Policy Council Meeting Minutes
Mountain States Early Head Start
CDA Center / Zoom
January 8, 2026 - 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Our Mission:

- Promote healthy pregnancies and healthy babies.
- Enhance the development of very young children.
- Promote healthy families.

Policy Council Member Attendance: PY 2025-2026					
Name & Title	*Center and Representative Type*	*Present*	*Absent*	*# of Absences*	*# of unexcused Absence*
Policy Council Members					
Mandy Milovich, Chairperson	Parent Representative	X		2 (Aug., Dec.)	
Chantel Petschel, Secretary/Treasurer	Parent Representative	X			
Ginger Buckley	Parent Representative	X			
Ashley Miles	Parent Representative	X		1 (Sept.)	
Jasmine Fairbrother	Parent Representative		X	1 (Jan.)	
Savannah Slaughter	Parent Representative	X			
Karen Schmidt	Jannus Board Liaison		X	2 (Sept., Jan.)	
Jessica Geiger, NIC Head Start	Community Representative	X		1 (Nov.)	
Nanci Jenkins	Community Representative	X		1 (Oct.)	

Staff Present: Aleta Garcia-Clute, Jana Brooks, Catie Kotmel, Irene Dreith, Jennifer Hepinstall, Karen Dapron, Krista Haller, Sarah Howell, Sandra Menegas, Teresa Rains, Melissa Bennett.

Call to order: Mandy called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

Connection Time: New Year word search puzzle fun.

Previous Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed the December meeting minutes.

Ashley M. motioned to approve the December 2025 meeting minutes; Jessica G., seconded and the motion for approval carried.

Report-Outs / Training:

Monthly Information Reports / Training:

Understanding Audits and Jannus' Annual Independent Audit Report – Postponed to February.

Program Design & Management Report Out

Director's Report & Program Updates – Jana Brooks

Jana read our mission statement aloud to the group and presented information about the recent Focus Area-2 review.

- **Grant Updates/Director's Report –** Teresa Rains
  - **Grant Cycle –** Teresa shared with members that every Head Start program runs on a five-year grant cycle and she explained what our five-year grant cycle looks like. We are in year three of the current five-year cycle. (See packet.)
    Our Focus Area-1 review was completed during the 2024-2025 program year, and we just completed the Focus Area-2 review in December 2025. Our next review will be held during the 2028-29 program year.
  - **Focus Area Two Review Updates**
    One big thank you to all parents who spoke with our reviewers! The federal reviewers spoke with parents, staff, community members, etc. They visited with specialists, performed data tours on our systems and processes, and each data tour was well received. One of the reviewers stated that our ERSEA data tour was one of the very best ERSEA reviews he has ever conducted. Our team did a great job showing how everything connects.
    Parents shared their surprise about the large group interview format but also enjoyed having the opportunity to share their experiences. The reviewers stated that talking to MSEHS parents and visiting a playgroup were highlights for them.
  - We will receive the final report within the next 90-120 days, and we will share that with you.

- **OHS Correspondence**
  None received.

- **Financial Report for November 2025**
  - Total spending for 2025-2026 year-to-date is: $1,031,942 and we are on track for spending so far. We will see a travel increase next month as we have several staff and parents travelling to the IHSA Conference in Boise on January 28th-30th.
  - Non-Federal Share (In-Kind) must be 20% of total federal dollars awarded, and our current percentage is 20.18%. Jana shared graphs explaining where our in-kind dollars come from.
  - Administrative expenses can be no more than 15% of total federal dollars, and our current percentage is 12.95%

- **Credit Card Report for November 2025 –** The report was reviewed and presented by Chantel and members voted to approve:

  Ginger B. motioned to approve the November financials; Ashley M. seconded and the motion for approval carried.

  Savannah S. motioned to approve the November credit cards; Ginger B. seconded and the motion for approval carried.

Jannus Board Report/Updates – Jana Brooks

Jana shared the next Jannus board meeting will be held on January 15th. Approval from the board will be requested at that time, and Mandy has been asked to attend the April meeting which will be held virtually. Jannus is focused on navigating national and global events and we will get more information on where things are headed for Jannus and our program.

Report Outs

Enrollment, Community Outreach & Engagement Reports:

- **December 2025 Enrollment Report and Infographic –** Sandra Menegas
  - Enrollment remains full at 90, with five enrollments completed in December.
  - We had five exits in December; three children aged out of the program and two families moved out of state.
  - December referral sources leading to enrollments this month included: One from WIC, one from a Fostering Families event, one from an outreach event held at Lakes Middle School, one new sibling born into a currently enrolled family, and one family from Child and Family Services.
  - 18 enrolled children currently have active IFSP's.
  - Waitlist information: Five families currently meet eligibility, 12 families are over income.
  - We have four enrolled pregnancies: one in the 4th trimester.
  - Two exits are forecast for January.

- **Eligibility Percentages:**
  - SNAP / SSI / TANF – 40%
  - Over Income – 3%
  - Income Below 100% - 15%
  - Income 100-130% - 8%
  - Foster Care – 10%
  - No Permanent Housing – 13%
  - Medically Underserved Area – 1%

  County Snapshot:
  - Bonner – 25
  - Kootenai – 53
  - Shoshone – 12

MSEHS Center Updates: Karen Dapron

Upcoming opportunities and center happenings were shared. Recap from December; Kootenai Health donated gifts to 14 of our families, and Selkirk Medical donated to 16 of our families in Sandpoint which helped a total of 41 children! Windermere spearheaded the Boots and Socks program again this winter, supporting many of our families. We so appreciate our community partners who help support families!

- January 8th – Policy Council meeting at CDA.
- January 14th – Circle of Security classes begins in CDA.
- January 15th – Parent Connect in Kellogg with Jennifer and Krista who will talk about mental health, making sensory bottles, and how to use our senses to nurture our mental health.
- January 19th – Centers closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- January 28th-29th – IHSA Conference in Boise.
- February 5th – Policy Council meeting at CDA.

Community Happenings

- Jennifer shared that NIC is offering low-cost dental exams and cleanings - services are being provided by dental students - $25 for children and $35 for adults. See details on our Facebook page. Assistance is available.

- Lactation and canvas study data on January 14th through the University of Idaho - virtual option.
- Navigating parenting after separation or divorce can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone! Bonner General Behavioral Health is offering a free parenting class to help you build confidence and create a positive plan for your family.
  When: Saturday, January 10, 2026
  Where: Bonner General Health Services Building
  Time: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

LUNCH BREAK: 11:15-11:30 am.

Old Business: Vote on School Readiness and Program Goal Updates (See packets)

Chantel P. motioned to approve the school readiness and program goal updates; Savannah S. seconded and the motion for approval carried.

An election was held and Alissa Rudebaugh has been approved as a new Policy Council member for this program year. Elections for next year's Policy Council will be held this spring.

New Business:
MSEHS Eligibility and Selection Criteria Review for Approval for 2026-2027 PY:
Every year we revisit our selection criteria for families. Aleta presented a Power Point with our current criteria and members suggested changes and/or additions, including prioritization points. We will vote to approve or disapprove at our next meeting. Sandra suggested bringing the community assessment into our criteria. See attached document with Performance Standards 1302.14 and items for review.
List of recommendations include:

- Food insecurity – add as line item: hold a discussion with families about what this looks like. (for example, "within the last 30 days did you ever feel unable to feed your family.") 2 points.
- Parent pregnant at time of application goes on waitlist, does the point carry over? Do we subtract the points?
- Add "delay" or "specialized needs"
- Access to affordable housing – 3 points
- #22 incarcerated – increase to 3

Aleta will send an email with proposals for an online vote by next week.

IHSA Conference and PC Parent Project Planning and Updates – Aleta
Virtual meeting to be held to discuss the project. Mental health continues to be the topic with more to come.

Meeting Wrap-Up – Aleta
Reviewed plan for next meeting.

- ***The meeting was adjourned by Mandy at 12:10 pm.***
- Our next Policy Council Meeting will be February 5th from 10:00 am to Noon at the CDA/Zoom.