



ROCKY MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, INC.
P.O. Box 1717 | 200 South Cruse Avenue | Helena, MT 59624-1717
phone: 406.447.1680 | toll free: 800.356.6544 | fax: 406.447.1629

Rocky Head Start Policy Council

Chairperson
Lana Larson

Vice Chair
Katelyn Buck

Treasurer
Ana Canuel

Policy Council Meeting Minutes November 19, 2024

Facilitator: Lana Larson

Time Keeper:

Scribe: Signe Ask

The meeting began at 12:00 p.m. (completed via zoom/in person)

Public comment on items on the agenda: Facilitator asked for any public comment on items; there was none.

Policy Council Members Present: Lana Larson, Ashley Johnston, Ana Canuel, Katelyn Buck, Dan Harris, Andrea Hoeger (Virtual Attendance), Sadie Gooch (Virtual Attendance), Maria Hall, Susan Geise.

PC Members Excused: Shayla Morrow, Maureen Bjerke

PC Members Unexcused:

6 members are needed to make a quorum. A quorum was met.

Others in Attendance: Signe Ask (Family and Community Engagement Coordinator), Leslie Cochran-Olson (Support Services Manager), Rodney Applegate (Fiscal Analyst), Dave Sorensen (Family Advocate)

Call to Order Welcome New Policy Council Members- New Policy Council members were introduced. Lana Larson Helena Housing Authority new to PC this year.

Treasurer's Report: Ana Canuel new Policy Council Treasurer gave the October Treasurers Report. Fund balances:

Parent Fund \$4,924.41

Hardship Fund \$6,551.19

Whitehall \$500

Townsend Memorial \$1,377.80

Misc. \$5,182.82

Christmas \$1,339.99

Deposits:

Parent Fund \$6.21 Interest

\$300 was spent from the Parent Fund for Dan Henry Fall Dance Musician.

Lana called for a motion to approve the October Treasurer's Report. **Maria Hall moved to approve the treasurers report, Dan Harris Seconded. None opposed.**

Head Start Director's Program and Budget Report November:

1. Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS)

The state is in the process of updating the Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS), which provide guidance for early childhood education across the state. I am part of the workgroup tasked with revising these standards, with the goal of having them ready for statewide implementation by December 2025. This collaborative effort will

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ensure the standards align with current research and best practices to benefit children and families.

2. Legislative Watch

As we prepare for the Montana legislative session, we are closely monitoring potential changes that could impact our families and program. Key areas of focus include Medicaid, Best Beginnings Scholarships, and Montana Child Care Licensing rules. I will continue working with the Montana Early Childhood Alliance to track current bills and assess how they intersect with federal Head Start rules. This proactive approach allows us to stay informed and advocate effectively for the needs of our program and families.

3. Updated Head Start Rules

We recently received the new rule package for Head Start, with some rules taking effect on October 21, 2024. Over the coming months, you'll see various Program Information Reports (PIRs) from the Federal Office of Head Start included in your packets. One of the most exciting changes is the introduction of a housing allowance calculator for determining family eligibility. Released on November 14, 2024, this new tool will allow us to revisit our waitlist and determine how it may increase the number of eligible families. We anticipate this will have a significant positive impact on enrollment.

4. Staffing and Enrollment

We are fully enrolled and working to fill two TA positions—one in East Helena and one in Townsend. Both positions have applicants, and we are in the final stages of completing their paperwork. Once finalized, these hires will strengthen our team and support program operations.

5. Townsend Center Expansion

On November 14, 2024, the Townsend City Planning Committee approved our variance request for the planned addition to the Townsend Head Start Center. Construction on this project is now moving forward. We are deeply grateful for this approval and look forward to using the additional space to support staff needs and potentially provide a meeting area for families to connect with partners such as SNAP and WIC. This enhancement will benefit both staff and families by fostering collaboration and access to essential services.

6. In-Kind Donations Requirement

As part of our federal funding agreement, Head Start programs are required to generate in-kind donations equivalent to 20% of their total funding. For our program, this translates to \$776,675 in in-kind contributions for the year. These contributions can come from volunteer hours, donated goods or services, and community partnerships.

Here is a breakdown of our current in-kind totals by site:

- **HHA:** 1,063
- **Valley:** 6,922
- **NC1:** 1,955
- **NC2:** 670
- **NC3:** 2,220
- **Eastgate:** 1,261
- **Townsend:** 7,133
- **Whitehall:** 3,522
- **Main Office:** 4,045

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While progress is being made, ongoing effort is needed to meet the total required amount. Staff and community partners play a critical role in helping us achieve this goal. Tracking and reporting contributions accurately is essential to meeting federal requirements and maintaining program funding.

7. New Facebook Page

We're excited to announce that our program has a new Facebook page: [Rocky-Head Start](https://www.facebook.com/WeareRockyHeadStart/).

<https://www.facebook.com/WeareRockyHeadStart/> Unfortunately, our previous page was removed and could not be restored.

We encourage you to follow, like, and share the new page with Head Start families and community members. Each week, we plan to post classroom highlights to showcase the amazing activities happening across our sites. Please send photos from your classrooms to Signe so they can be shared every Friday. This is a great way to engage parents and help them feel connected to our program.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our program. If you have any questions or would like more information on any of these updates, please don't hesitate to reach out.

I'll continue to keep you updated on our progress and any challenges that arise. Lana called for a motion to approve the Head Start Director's Program and Budget report. **Maria Hall moved to approve the treasurers report, Dan Harris Seconded. None opposed.**

Parent Nation Overview: Signe Ask presented on the upcoming Parent Nation Advocacy Training that will be offered through Rocky Head Start, Montana Zero-Five initiative and Early Childhood Collaborative. There will be four sessions with a mix of virtual and in person trainings training on Parent Nation. Our group will be called Empowered Parent Network. The first session is virtual on December 13 from 2:00-3:30. Each parent that attends will receive a \$50 gift card for their time. The hope is to train more parents within the community on advocacy work leading into the current legislative session. We will be opening this up to Head Start Policy Council and Head Start parents as well as other parents within the community. Susan Geise (Rocky Board member Head Start Liaison) offered to help parents with training when it comes to speaking at the legislature.

RIOT (Reading Instead of Technology) Event Planning: Signe Ask presented information on the upcoming event RIOT. RIOT is an event that starts in January and wraps up in March. During this time parents are asked to track their reading time with their Head Start student. In this time, we hope to have 50,000 minutes in reading time. Classrooms with the most minutes read will receive a prize and the top readers in each classroom will also receive a prize. Exploration Works also plans on being at this event to provide an activity. The question for Policy Council was, should this event take place in individual classrooms or as a larger group. Policy Council agreed that the kickoff event as a larger group is fun and the wrap up event is better in individual classrooms.

Grant Committee Members: Signe Ask presented information on the Rocky Head Start Grant Committee. This Committee is going to need to meet outside of Policy Council time to prepare for next years grant. Katelyn Buck would like to be on the committee but needs to know the dates in advance in December. Andrea Hoeger in Townsend would also like to participate on the Grant Committee. Sadie Gooch in Whitehall is also interested.

Interview Committee- Signe Ask presented information on Interview Committee. Lana Larson would like to be called for Interviews. Sadie Gooch would also like to help with the Interview committee if she can attend virtually.

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Meeting Evaluation and Adjournment. Dan Harris would like to add Picture Day for all Head Start children to the next Policy Council Agenda. **Maria Hall moved to adjourn Dan Harris seconded, none opposed.**

Public Comment: Dave Sorensen Head Start Family Advocate would like to add Pinewood Derby (Father Engagement Activity) to the next Policy Council Meeting Agenda.

The Policy Council adjourned meeting at 12:00 p.m.

Next Meeting: December 17 at 12:00 p.m. zoom or in person at the Neighborhood Center Room 15

Lana Larson, Chairperson