

Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)

Meeting Minutes

Date: Feb. 10, 2026

Time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Welcome and Introductions

ELAC Executive Committee member Tanya Hutton welcomed attendees and initiated introductions.

ELAC Committee Business

Members reviewed meeting materials:

- [ELAC Webpage](#)
- [Oct. 7, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
- [Dec. 16, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
- [Feedback Loop](#)
- [State Agency/Partner Updates](#)
- [Regional Coalition Updates](#)

If you have any questions, please email the Community Engagement Team (dcyf.communityengagement@dcyf.wa.gov).

Early Learning Budget and Legislative Updates

DCYF Assistant Secretary of Early Learning Nicole Rose, and Assistant Secretary of Licensing Ruben Reeves provided an update on early learning this legislative session, including budget considerations and potential impacts on early learning programs.

- There seems to be some questions about renewals and renewal criteria for the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) soft cap drop. Will you be able to provide more clarity before end of session for this?
 - The governor's request legislation [HB 2689](#) talks about stopping new entries (someone who is newly applying or does not apply timely). If someone receives WCCC and they reapply before the end of their eligibility period, we would



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expect that if they meet all other eligibility criteria, they would be eligible and allowed to continue to participate in Working Connections.

Please reach out to Nicole Rose (Nicole.Rose@dcyf.wa.gov) and Ruben Reeves (Ruben.Reeves@dcyf.wa.gov) with any follow up questions.

Staff Qualifications Updates

DCYF Senior Administrator of Workforce and Professional Development Tiffany Lee, Child Care Policy Manager Brett Skinner, Tribal Child Care Licensing Consultant Mindy Flett, and Workgroup Member Brogan Potter, from Wenatchee Valley YMCA provided an update on the Staff Qualifications Workgroup as part of HB 1648.

- What do you think is important to consider when verifying and recognizing domestic and international education?
 - As employers, we have a responsibility to verify work experience. It shouldn't be DCYF determining eligibility. It should be a conversation between the employer and the employee. There is not enough consideration for the fact that we are the professionals doing the hiring, recruiting, training, and retention. All that stuff is on our shoulders. However, if you do it that way, we don't have a say, and you could be eliminating people or saying they're not qualified based on your assessment when we may have a totally different assessment.
 - It could also be the other way around. DCYF could designate someone as being qualified, maybe as a leader or an owner, and maybe you wouldn't necessarily agree with that.
 - That's possible as well, but then we wouldn't necessarily keep them employed or hire them. We know who will work well in our centers, DCYF does not. Whether they meet your education determinations or any of those things sort of becomes irrelevant if they don't have the temperament to work in the field. We've seen well-educated people not being able to do the work and that's why experience becomes so critically important. Retention is critically important as well, because we want to mitigate turnover. The relationships we have with our employees are critical to incentivize people to stay. The more you take us out of the role of determining who's qualified or has the experience we want, I think that could negatively impact quality programming.
 - Are licensors aware of 1648 and do they take that into consideration when reviewing staff files?
 - We did have an initial training course for licensors and are planning more, both to provide updates to licensors about our work, but also to continue to talk about what this looks like so that we have all licensors on the same page.
 - Since the legislation went into effect July 2025, why has it taken so long to notify the field?

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- We did take steps initially to notify the field so that they had awareness that this bill was passing. The initial thought was since the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) deadline wasn't until August 2026, we were going to rely on the WAC change to go in effect before that date. Then we heard from the field that there was some confusion, and that's when we put together the training to share more information. We also decided to work on the memo, so we had at least those things, and then we'll get the WAC implemented as well.
 - We want to make sure that what we communicate to the field is clear and something that comes from the work group. And so, while we're meeting and making these recommendations, they will help shape what the communication will look like. I think we would want to prevent a scenario where we are interpreting 1648 to be implemented in a certain way, and then later discussions that occur in the workgroup aren't the same. Having to put the workforce through that kind of pivoting seems unfair.
- Other states have their own verification systems similar to our Managed Education & Registry Information Tool (MERIT). With large border county populations, it would be really helpful if MERIT could communicate with ORO.
 - That's a great idea. We will look into this.
- One thing that has come up with the family child care providers that I work with is the inability to use a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential in place of a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) for family child care. While a CDA is accepted alongside a diploma or GED in comparable early learning roles, this represents a notable equity concern. Family child care providers are held to a more restrictive qualification pathway than their peers and reviewing this policy could support a more inclusive and accessible workforce while maintaining program quality.
 - Are you suggesting the CDA alone?
 - Yes, in centers, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start programs you can use a CDA in lieu of a high school diploma or a GED. That is not true for family child care. It would be more beneficial for a family child care provider to have a CDA because it's very specific for them, more so than having a high school diploma or a GED. This causes a big inequity in the systems. We should really visit that and see if we can get that, that changed.
 - I agree and think that this is a great opportunity to look at how things are aligned or not aligned. Regarding your point about equity, I appreciate that idea.
- Please reach out to Mindy Flett, (mindy.flett@dcyf.wa.gov), Brett Skinner, (brett.skinner@dcyf.wa.gov), and Suzie Campbell, (suzanna.campbell@dcyf.wa.gov) with any follow-up questions.

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Understanding Our Workforce Data

DCYF Workforce Systems Integration Administrator Karma Hugo and Workforce Data and Systems Manager Julie Dean gathered feedback from members to establish a shared understanding of who makes up the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce and gathered recommendations about how to most meaningfully share workforce data in a responsive and collaborative way.

- Appreciate the acknowledgement of the value of those providing care outside of formal channels
- How are you defining who is an active Family Friend and Neighbor (FFN) provider?
 - Based on the definition, the provider must have one or more open employment record within MERIT with the criteria that it's either self-entered, or it was confirmed and/or verified. The individual should also have one or more of the following roles - the child care household member role or the child care provider role. They may have multiple roles as well so we are using that data to run a separate query so we can examine this specific body of the workforce to better understand.
 - We are holding FFN data as its own category for some of the analysis that we'll be doing because of the difference in the types of qualifications that are required.
- Were providers asked to weigh in on these categories? Cooks that meet requirements sometimes are counted in ratio to assist with breaks, or to step into a class when needed.
 - We have not consulted with child care providers yet. We have focused internally across the program teams that have the roles and requirements. We have focused on looking at the available data. This is a first step to beginning to collect the kinds of feedback and reactions to these kinds of groupings.
 - I think it is important to notice that there are so many exceptions. We recognize that in some cases having a broad grouping of categories for some analysis purposes may mean that there are some variations within those roles that are not being recognized at the time. Those are the kinds of caveats and limitations and background knowledge that we will need to make sure is included when we're sharing data so that we recognize the fluidity of roles at times within programs.
- Please reach out to Karma Hugo (karma.hugo@dcyf.wa.gov) and Julie Dean (Julie.Dean@dcyf.wa.gov) with any follow-up questions.

Closing Remarks/Adjourn

The next ELAC Public Meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 14, 2026.

Members in Attendance

Anna Olson, Astrid Newell, , Carlina Brown-Banks, Colleen Condon, Courtney Whitaker, Dani Hoffman, Danielle Rasmussen, Dr. Brian Knowles, Hanna Bruning, Jen Sandvig, Julie Rolling, Kawthar Abdullah, Kristen Sheridan, Lois Martin, Lola Moses, Mark Barkley, Molly Leithold, Olivia Burley, Samantha Bowen, Sheila Ater Capestany, Shereese Rhodes, Tafra Jones, Tammy McCauley, Victoria Hilt, Waylon Ballew

Members Absent

Ami Magisos, Andrea (Dre) Carrillo, Ashleigh Ligon, Brittany Hartikainen, Claudette Lindquist, Debbie Ham, Erin Schreiber, Heidi Scott, J Elizabeth (Liz) Mills, Jaymie Davis, Kim Davies Lohman, Laura Murphy, Michelle Perez, Muriel Herrera-Velasquez, Nancy Spurgeon, Naomi Wilson, Patti Bailey, Representative Joshua Penner, Representative Mari Leavitt, Senator Claire Wilson, Senator Paul Harris