



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

Executive/Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
December 8, 2025, 9:30 a.m.

Members Present

Tammy Hicks (Interim Chair) Roger Thompson Craig Jones

Members Absent

Mona Jackson

Staff

Bruce Watson Nina Daniels Dawn Engel Tom Porter
Melissa Jennings

Public

None

I. Welcome and Introductions

Notification of the Executive Finance Committee Meeting scheduled for December 8, 2025, was sent to the Pensacola News Journal, and posted to the Coalition Public Calendar Board on December 2, 2025. The meeting was called to order by Ms. Hicks.

II. Public Comments

None.

III. Discussion

Mr. Thompson started the meeting by apologizing to Ms. Engel for any comments made at Board meetings about her that might have been offensive.

Mr. Thompson stated that as directed by the Board, he was presenting an offer to Ms. Engel to be the Interim Executive Director until a decision is made on Mr. Watson's replacement. The Interim Executive Director position would come with a 10% increase in annual salary until the Executive Director is hired. This would entail conducting a turnover with Mr. Watson and then possibly conducting a turnover with the new Executive Director if someone other than Ms. Engel is selected. Additionally, Ms. Engel would also continue to perform the duties of her current position as Operations Director.

Ms. Hicks stated that the Hiring Committee was not comfortable recommending to the Board either of the two candidates that were interviewed. The Hiring Committee, and the Board, feel that more candidates need to be looked at and more interviews need to be conducted. She also said that the Board is considering doing a "meet and greet" with the finalists before a final decision is made.



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IV. Response

Ms. Engel responded that she had listened to the audio of December's Board meeting.

Ms. Engel stated that she would take the position, but with the following stipulations.

1. An 11.5% increase instead of the 10% that was proposed.
2. If the position is given to another candidate, she would retain the 11.5% pay increase permanently. This is because training the incoming Executive Director will not be a one and done event. It will require extensive interaction over many months.
3. If the position is offered permanently, a \$11,000.00 increase in annual salary in addition to the 11.5% offered for the Interim position.
4. Due to the lack of time remaining for there to be a proper turnover before Mr. Watson's last day of work, Mr. Watson needs to be permitted to come off PTO to help in the transition. Mr. Watson's participation in the transition is necessary. Mr. Watson agreed that with the Board's approval he will make himself available as needed.

V. Further Discussion

Ms. Engel also addressed some of the comments that were made during the December 2025 Board meeting. The first comment was regarding potential bias in the letters of recommendation that were presented during the August 2025 Board meeting. The letters were intended to only highlight Ms. Engel's qualifications and show she had support from within the company. This was done to better inform the Board as they discussed the options to either hire from within or form a selection committee. Ms. Engel stated that to date, she has not seen any of the letters.

Mr. Watson stated that at the November 2025 Board meeting he was going to present an amended resignation letter that that was different from the one given to the board in December. In this letter, Mr. Watson offered to come off PTO as needed to help with the transition. However, when he stated this as an option one Board member stated that Mr. Watson had to have hard-end dates for his last day of work and last day of PTO. Because no other Board members objected or offered to discuss the matter further, Mr. Watson took this as something the Board required and did not present the letter.

VI. Recommendation

The EXCOM unanimously agreed to take Ms. Engel's counterproposal to the Board for approval, as well as approval to have Ms. Watson assist with the transition, as needed. Mr. Watson was directed to schedule a special Board meeting for the week of December 15-19, 2025.

VII. Additional Discussions

It was discussed that having Ms. Engel added to the bank account will need to go to the Board for approval. This item will be added to the agenda of the next Board meeting.



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VIII. Adjourn: The Meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Next Meeting: January 22, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at the Early Learning Coalition Office, 1720 West Fairfield Dr., Suite 100/400, Pensacola, Florida 32501