

# Policy Council Minutes

Wednesday, March 25, 2026, 5:30 pm

**4821 North St, Benton Harbor**

1. Welcome and Introductions

**Policy Council Members in Attendance:** Khyra Kimble Millburg HS; Alli Harman SMC Dowagiac HS; Sydney Whittker Watervliet EHS; Sherry Bennett Van Buren GSC; Jen Moody GSRP Behavior Consultant; Betsy Bradley Strong Beginnings Family Liaison; Haylei Shepard Niles HS;

**Policy Council Members attending via Zoom:** Sara Parkhurst Cass EHS;

**Policy Council Members voting via email:** Kristin Survoy New Buffalo HS; Annie O'Connell New Buffalo EHS; Destinee Wadkins Dowagiac HS; Deborah Thrasher Decatur HS; Madison Gil South Haven HS

**Guests in Attendance:** Chanda Hillman CEO; Laura Burtis CFO; Kevin Wordelman COO; Maureen Ovington Director of Philanthropic Innovation; Mandy Orlando Head Start Education Director; Patti Masters Early Head Start Education Director; Stacey Spencer ERSEA Manager, Holly Pomranka Family Services Manager; Jodi Curran Family Advocate; Tiffany Costner Family Advocate; Laura Brugh Family Advocate; Ana Moreno Family Advocate; Trent Lamonds Family Advocate; Juanisha Young Family Advocate; Tiffany Perkins Family Advocate; Benny Russell Family Advocate; Ivette Bucio Communications & Engagement Coordinator

**Quorum was met.**

Haylei called meeting to order 5:34pm

2. \* Vote in Community Member: Betsy Bradley
  - a. Sydney motioned; Jen seconded. Motion carried.
3. \* Approve Minutes – January
  - a. Sydney motioned; Jen seconded. Motion carried.
4. \* Directors Report – January/February
  - i. Enrollment remains below target. OHS has begun issuing letters indicating that some programs may be required to return funds. If received, we plan to submit an appeal. Additionally, we will pursue a conversion request.
  - ii. Awaiting remaining funds; expected by the end of May
  - iii. Awaiting FA1 review results
  - iv. Improper Payment Study report submitted
  - b. HR Dashboard – Reviewing and revising onboarding processes to improve teacher and staff retention
  - c. Family Services Report – Approximately 120 children currently on the waitlist for next year

- d. Development Report – Give Back Night funds will be reflected at the next meeting; ongoing partnership discussions with Corewell; Flowers of the Future survey revamped, resulting in increased engagement
  - e. Education Report – Positive progress within the Outcomes Framework; goal setting in progress for dual language learners, the 25 students currently not demonstrating expected classroom progress
  - f. Health Services Report – Requirement is 10% IEP/IFSP enrollment; currently at 20%; participating in Dr. Yum project with NHSA  
Sydney motioned; Jen seconded. Motion carried.
5. \* Finance Report – January/February
    - a. Fiscal closeout scheduled for the end of April
    - b. In-Kind requirement not yet met; waiver approval pending
    - c. 8% of the fiscal year completed
    - d. Fringe benefits exceed budget due to February and March payments  
Sydney motioned; Alli seconded. Motion carried.
  6. \* 401K Contribution
    - a. Distribution scheduled for mid-April; all staff will receive the contribution regardless of participation
    - b. Contribution will be 15% for this year  
Alli motioned; Betsy seconded. Motion carried.
  7. \* New Accounting Database
    - a. System enhancements will include improved reporting, expanded HR functionality, modernized timesheet submission, and outsourced payroll processing
    - b. Implementation planned for June/July with full rollout in August  
Sydney motioned; Sherry seconded. Motion carried.
  8. \* Grant Amendment: Conversion
    - a. Proposal to convert Head Start slots to Early Head Start slots  
Sydney motioned; Betsy seconded. Motion carried.
  9. \* SF 425
    - a. Submitted three times annually to OHS; includes cash reporting, in-kind contributions, budget revisions, CACFP, and administrative costs  
Jen motioned; Alli seconded. Motion carried.
  10. \* SF 429
    - a. Annual real property report detailing facilities with federal interest  
Jen motioned; Alli seconded. Motion carried.
  11. Transition Plan
    - a. \* Search Firms
      - i. Recommendation: Welsh & Associates
      - ii. Conducting a national search
      - iii. Our goal is to have selected and hired new CEO by August 1; approval targeted for June Joint Planning Meeting
      - iv. OHS approval required prior to CEO start date
      - v. Selection Committee: Two Board members, two Policy Council members, and two staff (Marybeth – HR and Autumn – Head Education Coach)  
Sydney motioned; Betsy seconded. Motion carried.
    - b. \* Interim Director

- i. Laura Burtis; pending OHS approval
  - ii. Responsibilities distributed among the Directors
- Sherry motioned; Betsy seconded. Motion carried.
- c. \* CEO Job Description
  - i. Updated to include fundraising and capital strategy responsibilities
- Jen motioned; Alli seconded. Motion carried.
- 12. Education
  - a. Maureen Ovington – Childcare Systems Mapping
    - i. Overview of early childhood education ecosystem
    - ii. Emphasis on strengthening connections between children, families, and services
    - iii. Highlighted importance of reliable, high-quality childcare in supporting workforce participation
    - iv. Positioned childcare as critical community infrastructure
- 13. Communications
  - a. Parents Unite
    - i. NHTSA implemented this year; ongoing and expanding
    - ii. Upcoming social media campaign, including Superhero Day in mid-April
- 14. Report from Centers –
  - a. Sydney – Spring Scavenger Hunt
  - b. Millburg – Family Fun Night theme “at the farm”
  - c. Niles - Midwest Energy volunteering; Dunkin’ Donuts donated books
- 15. Report from Community Partners –
  - a. Sherry – VB: Virtual parenting series; 7th Community Baby Shower; Resource Fair on April 30; Van Buren Reads (2nd week of April); VBISD continues support of GSC
  - b. Jen – “Oh Baby!” event on June 14 led by Corewell
  - c. Betsy – No baby shower this year; Art Expo events launching in April
- 16. Pleasure of the Floor – Family services will begin recruiting events
- 17. \* Adjournment
  - a. Alli motioned; Sydney seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:02pm

\*Denotes approval needed

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, June 17, 2026 at 2:30 pm, 490 S. Paw Paw St, Lawrence