



**Early
Learning
Coalition**
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

**2675 Winkler Avenue, Suite 300
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Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors of Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida.

July 28th, 2026

Time and Place of Meeting

A meeting of the Review Committee of the Board of Directors of the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida was held remotely on July 28, 2026, commencing at approximately 4:00 pm EDT via Microsoft Teams.

Call to Order; Roll Call

The following directors, constituting a quorum, were present in person or by teleconference:

- Laura Bright, Committee Chairperson
- Jamie Merchant
- Dr. Derek Burkholder
- Rebecca Sandholdt

Others present:

- Robert Burandt, Esquire
- Evelyn Monteagudo, Owner, Kid's World Preschool 1 & 2
- Terri Ferreira, FPR-Steno, Veritext, Court Reporter

Coalition Representatives:

- David Kerem, Esquire
- Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz
- Richard Cocchieri

Presiding Officer

Laura Bright presided as Chair of the meeting; A quorum of the Board being present, Laura Bright called the meeting to order at approximately 4:00pm EDT.

Introductions

All participants were provided the opportunity to introduce themselves. No formal action was taken or required.



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Review Hearing Procedures

Laura Bright explained that the matter was a review hearing concerning the Coalition's determination not to renew Kid's World Preschool 1 & 2's School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten contracts for the 2026-2027 program year. The Chair clarified that the proceeding was a contract review hearing and not an appeal hearing under the Coalition's general appeals process or a trial.

The Chair reviewed the purpose and scope of the hearing, virtual meeting protocols, expectations for professional conduct, and the order of proceedings. The provider and the Coalition were each allotted up to 15 minutes for their respective presentations, followed by committee questions, brief responses or clarifications at the Chair's discretion, public deliberation, and committee action.

The Chair advised that the Committee could consider information relevant to the Coalition's contracting determination, including provider performance and compliance history, fiscal accountability, prior recoupment matters, responsiveness to Coalition and oversight requests, and other relevant contractual, operational, and programmatic considerations.

The Chair accepted into the hearing record additional materials submitted by the provider on July 24, 2026, after the established submission deadline. The Chair noted that some of the materials appeared duplicative and that acceptance into the record did not constitute a determination regarding their relevance, accuracy, or evidentiary weight.

Because portions of the additional materials concerned payment and recoupment matters, the Chair requested that Chief Financial Officer Richard Cocchieri remain available to respond to committee questions.

No formal action was taken or required.

Presentation by Kid's World Preschool 1 & 2: Attorney Robert Burandt

Attorney Robert B. Burandt presented on behalf of Kid's World Preschool 1 & 2 and administered the oath and questioned Evelyn Monteagudo concerning the Coalition's stated bases for its non-renewal determination.

The provider disputed the accuracy and characterization of several historical matters included in the Coalition's hearing materials. The provider maintained that it had paid VPK personnel the required hourly wage, complied with attendance submission requirements, employed properly approved instructors, and had not been substantiated for certain child-care allegations referenced by the Coalition.

The provider also disputed the Coalition's characterization of the 2025 complaint concerning the purchase of wraparound services as a condition of VPK enrollment. Ms. Monteagudo stated that the



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family involved initially sought wraparound services, subsequently requested the three-hour VPK program, and ultimately enrolled the child in the three-hour program.

Regarding the 2024-2025 attendance and reimbursement review, the provider stated that it repeatedly requested child-specific and date-specific information supporting the Coalition's initial recoupment calculation. The provider asserted that it did not refuse repayment but requested sufficient information to understand and verify the amount. Ms. Monteagudo stated that she ultimately submitted a cashier's check as a business decision because she believed repayment was necessary to secure renewal of the provider contracts. The payment was returned by the Coalition because the provider's accompanying correspondence conditioned the payment on execution of future contracts.

The provider further asserted that the historical matters relied upon by the Coalition had previously been addressed and that the Coalition had nevertheless renewed the provider's contracts for the 2025-2026 program year and placed the provider on a corrective-action status. The provider stated that the corrective-action period included increased monitoring and site visits and maintained that no material deficiencies were identified during that period.

The provider requested that the Committee not uphold the Coalition's non-renewal determination. The provider also expressed concern regarding the potential impact upon children, families, and employees if the contracts were not renewed.

Presentation by the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida: Attorney David Kerem

Attorney David Kerem presented on behalf of the Coalition and requested that the Committee uphold the Coalition's determination not to renew the provider's School Readiness and VPK contracts for the 2026-2027 program year.

Coalition counsel stated that the determination was based on the totality of the provider's documented contractual and compliance history rather than a single incident. The Coalition cited repeated concerns involving attendance and reimbursement inaccuracy, unresponsiveness to records requests, provider resistance to its obligations to maintain and produce records, VPK enrollment practices, instructor qualifications, prior corrective actions, and disrespectful communications with Coalition staff.

The Coalition maintained that several concerns arose through complaints or information received from parents, employees, or other external sources and were not initiated solely by Coalition personnel. Counsel emphasized the Coalition's contractual, fiduciary, and audit responsibilities when administering state and federal funds and the resulting need to verify that provider submissions and payments are adequately supported.

The Coalition demonstrated that the attendance review identified discrepancies and insufficient supporting documentation, including attendance records that had not been properly completed or



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signed. The Coalition further maintained that the provider was contractually required to summarily produce requested records and could not condition compliance upon the Coalition first identifying specific children, dates, or suspected discrepancies during an active audit.

Counsel stated that the provider's corrective-action history and subsequent conduct demonstrated an ongoing pattern rather than isolated or fully resolved events. The Coalition asserted that continued contracting would create an unacceptable operational and audit risk and require a disproportionate expenditure of Coalition staff time and resources.

The Coalition advised that non-renewal was distinct from termination or revocation and that the provider could be considered for contracting in a future program year. The Coalition also stated that it had reviewed provider capacity within the surrounding geographic area and believed other providers could accommodate affected children.

Conclusion of Review Hearing Presentations & Committee Question & Answer

At the conclusion of the presentations, Committee members were provided the opportunity to ask questions of the provider, the provider's counsel, Coalition counsel, and Coalition staff.

The Committee's questions and discussion addressed, among other matters:

- The Division of Early Learning's awareness of the matter and its oversight role;
- The attendance review and the reasons the preliminary recoupment calculation was reduced after additional documentation was reviewed;
- Whether sufficient child-specific information should have been provided to the provider following completion of the review;
- The provider's responsibility to independently reconcile payments and maintain complete attendance documentation;
- The provider's contractual obligation to produce requested records during an audit;
- Whether concerns identified during the corrective-action period were communicated and addressed promptly;
- The relationship between historical compliance matters and the 2026-2027 contracting decision;
- The outstanding recoupment balance;
- The effect of non-renewal upon children, families, and employees; and
- The availability of alternative providers in the surrounding area.

The provider was permitted to provide additional clarification and reiterated its position that prior matters had already been addressed, that it had not refused repayment, and that it had not been provided sufficient information to independently verify the final recoupment amount.

Committee Deliberation & Decision



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The Review Hearing Committee deliberated publicly based upon the information presented by the provider and the Coalition and the materials submitted for review.

Committee members discussed concerns regarding the timing and communication of certain audit findings and whether additional child-specific information should have been provided to the provider upon conclusion of the attendance review. Committee members also discussed the provider's independent responsibility to maintain complete records, reconcile payments, promptly comply with contractual records requests, and correct deficiencies following technical assistance and corrective action.

The Committee considered the provider's history of corrective action, the continuing attendance and documentation concerns, the Coalition's fiscal and contractual oversight responsibilities, the outstanding repayment obligation, and the effect of the decision upon children and families.

Dr. Derek Burkholder moved to uphold the Coalition's determination not to renew Kid's World Preschool 1 & 2's School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten contracts for the 2026-2027 program year and to require payment within 30 days of any final outstanding recoupment balance determined to be due.

Jamie Merchant seconded the motion.

Following further discussion, the motion passed by voice vote.

The Chair stated that the Committee's action had been entered into the record and that Coalition staff would issue written notice of the Committee's decision following the hearing.

Adjournment

The hearing was adjourned at approximately 5:47 pm.