



Montana Early Childhood Account Board Meeting  
March 11, 2026  
10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Via Zoom

**Welcome**

The meeting is called to order by board chair, Lisa Malmquist, at 10:03 a.m.

**Roll Call**

Present:

1. Tory Malek
2. Tracy Moseamn
3. Lisa Malmquist
4. Jackie Ronning
5. Beth Branam
6. Crystal Armstrong
7. Louisa Libertelli-Dunn
8. Caitlin Jensen
9. Mackenzie Espeland

Absent: Kathy Deserly (Excused)

- Confirmation of quorum

Early Childhood and Family Support Division Staff Present: Sally Tilleman, Jody Lehman, Shannon Mackey, Kathy Rich, Nicole Quirino, James Eastlick, Alex Dahy, Michelle Cusey

**Review and Approve Prior Meeting Minutes**

- Tory Malek motions to approve the meeting minutes.
- Jackie Ronning seconds the motion.
- Unanimously approved by the board.
- Motion passed.

**Conflict of Interest Review**

Louisa Libertelli Dunn and Beth Branam discuss conflicts of interest as they have registered child care services within their businesses. Lisa Malmquist discusses how board members must abstain from discussion and voting when conflict of interest is present.

Tracy Moseman, Crystal Armstrong, and Caitlin Jensen discuss that they may potentially have conflicts of interest but will abstain from voting in these instances. There is commentary from Lousia Libertelli-Dunn about how she cannot take part in certain discussions that may be considered conflict of interest. She respectfully disagrees with this rule as she feels her expertise in certain situations should be



consulted. She states that she is on this board to represent providers and does not see how this rule allows her to do so. Lisa explains how Bylaws must be respected despite this. The intent of the bill is to help the greater good and help to allocate funds appropriately utilizing a global view over personal interest. Additionally, Lisa discusses how providers' voices are also being heard via public comment. Lisa reviews the language of the Bylaws for conflict of interest.

### **Meeting Norms**

Lisa Malmquist reviews the meeting norms that are provided in the meeting materials, which will be posted to the MECA website after the meeting.

- Crystal Armstrong motions to accept the rules for meeting norms.
- Tory Malek seconds the motion.
- Unanimously approved by board.
- Motion passed.

### **FY26 Funding Review**

Lisa Malmquist gives a brief overview of the language from the prior motion made on funding. She suggests a small change in language, which would be that the board will work on spending up to \$3.5 million for the rest of the fiscal year 2026 instead of guaranteeing \$3.5 million would be spent within fiscal year 2026. This should be considered due to the timeframe that the board is currently on. There is a call to not spend MECA dollars without a thoughtful plan.

- Jackie Ronning motions to amend the previous language and replace it with new language that was outlined.
- Beth Branam seconds the motion.
- Unanimously approved by the board.
- Motion passed.

### **Child Care Worker Initiative (CCW)**

Lisa discusses the intent of funds and asks the board to consider if CCW aligns with this.

Kathy Rich (Section Supervisor for PDGB-5 Grant) presents the overview and data of the CCW Pilot that was completed by PDGB-5.

#### **Child Care Worker Pilot Overview**

- The pilot temporarily expanded income eligibility for the Best Beginnings Scholarship (BBS) from 186% to 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- Monthly Co-Pays were Capped at \$100 for all eligible CCW participants from 0-250% FPL.



- Eligible workers were in direct – care roles within licensed or registered child care programs.
- The program utilized a braided funding stream of both Child Care and Development Funds and PDGB-5 Grant funds.
- All participants were determined eligible using CCDF regulations and CCDF Staff.

#### CCW Pilot Data

- There were approximately 280 providers that participated in the CCW Pilot.
- The net payments from the PDGB-5 Grant came out to around \$2,907,065.00 for this. It is estimated that it would cost around \$1,440,000.00 yearly to continue this program. Though this estimate is rough due to the variables of subsidy and the excluded \$100.00 copay cap for those participants who were at 185% FPL and lower.
- Survey results showed 92% of respondents felt that the CCW pilot was a benefit for providers. It also showed that about 74% of respondents used the CCW pilot program as a strategy for recruitment, with 74% stating that the program helped them retain staff. Ninety percent of respondents stated that the availability of child care assistance played a significant role in the desire to remain in the workforce.
- Participation was spread throughout the state, but was utilized more in higher-populated areas.

#### Jody Lehman (Child Care Bureau Chief) discusses the CCW Pilot challenges.

- The braiding of funds was challenging as it was tied to regular BBS standards. Some applicants still had to follow rules for this. If CCW program is implemented, it should be definitively different from the BBS program.
- Child care licensing in Montana has transitioned systems to MACQS, so this would mean the program would need to be added and developed on top of contract amendments being made.
- Eligibility determination was made with the contractors who ran BBS locally. This may also require contract amendments to implement CCW.
- Design of this system would need to be thoughtful and would require the board to think about what data they would need to collect ahead of a system build.
- Tracy Moseman clarifies that below 185 FPL are continuing to receive BBS now that CCW has ended. The MECA Board would need to consider folks who are above 185 FPL- Jody Lehman confirms this.
- Caitlin Jensen enquires about the cost associated with developing a system for CCW within MAQCS. Jody states that development of this program would have a cost. Other modules within the system cost about \$300-400k to develop. The board would need to obtain a quote from the vendor to confirm cost, but this is likely the ballpark cost.



### **Board direction on option(s) to advance for further development**

Michelle presents proposals for three options the board could consider for advancement. The intent is to move one option forward for exploration and execution in fiscal year 2027.

- Option 1- Piloted CCW
- Option 2- Direct employee child care offset
- Option 3- Flexible workforce support grant program

### **Discussion**

- Lisa discusses adding CCW to option three to give providers a choice to use as CCW or for other things needed for their centers, groups etc.
- Crystal talks about leaning into flexibility to support varying needs across the state.
- Caitlin agrees with flexibility and states we could also add school-aged children providers to this to help support them as well.
- Jackie states that flexibility is key, but does not want to undermine the power of option one.
- Tracy- if the board were to choose a workforce grant program does this alleviate some of the challenges within MAQCS payments?
  - Jody confirms that this could potentially alleviate some of these challenges.
- There could be more people eligible than thought, so other options could cost more than option one. Option three allows a specific amount to be spent or given as grants. Subsidy claims could exceed the funded amount, which could result in a waitlist. This will all need to be handled by the board, as well as application approval.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Five members of the public made comment.

1. Caitlin Jensen motions to explore option three.
2. Tory Malek seconds the motion.
3. Unanimously approved by the board.
4. Motion passed.

### **Priority Alignment and Focus**

Michelle reviews the investment level framework and recaps the identified priorities. There is a need to prioritize two areas for focus in fiscal year 2026. These priorities can also be implemented in other fiscal years if not chosen as a priority for fiscal year 2026.

Board Members will vote on whether they would like to classify each priority as pilot, ongoing, or table. Exploration is excluded as this activity is meant to determine priorities for fiscal year 2026.



**Table 1: Votes for Priorities Classification**

<b>Priority Name</b>	<b>Pilot Votes</b>	<b>Ongoing Votes</b>	<b>Table Votes</b>
Training for Individuals Serving Children with Special Needs	9	0	0
Incentives for Serving High Needs Children	3	1	5
Public-Private Partnerships	2	0	7
Local Partnerships and Coalition Infrastructure	3	0	6
Quality Incentives for Providers	7	2	0
Study of Child Care Deserts and Targeted Recruitment	2	0	7

The top two choices by the board for implementation are training for individuals serving children with special needs and quality incentives for providers.

Michelle will work on two proposals based on these topics. She will present the proposals at the next meeting for an official vote.

1. Lisa likes the proposals for the child care facility improvement grant so that providers can improve what they have, as well as the workforce retention incentives.
2. Crystal is in agreement with these two proposals.
3. Beth is interested in the quality rating participation and workforce retention. She is also okay with facility improvements.
4. Mackenzie is in agreement with Lisa and Crystal.
5. Caitlin agrees with other board members.
6. Tory is in agreement.
7. Jackie is in agreement.
8. Tracy discusses the possibility of needing to put parameters around the facility improvements since some child care facilities are home-based and these funds might not be able to be used to improve home property value.
9. Lisa is in agreement that this will need to be thoughtfully outlined.



There is a pause to reflect if there is conflict of interest. There is none indicated.

- Tory Malek motions for Michelle to create proposals based on the early child care facility improvement grant and the workforce retention incentives.
- Louisa Libertelli-Dunn Seconds motion.
- Unanimously accepted by the board.
- Motion passed.

Louisa supports the developmental screening and the early childhood special needs professional development grant. Jackie thinks that screening is important, but we should also be able to disseminate results to act appropriately. Lisa agrees that screening data should be used to drive decisions that are being made. Early childhood professional development could encompass this.

- Jackie Ronning motions for Michelle to develop proposals for developmental screening training and early childhood special needs professional development.
- Tracy Moseman seconds the motion.
- Unanimously accepted by the board.
- Motion passed.

Proposals to be presented at the next meeting on March 26, 2026 by Michelle Cusey.

The board values public comment and appreciates the time individuals take to share their perspectives. To help the board manage comments, the board asks that the public refrain from repeating the same public comments. All written public comments must be received by 12 p.m. (noon) the day before each board meeting for board review.

### **Public Comment**

Two members of the public made comment.

### **Adjournment**

- Tory Malek motions to adjourn.
- Jackie Ronning seconds the motion.
- Unanimously accepted by the board.
- Motion passed.

Adjourned at 11:30 a.m.