

**Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
Board Meeting Minutes
August 14, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
Chair: Shannon Nickinson**

Members in Attendance

Shannon Nickinson	Melissa Sidoti	Paul Fetsko
Mona Jackson	Bambi Sealy	Craig Jones
Tammy Hicks	Shacondra Primm	Deborah Tucker
Cindy Kirk	Brian Wyer	Tarae Donaldson
Mary Ann Bickerstaff	Lindsey Cannon	Doug Brown

Members Absent

Edna Williams	Reginald Dogan	Roger Thompson
Deanna Oleske		

Public in Attendance

None

Staff in Attendance

Bruce Watson	Dawn Engel	Nina Daniels
Renee Maxwell		

I. Welcome and Introduction

Notification of this meeting of the Board of Directors was posted to the Coalition Public Calendar Board and sent to the Pensacola News Journal for publication on July 28, 2025. The meeting was called to order by the Vice Chair, Ms. Hicks.

II. Public Comments

- a. None.

III. Chair Opening Comments

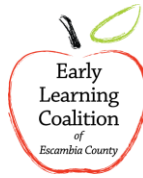
- a. **Approval of Consent Agenda: Meeting Agenda, Minutes of May 8, 2025, Financial Reports for April and May 2025**

Upon a motion made by Ms. Bickerstaff and seconded by Ms. Hicks, the Meeting Agenda, Minutes of May 8, 2025, and financial reports for April and May 2025 were approved without objection.

IV. Executive Committee Report

- a. **Deanna Oleske Board Member Approval**

Ms. Deanna Oleske has been named the Board of County Commissioner's statutory designee to the Coalition's Board of Directors. Upon a motion made by the EXCOM and seconded by Mr. Wyer, the appointment of Ms. Oleske to the Board was approved without objection.



b. New Finance Director Search and Options

The Finance Director position has been posted on the ELC website. A hiring company was also contacted. The hiring company has the resources to find qualified candidates, but they want between \$25,000-\$30,000 for their efforts. The accounting firm of Saltmarsh, Cleaveland and Gund, which is the Treasurer of the Board's employer, has proposed to do the functions of Finance Director, but as a contractor, and without a full-time day-to-day presence on site. The employee they earmarked to fill the Finance Director position appears to be very knowledgeable and experienced. The offer is considered very promising. The Executive Director spoke with the Chancellor of the DEL, and she was not comfortable with contracting out the Finance Director position and requested that the Executive Director contact the Finance Directors of the other Coalitions to see what advice or assistance they can offer.

c. Staff Issues

There have been two staff out for medical reasons since mid-March. One returned to work August 4. The other person is still out and has not communicated with the Coalition for over a month nor provided any word on when they are projected to return. As a result of the extended absence of this employee, the Coalition had to find an alternative for getting the work done that this position requires. The Coalition's solution has proven to be effective, but it revealed that a permanent staff position to do the work required is not necessary nor necessarily preferred.

d. Change to IT Support Services Contract

As a result of the extended absence of the IT Administrator, which is a one-of-one staff position, the Coalition modified the service agreement with Digital Boardwalk from shared management of IT support to providing fully managed IT support. The cost increase was about one third of what the Coalition has paid in wages and benefits to have a full-time staff position.

e. ELC Organizational Change

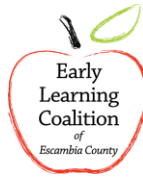
The Coalition Organizational Chart was updated to reflect having a contractor provide managed IT support. Upon a motion made by the EXOM and seconded by Ms. Bickerstaff, the new Organizational Chart was approved without objection.

f. FY 25-26 Early Learning Grant Agreement (ELGA)

The EXCOM brings the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Early Learning Grant Agreement to the Board for approval. Upon the motion made by the EXCOM and seconded by Mr. Wyer, the FY 25-26 Early Learning Grant Agreement was approved without objection.

g. First Notice of Award (NOA) for FY 25-26

The first Notice Of Award for FY 25-26 was presented to the Board for reference prior to the presentation of Coalition's budget for FY 25-26. This NOA does not include allocation by the DEL of the reverted and reappropriated funding from FY 24-25. Another NOA will be published sometime in the next two months that includes these allocations.



h. Coalition Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

The EXCOM makes the motion for the approval of the FY 2025-2026 Budget. The Budget will change once the DEL allocates the reverted and reappropriated funding from FY 2024-2025. Upon the motion made the EXCOM and seconded by Mr. Wyer, the FY 2025-2026 Budget was approved without objection. Five members declared conflict of interest due to the relationship with Coalition of the agencies they represent and did not vote. They each completed Conflict-of-Interest form as required.

i. ED Annual Evaluation

The Executive Director's Annual Evaluation required by the DEL was presented for discussion. Upon a motion made by Mr. Fetsko and seconded by Ms. Hicks, the ED's Annual Evaluation was approved without objection.

j. Audit and Tax Services Contract

The Request For proposals (RFP) process was completed to find a firm to conduct the Coalition's Annual A-133/Single Scope Audit, and the firm of Carr, Riggs and Ingram LLC was selected. The Coalition contract and the CRI agreements were presented for discussion. The Coalition and CRI swapped contracts and agreements and the wording of each meet the approval of both companies. Upon a motion made by Ms. Bickerstaff and seconded by Mr. Fetsko the contract and agreements between the Coalition and CRI were approved without objection.

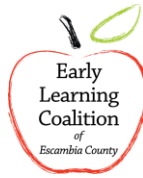
k. Governor Board Appointees

The ED spoke with the Governor's Appointment Office about the Coalition's three open Governor appointed Board positions. The ED was informed that they consider applications that are over three years old to be expired. The ED was also informed that they did not know one of the two regular position appointees had resigned. The resignation letter this former appointee sent to them five years ago was forwarded to the Appointment's Office. Currently there is one unexpired application on file, and that is for the Chair position, but it is close to being more than three years old. The Chair has updated her application, and one of the Coalition's Provider Representatives on the Board has also submitted an application. The DEL was asked if this is allowed, or is it considered a conflict of interest. The DEL has not yet replied. The Coalition requests at least one or two more Board members to apply. However, an applicant does not have to be a current Board member to apply.

V. Executive Director's Report

a. Coalition Status Reports: DEL Invoice Dashboard for June 2025

On the June Invoice submitted for Fiscal Year 2024-2025, the Coalition had spent \$15.38 million of the \$17.94 million SR grant, however, this amount did not include the cost of SR services for the month of June. On this invoice the SR Total was 85.7%, SR Admin was 3.0%, Non-Direct was 19.5% and Quality was 10.2%. VPK Services was \$4.85 million of \$4.97 million which is 97.7%. VPK Admin was 2.4%.



This was the last invoice to the DEL for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. The DEL directed that Coalitions could only invoice VPK Program expenses. All SR and SR Plus Program expenses that had yet to be invoiced would be submitted for payment by using a Prior Year Invoice in July using Fiscal Year 2025-2026 funding. This was necessary because any unexpended SR funding after the May invoice was approved was going to be reverted back to the State for reappropriation in FY 2025-2026. The amount of SR funding reverted was \$2,560,523.00 and the amount of SR plus was \$184,588.00. The plan is for this money to be provided as an additional allocation to the Coalitions, however, reappropriation of these funds has not yet occurred. There will also be no 13th invoice for 2024-2025 SR expenses.

b. Coalition Status Reports: Enrollment/Wait List Status Report, and Contracting Summary Report

There are 2,450 children enrolled in the School Readiness program of which 56 are SRMAT and 1,117 are school-age children. There are 370 children on the wait list.

There are 1,712 children approved for the 25/26 VPK Program of which 619 children are already enrolled.

There are 82 SR Providers, and 67 VPK Providers under contract.

VI. Old Business

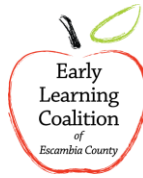
a. Legislative Budget for 2025-2026 Recap

A summary of the Legislative Budget for 2025-2026 for Early Learning was presented for discussion.

b. Fiscal Year 24-25 Funding and Transition to FY 25-26 - Update

All SR and VPK Advance monies were expended with the May 2025 Invoice. For the SR Program funding this was done a month earlier than normal because the DEL required all SR and SR Plus advances to be returned with the May invoice so that it could be reverted and reappropriated. To help ensure expenditure reimbursements were more than advances, the DEL approved including any non-direct expenses already paid or obligated in June to be included in the May 2025 invoice. There will not be a June 2025 or a 13th invoice for 2024-2025 for SR and SR Plus services or expenditures.

This was done so that the balance of unexpended, but allocated SR and SR Plus funds could be reverted to the Coalition for use in Fiscal Year 2025-2026. Payment for the June Service Period of SR and SR Plus will be made by doing a Prior Year Invoice in 2025-2026. The amounts reverted were \$2,560,523 for SR and \$184,588 for SR Plus. Approximately \$1.4 million of the reverted funds were used to pay for June SR services. June SR Plus services have not been invoiced because the reverted funds have yet to be reallocated and there was no SR Plus in the first NOA for FY 2025-2026.



c. Fiscal Year 25-26 SR Funding Projections and Budget Options

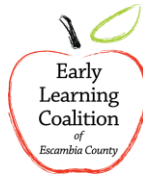
FY2025-2026 allocates \$16,368,533 to the School Readiness Program. This year's funding for the Gold Seal (GS) rate incentive, in the amount of \$368,944, was added back into the SR Program. When making projections, this amount must be taken out of the total available for direct services as it can only be spent to pay the GS rate incentive. The Quality Performance Incentive (QPI) of \$868,415 remains in a separate funding stream. Projections forecast both the GS and QPI to be significantly underfunded. It is expected that the Coalition will have to use SR Quality funding again this year to cover these shortfalls.

Multiple scenarios were presented for discussion:

1. This scenario shows what the impact would be if the Coalition received the same amount of SR funding it was allocated in FY 2024-2025, approximately \$18.3 million. It shows that this amount would not be enough to serve the number of children enrolled on June 30, 2025.
2. This scenario shows that if there is no more funding provided enrollments would have to decrease by over 500 children from 2,541 to 2,025 to ensure the Coalition does not exceed the SR funding allocation.
3. This scenario shows that when the Coalition received the reverted funds of \$2.56 million, \$1.4 million will have to be used to pay for June's invoice. The remaining \$1.6 million will increase the SR funding amount. With this amount the Coalition can support 2,180 children in care. This still leaves the need to reduce the current enrollments by over 360 children.
4. This scenario shows the AELC proposed plan called Compression Scenario where the reverted funds from every Coalition are compiled and redistributed based on need. This would possibly increase the Coalitions funding by an additional \$400,00 above the anticipated reverted amount of \$1.16 million, for a total of \$1.56 million. This would support 2,230 children in care. This would result in a reduction of approximately 300 children.
5. This scenario shows that funding for this scenario is the same as Scenario 4. The key difference is that instead of a level reduction in all age groups, school-age children are reduced to keep as many birth-to-five children in care as funding allows. Reductions would be from the oldest to youngest within the school age care level. This scenario would result in a reduction of around 500 children. These children would be aged five and older.

The following is a list of actions that can be taken to mitigate and/or alleviate the shortfall:

1. Common actions applicable to all scenarios that are requested to be approved now.
 - a. Formally freeze the Wait List. An exception would be for SRMAT program due to the separate funding stream.
 - b. Get DEL permission to not roll over At-Risk referrals after the referral expires.



- c. Get DEL permission to terminate all children with a payment certificate that have not been enrolled at a provider site.
 - d. Divert as much non-direct funding as possible to services. This means severely restricting spending on quality initiatives and programs.
2. In addition to the list of decisions to be implemented right away, three alternatives were presented for consideration:
- a. Postpone the decision to disenroll children for the first third of the fiscal year and reassess the impact and choices at the November Board meeting.
 - b. Take steps to implement across the board reductions in enrollments per scenario 4. Implementation of this alternative would be slightly delayed because disenrollments require prior approval from the DEL.
 - c. Take steps to implement reductions in school age enrollments per scenario 5. Implementation of this alternative would be slightly delayed because disenrollments require prior approval from the DEL.

The Board was asked to approve one of the actions listed above for enrollments and disenrollments going forward. Upon a motion made by Mr. Wyer and seconded by Ms. Bickerstaff, it was approved without objection to request approval from the DEL to implement the list of common actions and to postpone the decision to disenroll children for the first third of the fiscal year and reassess the impact and choices at the November Board meeting. The Executive Director was tasked to contact the DEL for approval to implement the common actions.

VII. New Business

a. ED Travel Approval

Annual approval of ED travel related to DEL, AELC and related business is required. Upon a motion made by Ms. Hicks and seconded by Mr. Fetsko, ED travel was approved without objection.

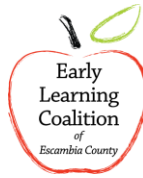
b. Internal Control Questionnaire (ICQ)

The annual ICQ is usually reviewed and approved by the EXCOM. This year it was received too late for the EXCOM to review it, and it is due before the next meeting. The ICQ was presented to the Board for discussion. Upon a motion made by Ms. Bickerstaff and seconded by Ms. Donaldson, the Internal Control Questionnaire was approved without objection.

c. EOY Reports

Fiscal Year 2024-2025 End of Year summaries for Medical Support, CCRR and Program Support were presented for discussion.

d. Kindergarten Readiness Rates



A summary of the Kindergarten Readiness rates for the 2023-2024 VPK program was presented. The Kindergarten Readiness Rate went down primarily because the state changed the cut score for Kindergarten Readiness from 694 to 706. This resulted in nearly a 20% decrease in the number of children determined to be Kindergarten Ready.

e. VPK Requirements/ECSD/ReadyKids! ReadingPals Program - Update

An issue was found that placed the school district VPK program in non-compliance with DEL Guidance regarding what can and cannot be done during VPK Instructional Hours. The school district allows the ReadyKids! ReadingPals program volunteers to take children out of class once a week for forty-five-minute sessions, focused on improving literacy. The volunteers are not qualified VPK teachers or aides, and DEL guidance says only VPK qualified teachers can deliver VPK Instructional Hours. The Coalition reconfirmed what was in guidance with the DEL staff and then informed the school district that ReadingPals would have to be done outside of VPK hours. The school district agreed and informed ReadyKids!. ReadyKids! strongly objected to being forced to change how they operate. Members of the ReadyKids! Board of Directors took it upon themselves to get a State Representative and the Children's Movement, who are the state Reading Pals! Sponsors, involved. The result was that the DEL said because ReadingPals follows a curriculum, it can be done during VPK hours. Because of the DEL decision regarding interpretation of their own guidance, the Coalition reversed its decision, and the school district was informed they could allow ReadingPals! to do their mentoring during VPK hours.

f. Executive Director Resignation

Mr. Watson has made the decision to resign as the Coalition's Executive Director. November 14, 2025, is tentatively his last day, but Mr. Watson included in his resignation letter that he will stay until 90 days after a new Finance Director has been hired. Mr. Watson has recommended to the Board that Ms. Engel, the Coalition's current Operations Director, would be an excellent choice for his replacement. This discussion led the Board to decide to create an Ad Hoc Executive Director Selection Committee to discuss the options for sourcing and hiring a new Executive Director. Mr. Watson will send a poll out for Board members to select dates and times they are available for this first meeting of the ED Selection Committee, and from their inputs a date and time will be selected.

VIII. Audits and Reviews in Progress.

a. DEL Accountability Review: Waiting for Final Report.

b. DEL Finance Review: Waiting for Draft Report.

IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 13, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at the Early Learning Coalition offices at 1720 West Fairfield Dr., Suite 100/400, Pensacola, FL 32501