

Policy Council Minutes

Wednesday, November 19, 2025, 5:30 pm

Dowagiac – McCleary St: 603 McCleary St, Dowagiac

1. Welcome and Introductions

Policy Council Members in attendance: Jen Moody (Berrien GSC), Sherry Bennet (Van Buren GSC), Alli Harman (SMC), Kristin Survoy (New Buffalo), Annie O’Connell (New Buffalo), Haylei Shepard (Niles), Destinee Wadkins (Dowagiac), Mary-alice Wirick (Home Visiting), Amelia Espinosa (Bangor), Sara Parkhurst (Cass), Sydney Whittker (Watervliet), Jennifer Russell (Watervliet)

Guests in attendance: Chanda Hillman CEO; Laura Burtis CFO; Maureen Ovington Development Director; Melanie Bullock Workforce Development Manager; Laura Brugh Family Advocate; Jodi Curran Family Advocate; Trent Lamonds Family Advocate; Evelia Alcaraz Family Advocate; Sarah Savage Family Advocate; Ana Moreno Family Advocate; Juanisha Young Family Advocate; Belinda Russell Family Advocate; Rut Vargas Family Advocate; Stacey Spencer ERSEA Manager; Elmira Morales Family Advocate; Tiffany Perkins Family Advocate; Ivette Bucio Communications and Engagement Coordinator

Quorum was met.

Haylei called meeting to order at 5:48pm

2. * Approve Minutes – October Meeting
Sara motioned; Jen seconded. Motion carried.
3. * Vote for Officer
 - a. Treasurer
 - i. Jennifer Russell
Mary-alice motioned; Destinee seconded. Motion carried.
4. * Directors Report – October - attendance dropped a little in October due to illnesses –
 - a. National updates: Continuing resolution in place until January 30. Chanda and the board chair will be in Washington, D.C. from the 27th–29th and will advocate if needed. Two Michigan Head Start programs are currently closed due to funding delays.
 - b. HR Dashboard: Working on strategies to improve gaps in staffing. We currently have 23 registered apprentices.
 - c. Family Services Report: Working on family partnership agreements, those numbers are expected to increase in January. Family services have been helping a lot in classrooms.
 - d. Development Report: Attended Project T groundbreaking; met with the foundation supporting Development Director’s role. Flowers of the Future event at SMC went very well. Decatur event also went well; it led to a meeting with the village about possible future space.
 - e. Education Report: Continuing work on NAEYC accreditation.

- i. CLASS scores remain important as OHS reviews them. Coaches will support classrooms to improve scores.
Sara motioned; Mary-alice seconded. Motion carried.
5. * Finance Report – October
 - a. 75% of the fiscal year completed. Savings in personnel due to open positions. In-kind through September: \$650,648.16 with the goal of \$1,140,000 for HS; \$241,959.80 with the goal of \$542,000 for EHS. The Mercantile Credit Card balance of \$27,000 is higher than usual due to training costs being fully charged.
 - b. Travel, fuel, and vehicle maintenance continue to be closely monitored.
Sara motioned; Jen seconded. Motion carried.
6. * Health Insurance Quote
 - a. Insurance costs roughly \$1.5 million total annually. This year’s quote came in lower than expected, allowing the addition of Teladoc services (virtual medical, nutrition support, mental health, dermatology, digital physical therapy) at no cost.
 - b. The medical opt-out has been discontinued, but Teladoc will remain available to all staff at no charge.
Sydney motioned; Sara seconded. Motion carried.
7. * 2025-2026 In-Kind Wavier
 - a. Requesting an additional Non-Federal Share waiver of \$350, 545. Two main reasons to help support the waiver, lack of community resources and impact on the community if the program ceased operations. Approval from OHS is uncertain. If the waiver is denied and funds are fully spent, the program may owe repayment; if unable to repay, re-competition (DRS) would be required.
 - b. Two new van rebates counted as in-kind, as well as \$45,000 in air purifiers donated by the Berrien Community Foundation.
Sydney motioned; Sara seconded. Motion carried.
8. Education
 - a. Focus Area 1 Audit
 - i. Programs usually receive a 45-day notice, but unannounced reviews are allowed. We have not received notice yet.
 - ii. The review checks compliance with standards. For Policy Council, reviewers check for general understanding; staff are not allowed in the one-on-one meetings.
9. Communications
 - a. Flowers of the Future Tours – These tours help tell our story and highlight the importance of our services. Nearly 100 people have attended so far.
 - b. Contingency Planning – Preparing in case funding is not received by January 30.
 - c. Plan for PC Community Members – begin brainstorming on who could serve as strong connectors for families and resources.
10. Report from Centers
 - a. Donuts with Grownups, Watervliet families enjoyed the event.
 - b. Donuts with Grownups in Niles went well, Dunkin donated donuts and staff from Dunkin came to distribute them. Craft show in Niles this weekend.
 - c. Family Committee training: Send ideas to Chanda or the Communications and Engagement Coordinator to set up training for families. Topics can come from the list handed out or any new ideas that families request.
11. Report from Great Start Collaboratives – Thank you to GSC’s.

12. Pleasure of the Floor – We asked Cass for an extension through January 31st. Still working through the process to be able to move Cass classrooms to Mc Cleary.
13. * Adjournment
Mary-alice motioned; Sara seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:25pm

*Denotes approval needed

Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 21, at 5:30 pm, Zoom