

Board Meeting December 2, 2025

Consent Agenda

- | | |
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| 1. Agenda | CA 1 |
| 2. Public Announcements | CA 2-3 |
| 3. Minutes: November 13, 2025 | CA 4-10 |



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
Board Meeting Agenda
December 2, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.

Pages

I. Welcome and Introductions

- a. Notification of this meeting of the Board of Directors was sent to the Pensacola News Journal for publication on November 22, 2025, and posted to the Coalition Public Calendar Board.

II. Public Comments

III. Chair Opening Comments

- a. Approval of Consent Agenda: Meeting Agenda and Minutes of November 13, 2025,
(BA) CA1 – C10

IV. ED Selection/Hiring Process

- a. Executive Director Resignation Letter Amendment dated November 25, 2025, (I) 1-5
b. Executive Director Comments on Coalition Status (I) 6-16
c. Board Discussion and Decision Regarding Next Steps in Selection/Hiring Process (BA)

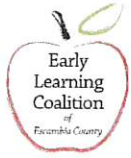
V. Adjourn

**Next Meeting: Thursday, February 12, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at the Early Learning Coalition offices,
1720 W. Fairfield Dr., Suite 100/400, Pensacola, FL 32501**

Key: (BA) = Board Approval (D) = Discussion (I) = Information Att = Attached file

The mission of the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County is to identify and meet the needs of children and families to lay the foundation for lifetime success by: maximizing each child's potential, preparing children to enter school ready to learn, and helping families achieve economic self-sufficiency.

CA.1



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

1720 West Fairfield Drive, Suite 100/400
Pensacola FL. 32501

DATE: November 22, 2025

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

A meeting of the legislatively mandated Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, 2nd of December at 11:00 a.m.

at the

Joyce Griffin Room for Professional Development and Testing
Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
1720 West Fairfield Drive, Suite 100/400
Pensacola, FL. 32501

The agenda and meeting materials will be posted to www.elcescambia.org.

For more information, or to receive an invite to the full virtual meeting, call or email:

Bruce Watson, Executive Director at (850) 607-7620 or askelc@elcescambia.org.

The meeting may be accessed by:

Joining the Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83520031403?pwd=M9RErCl7qpTdExtZj6kC84LJazIFbV.1>

Meeting ID: 835 2003 1403

Passcode: 723209



Renee Maxwell

From: Bruce Watson
Sent: Saturday, November 22, 2025 1:57 PM
To: Pensacola News Journal (business@pnj.com)
Cc: Renee Maxwell
Subject: RE: Public Service Announcement December 2025

Good morning,

Please post the following December 2025 meeting in your free government meeting calendar for the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia.

Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 2, 2025, at 11:00am.

The meeting will be held in the Joyce Griffin Room for Professional Development and Testing at the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
1720 West Fairfield Drive Suite 100/400 Pensacola, FL. 32501

The meeting may be accessed by:

Joining the Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83520031403?pwd=M9RErCl7qpTdExtZj6kC84LJazlFbV.1>

Meeting ID: 835 2003 1403
Passcode: 723209

Thank you.

Respectfully, Bruce

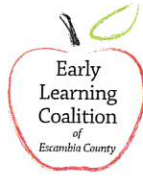
Walter B. Watson, Jr.
Executive Director
Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
1720 W. Fairfield Dr., Suite 100/400
Pensacola, FL 32501-1052
Bwatson@elcescambia.org www.elcescambia.org
Main: 850-595-5400, Office: 850-607-7620, Cell: 850-287-0650, Fax: 850-466-3783

“What you do or say today may change a persons life permanently. The question is will it be a positive or negative change that you have caused.”

Walter B. Watson, Jr., September 2018

Sunshine Law and Public Records Caution: 1) The Florida Government in the Sunshine Law prohibits discussion outside of a duly noticed meeting between any two or more Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County board members regarding any matter that may come before the Board. This prohibition extends to discussions via email. 2) Furthermore, most email communications made or received by the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County members or staff are considered public records that must be retained and, upon request, made available to the public and media.

From: Renee Maxwell <Rmaxwell@elcescambia.org>
Sent: Monday, October 27, 2025 11:09 AM



**Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
Board Meeting Minutes
November 13, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
Chair: Vacant**

Members in Attendance

Paul Fetsko	Roger Thompson	Bambi Sealy
Craig Jones	Tammy Hicks	Shacondra Primm
Deborah Tucker	Cindy Kirk	Brian Wyer
Tarae Donaldson	Mary Ann Bickerstaff	Lindsey Cannon
Doug Brown	Reginald Dogan	

Members Absent

Edna Williams	Deanna Oleske	Melissa Sidoti
Mona Jackson		

Public in Attendance

Marcus McBride

Staff in Attendance

Bruce Watson	Dawn Engel	Nina Daniels
Tom Porter	Melissa Jennings	Renee Maxwell

I. Board Chair Resignation

On November 10, 2025, Ms. Shannon Nicksinson submitted her letter of resignation to the Executive Director. Upon a motion made by Ms. Bickerstaff and seconded by Mr. Fetsko, the Chair's resignation was accepted without objection. The Vice Chair, Ms. Hicks, will cover the responsibilities of Board Chair at meetings until a new Board Chair is appointed. Ms. Hicks was unable to be at this Board meeting in person, and it was discussed before the meeting began, to have the RDC Chair, Mr. Thompson, conduct the meeting.

II. Welcome and Introduction

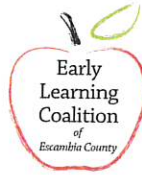
Notification of this meeting of the Board of Directors was posted to the Coalition Public Calendar Board and sent to the Pensacola News Journal for publication on October 27, 2025. The meeting was called to order by the RDC Chair, Mr. Thompson.

III. Public Comments

- a. None.

IV. Chair Opening Comments

- a. **Approval of Consent Agenda: Meeting Agenda, Minutes of August 14, 2025, Financial Reports for June through September 2025**



Upon a motion made by Mr. Brown and seconded by Ms. Hicks, the Meeting Agenda, Minutes of August 14, 2025, and Financial Reports for June, July, August and September 2025 were approved without objection.

IV. Executive Committee Report

a. Introduction of New Finance Director

Mr. Tom Porter was introduced to the Board. He was hired as the new Finance Director on September 22, 2025.

b. DEL NOA for FY 25-26 Dated 25AUG25

The DEL issued the second Notice Of Award (NOA) for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 on August 25, 2025. It was presented to the Board as a reference in the following discussion of the Coalition budget.

c. Revised FY 2025-2026 Budget Summary

The Coalition budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 was revised now that the DEL has allocated the reverted and reappropriated funding from FY 2024-2025. Most non-direct spending approved in the initial budget was not impacted, except for quality spending which was increased. The rest of the additional funding allocated in the second NOA went to SR services. Conflict-of-Interest forms were provided to Board members who have a conflict in voting on budget items. Upon a motion made by the EXCOM and seconded by Ms. Bickerstaff, the revised Coalition Budget for FY 2025-2025 was approved without objection.

d. Gubernatorial Board Appointments and Total Board Membership

The DEL issued the Coalition a finding in the Accountability Review because there were not at least three applications for Gubernatorial appointments on file with the Governor's Appointment Office. There are only two applications on file with the Governor's Appointments Office, one is the former Board Chair, and the other is a contracted Provider, which may mean that application is not acceptable. The Executive Director indicated that after his employment with the Coalition ends, he may apply to be the Board Chair. The Coalition also needs to recruit one or two more private sector members.

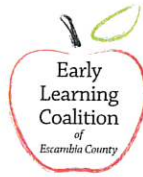
e. 2025 Code of Ethics

The Annual Code of Ethics was presented to the Board. All Board members are required to complete the acknowledgement form.

V. Executive Director's Report

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

Through September the Coalition spent \$5.6 million of the \$19.4 million SR grant which is 29.0% of the grant. SR Admin was 1.4%, Non-Direct Services was 12.5% and Quality was 7.2%. VPK Services was \$774,000 of \$4.8 million which is 15.9%. VPK Admin spending was 2.6%. Note that the Invoice Dashboard still includes the \$1.4 million submitted as a Prior Year



Invoice for SR services for June 2025. The DEL still has not adjusted the current year balances to account for this amount, and therefore utilization figures, and associated targets and restrictions, are skewed accordingly.

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

There are 2,302 children enrolled in the School Readiness program of which 65 are SRMAT and 1,006 are school-age children. The BG8 ECON Pri 6 Wait List has 326 children, BG8 ECON Pri 7 Wait List has 38 children and the SRMAT Wait List has 45 children for a total of 409. These figures include the 35 Pri 6 and 2 SRMAT children that were pulled from the Wait List last week.

There are 1,852 children approved for the 25/26 VPK Program of which 1,471 children are enrolled.

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

VI. Old Business

a. Fiscal Year 25-26 SR Funding Projections - Update

The second NOA for FY 2025-2026 allocates \$19,449,682 to the School Readiness Program. However, this year funding for the Gold Seal (GS) incentive was added back into the SR Program in the amount of \$368,944. Therefore, when making projections this amount must be backed out of the total available for services. Quality Performance Incentive (QPI) remains in a separate funding stream for \$868,415. Projections forecast both the GS and QPI to be significantly underfunded. It is expected that like last year, at the end of this year the Coalition will have to use SR Quality funding to cover these shortfalls.

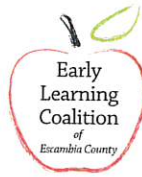
Funding Projection Scenarios are as follows:

Scenario 1. This has the additional funding provided in the new NOA. In this scenario enrollments stabilize around 2,400 children. Originally the Coalition projected this number to be 2,300 children, however, upon reaching that number and entering the true cost for the first quarter there is enough funding to support a higher number. In no case can the Coalition serve the 2,541 that were enrolled at the end of 2024-2025.

Scenario 2. This scenario projects what the Coalition would need to get back to the point of serving the same number of children that were enrolled at the start of the Fiscal Year. At this point it would take over \$820,000 to serve 2,545 children.

Scenario 3. This scenario demonstrates what the impact would be if the Coalition had received the same amount of SR funding it was allocated in FY2024/2025, approximately \$18.3 million. It demonstrates that even if the Coalition had been fully funded it was not enough to serve the number of children enrolled on June 30, 2025.

Scenario 4. This is a reminder of what the shortfall was at the beginning of the Fiscal Year even with the reverted funds to serve the number of children enrolled at that time.



Worksheet 5: This table demonstrates the impact the changes over the years, primarily increased provider rates, full implementation of QPI, and underfunding of Gold Seal, have had on the number of children that can be served. The amount of funding for SR has been relatively the same for 8 years. However, the cost of care per child has risen significantly without any real increase in funding, and this does not even address the effects inflation has had on the prices of everything from food, utilities, rent and especially insurance.

b. Recap of Early Learning Conference 28SEP25

A list of sponsors and donors who supported the Coalitions first ever Early Learning Conference is provided. Overall, the conference was a huge success, and planning has already started for the second conference next year.

VII. New Business

a. Impact 100 Grant

The Coalition was one of twelve non-profits to receive a \$103,500 grant from Impact 100. Well done to Melissa Jennings, the Community Director, as this was her project and she should receive all the accolades for getting this grant. The Coalition now has a name the van campaign going on with our providers for the new Classroom on Wheels!

b. Building Lease Agreement - Update

The owner of the building has agreed to renew the Coalition's lease when it expires in 2027. The rent will go up from around \$12,000 per month to \$17,000. However, this is still a very good deal and lower than anything else on the market for the same square footage and other amenities, such as utilities and location. The EXCOM approved the Executive Director to negotiate a new lease.

c. Staff Terminations

In the past two months, two staff were terminated for cause. One filed an appeal to the Board which per the Employee Handbook was reviewed by the EXCOM who found no reason to disagree with the Coalition's decision.

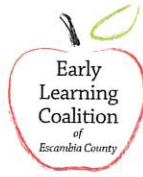
d. Coalition Customer Satisfaction Survey

The results of the annual Coalition Customer Satisfaction Survey have been received since the last EXCOM and are presented here for the first time. The Coalition scored well and received good feedback from the survey.

e. HR Services

Two proposals for HR support are provided for consideration. A third is being worked on with Higginbotham, our insurance agent.

f. Twenty Years of VPK



This year is the 20th anniversary of the VPK Program. The Coalition has a couple of things in work to recognize this milestone. One is having some former VPK graduates, now adults, return to their classrooms and film their interactions with their VPK teachers. The Coalition is soliciting other ideas of how we can mark the event.

g. Ideas for ELC Twenty-fifth Anniversary Recognition

This year is the 25th anniversary of the incorporation of the Coalition. November 30, 2000, was the day the Coalition was the Articles of Incorporation were approved. The Coalition is soliciting ideas of how the event can be celebrated.

h. 2026 Meeting Calendar

The 2026 Meeting Calendar was presented to the Board. Upon a motion made by Ms. Kirk and seconded by Ms. Bickerstaff, the 2026 Meeting Calendar was approved without objection.

i. CARES, CRSSA and ARPA Summary

A summary of all the additional funding that was granted in response to the COVID pandemic, and subsequent recovery was provided.

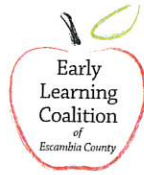
j. ED Search/Resignation Update

The discussion started with mentioning the paragraph of Ms. Nickinson's resignation letter that states that she wants to submit a resume and apply for the position of Executive Director.

Ms. Cannon recapped the progress of the Hiring Committee. Ms. Cannon stated that the Committee started by updating the job description then proceeded to post the job opening on Employ Florida. The job was posted for ten days, after which the Committee did not feel that they had an adequate pool of candidates to choose from. The job posting was posted an additional ten days to see if more candidates would apply. From the pool of candidates, three candidates were chosen for interviews. After being invited for an interview one of the three candidates decided to withdraw. Interviews were to start on Friday, November 14, then on Monday, November 10, Ms. Nickinson submitted her resignation as Board Chair and stated she intended to apply for the ED position. Up to that point Ms. Nickinson had been one of the four members of the Hiring Committee.

Due to Ms. Nickinson having been part of the Hiring Committee and having contributed to the development of the job description, had been involved in the selection of the three finalist to interview, and possessing inside knowledge of what the Committee is looking for in the candidates to include developing the interview questions, it was agreed that it would be inappropriate, and possibly unethical, to allow Mr. Nickinson to apply for the position.

Mr. Watson offered that after December 23, as afforded by the Employee handbook, he would use his PTO balance, however, he would make himself available to conduct turnover, but when he did so his PTO would be suspended and he would be working regular hours. This in turn would extend his last day of employment. Mr. Brown stated this was unacceptable that Mr.



Watson must have a predetermined hard and fast last day of work and last of employment based on when his PTO would run out. No other Board members disagreed with this statement, or attempted to modify the conditions.

Discussions continued about reopening the job position to try and get more qualified candidates to apply. Upon a motion made by Mr. Brown and seconded by Mr. Fetsko, it was approved without objection to continuing the interview process as scheduled. If a candidate is selected then the Board will meet to approve them being hired. If a candidate is not selected, then the Board will meet to discuss what the next steps will be in the process to select a new Executive Director.

k. Board Secretary

Mr. Jones volunteered to be the Board Secretary. Upon a motion made by Mr. Fesko and seconded by Ms. Cannon, the appointment of Mr. Craig as the Board Secretary was approved without objection.

VIII. Audits and Reviews in Progress.

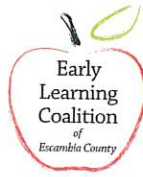
a. 2024-2025 Financial Review - Report

The final report is presented for discussion. There were no Findings and two Observations. One was how the Coalition booked payment of three-year contract in the GL, and the other was the narrative provided in the annual report regarding ARPA was deemed insufficient.

b. 2024-2025 Accountability Review – Final Report and CAP

The following is the list of findings:

- The lack of applicants for Gubernatorial appointed positions. This has already been discussed with the Board.
- The Coalition allowed Board members to vote after declaring a conflict of interest. This was due to a misunderstanding regarding the purpose of declaring a conflict.
- Some sampled staff and contractor background screenings were done after the five-year date. A better tracking tool has been implemented.
- The DEL says the Coalition did not do all the required Tier 1 monitoring of providers. The monitoring was done and the Coalitions proved it; the error was the tracking sheet had not been properly updated. However, the DEL refused to remove the finding.
- Note that a second finding regarding Tier 1 monitoring was added to say this was a repeat of two years ago, even though the specifics were significantly different.
- The DEL and Coalition agreed to disagree and how many providers must be Tier 2 monitored each year. On the one hand DEL guidance says every provider gets a Tier 2 every other year, however, the DEL has a table that says a Coalition of this size must monitor a minimum of 50 providers every year. The Coalition pointed out this table is skewed and places an undue burden on smaller Coalitions.
- In the opinion of the DEL the Coalition's CCR&R policies did not adequately address serving providers. A new policy was written to meet the DEL expectations.

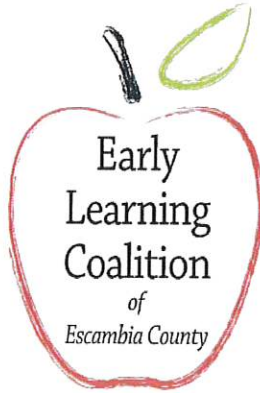


- c. **FY 2024-2025 A-133** - Initial introduction was done.
- d. **DEL Finance Review** - Data pulls are in work.
- e. **DEL Desk Review 1 for FY 25-26** - Data pulls are in work.

IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 11:51 p.m.

Next Meeting: Thursday, February 12, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at the Early Learning Coalition offices at 1720 West Fairfield Dr., Suite 100/400, Pensacola, FL 32501



Board Meeting November 13, 2025

Meeting Package

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Agenda | |
| 2. Amended Executive Director Resignation Letter | 1-5 |
| 3. Recommendation Letters | 6-16 |



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
Board Meeting Agenda
December 2, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.

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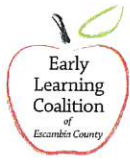
- a. Executive Director Resignation Letter Amendment dated November 25, 2025, (I) 1-5
b. Executive Director Comments on Coalition Status (I) 6-16
c. Board Discussion and Decision Regarding Next Steps in Selection/Hiring Process (BA)

V. Adjourn

Next Meeting: Thursday, February 12, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at the Early Learning Coalition offices, 1720 W. Fairfield Dr., Suite 100/400, Pensacola, FL 32501

Key: (BA) = Board Approval (D) = Discussion (I) = Information Att = Attached file

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Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County



November 25, 2025

Board of Directors
Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
1720 W. Fairfield Dr., Suite 100/400
Pensacola, FL 32501

Dear members of the Board of Directors,

This letter is to update my letter of July 26, 2025, regarding details affecting my resignation as Executive Director of the Coalition, and to address some concerns that I have about how the hiring process is going.

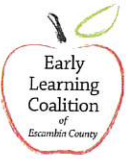
I sent my first letter with a proposed resignation date that I assumed would give the Board enough time to hire someone and afford time to conduct a turnover with my successor. In addition to the proposed date, I included a caveat that I would stay for at least 90 days after we hire a Finance Director. Our new Finance Director was hired on September 22, 2025, so day 90 would be December 21, however, unless the Board disapproves, I plan to stay until December 23. This means the time from my original notification to my last day of work will be about five months.

As provided for in the Coalition's Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual, aka Employee Handbook, I plan to use the unexpended PTO I have on the books which would make my last day of employment February 15, 2026.

On several occasions, I have said that while I was on terminal PTO I would make myself available should my successor or the new Finance Director have further questions or need assistance. However, at the Board meeting on November 13, 2025, the Board said that I cannot do this and I had to establish hard dates for my last day of work and the end of my PTO, which as I understand means that I cannot come off of PTO as required to conduct turnover or provide assistance if needed. Therefore, I intend to adhere to what the Board stated, which is why I have stated in this letter what the hard dates are for my last day of work and end of PTO.

The Board decided to effectively exclude me from the selection process and as a result what has transpired has been beyond my control. I won't trouble you with my concerns about the hiring process, except to say there are many, not the least of which was the Chair resigning to apply for the position. There was a first and then a second round of job announcements, followed by interviews, and after the last interview was done there was still no one selected. This has resulted in a special Board meeting being scheduled for December 2, 2025, so a plan can be developed on how to proceed in the Executive Director hiring/selection process.

I am concerned that the hiring process has taken a lot longer than expected, for instance the first interview was not done until November 14. Which coincidentally, was my original proposed



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County



retirement date, and it now looks very likely that someone may not be hired by December 23. Even if someone is hired by this date there will not be enough time to complete what I would consider a minimally sufficient turnover. The turnover will certainly not be the month to two months of watch, listen and learn that I envisioned and hoped for.

Lastly, I am concerned that how this process has unfolded; the two rounds of applications, over two months of meetings, two more weeks to do interviews and still no decision; collectively appears to outsiders, especially the staff, to be an indecisive process and an excessive amount of time to hire someone. This perception is undermining the staff's confidence in the Board and is negatively affecting morale. I have had staff sitting in my office crying because of this. I have others who have indicated they may resign. The staff know when my resignation letter was submitted and what the resignation dates were. It is now the end of November, and no one has been selected yet. The staff have been asking me when I am leaving, what is my last day, and why is this process taking so long. I cannot explain why because I refuse to say anything negative in nature to them, but quite frankly I do not know the answers either. I just assure them that everything will be okay, and I have been working to ensure the best possible outcome for the staff and the company. What I did not say is that until recently I was willing for their sake to do whatever it takes to make the transition easy for them and ensure this company is in best condition that it can be when I leave. However, after the November Board meeting and the subsequent lack of choice after the interviews I see that my services are no longer desired and my options are now limited. The only thing I can do now is hope and pray the Board finds a way to move forward.

Sincerely,

Walter B. Watson, Jr.
Executive Director



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

SUBJECT: Annual Leave

I. PURPOSE

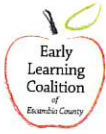
To provide employees, full-time and part-time, with time for rest and relaxation with pay, and/or leave with pay for personal reasons. The Coalition has adopted a policy that does not separately recognize annual and sick leave. All leave is combined into a leave pool which each employee is expected to use professionally.

II. POLICY

1. Leave for all employees will be earned on a semi-monthly basis to be used for personal, vacation and/or sick leave as approved by immediate supervisor. The two payroll periods each month shall be the 1st to 15th of the month and the 16th to last day of the month.
2. Leave is accrued each payroll period. All full-time employees, those receiving pay for 40 hours per week, will earn 216 hours per year. All employees receiving pay for less than 40 hours per week will earn leave on a prorated basis for hours worked each pay period, rounded up the nearest quarter hour. Because the total hours in each pay period fluctuates the amount of leave earned by all employees in a pay period will fluctuate as well. For example, an employee receiving pay for the full hours in an 89 hour pay period would earn 9.25 hours, for an 80 hour pay period 8.32 hours, and for a 98 hour pay period 10.19 hours. An employee receiving pay for 32 hours per week, for 64 hours in an 80 hour pay period would earn 6.65 hours, vice the 8.32 hours earned by an employee working the full 80 hours. All fractions that result from the earned leave calculations are rounded up the nearest 100th of an hour. The equation for calculating how much leave is earned for each hour worked is as follows:

216 hours of leave per year divided by a standard 2,080-hour full time equivalent (FTE) equals 0.1039 hours of leave earned per hour worked. ($216/2080 = 0.1039$) Simply stated everyone earns 0.1039 hours of leave per hour worked regardless of how many hours.

- a. The term "Receiving pay" as defined here means all pay received in a payroll period, including earned leave hours used and holidays.
- b. The term "Leave" can be used interchangeably with the term Paid Time Off (PTO).
3. Employees are encouraged to exercise the use of leave (vacation) each calendar year. All employees are encouraged to take at least one annual 40-hour consecutive leave period each fiscal year.
4. Leave shall not be used in increments of more than two (2) consecutive weeks, unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director or Board Chair.
5. Leave may be accumulated and carried over from one calendar year to the next.
6. The total amount of leave that can be accumulated cannot exceed 360 hours. The leave balance for an employee will be adjusted to the cap of 360 each pay period.
7. All employees are encouraged to maintain an 80 hour leave balance.
8. No pay in lieu of annual leave is permitted.



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

9. Holidays are not counted as annual leave. If a holiday occurs during an employee's annual leave period, the employee is not charged for that day as leave.
10. Employees must receive authorization from the immediate supervisor prior to the day on which annual leave begins, except in emergency situations. A minimum of two weeks advance notice is recommended.
11. All employees will be required to complete an Employee Request for Leave Form, using the request form or online request as applicable, prior to the use of leave. In the event of an emergency/illness, phone contact must be made with the employee's immediate supervisor or the Executive Director on the first day of the leave.
12. Supervisors are required to maintain a calendar of employee requests for use of leave. Annual leave requests may be denied if other employee(s) have received prior approval for leave.
13. Leave will be paid at the non-exempt employee's straight time rate for regularly scheduled hours.
14. Should an employee be on leave for a period of three or more days because of a medically related issue, the employee must submit a doctor's/medical statement of the employee's ability to return to work. If appropriate, the statement should advise of any limitations on the employee's work activities deemed medically necessary. Any exceptions must be approved in writing by the Executive Director.
15. Employees may be paid for unused leave upon termination of employment.
 - a. Employees that are terminated shall be paid for unused leave at the rate of one half of their hours accrued at the last day of work, paid at regular straight time pay for up to a maximum of 360 accrued hours.
 - b. Employees that are terminated due to a lay-off or position ending will be compensated for their full amount of leave accrued as of their last day of work.
 - c. Employees that have remained employed with the Coalition for a period of ten (10) years or more, shall be allowed to use their accrued PTO consecutively up to their last day of employment, however, advance notice must be given and an adequate turnover and PTO schedule must be approved, and they shall be paid for any unused leave at the rate of one half of their hours accrued at the last day of work, paid at regular straight time pay for up to a maximum of 360 accrued hours.
 - d. Employees that provide less than two weeks notice for job termination will receive no compensation for unused PTO, nor afforded an opportunity to take PTO prior last day of work as a proper turnover or opportunity to hire a replacement is not feasible during this transition.
 - e. Employees that provide two to four weeks' notice with supervisor approval may be approved up to ten (10) days PTO provided adequate turnover is assured, and they shall be paid for any unused leave at the rate of one half of their hours accrued at the last day of work, paid at regular straight time pay for up to a maximum of 360 accrued hours.
 - f. Greater than four weeks' notice, but less than 10 years of service, will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis as long as adequate turnover is assured, and they shall be paid for any unused leave at the rate of one half of their hours accrued at the last day of work, paid at regular straight time pay for up to a maximum of 360 accrued hours.



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

16. Flex time (when approved) allows employees to arrange/modify their work schedule but must be used within the semi-monthly pay period earned. Flex time may not be carried forward to any pay periods.

November 24, 2025

Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County Selection Committee
1720 W. Fairfield Drive, Suite 100/400
Pensacola, FL 32501

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure to recommend Dawn Engel for the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia Executive Director position. I have had the opportunity to work closely with Dawn for several years, and during that time she has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership, professionalism, and a deep commitment to elevating early childhood education in our community.

One experience that truly illustrates her capabilities was our work together on a local early learning conference that hosted more than 200 attendees. This event offered over 20 breakout sessions and welcomed numerous vendors and sponsors. Coordinating an event of this size requires intense planning, strong communication, and the ability to adapt quickly. Dawn executed the conference flawlessly. From developing the session schedule to managing presenters, vendors, and attendees, she ensured that every detail was handled with precision. Watching her lead with calm confidence and deliver such a seamless event was a clear reflection of her strengths.

In her most recent role as Operations Director, she's continued to demonstrate that same level of leadership. She supervises a department of 14 staff, manages complex responsibilities, and does it all with a steady, approachable presence. She developed and implemented an effective monitoring schedule for School Readiness and VPK providers in compliance with DEL, oversees fraud investigations, and manages provider and client review hearings. She also maintains strong relationships with providers, DEL, AELC, and many other community partner relationships built on trust, follow-through, and genuine respect.

Dawn is someone who brings integrity, professionalism, and heart to everything she does. She is an asset to the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County and would serve as an exceptional leader as the Executive Director. I'm proud to recommend her without hesitation.

Should you need any additional information or have questions, please contact me at kdawkins@uwf.edu.

Sincerely,
Kaley Dawkins

Kaley Dawkins
University of West Florida
Educational Research Center for Child Development Director



November 24, 2025

Re: Dawn Engel: Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

Dear Members of the Board:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write in strong support of Dawn Engel's application for the Executive Director position at the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County. I have had the privilege of working with Dawn in the support of young children and I can say without hesitation that she is one of the most dedicated, mission-driven leaders I've had the pleasure of working with in the early childhood education field.

Dawn brings to her work a rare combination of visionary leadership and on-the-ground commitment to improving outcomes for children, families, and educators. Her deep knowledge of the local community, her unwavering focus on quality, and her collaborative spirit have helped build strong partnerships and foster real, lasting impact. She is a natural coach, a strong systems thinker, and tireless advocate for equity and excellence in early learning. I have seen firsthand how she cultivates a culture of trust, reflection, and continuous improvement across teams, always with the end goal of better serving children.

Her leadership is rooted in lived experience, integrity, and a long-standing commitment to the field. I can think of no one more qualified to lead the Coalition into its next chapter. The Board would be fortunate to have in Dawn a leader who leads not for recognition, but from a place of deep purpose and care. I give her my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Courtney Williams", is written over a horizontal line.

Courtney Williams, CEO

BECKER'S[®]

School Supplies

1500 Melrose Highway, Pennsauken, NJ 08110

Telephone: 800-523-1490 ext. 133

Direct line 856-792.4509

Fax: 856-792-4500

Paul.Becker@cjbinc.com

Subject: Dawn Engel

Paul Becker
Becker's School Supplies
Director of Sales
1500 Melrose Hwy
Pennsauken NJ 08110
Paul.Becker@cjbinc.com
609.602.1815

It's my honor to endorse Dawn Engel for the Executive Director position. While our partnership is still in its early stages, Dawn has made the experience welcoming, inclusive, and highly collaborative. From the start, she has demonstrated a rare ability to balance strategic vision with practical execution—qualities that set true leaders apart.

In our interactions, Dawn has shown exceptional clarity in communication and a deep understanding of the complexities involved in early learning systems. For example, she has proactively shared insights on compliance processes and resource allocation strategies that reflect both her expertise and her commitment to improving outcomes for children and families. Her approach fosters trust and transparency, which is critical in building strong partnerships.

Having worked with nearly every ELC and many similar programs nationwide, I can confidently say Dawn possesses that intangible quality that distinguishes transformational leaders from those who simply manage. She combines operational rigor with a genuine passion for mission-driven work, and that combination is rare.

I strongly believe Dawn will excel as Executive Director and continue to make a lasting impact on the Coalition and the community it serves.

Paul Becker

Paul Becker

Paul.becker@cjbinc.com

November 20, 2025

To the Selection Committee:

It is my pleasure to offer my full recommendation for Dawn Engel in her application for the position of Executive Director of the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County. As the Regional Partnerships Director for LENA, I have worked closely with Dawn and the ELC of Escambia as their partner for several years, giving me a clear view of her leadership, strategic capability, and the deep respect she holds within the early childhood community.

Dawn brings more than sixteen years of organizational experience with the ELC of Escambia, and that depth of knowledge is visible in every aspect of her work. She understands the structure, history, mission, community partnerships, and operational needs of the Coalition at a level that few others could. This long-term commitment has uniquely positioned her not only to recognize what the organization needs today, but also to anticipate its challenges and opportunities for the future.

Throughout our partnership, Dawn has demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities. She is decisive, organized, and strategically minded, but equally compassionate and deeply grounded in the needs of children, families, and educators. She guides her team with professionalism and care, and she consistently seeks solutions that improve outcomes at the system level rather than simply addressing surface-level challenges.

One of Dawn's greatest strengths is her ability to move seamlessly from vision to execution. She has led complex initiatives, strengthened community partnerships, managed challenging operational demands, and ensured that critical resources and programs remain aligned with the ELC's mission. Dawn is innovative, thoughtful, and unafraid to explore new approaches when they strengthen service delivery and measurable results.

Her professionalism and leadership presence are unmistakable, and she brings a level of dedication to the organization that cannot be taught—it has been earned through years of experience, growth, and stewardship. Dawn understands not only how the Coalition works, but why the work matters. That is the most valuable kind of leadership a mission-driven organization can have.

I strongly and enthusiastically support Dawn Engel as the next Executive Director of the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County. She has proven herself ready to lead, ready to elevate the organization's impact, and ready to guide its future with the same dedication and integrity she has demonstrated throughout her career.

Sincerely,

Gina Gates
Regional Partnerships Director
LENA

November 20, 2025

Board of Directors of The Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
1720 W Fairfield Drive Suite 100/400
Pensacola, Florida 32501

Dear Board of Directors,

I am honored to provide this letter of recommendation for Dawn Engel, who currently serves as the Operations Director for the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County. I have had the privilege of collaborating with Dawn for nearly a decade, and during this time, she has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership, unwavering commitment, and genuine care for the early learning community she serves.

Dawn is incredibly responsive and reliable; qualities that have made our partnership both effective and enjoyable. She brings dedication and integrity to every aspect of her work, always advocating for the providers in Escambia County and ensuring they have access to the highest-quality resources available. Her commitment to improving the development and learning experiences of young children in the county is evident in every decision she makes.

One of Dawn's standout strengths is her deep understanding of guidance from the Florida Division of Early Learning (DEL). She stays well-informed, interprets updates with clarity, and ensures her team and providers can maximize the resources, tools, and opportunities available to them. Her ability to apply DEL guidance thoughtfully and strategically is a significant asset to the Coalition and the entire early childhood community in Escambia County.

Based on my long-standing professional experience with Dawn, I believe she is more than qualified for the Executive Director role. Her leadership skills, her deep operational knowledge, and her unwavering dedication to providers and families make her uniquely prepared to guide the Coalition into its next chapter. I am genuinely excited to see where she would take the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County and how she will continue to strengthen, grow, and support the provider community as its new leader.

It has truly been a pleasure to work with Dawn over the years. Her professionalism, knowledge, and commitment to quality early learning make her an exceptional leader and a trusted partner. I recommend her with the highest confidence and without hesitation.

Sincerely,
Paolo Risco
Business Development Manager
Teaching Strategies LLC.

November 24, 2025

To whom it may concern:

I am pleased to recommend Dawn Engel for Executive Director of the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County. I have been employed with the Florida Department of Education for the past 24 years and have had the pleasure of working with Ms. Engel since 2016. We first began our work together when I was employed with the Division of Early Learning in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Unit from 2016- 2020 and have continued our working relationship through the years as I am now the Director of Early Learning Fraud Prevention in the Office of Inspector General.

Throughout our time working together Ms. Engel has demonstrated consistent leadership, communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills. She and her team are responsible for providing suspected fraud cases to my office in quick and efficient manner. Ms. Engel goes above and beyond when collecting information to build a case to move towards prosecution.

I am confident that with Ms. Engels 16 years of experience and her institutional knowledge of being employed at the ELC of Escambia County as the Operations Director, Program Integrity Director, Executive Assistance, Professional Development Assistant and being an Owner of a Family Day Care Home, she is well experienced to become the next Executive Director for the ELC of Escambia County.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions 850 339 7032.


Shana Beiro

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the status of my application for the Executive Director position at the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County. I applied for this position with 16 years of dedicated service to the Coalition, including ten years in a director role and the past five years serving as the Executive Director's primary support as I was being trained to eventually move into this role upon his retirement.

On November 14, 2025, I interviewed as one of the top three candidates selected after two rounds of advertising. However, the day before my interview, I sat in the Coalition's board meeting and listened as my integrity was questioned based on what was or was not included in my resume and application. It was deeply disheartening to hear it implied that I had been deceitful—especially after the many years of unwavering commitment I have given to this organization.

I have always loved my work, our employees, our partners, early childhood educators, vendors, DEL staff, and the Executive Directors statewide who have supported and guided me throughout my career. Over the past several days, I have been meeting with DEL staff and Executive Directors from across Florida, all of whom are aware of Bruce's retirement. When they asked how the process was going, I shared that I had completed my interview and explained the hurdle I faced. Every one of them emphasized that, in this line of work, extensive experience unquestionably outweighs formal education—especially 16 years of coalition-specific experience.

As the expected decision timeline moved from Monday to Tuesday with no update, my concern grew. Ultimately, I learned through a private Facebook message what was happening behind the scenes. I responded professionally and wished the individual's friend good luck, but it was still disheartening to learn this news informally rather than through proper communication.

Before entering a full day of training, I want to make it clear that no one has coached or influenced me in writing this letter. I reviewed the Executive Director job description myself and highlighted every area in which I possess direct experience or demonstrated knowledge. Under "Minimum Qualifications," item #3 states: *"Professional or nonprofessional experience as described above can substitute on a year-for-year basis for the required college education."* A typical path to a master's degree takes approximately six years. I have 16 years of direct experience at the Coalition—nearly triple the required educational equivalency.

As I stated in my interview, while I did not take the traditional academic route, I bring extensive hands-on experience in every aspect of Coalition operations. An early childhood degree cannot fully prepare someone for the realities of this work—the constant policy changes, annual rule updates, contract shifts, state mandates, audits, monitoring cycles, and system transitions. These are things you can learn only through years of direct involvement.

I want to be clear: my integrity should not be questioned based on the absence of education on my resume. I do not have a degree—therefore, I did not list one. In preparing my application, I

intentionally focused on my skills, experience, and qualifications, as many professional resume resources recommend. My experience is what qualifies me for this role.

I began my career as a family child care home owner before joining the Coalition 16 years ago. I understand the industry deeply—its rules, regulations, and Florida statutes. I know our Coalition, our employees, and our mission. I am the person staff from multiple departments come to with questions about rules, policies, or clarifications. I have consistently advanced in my career through dedication, knowledge, and performance.

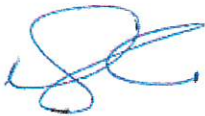
Our agency's mission is to help families achieve economic self-sufficiency, prepare children for school, and support them in reaching their full potential. I was once a young single mother who relied on this very system. I am living proof that people can rise above challenges and build a successful future without a traditional educational path. I devoted my career to the same system that once supported me—and I have excelled in it.

As an applicant and, more importantly, a 16-year employee who has given everything to this organization, I believe I deserve timely and transparent communication regarding the hiring decision. Five days with no update has been discouraging and has left me feeling undervalued.

I ask the Board to genuinely reflect on this situation. Is it our intention—as an agency that champions opportunity and resilience—to send a message to the families we serve that despite their determination, their growth, and their commitment, they will still be limited simply because they did not follow a traditional educational path?

Thank you for your time, consideration, and fairness in evaluating this matter.

Sincerely,



Dawn Engel



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

POSITION: Executive Director
REPORTS TO: Escambia County School Readiness Coalition Board of Directors
SALARY: \$90,000 - \$115,000 **FLSA:** Exempt

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This is an administrative and managerial position responsible for ensuring that all School Readiness and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs, services and operations are aligned with the Coalition's mission and with policy decisions approved by the Coalition, and all regulatory requirements of the Department of Education's Division of Early Learning.

ESSENTIAL JOB FUNCTIONS

1. Maintain and safeguard the corporations 501(c)(3) IRS standing.
2. Uphold Coalition established By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation.
3. Maintain various types of insurance coverage, including liability, D&O, cyber and workman's compensation, per Board directives and in accordance with contractual agreements with outside funding sources.
4. Monitor and provides assurances that all corporate taxes and tax returns are filed accurately.
5. Develop, implement and administer a comprehensive service delivery plan for programs funded by the state of Florida intended to enhance all children's readiness to enter kindergarten and/or participate in Voluntary Pre-kindergarten program.
6. Communicate regularly with the Division of Early Learning through conference calls, phone calls, e-mails, meeting attendance, etc.
7. Provide policy and guidance to the Coalition Executive Committee, Finance Committee, and Board of Directors.
8. Responsible for the hiring and supervising of staff.
9. Provides leadership, supervision and direction to all staff to ensure that the mission and goals of the Coalition are effectively carried out and manages the human resources of the organization according to agency personnel policies.
10. Prepare and recommend an annual budget to the Coalition to ensure proper allocation of cost, reasonable and necessary expenses and efficient use of resources consistent with state guidelines.
11. Responsible for the oversight of fiscal accounting to ensure compliance with state and federal requirements.
12. Identify improvements and adjustments needed to ensure Coalition program effectiveness and efficiency.
13. Provide guidance and assistance and serve as a liaison for overall early education and care program coordination.
14. Stay knowledgeable about legislative issues and provides direction and technical assistance to the Coalition; educating, training, and communicating with the Board, staff, providers and partners.
15. Assist the Coalition in the identification and recruitment of new board members.
16. Represent the Coalition at state and community workgroups and task forces in early learning and care.
17. Be the public-facing voice of the Coalition in matters of advocacy, community education media relations, and community partnership development.



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

18. Establish and identify additional funding streams through public and private sources to support the Coalition's strategic initiatives.
19. **Other duties as assigned by the Coalition.**

Please Note: These essential job functions are not to be construed as a complete statement of all duties performed. Employees may be required to perform other job-related marginal duties as required.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

1. A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and five years of professional experience in program management, program planning, program research and evaluation.
2. A master's degree from an accredited college or university can substitute for one year of required experience.
3. **Professional or nonprofessional experience as described above can substitute on a year-for-year basis for the required college education.**
4. Must possess valid Florida driver's license with no record of criminal driving offense or license suspension for point accumulation.
5. Ability to use computer systems/software; Microsoft Office Suite (2021 or higher) and general office equipment.
6. Must successfully complete a Level II background check prior to employment.
7. Must be available to work a flexible schedule to accommodate late afternoon or evening meetings.
8. Out-of-town travel may be required

ESSENTIAL SKILLS REQUIRED

- Leadership abilities of initiative and commitment, self-motivated, prepares thoroughly and respects process.
- Expertise in hiring, supervising and managing staff; can identify staff developmental needs.
- Ability to think analytically and strategically, prioritize and focus on the Coalition's mission in fluid, often complex circumstances.
- Builds effective relationships and has experience with boards.
- Knowledge of methods of compiling, organizing and analyzing data.
- Ability to develop policies, procedures, standards and rules.
- Ability to review and evaluate programs and community partnerships with an eye toward the strategic goals and needs of the Coalition.
- Ability to establish and maintain a liaison with other agencies.
- Ability to plan, organize and coordinate multiple work assignments.
- Ability to communicate (in oral and written format) effectively.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with others.
- Knowledge of early education and care is beneficial.
- Effective records management practices.
- Extensive knowledge of budget preparation and reporting.
- Possess problem solving techniques.



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

ESSENTIAL PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

Frequently sit, stand, walk, twist at the waist, and routinely operate a computer keyboard, telephone, copier and fax machine. Able to operate an automobile. Medium (less than 50 pounds) lifting occasionally required.

Reasonable accommodation will be made for otherwise qualified individuals with a disability.