

**Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County
Board Meeting Minutes
January 6, 2026, 10:30 a.m.
Interim Chair: Tammy Hicks**

Members in Attendance

Roger Thompson	Bambi Sealy	Tammy Hicks
Shaondra Primm	Deborah Tucker	Brian Wyer
Tarae Donaldson	Mary Ann Bickerstaff	Lindsey Cannon
Doug Brown	Melissa Sidoti	Mona Jackson
Craig Jones	Paul Fetsko	

Members Absent

Edna Williams	Deanna Oleske	Cindy Kirk
Reginald Dogan		

Public in Attendance

Kathy McKechnie	Melissa Stankard	Stephanie Bosso
Brooke Watkins	Marcus McBride	

Staff in Attendance

Bruce Watson	Dawn Engel	Tom Porter
Melissa Jennings	Nina Daniels	Stephanie Richardson
Jase Palmer	Mary Palmer	Angela Mitchell
Paula Rollins	Natasha Brantley	Baileigh Bosso
Misty Lambeth	Candace Salter	Theresa Hoang
Millie Fre	Clay Gillis	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 January 5, 2026, and posted to the Coalition Public Calendar Board. The meeting was called to order by the Interim Chair, Ms. Hicks.

II. Public Comments

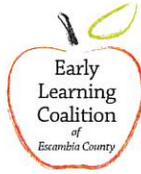
a. Ms. Melissa Stankard

Ms. Stankard addressed the Board expressing her concerns about how the Board is handling the hiring process of Executive Director position. Ms. Stankard also spoke on behalf of many staff members to recommend Ms. Engel for the position of Executive Director.

b. Ms. Stephanie Bosso

Ms. Bosso addressed the Board to give her recommendation of Ms. Engel for Executive Director.

c. Ms. Kathie McKechnie



Ms. McKechnie addressed the Board to express her support for Ms. Engel to be the new Executive Director of the Coalition.

d. Ms. Brooke Watkins

Ms. Watkins addressed the Board regarding her concerns regarding the Board's hiring process of a new Executive Director. Ms. Watkins also made her recommendation of Ms. Engel for the Executive Director position.

III. Chair Opening Comments

a. Approval of Consent Agenda: Meeting Agenda, Minutes of December 2, 2025 and Minutes of December 15, 2025

Upon a motion made by Mr. Fetsko and seconded by Mr. Thompson, the Meeting Agenda, Minutes of December 2, 2025, and Minutes of December 15, 2025 were approved without objection.

IV. New Business

a. New Articles

News Articles were presented to Board. Mr. Brown wanted clarification of the relevance of the news articles.

Mr. Watson responded by saying that after the hiring committee met, Mr. Watson felt it was in the best interest of the Coalition to look into the backgrounds of all four candidates.

Mr. Brown asked Mr. Watson if that was an independent action or if it was done on behalf of the hiring committee. Mr. Watson responded, saying that it was an independent action.

Mr. Brown asked Mr. Watson what he wanted the Board to know from this information.

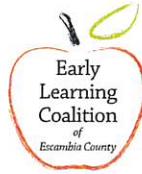
Mr. Watson replied that he thinks the hiring committee should speak for itself. The last article was added at the request of a member of the hiring committee. Mr. Watson went on to state that he believes that the new information will likely impact the hiring committee's recommendation.

b. Hiring Committee Recommendation

Ms. Cannon discussed the hiring committee's process and stated that after hours of discussion, Mr. Al Henderson was chosen as their recommendation for the Executive Director's position.

Ms. Cannon went on to say that Ms. Engel was not in the discussions for the position since the Board had already heard a motion to make her Executive Director and Ms. Engel did not receive the majority of votes to be awarded the position of the Executive Director.

Mr. Jones stated that the hiring committee asked Mr. Watson to contact Mr. Henderson to see if he was still interested in the Executive Director position. The new articles stated that Mr. Henderson had accepted a position with Escambia County and that his start date is January 12, 2026. Mr. Jones stated that as of the time of this meeting there had been no word from Mr. Henderson.



Mr. Thompspon stated that he personally feels that Ms. Engel should still be considered in the mix of candidates and that the Board should make the decision.

Mr. Watson stated that with the role the Coalition plays in the community, and with our relationship with our partner agencies, do we feel like it's the best interest of the Coalition to offer a position to somebody that the County has just hired. What will that do with our relationships with the County?

Mr. McBride wanted on record that he feels that bringing the news articles into this conversation at this point in time is dangerous. He feels that the conversation that is being had speaks of a lot of inappropriate things that may have happened in leadership and discussions.

Mr. Fetsko shared his experience of how the hiring process is done at the school board. Mr. Fetsko says the school board uses a rank order process. If the top candidate does not accept the open position, then you offer the position to the next candidate in rank order.

Mr. Brown made a motion for the Hiring Committee to provide the Rank Order. The motion was seconded by Ms. Sidoti.

The Hiring Committee provided the rank order:

1. Al Henderson
2. Dawn Engel
3. Michelle Forrest

Ms. Maxwell stated for the record that she has been present at all of the hiring committee meetings and shared that Ms. Engel had scored highest overall on the resume reviews.

Mr. Thompson responded that the overall score after the resume reviews and interviews, Mr. Henderson did score the highest with Ms. Engel coming in second.

The motion was put to a roll call vote. 14 members of the board were present, and 4 members of the board were absent.

13 members voted in favor

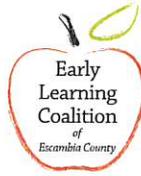
1 member Abstained

The motion to accept the Rank Order made by the Hiring Committee was passed.

Ms. Primm made a motion to implement a timeframe of (3) business days on receiving a response from each candidate that the job offer is extended to. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brown. The motion passed without objection.

Ms. Hicks requested that the hiring committee draft the tentative offer letter that she will need to send to Mr. Henderson.

Ms. Donaldson stated that she can provide a tentative offer letter template that can be used.



Ms. Cannon stated that the Board needs to decide what salary they want to offer Mr. Henderson. Ms. Cannon went on to state that Mr. Henderson will have to come in and do a lot of repair work and relationship building.

Ms. Engel asked Ms. Cannon to clarify what repairs needed to be done.

Ms. Cannon replied, there will be repairs needed amongst the staff.

Conversation turned back to whether Mr. Henderson was still interested in the position.

Ms. Cannon offered to call Mr. Henderson while the meeting was still going on, to ask if he was still interested in the position.

Ms. Cannon left the room to make the call to Mr. Henderson. Notation of what was said in the conversation is not available.

After a brief pause, Ms. Cannon returned to the meeting and stated that Mr. Henderson said that he was still interested in the job and that he would not have applied if he was not interested. Ms. Cannon stated that Mr. Henderson stated that the Coalition is a better fit for him.

V. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 11:39 a.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 Secretary Signature:



Date: