

Minutes of a Meeting of the Appeals Committee of the Board of Directors of Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida.

July 21st, 2026

Time and Place of Meeting

A meeting of the Appeals Committee of the Board of Directors of the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida was held remotely on July 21st, 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
- Dr. Derek Burkholder
- Emily Budd

Coalition Staff Present:

- Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz, Chief Executive Officer
- Cheryl Carpenter, Chief of Early Childhood Education

- Brenda Griffin, Director of Early Childhood Education

Presiding Officer; Secretary

Laura Bright presided as Chair of the meeting; Melanie Stefanowicz served as secretary of the meeting and kept the minutes. 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.

Review of Hearing Procedures

The hearing procedures were reviewed. No formal action was taken or required.

Presentation | Educare Academy: Ms. Shannon Mills

Ms. Shannon Mills presented her rationale for the committee to consider and requested the Committee reject the Coalition's decision to terminate Educare Academy's School Readiness (SR) and Voluntary Prekindergarten contracts.

Presentation | Early Learning Coalition Staff

The Early Learning Coalition staff presented its rationale for terminating Educare Academy's SR and VPK contracts.

Conclusion of Appeal Hearing Presentations

At the conclusion of both presentations, the appeals committee members were provided the opportunity to ask clarifying questions of Coalition staff members and Ms. Mills

Deliberation by Appeals Committee

The Appeals Committee met to deliberate. A full discussion followed and the committee decided, based on the information presented by both the Provider and the Coalition, to uphold the Coalition's decision to terminate Educare Academy's School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten contracts.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Appeals Committee unanimously approved the Coalition's decision to terminate the providers' contracts, effective July 31, 2026.

Additionally, in accordance with the termination of the SR and VPK contracts and Due Process Procedures, the Coalition hereby upholds the revocation of Educare Academy's eligibility to deliver the SR and VPK programs. Educare Academy and Shannon Mills may be considered eligible to contract with the ELCSWFL, pending satisfactory DCF inspections, July 1, 2028. Finally, this termination decision, and the resulting term of ineligibility, encompasses Educare Academy's current affiliates, employees, and agents, to the same extent as the revocation includes Shannon Mills and that any transfer or sale of this business to a person or entity currently related to, or in any way associated with, Educare Academy's, will not serve as basis for circumventing the termination decision or avoiding the consequences of the violations that have resulted in revocation.

Hearing Adjournment

The section, Hearing Adjournment, was presented. A full discussion followed. No formal action was taken or required.

Respectfully submitted,