



SUMMER NEWSLETTER

www.elcofswfl.org

239-935-6100

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A Message From Our CEO



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Summer in Southwest Florida offers more than sunshine and outdoor fun - it provides countless opportunities for learning, growth, and connection. Whether it's counting seashells at the beach, reading a book together at bedtime, or cooking a meal as a family, everyday routines can help young children build the skills they need for school and beyond.

At the Early Learning Coalition, we continue to work alongside our partners to make early learning more accessible, equitable, and engaging. Through the Ready Together Alliance, we're deepening our collaboration with local organizations and school districts to expand access to high-quality early education. We're especially excited about the potential expansion of School Readiness programs within Lee County Schools, which would allow more families to access care in familiar, trusted environments.

We are also preparing for the start of Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) programs in August. This is an exciting milestone for thousands of 4-year-olds across our region. If your child is registered, now is the perfect time to talk, play, and read together to support a confident start to the school year.

Here are five simple ways families can support summer learning at home:

- Talk about colors, shapes, and numbers during everyday activities like shopping or playing outside.
- Read aloud every day, even for just a few minutes.

- Encourage pretend play, puzzles, drawing, and other hands-on experiences.
- Let children help with cooking or sorting tasks - they're full of learning moments.
- Visit your local library and explore books together.

Our newly refreshed logo and branding reflect this moment of growth and optimism. The open book represents our commitment to early literacy. The four children symbolize the diversity and promise of the families we serve across Glades, Hendry, Collier, and Lee Counties.

Whether you're a parent, provider, educator, or community member, thank you for all you do to support early childhood development. Together, we're helping children in Southwest Florida build strong foundations—this summer, and for every season ahead.

Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz
Chief Executive Officer
Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida



2nd Annual Director's Conference

June 7, 2025 marked the Early Learning Coalition of SWFL's Director's Conference - a time for Preschool Provider Directors to get together for commraderie, learning, and a dash of fun!

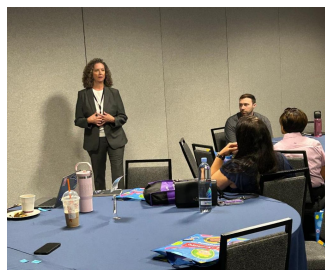
This year's theme was *Seeds of Inspiration: Growing Educators*. Chancellor of Early Learning at the Florida Department of Education, **Cari Miller** delivered the keynote address.

Directors attended trainings and information sessions in breakout meetings. Chancellor Miller mingled with attendees and listened to concerns.

The day ended with multiple raffles with classroom-themed prizes. Good times!



Chancellor Cari Miller traveled from Tallahassee to deliver the keynote and to listen to providers and staff.



Early Learning Coalition CEO, Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz takes all questions at one of the roundtable discussions.



Attendees visited the many vendor's tables during conference breaks. Breakfast & lunch were served.

Members of the Program Services and Risk Management team attended a full day training course to become **Mental Health First Aid Responders**.

They learned:

1. skills related to identifying signs and symptoms of distress/crisis related to various mental health challenges,
2. ways to discuss these issues with the affected individuals,
3. how to apply ALGEE methods (assess/approach, listen non-judgementally, give reassurance and information, encourage appropriate professional help and encourage self-help and other support strategies).

Certificates are valid for 3 years and will strengthen their CCRR skills in working with our general population and families in need. Understanding how to speak in a more compassionate and inclusive manner and also identify challenges really helps them become better Coalition team members!



In Our Community

It's always nice to get out and connect with the wonderful people and organizations in our community. Here are some of the places we visited in summer, 2025.



Our ELC was proud to attend the Cultivando Para Nosotros Festival located at the Immokalee **Pioneer Museum** at Roberts Ranch. The festival celebrated food, gardening and community - and had a plant-based theme. Children colored our giant "garden" mural while parents learned about Prekindergarten programs.



Our ELC attended Books, Blocks & Balls events June 11, 18 and 19 at library locations within Lee County. These **Healthy Start SWFL** Developmental Screenings put parents and their children together for play-based learning activities. Parents can also connect with community resources.

August: Tax Free School Supplies

The 2025-2026 school year is set to begin, and Florida residents can purchase school supplies tax-free in the month of August.

Items that are exempt from sales tax include school supplies selling for \$50 or less; clothing, footwear and accessories selling for \$100 or less, and computers and related accessories selling for \$1,500 or less.

The tax holiday runs August 1 through August 30.
What qualifies for exemption? [See the list](#)



Wrap-Up

June 30, 2025 marked the end of our fiscal year, and with it, an opportunity to reflect back and to plan ahead. Staff were asked to evaluate how we served our mission, and what we wanted to accomplish going forward. We made time for team-building! "Get to Know You Bingo" and "Two Truths and a Lie" helped staff connect and have a little fun, too. To top it off, staff was treated to an end-of-fiscal-year lunch - courtesy of our Board of Directors!



Board Member Laura Bright expresses the board's appreciation for all we do.



Staff members received certificates marking their years of service at our coalition.



Good Videos

Information is just a click away on our YouTube channel. It's full of information about the [services offered](#) at the Early Learning Coalition of SWFL. There are parent tips for making the most of time together with your child. Check out the Early Learning Coalition [YouTube channel](#)

Storm Prep

It's been a wild few years for named storms/hurricanes. We've learned it makes sense to be prepared. Do you wish there was a resource you could access when the power goes out?

Print-ahead [Storm Preparedness Response sheets](#) from the [Florida Division of Emergency Management](#) are good things to add to your emergency kit.



Here you will find (in English, Spanish & Creole) how-to's on creating safe drinking water, electrical and carbon monoxide safety procedures, and flood responses. Be safe, be prepared.

MarcoPolo Learning

We're so excited by MarcoPolo learning modules for families that we made our access code available for anyone to use. Check out the 850 videos and 3,000 games that makes learning with your child fun!

Be our guest! [Use Code 31827](#)
[MarcoPolo Learning](#)



Get your MarcoPolo [Summer Choice Board!](#)

An advertisement for the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida. It features a yellow background with a cartoon girl and the text "LOOKING FOR AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE? We can help! We get it! Child Care can be expensive, but we're here to help with the basics." Below this is a list of bullet points: "Do you qualify for reduced rates? Let's find out!", "Find a center near your work or home? Let's do it!", and "Special needs? We can help with that, too". At the bottom is the Early Learning Coalition logo and the text "Call or visit: www.elcofswfl.org | 239-935-6100".

School Readiness

Florida's School Readiness Programs can help ease the burden of child care costs for families that qualify. The Early Learning Coalition of SWFL can assist in submitting your application through the Florida Early Learning [Family Portal](#). Make an appointment, or stop by our offices to see if your family can take advantage of this program. [Information about School Readiness](#)



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