

Durham PreK Governance Committee Business Meeting NOTES

January 15, 2026 (9:30am-10:15am)

In Attendance, listed in random order:

Voting Members: Cathy Collie-Robinson, Brenda Carter, Jason Rutherford, June Shillito, Dr. Aleksandra Holod, Tabitha Blackwell, Dr. Deborah Pitman, Miranda Marshall, Beth Messersmith, Kristina Baldrige, Dr. Iheoma Iruka, Dr. Wykeshia Glass, Ellen Reckhow, Brittany Gregory

Non-voting Members: Dr. Linda Chappel, Joy Turner, Tammorah Mathis, Monnie Griggs, Ileana Vick, Dr. Kristi Snuggs, Kate Irish
Guests: Karen Thompson, Tosh Adams, Adrienne Stephens, Nita McAdoo, Rachel Osborne, Marilyn Agostini, Maggie West, Cate Laster, Tabitha Williamson, Jameka Wells

WHAT	NOTES
Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Introductions and Meeting Protocols● Cathy Collie-Robinson and Dr. Linda Chappel welcomed Governance Members● Attendance reviewed and meeting quorum verified
Meeting Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Welcome New Members● Approve November Meeting Notes● DPK Budget Review and Assessment of the parent fee policy● Student enrollment
Introduce New Governance Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ellen Reckhow Early Years Board Representative
Review and Approval of Notes from the November 2025 meeting*	Governance unanimously approved Governance Committee meeting notes from November 2025 Motioned by Dr. Iheoma Iruka, Seconded by Dr. Aleksandra Holod. <ul style="list-style-type: none">● All in favor

DPK Budget Review and Assessment of the parent fee policy *

- For the current year budget, we have no cuts to the already funded seats because we were given one time ARPA funds that expire.
- As we craft the budget for next year, we will need to look at the gaps caused by the temporary funding.
- This year we were able to use one-time dollars to implement the increase in the teacher support payment and were able to preserve the wrap care scholarships. We budgeted for a small bonus for instructional staff. We were not able to implement the Governance approved increase in the per child reimbursement rate.
- For the FY2027 budget we need to implement the approved per child reimbursement rate increase at an additional cost of \$262,160
- We need dollars to fund Murray-Massenburg as these seats were funded by temporary ARPA dollars that expire. The additional cost for this is \$825,315
- We need funding to increase the wrap care as we were told to anticipate an increase in the state funded subsidy reimbursement rate at an estimated additional cost of \$31,500
- We are expecting a teacher raise this year as well.
- Overall we will need over \$1.9 million to maintain the current seat numbers.
- The current budget number is \$5,466,393 that is direct and then one time ARPA funding of \$770,000
- Member asked if we are fully enrolled at Murray Massenburg? Yes, we are full at Murray Massenburg
- ARPA dollars for Murray Massenburg were budgeted to DPS directly and will expire this coming school year.
- Kristina, can we as a group decide to move seat allocations from Whitted to Murry Massenburg
- We do not have the ability to move seats as these funds are controlled by DPS
- Our goal is to use Durham County local funding last and to fully fill seats paid for with state and federal funds first.
- Members reviewed the slides for parent fees to decide to vote to approve the staff recommendations, to maintain current rate or to wait on a vote until a later date.
- Parent fees are assessed at 2% of income for families earning or over 400% of the federal poverty level. This fee goes directly to the site and DPK reduces the child reimbursement payment to match the established rate. If the parent fee is \$200, we pay the difference- \$1256 so the site still receives the full rate of \$1456.
- The meeting slides have charts that display the increase in parent fees collected
- The next chart shows the impact of parent fees
- We have seen a sharp increase in the median income in Durham County. When originally adopted by Governance, the plan was for higher income families – those making above the median income- to pay a portion of the cost for the service. However, over time with inflation and wage increases we have not adjusted the rate. At this time we see parents in the median income paying parent fees as well. Therefore the staff recommend adjusting the rate to 450% of the federal poverty level.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of adjusting the parent fee is shown in a chart on the slideshow. • Cathy, so we have a staff recommendation. What are we going to do going forward? • Kristina, the next 9-12 months will probably be rough for Durham families, so this is something that I think we need to consider very seriously • Jason, we should consider pushing the vote to February with all of the potential changes coming to Durham’s Budget • Iheoma, we must figure out what our priority is. Do we need to maintain the seats or increase the number of seats. If we start paying more parent fees, then it will impact the number of seats that we can pay for. • Kristina, the strategic question for today is, are we prioritizing capacity building or are we prioritizing filling every seat and making that experience as strong as possible so that parents that fill them become our evangelist moving forward. • Linda, the application for next school year opens March 2 and it is confusing to parents to start the application process without a set parent fee policy, and this is why it is timely now to make a decision. In the past this policy was changed to make sure that parents at the Durham median income, or below, did not have a parent fee. • Miranda, I do believe that a cut to any extra revenue would be dangerous at this point. The average preschool tuition is \$1500 a month. Likely if a parent is at the 400% poverty level, then both parents are working and the child was already in care before- which means that the DPK parent fees are significantly less than what they were paying previously. The people that declined the seat because the parent fee was too high- do we know if those children were previously in formal childcare? • Joy, that is information that we do not have. Yes, the parent fee would be less than the tuition they were paying- however, if both parents are working, then they will also have to pay the wrap care fee (before and after school) to the center, so it is not just the parent fee parents are paying. DPK covers a 6.5 hour day. • Beth, ACA premiums have gone through the roof starting in July, snap benefits will affect this group, Medicaid rebates are also going to be hit. We are looking at a lot of changes coming this year for families. I do think that if we can provide relief, it is helpful but at the same time the projected \$2 million is a massive budget gap to fill. We need to be mindful of how to fill that gap. • Ellen, this is a double-edged sword. These parents may also be homeowners and the tax rates in Durham have also increased. We need to keep all these things in mind.
Vote on the parent fee policy	Kristina Baldrige motioned to pass the staff recommendation and increase the parent fee threshold to 450% of the federal poverty level. Brittany Gregory 2 nd the motion

	<p>6 in favor 2 not in favor 3 abstain from voting Motioned passed</p>
Student Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collaborative DPK program has been able to provide seats to accommodate 42% of Durham’s 4-year-old census • Ellen, Identified that the flat growth of the program over the past 8 years is disturbing. • Linda, the reality of the Covid pandemic impacted our ability to grow. We have also experienced cuts in funding in NC PreK seats for Durham and Title I seats in Durham Public Schools. We have invested in our workforce and the programs in the community so that when funds are available, we are ready for expansion. • Ellen, we are substantially under enrolled in Whitted. We have funded seats unused. • Linda we are working with DPS to increase the enrollment at Whitted. • Joy, In the charts given you can see the enrollment numbers. You can see that we have had an increase in enrollment since our November meeting. You can see improvements across all programs. • Kristina, any insights as to why the Headstart seats are not full? • We can address enrollment more fully in the March meeting.
March meeting move?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beth, I am concerned that waiting until March is too late to vote as the county budget is being worked on. I recommend holding a February meeting. • Ihoema, what do you think we can accomplish in February? • Beth, I feel like if we are going to launch an advocacy at local government then that time frame is short. We need to look at what our needs are, what we can cut, can we make our case? • Ellen, I think that a March meeting will still give us time to build an advocacy program for the budget.
Adjournment	Motioned by Ellen Reckhow, Seconded by Dr. Iheoma Iruka
Final Announcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule for 2026 meetings: 3rd Thursday of every other month (July-May) • Future Meeting Dates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3/19 9:30-11:30 Virtual • 5/21 9:30-11:30 Virtual

** Agenda items with handouts*

Durham PreK Governance Committee

Planning Meeting

Thursday, January 15, 2026; 10:05am – 12:30 pm
Early Years Large Conference Room, Durham

DRAFT NOTES

Planning Meeting convened at the conclusion of the business meeting

Purpose of meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to work together to strengthen Durham PreK by:

- (a) Exploring the current state of the program
- (b) Identifying opportunities available to the program in the coming 1 – 2 years
- (c) Building shared awareness around the challenges and risks facing the program in the coming 1 – 2 years
- (d) Naming action steps to leverage opportunities

Attendees: Kristina Baldrige, Tabitha Blackwell, Cathy Collie-Robinson, Brenda Carter, Dr. Linda Chappel, Dr. Wykeshia Glass, Monnie Griggs, Dr. Alex Holod, Kate Irish, Dr. Iheoma Iruka, Tammorah Mathis, Miranda Marshall, Beth Messersmith, Dr. Deborah Pitman, Ellen Reckhow, Jason Rutherford, June Shillito, Dr. Kristi Snuggs, Karen Thompson, Joy Turner, Ileana Vink, and Jameka Wells.

Facilitation Team: Maggie Chotas and Laura Swartz, *DSC*

Facilitated Meeting Summary

DPK's strengths, opportunities, risks & concerns

In table groups, committee members were invited to share their thoughts about the program's strengths, opportunities, challenges and risks. Joy Turner, Early Years Director of Data and Provider Relations, gave an overview of the data and charts describing the data to provide context for conversation. *You'll find the data provided in the appendix to these.* Over the course of the meeting, committee members built on their responses and dug deeper into the data provided. The synthesized responses that follow address the following categories:

1. **Current strengths in the DPK program**
2. **Questions generated by the data**
3. **Opportunities that could support DPK in the next 1-2 years**
4. **Challenges and risks facing the program in next 1-2 years**

1. **Current strengths in the DPK program**

Teacher Compensation & Retention

- Compensation and commitment to increasing that compensation

- Ability to retain experienced teachers/ staff (via compensation)
- Provides funding for classroom resources and encourages teachers to increase their education
- Strong structural support and professional development for our partner teachers/ staff
- Teacher wages

Reaches families from a range of backgrounds

- Brings in both low and middle-income families – DPK is serving more low-income families in Durham – we can see locally funded seats
- DPK seats are most-funding – good work by team
- Seen as “for-everyone” – buy-in and support
- Ability to catch families who might fall through the cracks
- Broad engagement across Durham of people with different backgrounds

Strong support from community

- Strong energy, engagement and support from County stakeholders
- Durham County Government – sales tax for education continuum in Durham

Collaboration

- Strong collaboration across agencies and with the community
- Collaboration of NCCU & Durham Tech – apprenticeship and workforce parts are a strong model for the rest of the state

Miscellaneous

- Passion and creativity
- Parents are grateful and the children are ready for Kindergarten
- This Governance Committee is a strength
- Program design – true cost of care; teacher wages and pay
- Amazing data-team & student-data

2. Questions generated by the data

Enrollment concerns

- Interested in why >400% FPL families are continuing to increase but lower income families are declining?
- Why are parents not choosing certain locations?
- Why are parents choosing to stay on the wait lists?
- Most wanted/ least wanted locations – why?
- Are there areas the need more seats based on demand?
- Why are Title I seats so under-enrolled?

Funding

- Why fund the program differently? Concerned about public schools being funded directly

- Will the County change funding for DPS slots when DPS seats remain empty for extended periods?
- How does Durham PreK relate to other efforts to fund education in Durham?
- How stable are the national/ state funding streams?
- Will it be feasible for Durham to cover the budget shortfall caused by the loss of ARPA funds?

Parent/ Family concerns

- Do families know they can come to Durham PreK with concerns about a site without fear of retaliation?
- Can parents identify the address they most need/ want their care near? Might be home or work
- Can we consider “secret-shopper” to see parent experience?
- What is the cost per child?

Measuring & marketing outcomes

- How does the County measure our success? What outcomes matter most to them?
- Parents say kids are prepared – how does DPS feel? Can we track across time?
- In marketing – do we show results/ data around children’s success?

Demographics

- General data on Durham’s changing demographics
- Do we have demographics or income data across each site?

Miscellaneous

- What is the correlation between TSG and m-class?
- How many families use and need transportation & aftercare?
- Percent of Durham only PreK families with a parent fee has increased from 18% in 2020 to 47% in 2026. Will this trend continue until 100% of families have a fee?

3. Opportunities that could support DPK

Marketing & advocacy

- Marketing and telling our story
- Talking about the education continuum
- Short video that publicizes the DPK program (including the range of size, different sites, educational space to fit family needs)
- How to message our success effectively to various stakeholders?
 - What are the different communities/ constituencies most concerned about?
 - Educate lawmakers and commission members on success outcomes
 - Marketing various locations to parents
- Apply to effectively build an advocacy message & ambassadors (parents & employers)
- Use available data to advocate for the program
 - i.e. a marketing campaign targeted to areas that are under-enrolled

- Bus wraps, create program videos
- We can be a model for other counties and states More publicity, articles in the press, social media → create messaging that can be easily shared

Funding

- State funding to private schools – parents may not enroll in public school DPK sites because they are not planning to go to public schools
- Charter & private school enrollment is up while public school enrollment is down
- Transparency in how money is spent is important
- Diversify funding sources to include private employes, foundations, private donors, leverage chamber (get greater chamber buy-in)
- Opportunities for fund development, bring in extra private funds
- Stronger braided funding

Engagement with families

- Struggle to engage and serve the children/ families most in need
 - How do we get to the most vulnerable
- Have more conversations with parents to gather perspectives
- Parents ability to navigate the system – understand the system and DPK
- User experience (portal to placement) – community understanding about “who” they are applying to

Transportation

- Families move
- Resource constraints
- Can we look at partnerships?

Expanding collaboration

- Collaborative spirit is great but needs enhancing as funds tighten and challenges arise
- Collaboration with child-care centers and local universities

Miscellaneous

- Increasing support for our teachers & staff
- Add 3-year-old program
- Data, making sure we are asking the right questions

4. Concerns & risks facing the program in the next 1-2 years

Funding

- Systematic disinvestment from federal and state government
- Unclear where NCPReK, Public Schools, Head Start could be affected by federal cuts
- Federal impacts on families
- Big scary funding gap – trying to keep current funding
- Surprise of NC PreK seats cut

- Flat funding – no growth in enrollment
- Expensive to do well, hard to maintain when other funding streams (federal block grants, state environment) are inconsistent
- Very complex funding model which is difficult to explain to parents
- Limited increases in funding to reach out 75% goal
- Potential for a long-term shortfall → is our priority quality or seats?
- DPK seats are most funded but may not reach the poorest families
- County costs rising and the noise during the budget season
- Sustainability of funding – need to look at private funds

Public perception & threats to the Hispanic community

- Families not “trusting” public programs – you can’t market trust, you must show it. Need to find out why?
- Fears among immigrant families – chilling affect seen in enrollment numbers
 - Trusted partners cannot be as visible as they were in the past doing outreach

Early Childhood Education

- Has never really told our story very well
- Need to look at continuum of 0-5, what opportunities are available to infants and toddlers?
- Need to show the community clear return-on-investment (ROI)

Staffing

- Risk of teachers leaving the field
- Risk of returning increased ICE/ BP in Durham

Enrollment

- Lack of growth (but thankful to maintain)
- Potential backsliding of number of seats we can offer

Miscellaneous

- Parents have difficulty with online application
- Wrap care – how to provide it? How can parents afford it?
- Transportation – what about parents who cannot drive their children to preK?

Considering ways to support DPK via collective actions

Committee members considered concrete actions to take to support Durham PreK. After reflecting on interest and availability, members wrote down actions they commit to taking.

Member commitments & action steps

- *Kristina Baldrige*: parent research (interviews, focus groups, surveys), marketing strategy planning, and extra eyes/ideas for funding pitch to County
- *Jameka Wells*: continuing the collaborative work
- *Brenda Carter*: willing to do more recruitment and advocating for DPK
- *Iheoma Iruka*: examine the ROI in traditional and non-traditional ways, attend meetings, speak on/ write on behalf of DPK
- *Ellen Rechow*: (1) Help with outreach to the County Commissioners and the Superintendent and the School Board to gather data to show the impact of PreK on future academic success (2) Market the PreK opportunity by involving other community partners in a large forum possibility at Whitted.
- *Tabitha Blackwell*: willing to support as needs arise. Book Babies has access to hundreds of families that might be able to provide insights as needed
- *Cathy Callie- Robinson*: engage in conversations with elected officials, support efforts to highlight or showcase DPK in action to elected officials and business community

Closing

In closing, Cathy Callie-Robinson shared that 165 people have applied to the teaching academy to become childcare providers. People in our community believe in the importance of Early Childhood Education and want to be a part of this work!

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 pm

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Appendix: Data