KANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS PANEL

Monthly Meeting Minutes
Friday, April 17, 2026

All In For Kansas Kids

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

Members Present

Nichelle Adams, Kansas Department for Children and Families
Marites Altuna, Kansas State School for the Blind
Sarah Behrens, University of Kansas Medical Center
Tammie Benham, Southeast Kansas Library System
David Brock, McPherson USD 418
Kimberly Cervantes, KDHE - Child Care Licensing
Rebecca Clancy, Russell Child Development Center
Janelle Dean, Asbury Child Development Center
Heather Faulkner, Reno County Child Care Task Force
Kelly Frantz-Langford, TARC
Holly Frye, Kansas Department of Health and Environment
Talia Juiliano-Myers, Child Care Aware of Eastern KS
Kim Kennedy, Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF)
Malissa Martin, SparkWheel, Inc.
Natalie McClane, Kanas State Department of Education
Trina Morgan, Kansas Children's Service League
Bethany Samuel, Kansas Department for Children and Families
Cheisa Myles, Blessed Assurance Daycare
Patty Peschel, KCCTO
Lisa Schmidt, Women's Community Y of Leavenworth, Kansas
Melissa Schoenberger, Chair, Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund
April Shuman, Gigi's Child Care Home
Christina Small, Salina Area United Way
Cornelia Stevens, TOP Early Learning Centers
Rebecca Stewart, Supporting Care Providers of Kansas
Desiree Streight, Little Explorers Playschool and CCPC Secretary
AbdulRasak Yahaya, Open Minds Child Development Center
Mandi Waugh, Child Start
Mallory Arellano, Newman University

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.

April Meeting Agenda

Janelle Dean moved to approve the agenda and Marites Altuna seconded, with a unanimous vote to approve the agenda as presented.

March 27, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Trina Morgan moved to approve the March minutes, and Tammie Benham seconded, with a unanimous vote to approve the minutes as presented.

Panel Introductions

To learn more about the panel members serving during this term, please refer to the April's Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Meeting timestamp 7:32-15:28. The segment included introductions and information about the individuals serving on the panel for the current year.

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.

Information from the All-In for Kansas Kids Facebook page highlighted the Early Childhood Workforce Convening hosted by the Children's Cabinet on April 7. The convening grew out of discussions from the panel and other workgroups focused on strengthening the early childhood workforce.

- The event brought together partners from across the state, including child care providers, early intervention representatives, home visiting programs, state agencies, training organizations, direct service providers, nonprofits, and workforce partners. Participants discussed workforce challenges, career pathways, and opportunities for collaboration across sectors. The goal was to create shared understanding, strengthen commitment, and explore opportunities to support and sustain the workforce.
- Attendees were encouraged to think creatively and develop forward-looking solutions. Discussions emphasized the importance of cross-sector collaboration, recognizing that professionals often move between different areas within early childhood services. Participants identified the value of working collectively to address fragmented systems and improve coordination statewide.
- Key themes and priorities included elevating and sustaining the workforce as a viable long-term profession, identifying strategic opportunities for systems improvement, and building a more coordinated, data-driven system. Conversations also focused on using workforce data and statewide systems to better understand workforce movement, gaps, and future needs.

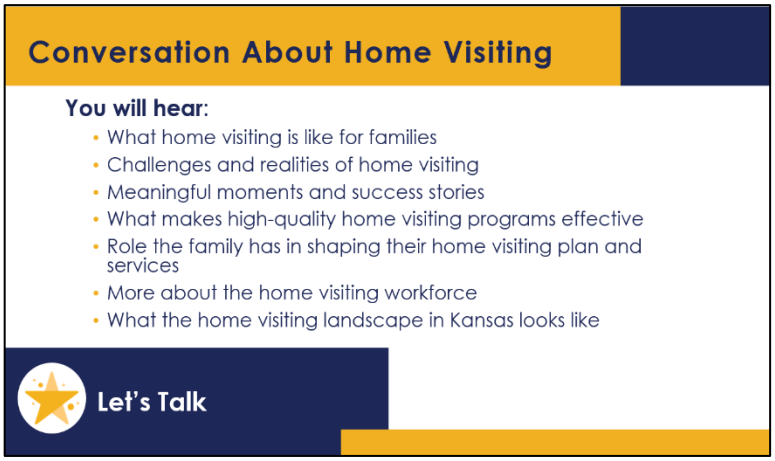
For more information about the highlight on what's happening in Kansas and other relevant details, please refer to the April's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 16:50-24:11.

Home Visiting

Melissa Schoenberger transitioned the group into the main content with a focus on home visiting and lived experiences. The discussion then shifted to the early childhood workforce and an upcoming "coffee talk" presentation led by the home visiting team. Designed as an interactive conversation, the presentation explored home visiting services in Kansas, including their impact on families, workforce experiences and challenges, program effectiveness, and opportunities to strengthen policy and practice statewide.

Lisa Williams from the Kansas State Department of Education facilitated the discussion and introduced a panel of home visiting professionals representing Parents as Teachers, Healthy Families America, KDHE, and statewide advocacy organizations. Panelists shared their experience supporting families through home visiting programs and highlighted the importance of relationship-based, individualized support for parents and caregivers.

The presentation highlighted that home visiting services help families access resources, strengthen parenting skills, support child development, and connect families to community services. Home visiting was described as a key component of Kansas's early childhood system that supports both children and parents through consistent, family-centered engagement.



The panel heard an interactive presentation from home visiting professionals about the scope and impact of home visiting services in Kansas, which provide more than 115,000 visits annually.

- Home visitors described their work supporting families through parent-child activities, developmental guidance, screenings, resource connections, and individualized support tailored to each family's needs. Presenters highlighted the

importance of flexibility, relationship-building, and meeting families where they are, including providing services in homes, libraries, child care centers, and other community spaces when appropriate.

- Discussion highlighted the extensive training and ongoing professional development required for home visiting staff, including certifications, reflective supervision, and training in areas such as mental health, substance abuse, child development and much more. Supervisors also discussed workforce recruitment and retention challenges, burnout prevention, and the emotional demands of supporting families experiencing ongoing crisis and instability.

- Panel members discussed opportunities for stronger partnerships with libraries, child care providers, and community organizations to create additional welcoming spaces for families to engage in services. Participants also explored the future role of the Office of Early Childhood in improving coordination among home visiting, child care, and other early childhood programs.
- Home visitors shared personal stories demonstrating the impact of their work, including supporting families through mental health challenges, domestic violence situations, substance use recovery, developmental screenings, and family crises. Presenters highlighted that home visiting professionals are often trusted supports for families during some of their most difficult moments and play a critical role in strengthening both parent and child well-being.

For further insights regarding this discussion, please refer to the April's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 24:20-1:35:54.

Work Group Updates

Melissa Schoenberger transitioned the meeting into workgroup updates, reminding members of the challenge posed in April: to reflect on what each workgroup is exploring, identify key "aha" moments, discuss unforeseen barriers, and consider how fellow panel members might support their efforts. She emphasized that the updates were intended to be informal opportunities for shared learning rather than formal presentations.

Ecosystem Workgroup Update:

- Abdul Yahaya - shared that the group is narrowing its focus to a set of actionable recommendations. He noted that the workgroup has benefited from diverse perspectives and strong collaboration, particularly as momentum builds around the

transition to the Office of Early Childhood. The group hopes to offer meaningful suggestions that support the integration of early childhood functions and community networks into a more unified system.

Family-Friendly Workplaces Workgroup Update

- Bethany Samuel - reflected on the group's continued exploration of an employer recognition initiative. Building on research from the previous panel year, the workgroup reviewed models from other states and countries, including Australia, and shifted this year's focus toward identifying and connecting organizations already engaged in advancing family-friendly workplace practices across Kansas. Bethany described the growing interest among employers and community organizations as a key "aha" moment and encouraged panel members to connect the group with employers or organizations interested in supporting family-friendly workplace initiatives.

Targeted Journey Workgroup Update

- Kim Kennedy: shared updates on conversations related to workforce alignment, particularly for younger professionals entering licensed childcare settings. The group has been exploring ways to ensure that coursework and training pathways align more effectively with childcare licensure requirements while identifying broader opportunities for workforce coordination and support.

The Mental Health Workgroup Update

- Meghan Kluth: explained that the group has been focused on identifying priority training and resource needs related to workforce mental health. Topics under discussion include burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, mental health first aid, healthy conflict resolution, and strategies for supporting professionals who may struggle to step away from work when needed.
- Also shared that the group recently completed a survey to better understand which resources or supports would be most beneficial and how those tools could be adapted across different work environments and professional roles.

Please refer to the April's Early Childhood Recommendation Panel time stamps 1:35:54 to 1:49:52 hear more about what was discussed.

System Updates

Lindsay Orion from the KU Center for Public Partnerships and Research provided system updates, including information about upcoming statewide Care and Wellness Conferences taking place in May and June. The conferences are intended to connect early childhood professionals and families across Kansas, with upcoming events scheduled in Wichita and Salina.

- Lindsay also shared updates on the All-In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan Progress Dashboard, which launched in January and receives quarterly updates. The dashboard serves as an online resource to track progress toward goals and actions within the statewide strategic plan. It includes narrative updates, data indicators, partner contributions, and "bright spots" that highlight initiatives and successes happening across Kansas.
- The dashboard connects strategic plan priorities to needs assessment data and ongoing statewide initiatives, including work related to the new Office of Early Childhood. Lindsay encouraged organizations and community partners to contribute information, feedback, and examples of progress through the dashboard's collaboration feature.

Please refer to the April Early Childhood Recommendation Panel meeting, timestamps 1:35:54–1:49:52, for an interactive opportunity to explore and navigate the dashboard while hearing additional discussion and updates.

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

Upcoming Meetings: (all via Zoom)

- Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund meeting – Friday, June 5, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

- Early Childhood Recommendations Panel meeting – Thursday, May 14, 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 11:06 a.m.