

Draft Minutes: Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) May 1, 2026

The meeting was held at the SCC Jack Huck Continuing Education Center, 301 S. 68th St. Place, Lincoln, NE.

Council members present: Anthony, Bittner, Bunnell, Carmoney, Flood, Gomes, Hobson, Jara, Kilgore, Knust, Kresser, Lada, Layman, Marinovich, Peterson, Rayburn, Rotert, Schroder, Vanderford, Vint. Council members excused: Beair, Jara, Packard, Ray, Schmidt

Also in attendance: Council Facilitator, Phillips; Council Secretary, Hoffman; Technical Assistants Cimino, Clark, Johnson, Jones, Shockley

This quarterly meeting of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) commenced at 9:00a.m. Public notification of the meeting was on the Nebraska Department of Education website and in the Omaha World Herald. The Public Meetings Act was available online and onsite in the meeting room. Presentation materials may be found in this [GoogleDocs](#) folder.

Council Meeting Convenes

ECICC Facilitator, Mary Phillips, called the meeting to order at 9:00a.m. and ECICC Vice-Chairperson, Gina Bittner, welcomed the group and led introductions. The Open Meetings Act was noted as being in the room.

Approval of minutes – February 13, 2026

Motion was made and seconded respectively by Marinovich and Gomes to approve the minutes from the February 13th ECICC meeting; roll-call vote was taken, the motion passed.

Roll call vote: Yes – 18; Abstain - 1

Yes: Anthony, Bittner, Bunnell, Carmoney, Flood, Gomes, Hobson, Kilgore, Knust, Kresser, Lada, Layman, Marinovich, Peterson, Marinovich, Rayburn, Rotert, Schroder, Vanderford

Abstain: Vint

Public Comment:

Mention was made that the upcoming Nebraska Young Child Institute, being held in Kearney on June 16th & 17th will be attended by a number of Council members. Annual Planning Regional Meeting (PRT) meetings are also currently happening.

Early Childhood Update

Melody Hobson, Administrator for the NDE Office of Early Childhood, shared a powerpoint with updates about the NE Literacy Plan, the status of Rule 11, Step Up to Quality program numbers, and the two-step, Individual School Readiness Tax Credit program. Additional project updates were shared that included some current trainings, the Child Development Associate (CDA) Roundtable, and information about trainer agreements that ensure compliance with NDE policies. Melody shared that two sets of grants will be brought to the State Board for approval at its next meeting. They are the Continuation and the New and Expansion grants for school district-operated preschools. Melody can be reached at melody.hobson@nebraska.gov.

Head Start Update

Head Start State Collaboration Director, Steph Knust, shared a powerpoint presentation that included eligibility criteria and current Office of Head Start (OHS) and Nebraska grant recipient updates. Steph also shared that Lizbeth Casco White has been appointed to serve as Director of the Office of Head Start as of April 6th. It was noted that Nebraska is one of the highest enrolled states for Head Start programs in the country. Due to the timing of application instructions going out in May for public review, Head Start Collaboration Office current grants will be extended through 2/28/2027, under current scopes of work; she noted a continuing lead screening project, ongoing PDG grant work, and other HS data projects. A page was shared with a number of Head Start resources. Steph can be reached at steph.knust@nebraska.gov.

Part C Update

EDN Co-leads, Amy Bunnell and Jessica Anthony, provided updates regarding the Part C Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) report and findings that were received in April from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The Federal Office monitors states for IDEA compliance in the provision of early intervention programs and services. Additional background information was shared about the October 2024 Nebraska monitoring visit by the Federal Office, resulting in findings that will require corrective action. Amy and Jessica reported the DMS findings to the ECICC membership and answered clarifying questions. The ECICC membership expressed significant concerns around the fiscal findings and required actions. The members expressed support for the EDN Co-leads to submit the Request for Reconsideration regarding the fiscal findings related to current evidence and federal laws/regulations that support the use of IDEA Part B federal funds for FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education) early intervention services. The letter will be sent no later than May 1st. The Nebraska Part C DMS report can be found at the following link. [DMS Report](#) The Co-Leads will continue to communicate with the Council to keep it informed. Amy can be reached at amy.bunnell@nebraska.gov; Jessica can be reached at jessica.anthony@nebraska.gov.

Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Updates

Jackie Farrell, Vice President of Systems Alignment with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, shared about the recently awarded PDG grant, which includes funding that must be utilized by the end of December 2026. It will consist of a one-year planning period to streamline work with systems alignment for early childhood (birth-five) efforts in Nebraska, emphasizing coordination, quality, workforce and data. Details that included PDG elements, categories, projects and outcome strategies were shared. Jackie can be reached at jfarrell@nebraskachildren.org.

Legislative Updates

First Five Nebraska (FFN) Policy Advisor and ECICC Technical Assistant, Mitch Clark, shared updates about the Legislative session that wrapped up on April 17th. First Five Nebraska advocates at the state level for early care and education policy. A focus of this session for FFN was LB304 regarding childcare subsidy eligibility. Other early care and education bills related to budget, literacy, programs and operations, licensing, taxes, and maternal and child health. Mitch can be reached at mclark@firstfivenebraska.org.

Technical Assistant Sharing

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Federal Administrator with DHHS, and ECICC Technical Assistant, Shela Jones, shared details and requirements around the following three Child Care-related grants: Quality Improvement Grant, Start Up and Expansion Grant, and an Emergency Mini Grant. Both family home and childcare centers are eligible. Shela can be reached at shela.jones@nebraska.gov.

Early Childhood Acronyms Activity

Council Facilitator, Mary Phillips, led the group through a fun activity using the Kahoot platform to help educate about the many acronyms that exist in the early childhood world. The list of acronyms used can be found on the meeting GoogleDoc linked [here](#).

Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant Update

Jamie Cook, NDE Literacy Officer, shared a handout and update about current CLSD work that includes 46 sub-grantees, several of them being awarded in the birth-kindergarten age window. A handout was shared that noted data from the initial semester of work that showed positive results. Jamie noted that, at a recent CLSD convening meeting in Washington D.C., out of the 24 states who are in year one of their grants, Nebraska was one of three recognized for its first year of work. Jamie can be reached at jamie.cook@nebraska.gov.

August 14th meeting & components

The next meeting will be in-person on Friday, August 14th, and ECICC Secretary, Karen Hoffman, will communicate with the group once a location is finalized. The Council is invited to email agenda ideas to Karen for consideration by the Steering Committee; a reminder email will go out in early July.

Gina adjourned the meeting at 11:45a.m. with thanks to everyone for attending.