dannai Clayborn seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Jaymie presented a video about the benefits of regular attendance for Head Start children. The program monitors absence data, to identify trends and provide supports when attendance becomes an issue. When a child is absent without notice, the parents are contacted and if there is no response, a home visit is scheduled with the classroom's Family Advocate. Jaymie confirmed that a family does not lose its enrollment slot due to attendance until 30 days of no contact between the family and the program.

For the Policy Council, Dan Harris made the motion to approve the Attendance Partnership Agreement and the Attendance Policy and Procedure. Ashley Johnston seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Debbie Havens made the motion to approve the Attendance Partnership Agreement and the Attendance Policy and Procedure. Susan Geise seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ashley Peña-Larsen provided some history of the Head Start program, which was launched in 1965. Rocky's program began in 1967. In Montana, Head Start served nearly 4,000 children in 2024. That represents one-sixth of all children in a licensed or registered childcare program. Ashley spoke about Head Start using a three-generation approach, where the children, their parents, and their grandparents are all part of the process. Rocky Head Start provides slots for 125 children in 8 classrooms, all offering 1,020 hours of service per year.

Though Head Start is most often thought of as an education service, the program provides much more. There is a health and wellness component which includes health screenings, immunizations, mental health supports and physical activity. Social Service areas include community collaboration and parent engagement, and Rocky Head Start's Family Advocates provide access to resources in the community. At least 10% of total enrollment must be children with a diagnosed disability. At Rocky Head Start, 32% of enrolled children meet that criterion.

Ashley provided highlights from Head Start's annual report. She noted that while 103 children were enrolled in the program, it was funded to serve 176 children during the 2023-2024 school year. The enrollment reduction was not effective until August of 2024.

For the Policy Council, Dan Harris made the motion to approve the Annual Report. Ashley Johnston seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Erin Lyndes made the motion to approve the Annual Report. Dannai Clayborn seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ashley reported that Rocky Head Start completes a program self-assessment annually. Information is gathered from surveys completed by Head Start families, boards, and staff. The assessment is completed as an effort to continually improve the program and is driven by the data collected.

For the Policy Council, Dan Harris made the motion to approve the Self-Assessment Action Plan. Ana Canuel seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Dannai Clayborn made the motion to approve the Self-Assessment Action Plan. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ashley noted there are no changes to the Head Start Program Goals, which are required to be updated every five years. Progress noted included strengthening partnerships in smaller communities, expanding mental health services, providing Parent Village services and improved program visibility. Challenges include the loss of STARS funding by September 2025, limited availability to community resources, and barriers to family participation, such as transportation.

For the Policy Council, Ashley Johnston made the motion to approve the Head Start Program Goals. Dan Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Erin Lyndes made the motion to approve the Head Start Program Goals. Susan Geise seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ashley explained that the School Readiness Plan is based on the previous year's students and their progress throughout the school year. This data is reviewed three times per year to track progress. Parent education is also provided through events and outreach. Ashley noted a recent increase in need for speech IEPs for Head Start children, along with noticing some reduced gross motor skills in incoming students.

For the Policy Council, Dan Harris made the motion to approve the School Readiness Plan. Ana Canuel seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Debbie Havens made the motion to approve the School Readiness Plan. Dannai Clayborn seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ashley provided an overview of the 2025-2026 Head Start operations grant and budget. The grant will serve 125 children and their families in Lewis & Clark, Broadwater, and Jefferson counties. Services will be provided over the course of 147 days, for a total of 1,020 hours. Hours of operation will change to 8:30 a.m. through 3:30 p.m. at all sites except Eastgate, where the schedule will follow regular school hours. There are no projected changes to service area, enrollment, or service delivery. When reviewing the program budget, Head Start worked to eliminate a projected \$101,000 shortfall for grant year 2025-2026. Adjustments included the elimination of one permanent substitute position, a decrease in some contractual services, and recalculation of indirect costs.

For the Policy Council, Ashley Johnston made the motion to approve the 2025-2026 Head Start Operations Grant and Budget. Dan Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Susan Geise made the motion to approve the 2025-2026 Head Start Operations Grant and Budget. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ashley spoke about the \$27,000 provided to Rocky Head Start for Training and Technical Assistance. These funds are used to support staff training, family engagement, and compliance with Head Start standards. The largest portion of the funding will be used for staff credentials and compliance. Remaining funds are allocated for family learning opportunities, professional development, trauma-informed care, and indirect costs.

For the Policy Council, Ashley Johnston made the motion to approve the Training and Technical Assistance Plan and Budget. Ana Canuel seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the Rocky Board, Dannai Clayborn made the motion to approve the Training and Technical Assistance Plan and Budget. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

The Policy Council meeting was adjourned at 4:43 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Debbie Havens made the motion to approve the December 19, 2024, Board of Directors meeting minutes and the September 26, 2024, Finance Committee minutes. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Director's Report – Lori Ladas

Lori asked for any questions regarding her written memo included in Board packets. She spoke about vacancies to Board committees resulting from the recent retirements of Jerry Loendorf, Daniel Pocha, and Bob Mullen from the Rocky Board. Dan Rispens and Teri Lilletvedt volunteered to serve on the Executive Committee. Paula Jacques will fill the vacant Finance Committee position. Charlie Lane agreed to fill the vacant position on the Personnel Committee, and new members of the Nominating Committee include Kate Anderson and Erin Lyndes.

Susan Geise made the motion to approve the updates to the Board Committee list as discussed. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Lori referenced the draft Strategic Plan, which was included in Board packets. The plan was completed with the assistance of two facilitators, Eric Schindler and Jill Steeley. Lori thanked the Board members who were able to attend planning sessions and spoke about the Program Directors session where goals were developed and work plan items were determined. Lori noted that a broad range of goals are included in the plan, and that with the uncertainty of funding sources, the plan is viewed as a dynamic document that can be updated as needed. The recommendation was made to review the document in a year to assess if any changes are needed.

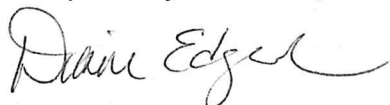
Susan Geise made the motion to approve the Strategic Plan as presented. Erin Lyndes seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Finance Report

Cash balance today is \$2,191,158. The accounts payable balance is \$137,777.53, which is higher than typically reported due to the timing of the Board meeting this month. Lori acknowledged that \$822.05 of the accounts payable balance represents invoices past 31 days due, because of late invoice delivery from the vendors. The financial reports from WIPFLI were shared. Lori noted that the statement of financial position is stable compared to last month, and the statement of activities shows revenues for the year to date at \$31,748. In reference to the program fiscal updates, Lori mentioned that an Ad-Hoc Committee of the Board met on Monday to discuss Rocky Mountain Preschool Center's budget, and that the committee will complete some research and plans to reconvene next month to continue discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Diane Edgar
Executive Assistant

Approved by the Board of Directors:


Name


Date