

**Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
Board Meeting Minutes
December 2, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
Chair: Vacant**

Members in Attendance

Roger Thompson	Bambi Sealy	Tammy Hicks
Shacondra Primm	Deborah Tucker	Cindy Kirk
Brian Wyer	Tarae Donaldson	Mary Ann Bickerstaff
Lindsey Cannon	Doug Brown	Reginald Dogan
Melissa Sidoti	Mona Jackson	

Members Absent

Edna Williams	Deanna Oleske	Paul Fetsko
Craig Jones		

Public in Attendance

Marcus McBride

Staff in Attendance

Bruce Watson	Nina Daniels	Tom Porter
Melissa Jennings	Renee Maxwell	

I. Welcome and Introduction

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. The meeting was called to order by the Vice Chair, Ms. Hicks.

II. Public Comments

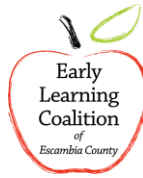
- a. None.

III. Chair Opening Comments

- a. **Approval of Consent Agenda: Meeting Agenda and Minutes of November 13, 2025,**
Upon a motion made by Mr. Thompson and seconded by Ms. Bickerstaff, the Meeting Agenda and Minutes of November 13, 2025, were approved without objection.

IV. ED Selection/Hiring Process

- a. **Executive Director Resignation Letter Amendment dated November 25, 2025**
Mr. Watson presented an amended letter of resignation to the Board. Mr. Watson made changes to his original letter of resignation submitted in July after it was made clear at the November 2025 Board meeting that the Board required Mr. Watson to submit definitive dates for his last day of work and last day of employment. Per the amended letter, the date for Mr. Watson's last day of work is December 23, 2025, and the date for his last day of employment is February 15,



2026. For reference, Mr. Watson included an excerpt from the Personnel Policy and Procedure Manual regarding final PTO for Coalition employees with ten or more years of service.

b. Executive Director Comments on Coalition Status

Mr. Watson mentioned to the Board about the staff having a lot of uncertainty regarding the fact that it has been known since July 2025 that Mr. Watson was resigning, and there has been no decision made on a replacement as of December 2025.

Mr. Watson sent Mrs. Engel to attend the quarterly DEL/ED meeting in Orlando last month in his place. Mr. Watson got feedback from these people attending these meetings and also had conversations with some of the other Coalition Executive Directors about the status of Mrs. Engel. They were surprised to learn that given the opportunity the Board did not hire from within and instead a selection committee was formed.

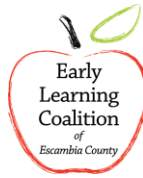
Mr. Watson stated that he has issues with the selection process going back to the August 2025 Board meeting when it was announced that he was resigning and made the recommendation to hire Ms. Engel. The Board did not have any discussion on the merits of the recommendation to hire Ms. Engel for the position up front. The Board went straight from a member making a motion to form a Selection Committee, and after the motion was seconded, immediately put the motion to a vote. The usual step of asking the Board if there was any discussion was not taken.

Mr. Watson stated that he was also not invited to the first and only meeting of the Selection Committee. He believes he was prohibited from attending because he had made a recommendation for someone to be appointed directly and had therefore displayed a bias. Mr. Watson stated that he also felt that some people decided that this somehow disqualified him from participating in the hiring process. Mr. Watson was permitted to attend meetings after the Board tried to assign tasks to the Administrative Aide that was above the scope of her duties and assigned responsibilities.

Mr. Watson stated that at the meetings of the Hiring Committee he attempted to offer guidance and information but some of the committee members made snide comments and questioned the accuracy of his comments. Mr. Watson said that he felt disrespected and that his input was disregarded by the Hiring Committee.

Mr. Watson continued by saying that the only reason Ms. Engel is not being considered for the position is due to her not having a college degree. The Coalition's Job Description clearly states that the position does not require a college degree if applicant has the job experience to compensate for it. Ms. Engel has 16 years of experience at the Coalition and has been trained on most of the Executive Director's duties.

c. Board Discussion and Decision Regarding Next Steps in Selection/Hiring Process



Mr. Thompson stated that after lots of thought since the last meeting, he feels that the best thing for the Coalition at this point is to offer the position to Ms. Engel. Mr. Thompson went on to state that Ms. Engel meets the qualifications and scored high in the interview process.

The members of the Hiring Committee gave a recap of the interviews and stated that both candidates that were interviewed scored close to each other and both candidates interviewed well. The Committee was unable to agree on a candidate to recommend to the Board for the position.

Ms. Sidoti spoke about her experience of hiring an Executive Director at Opening Doors. Ms. Sidoti brought up the idea of having an Interim Executive Director until an Executive Director can be found.

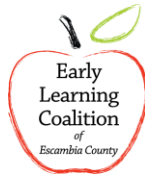
Mr. Brown asked if there was a recommendation from the Hiring Committee. Ms. Cannon responded with it was recommended to bring the issue back to the Board due to the Hiring Committee not being able to give a definitive yes to either candidate. Ms. Cannon stated that the Hiring Committee is looking for guidance from the whole Board.

Mr. Thompson made a motion to select Ms. Engel as the Executive Director with a 90-day probationary period. Mr. Wyer seconded the motion. The motion was discussed and it was agreed to remove the 90-day probationary period from the motion. Mr. Thompson made an amended motion to select Ms. Engel as the Executive Director. Mr. Wyer seconded the motion. The motion was put to a roll call vote. There were 14 Board members in attendance. 4 members were absent. The results of the vote were: 6 members voted Yes; 7 members voted No; and 1 member Abstained. The motion was not approved.

The Board then discussed offering Ms. Engel the position of Interim Executive Director. Mr. Watson stated that Ms. Engel was unable to be at this meeting and he is not sure if she would be willing to accept the position.

Mr. Brown made the motion to appoint Ms. Engel as Interim Executive Director for a period TBD while the Hiring Committee finds a replacement, and at the same time the Board takes immediate action to identify signers on all accounts to ensure there is continuity. Ms. Donaldson seconded the motion. The motion was put to a roll call vote. The motion passed unanimously.

After discussions, it was decided that Mr. Thompson would offer Ms. Engel the position on behalf of the Board. A motion was made by Ms. Hicks and seconded by Ms. Donaldson to have Mr. Thompson offer Ms. Engel the Interim Executive Director position. Mr. Thompson asked to have another Board member be with him when he presents the offer to Ms. Engel. Mr. Watson reminded the Board the if two or more Board members come together, it would have to be a public stated meeting. Mr. Thompson asked Mr. Watson if he would prepare the offer letter to be given to Ms. Engel. Mr. Watson said yes, he would prepare the letter.



It was agreed to have an EXCOM meeting on December 8, 2025 to offer Ms. Engel the offer of being the Interim Executive Director.

The discussion led to talks about the pay increase for the Interim Executive Director position.

Mr. Watson stated what Ms. Engel currently makes and stated what he currently makes.

Mr. Watson said, “How much are you going to make it worth her time and effort to hold down a position that quite frankly you’re saying she wasn’t good enough to be given outright, but you want her to hold down the fort until you pick somebody else.”

Ms. Sidoti replied, “I don’t think that was what the Board was saying.”

Ms. Jackson stated, “We need to stop that and be professional and move on.”

Mr. Watson replied, “I’m not a member of the Board. What are you going to do, throw me out of the room. I’ll be happy to leave.”

Ms. Sidoti made the motion to give Ms. Engel a 10% salary increase for the Interim Executive Director position. Mr. Brown seconded the motion. The motion was approved without objection.

Mr. Watson said, “For the record, Executive Director feels like his inputs are no longer warranted. I’m leaving the room. Y’all tell me what you want me to do when you are done.”

Before Mr. Watson left the room, Mr. Brown asked if the staff in attendance were going to stay.

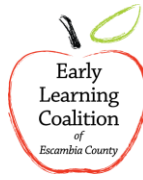
Mr. Watson replied that the staff were there to listen and if the Board does not want them to stay, then the Board can ask them to leave.

After a brief moment, Mr. Brown stated that he wanted to be on record that the Executive Director deemed his input was not needed and he left the room. Mr. Brown went on to say that he feels that Mr. Watson’s behavior was completely inappropriate and unprofessional. Ms. Jackson agreed with Mr. Brown and said she felt like the Board was being bullied. Ms. Hicks added that Mr. Watson is human and cares deeply about this company and its’ people. He just wants to ensure that what is done is what is best for the Coalition.

Mr. Brown also wanted on record that to receive recommendation letters of support for a candidate for a position that is not posted creates bias.

A discussion regarding needing to get an Interim Board Chair was started. The Board discussed needing an Interim Board Chair to be able to have someone who would have the authority to sign checks and any other forms or contracts that might need to be signed. The Board asked the Vice Chair, Ms. Hicks, if she would be willing to be the Interim Board Chair until a permanent Board Chair can be found. She agreed to accept the position. Mr. Brown made the motion to appoint Ms. Hicks as the Interim Board Chair until a permanent Board Chair can be found. Mr. Thompson seconded the motion. The motion to make Ms. Hicks the Interim Board Chair was approved without objection.

The members of the Hiring Committee agreed to meet on December 9, 2025, at 1:30pm.



V. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43 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