



COLLABORATIVE FOR COLCHESTER'S CHILDREN

Feb 10, 2026

Leadership Work Group Meeting

Cragin Memorial Library

9:00-10:30 AM

Attendance: Cindy Praisner, Melissa Deacon, Kate Byroade, Eve Hurley, Sarah Russell, Chelsea Long, Erin Howes, Kaitlin Cassidy, Judy O'Meara, Lindsay Therian, Marissa St John, Rachel Russo, Jessica Kuckel, Sharon Wilinski, and Teresa Messervy

Introduced New Program Coordinator for C3- Melissa Deacon.

Partner Updates

Cragin- Play with Me program happening now, Storytimes are currently running. Working on Summer Reading and planning for the launch of a new app.

Castle- Early start spaces are full. Trivia fundraiser in April. Early Start application is open and on their website.

TVCCA- Jamie Garvin is no longer with WIC. Marissa St John is with WIC now. Marissa introduced herself to the group. Early Head Start is full. Doing well with Head Start with new scope.

CPS- Budget meetings will begin next week. Superintendent will present his budget on Feb 18th at 6 pm in the WJ Black Box theater. Superintendent Sullivan is sending out a letter to all families today.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Update - E. Hurley noted nothing new to report for Colchester.

CES- Kindergarten Story Times are beginning. Preschool Lottery will be pulled mid-February for 2026-27. Early Start Application is on their website for next year as well.

Staffed Family Childcare Network- Rachel Russo joined us today as the representative that covers Colchester. Her role is to support family childcare providers as well as serve as their voice in community meetings such as at our Community Table.

Parent Council Updates - Parent Ambassadors reported that they held a PJ Party for Parent Council members and hosted Part I of a Book Club on Good Inside. Part II will be March 30th. They are also hosting a Cocoa Pop-Up at the Park on March 24th. Additionally, they are planning a Parent Cafe with Marissa from WIC for March 13th. The topic will be on nutrition-eating well on a budget. Flyer to come soon!

C3 General Updates and Events- Currently running Play & Learn groups, COS class and Conscious Discipline Workshops at night. Dad's group on communication tonight. Parenting as a Team will also be Feb 23rd. It is a fun date night for couples. FLIP It series to begin on Feb 26th. Inishmor Fundraiser on March 26. We will be hosting a PD on Speech and Language for community partners. A CES Speech and Language therapist will be providing the workshop. C3

will be working to establish a monthly newsletter/calendar to help with communication of programs. Additionally, we'll submit something to the Park and Rec Connection (physical copy) as well.

OEC/Shine Updates - Early Start spaces are full. First monitoring visit is over. It was a bit rocky using the new form. Difficult to know how others are scoring their programs. Currently waiting for more information on QE funding (expected) and possible \$10k community match. The State added 1039 new Early Start spaces and 165 Smart Start spaces during the last RFA beginning on January 1. The State is still accepting feedback on the One Point of Entry Portal. Contract Amendments for the 8% provider rate increase should be arriving soon. Once signed, the increase will be retroactive to Oct 1.

Budget Review - Budget is currently on track, though we are waiting for more information on the QE funding and Community Match. C.Praisner would like to use the \$1000 currently budgeted for monitoring visits to contract with EASTCONN to do the second monitoring visit. Hopefully, they will come with a broader understanding of the monitoring expectations as they serve multiple communities. Program Coordinator line is underspent due to the gap between L.Buyniski's resignation and hiring Melissa Deacon. Parent Ambassadors are overspending but we'll use fundraising dollars to fill in any funding gaps if needed. C Praisner would like to see how many hours PAs need to do their work for a year so additional hours will be provided to the PAs in consultation with C Praisner.

Organizational Structure Changes - New Organizational Chart was reviewed for the second time. It was approved through consensus. C Praisner discussed the opportunity to submit a proposal to the Town Charter Revision Commission to request being made a Town Department. She feels that it would create greater sustainability and clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities if the relationship with the Town was formalized. There will be ongoing conversations about what that might look like with a possible merging with Youth and Social Services. If anyone has concerns or suggestions, please email C Praisner.

Local Needs Assessment-

Purpose of the LNA is to create a Community Action Plan based on Local Needs Assessment findings, including:

- Identifying gaps and trends related to young children and families based on the Local Needs Assessment; and
- Implementing collaborative action steps and solutions to address the gaps identified.

The Toolkit is supposed to be released by the end of February. We were provided with some questions to begin talking about strengths and needs. Erin Howes reviewed the questions and answers discussed at the last Parent Council meeting. The group indicated a need for non-traditional/flexible hours. There was discussion about how to gather specific information related to this need. 2-3 questions can be added to the Parks and Rec survey that will be going out in March. It was suggested that the questions be multiple choice rather than open-ended to encourage more responses. C Praisner and M Deacon will work on questions to ask. One will be likely be related to financial well-being.

Upcoming Meeting Dates for 2025-2026

Tuesdays, 9:00-10:30 am- April 21

Submitted by:

Cindy Praisner, Early Childhood Coordinator