KANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS PANEL

Monthly Meeting Minutes
Friday, March 27, 2026

All In For Kansas Kids

Visit the Children's Cabinet website for meeting materials and the YouTube recording.

Members Present

Cathy Gray, Butler Community College
Kim Kennedy, Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF)
Bethany Samuel, Kansas Department for Children and Families
Malissa Martin, SparkWheel, Inc.
Tammie Benham, Southeast Kansas Library System
Pshyra Bedell, USD 231
Kelly Frantz-Langford, TARC
Rebekah Meitler, USD 323/ Kansas State University
Cornelia Stevens, TOP Early Learning Centers
Tabatha Rosproy, Kansas Parent Information Resource Center
Lisa Schmidt, Women's Community Y of Leavenworth, Kansas
Melissa Schoenberger, Chair, Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund
Desiree Streight, Little Explorers Playschool and CCPC Secretary
AbdulRasak Yahaya, Open Minds Child Development Center
Talia Juiliano-Myers, Child Care Aware of Eastern KS
Mandi Waugh, Child Start
Jenny Smith, Kansas Parents as Teachers
Larry Lewis, Growing Futures Early Education Center
Natalie McClane, Kanas State Department of Education
Rebecca Stewart, Supporting Care Providers of Kansas
Christina Small, Salina Area United Way
Natalie Sollo, KUSM-W
Kami Cohorst, Child Care Aware of Kansas
Amy Gottschamer, Googols of Learning Child Development Center
Laura Evins, USD 252 Southern Lyon County
Nichelle Adams, Kansas Department for Children and Families
Mallory Arellano, Newman University
Sara Bloom, Kansas Department of Commerce
Kimberly Cervantes, KDHE - Child Care Licensing
Rebecca Clancy, Russell Child Development Center
Megan Cook, Kansas City Kansas Public Schools USD 500
Heather Faulkner, Reno County Child Care Task Force
Holly Frye, Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Minutes

Welcome

Melissa Schoenberger, called the meeting to order with a quorum present, described processes for a remote meeting, and directed participants to the **Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund website** for meeting materials.

March Meeting Agenda

Desiree Streight moved to approve the agenda and Tabatha Rosproy seconded, with a unanimous vote to approve the agenda as presented.

January 16, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Christina Small moved to approve the January minutes, and Tammie Benham seconded, with a unanimous vote to approve the minutes as presented.

Kansans' Open Forum - Written and Verbal Comments

Kansans are encouraged to submit comments through the Kansans' Open Forum Comment Form by 5:00pm the day preceding each meeting to share written comments or to sign up to share verbal comments with the Panel during this portion of the meeting. No comments submitted.

Kansas In The News

Melissa Schoenberger provided an update on current happenings in Kansas during a segment called *Kansas in the News*. The update highlighted efforts to monitor and elevate Kansas-related news through a variety of local sources, including social media, radio, and community-based outlets.

During this segment: A shout-out was given to current panel members and CPPR, along with the announcement of the Kansas Future Fellows fifth cohort, which continues statewide futures work. Several panel members have joined the new cohort, while others were recognized for their participation in the fourth cohort.

- Mandi was acknowledged for her deep engagement, serving as an example of the experience new members can expect.
- The group recognized the five new members who will engage with critical questions and contribute ideas to support the state's future.

For more information about the highlight on what's happening in Kansas and other relevant details, please refer to the March's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 11:36-12:36.

Well-Being Discussion Introduction

Melissa Schoenberger transitioned the group into the main content, beginning with a focus on well-being. During this section, she emphasized the importance of starting with a meaningful kickoff to frame the purpose of the conversation. Melissa reflected on attending the governor's conference in Wichita last fall, where a panel session included a presentation that highlighted the importance of empathy and human connection. This message resonated and has remained influential in her thinking. Drawing on insights gained from past meetings and panel members, she noted the value of continuous learning.

In preparation for the current meeting, Melissa aimed to ground the discussion in purpose by reflecting on why this work matters, why the guests were invited, and how participants can become better stewards in the early childhood field. The group together was able to watch a short video, under three minutes, to help set the tone for the discussion.

KAN-LINK Overview + Presentation

Meghan Cizek and Jenny Buller with KU Center for Public Partnerships and Research presented on KAN-Link (Kansas Linking Infrastructure for Nurturing Kids), a multi-year initiative focused on increasing access to early childhood services and decreasing involvement in child welfare systems. The project aims to ensure families are connected to appropriate resources early, supporting overall family well-being and preventing crises.

KAN-Link is described as a collaborative effort involving the KU Center for Public Partnerships and Research (evaluation and implementation support), the Kansas Children's Cabinet (grant lead), the Department for Children and Families, and community partners. A key component includes a steering committee with members who have lived experience, which helps guide priorities and ensures the work reflects family needs.

Key goals and approach:

- Increase access to early childhood services as a prevention strategy.
- Reduce child welfare involvement through early support.
- Strengthen connections between systems (early childhood, health, schools, and community organizations).
- Focus on both state-level systems change and local-level pilot testing.

The presentation emphasizes that early childhood services function as protective factors and should be viewed broadly as prevention, helping families thrive before issues escalate.

Lived Experience and Co-Design:

- A cohort of lived experts participated regularly and received stipends.
- These individuals helped shape priorities, design strategies, and ensure relevance to families.
- Co-creation with families was highlighted as essential to effective service design and communication.

Local Pilot Initiatives (Family Resource Centers):
Five pilot sites tested small-scale, "safe-to-fail" innovations to improve screening, referrals, and connections. Key focus areas included:

- Health insurance navigation as an entry point for broader service connection.
- Partnerships with schools to identify and refer families (including texting outreach systems).
- Collaborations with hospitals, prenatal programs, and pediatric providers
- Development of self-referral tools (e.g., QR codes, flyers).
- Family-led outreach efforts to build trust and reach harder-to-engage populations

Examples included:

- School-based referral systems connecting families to early childhood resources.
- Hospital partnerships beginning at labor and delivery.
- Pediatric partnerships identifying needs at early well-child visits.
- Community-driven outreach councils led by families.

Data collection and continuous improvement were emphasized, with pilots documenting workflows, outcomes, and lessons learned to inform potential scaling. The session concluded with a reminder that meaningful impact required ongoing collaboration, continuous learning, and authentic engagement with families to ensure systems were responsive and effective.

For further insights regarding this discussion, please refer to the March's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 17:50-53:17.

K-PoP Presentation

The presentation transitions to a session on well-being, where Vanessa Eberle and Sophia Ringering present on KPOP (Kansas Power of the Positive) and the Essentials for Childhood initiative.

K-POP is described as a statewide coalition of more than 90 members across 50 agencies focused on ensuring that Kansas children live in safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments.

The initiative has operated for 12 years and is supported through CDC funding via the Essentials for Childhood Cooperative Agreement. The work focuses on reducing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and promoting positive childhood experiences (PCEs) through upstream prevention strategies.

Vanessa Eberle and Sophia Ringering shared the importance of social connection and positive experiences as protective factors that support child development and resilience. K-POP's work is organized around three strategies:

- Promoting family-friendly workplace policies.
- Changing social norms to increase social connectedness.
- Using data to guide decision-making and action.

Family-Friendly Workplace Initiative: An employer survey assesses 19 workplace conditions important to working families by measuring both employee priorities and workplace performance.

- Results identify gaps that inform improvement efforts. Employers have made 28 policy changes, impacting approximately 12,000 employees.
- Common changes include telework options, parenting supports, and breastfeeding accommodations.
- Findings also highlight disparities in access among hourly workers, rural mothers, and women in manufacturing. A family-friendly workplace designation system is in development.

Social Norms and Connectedness: A statewide social media campaign promoting positive norms generates approximately 15 million impressions and is being continued. Training

programs such as "Connections Matter" and the HOPE framework support workforce development and trauma-informed practice.

Data to Action: Efforts focus on improving youth data collection, sharing findings, and supporting data-driven decision-making through policy briefs and community data walks. Challenges include declining youth survey participation due to legislative and procedural barriers. Research on positive childhood experiences highlights links to improved long-term outcomes and life expectancy.

The session concluded with opportunities for engagement, including participation in data walks, workplace initiatives, trainings, and social media sharing, and emphasizes continued collaboration to support Kansas children and families. To hear this entire presentation please refer to the March's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 53:13-1:25:28.

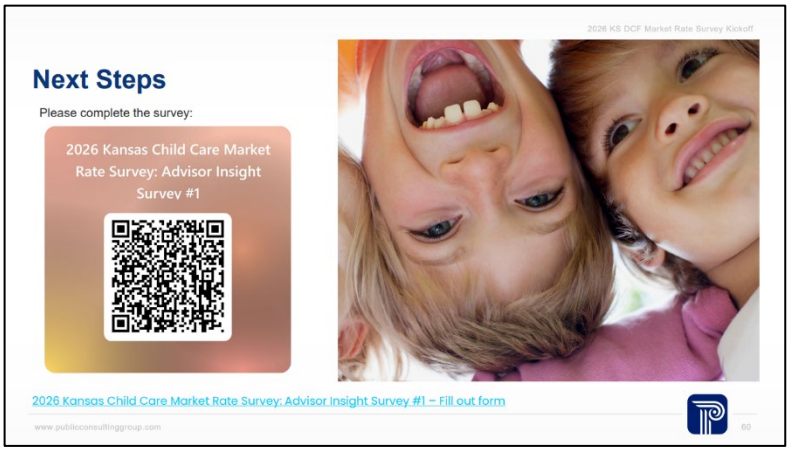
Child Care Provider Market Rate Analysis

Megan Smith (Public Consulting Group) introduced the team and outlined the purpose of the session, which is to support Kansas' CCDF-required market rate study. PCG provided an overview of the project team, scope, and timeline. The study will include a market rate survey, analysis of child care prices (including the 75th percentile), comparison of subsidy reimbursement to provider costs, and review of provider characteristics, fees, age groupings, and participation in quality initiatives such as Links to Quality.

The survey is planned to launch in early May for a minimum four-week period, with a draft report due August 31 and final report due October 31. Stakeholder engagement will include listening sessions, advisory input, and an optional ad hoc work group to support survey development and interpretation.

- Discussion highlighted key themes including rural vs. urban cost differences, the need to include underrepresented voices (including families of children with disabilities and family child care providers), and concerns about the gap between reimbursement rates and the cost of high-quality care.

Panel members were invited to join the ad hoc work group and complete a follow-up survey for additional feedback. The deadline to express interest in the work group was set for the end of the following week. The session concluded with recognition of the importance of the study for informing child care policy and funding decisions in Kansas.

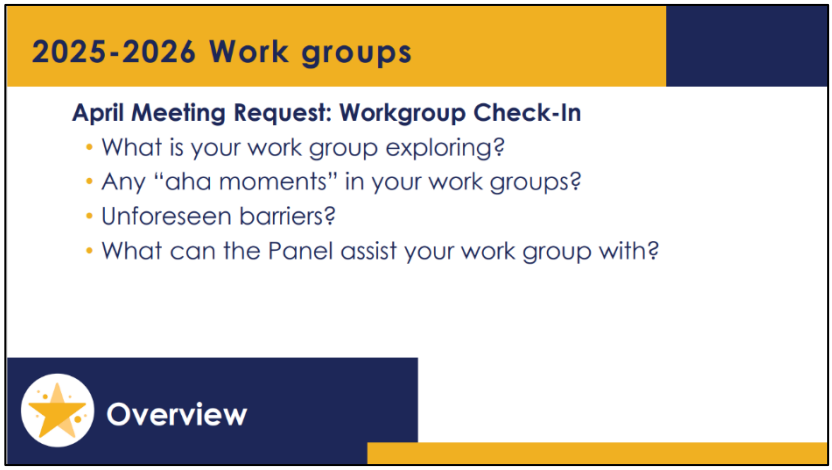


To hear this entire presentation please refer to the March's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 1:25:56-1:53:42.

Work Group Preparation for April

Melissa Schoenberger provided an overview of upcoming work group expectations, including a "warm check-in" during the April meeting. Work groups will be asked to share informal updates on their focus areas, including key learnings, emerging insights or "aha moments," challenges or barriers, and any support needed from the broader panel.

- Panel members are encouraged to begin preparing for the June final session, which will serve as a culminating share-out.
- Rather than requiring formal recommendations, participants are invited to creatively define how they wish to present their work (e.g., presentations, artifacts, visuals, or other formats).



- Participants are encouraged to begin planning early for the June presentation, with flexibility to determine how their work will be summarized or shared with future panels.

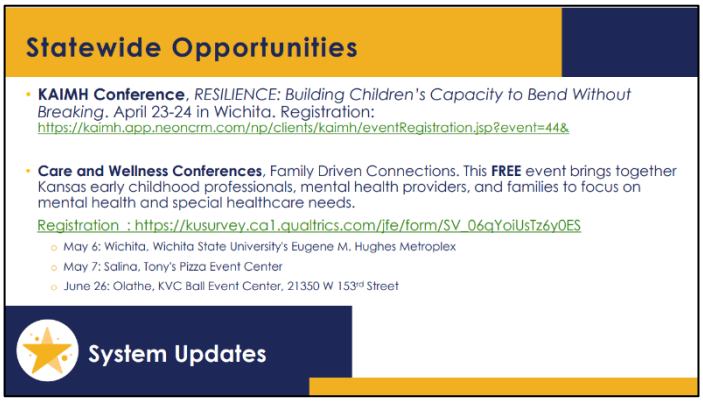
Please refer to the March's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 1 1:54:08-1:57:22 to hear more about what was discussed.

System Updates

Melissa Schoenberger shared brief system updates and highlighted upcoming statewide opportunities for early childhood professionals. These included the KAIMH Conference, with a focus on resilience, and the Care and Wellness Conferences, which emphasize family-driven connections.

The Care and Wellness events are free and bring together early childhood professionals, mental health providers, and families to focus on mental health and special health care needs.

- Conferences will be held in Wichita, Salina, and Topeka in May. Registration information will be shared with participants for distribution through their networks.



Panel Application Update (2026–2027)

Early Childhood Recommendation Panel 2026-27 membership applications will be accepted from April 3 - May 4, 2025 on the Children's Cabinet website:

- Any Kansan interested in applying is welcome.
- June 5, 2026 – membership recommendations presented to KCCTF Board for approval.
- The membership year will extend from July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027.
- Contact Lindsay Orion (lindsayorion@ku.edu) with questions.
- Website Link:https://kschildrenscabinet.org/apply-for-the-early-childhood

Note: The application has been updated with minor revisions, including more reflective and thought-provoking questions focused on applicants' interest in serving on the panel and the value of their participation within the early childhood system.

Upcoming Meetings: (all via Zoom)

- Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund meeting – Friday, April 3, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- Early Childhood Governance Summit – Friday, April 17th 16, 9:00 a.m. -11:30 a.m.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 11:04 a.m.