



EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

08.28.2026 | Program Committee

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Welcome Message from the Program Committee Chair

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the August meeting of the Program Committee.

This time of year naturally brings a sense of new beginnings as children, families, educators, and schools settle into a new school year. But in early learning, we also know that learning did not pause for the summer. Throughout our region, children continued to learn and grow through School Readiness, Summer VPK, Summer Bridge programs, and the dedicated work of our providers and community partners.

I want to recognize and thank everyone who helped make those summer learning opportunities possible, and who is now supporting children and families through the transition into a new program year. Your work helps ensure that children arrive ready to learn and that families have the support they need to succeed.

As we begin today's meeting, I look forward to hearing about the Coalition's program work, reviewing our progress, and considering how we can continue strengthening services for children, families, and early learning providers across Southwest Florida.

Thank you for being here!

Warm regards, **Bethany Quisenberry** Program Committee Chair

Welcome & Public Comment

Each public speaker shall be allowed a maximum of three minutes to speak. Prior to the Program Committee meeting, each speaker shall [complete and sign the public comment form](#), which is maintained by the Administrative Coordinator, and state whether they intend to speak on a specific topic on the agenda or a topic that is not on the agenda. If the topic is not on the agenda, the Board of Directors will not comment on the issue but may direct the CEO to contact the speaker about the issue. The CEO may contact the speaker to review or resolve the issue, or to schedule the issue at a subsequent committee meeting. General citizen participation shall not be permitted when the Board is sitting as the legislative body pursuant to 6M-9.400 of Florida State Board Rule, to hear any appeals cases, charges, or recommendations to terminate a provider or client, or otherwise acting as a quasi-judicial body.

Meeting Agenda & Adoption

Program Committee Meeting Agenda



August 28th, 2026 9:00am EDT

In person and/or virtually via Microsoft Teams

Welcome & Public Comment

Bethany Quisenberry

Meeting Agenda Adoption

Bethany Quisenberry

Meeting Minutes | Voting

Bethany Quisenberry

Program Services Department

Dr. Elizabeth McBride

Early Childhood Education Department

Brenda Griffin

Contracts and Professional Development

Brenda Griffin

THRIVE: Early Identification, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), & Child Intervention

Cheryl Carpenter

Strategic Initiatives

Cheryl Carpenter

Legislative Updates

New Business

Next Meeting Scheduled

October 30, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

Microsoft TEAMS meeting link



June 5, 2026 Meeting Minutes | Voting

Please review the minutes of the previous meeting. During the meeting you will have the opportunity to request corrections or amendments.

We will need a member to motion to approve as well as a second to the motion.

After the motion and the second, all committee members will be able to indicate their vote.



[06.05.2026] Program Committee Meeting Minutes_DRAFT.pdf



[06.05.2026] Program Committee Meeting Minutes_DRAFT.pdf

View PDF in Appendix or on [Zeck.app](#) 

 **Vote: Approval of the June 5, 2026, Meeting Minutes**

Program Services Department

Beth McBride, Chief Programs Officer

Utilization Report:

INFORMATIONAL ITEM



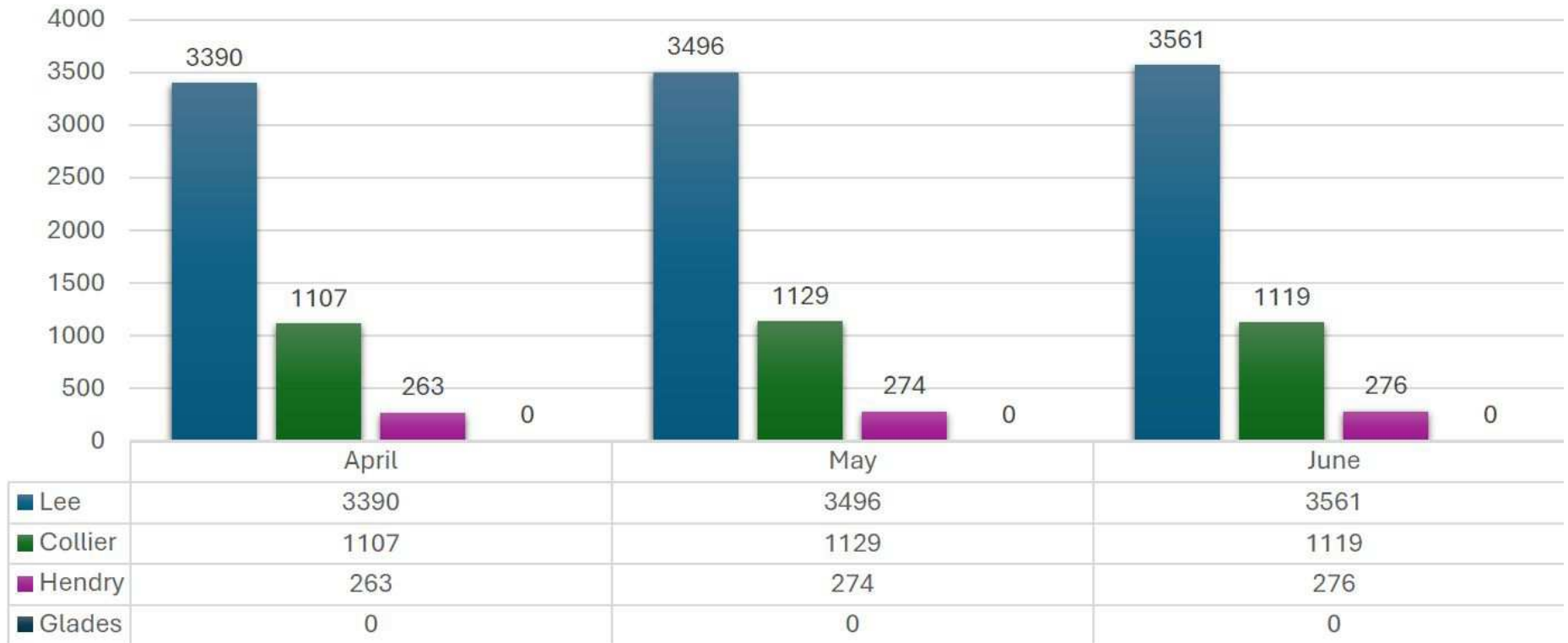
Utilization Report 8-21-26.pdf

of Children Paid in Q4 of FY (April 2026-June 2026)



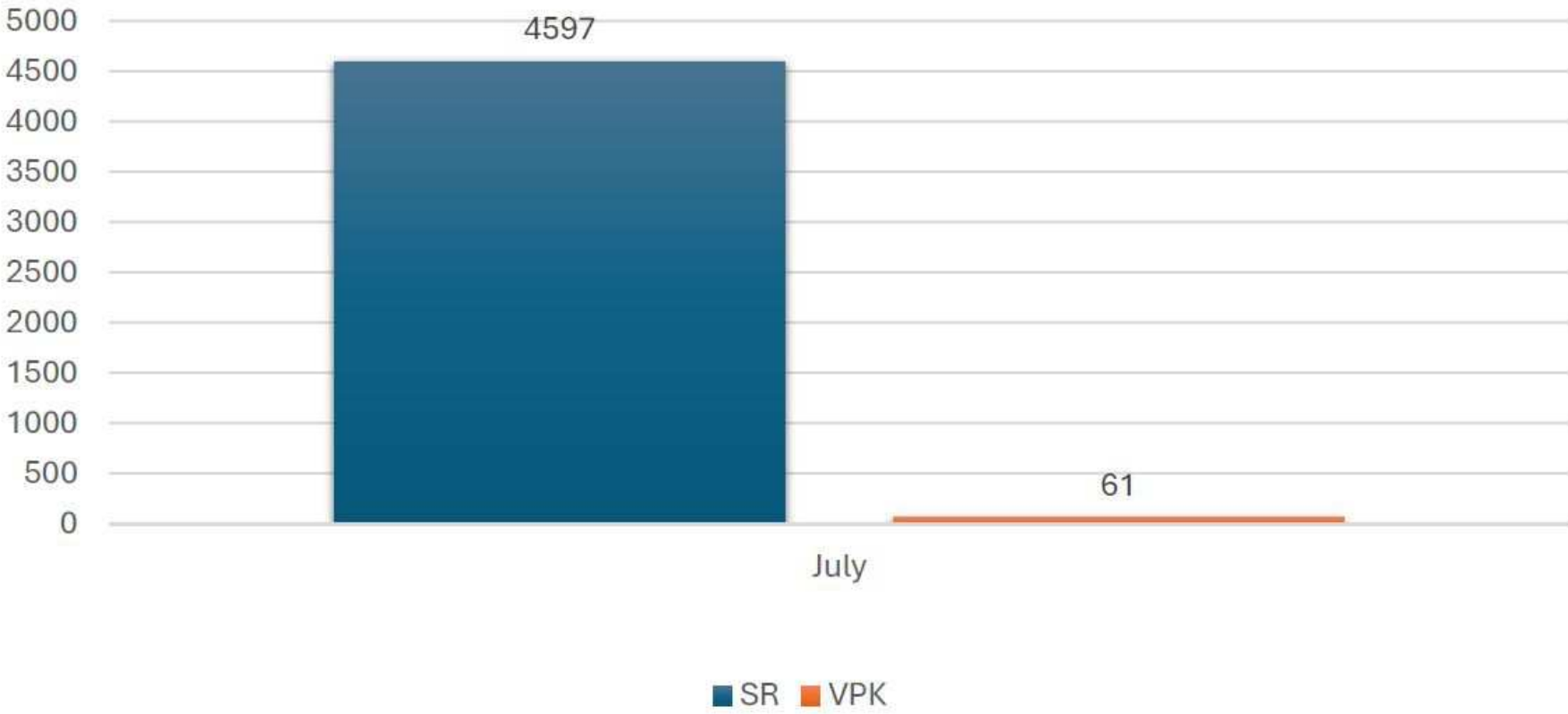


of Children Enrolled in SR in Q4 of FY (April 2026-June 2026) by Provider County



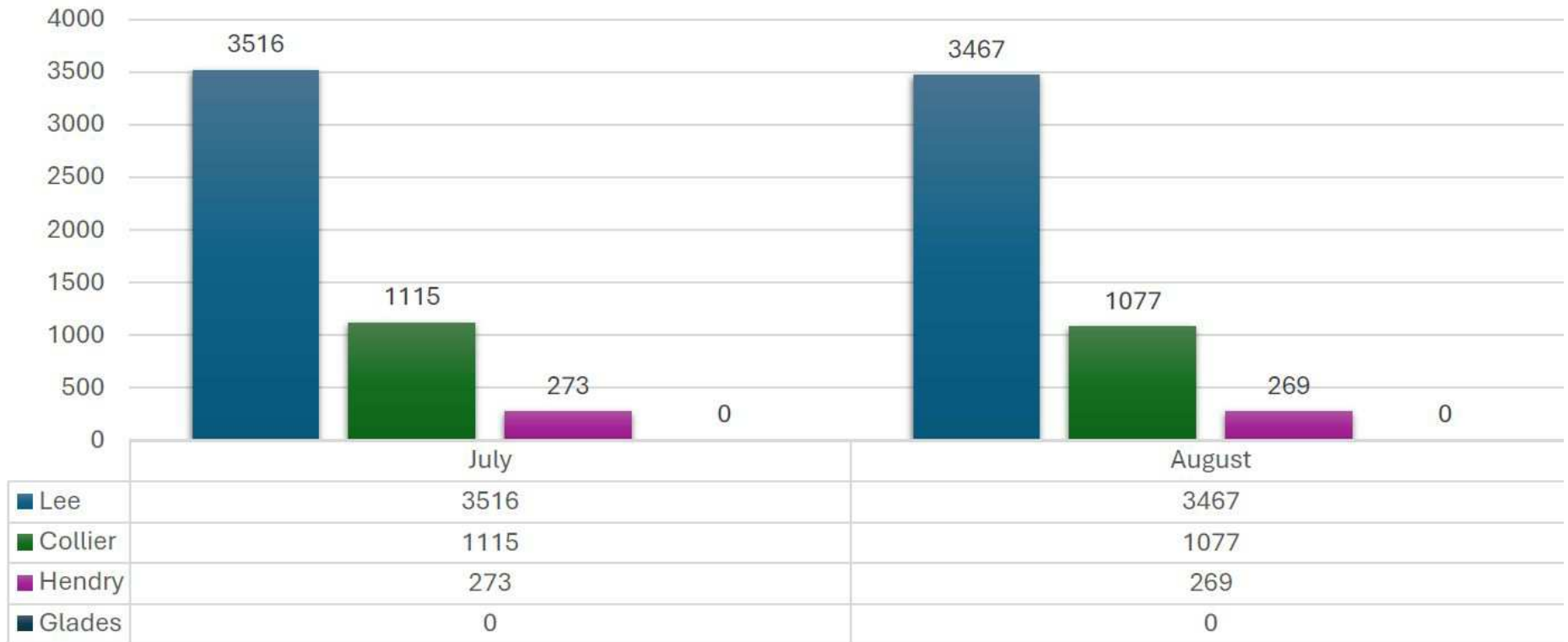
of Children Paid YTD (July 1st, 2026 – August 21st, 2026)

(August data not available yet)



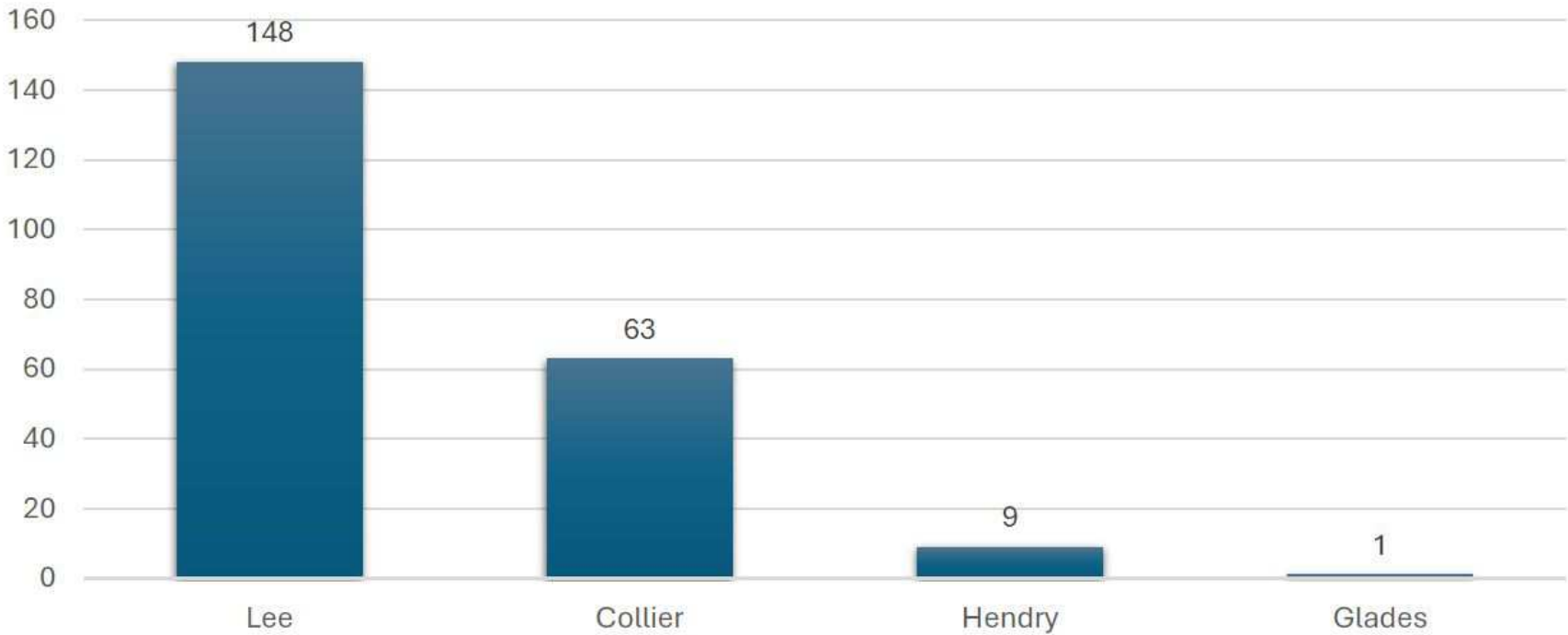


of Children Enrolled in SR YTD (July 1st, 2026 - August 21st, 2026) by Provider County





SR Unused Vouchers by Household County as of 8/21/26



As of 8/21/26

of SR Applications
Submitted

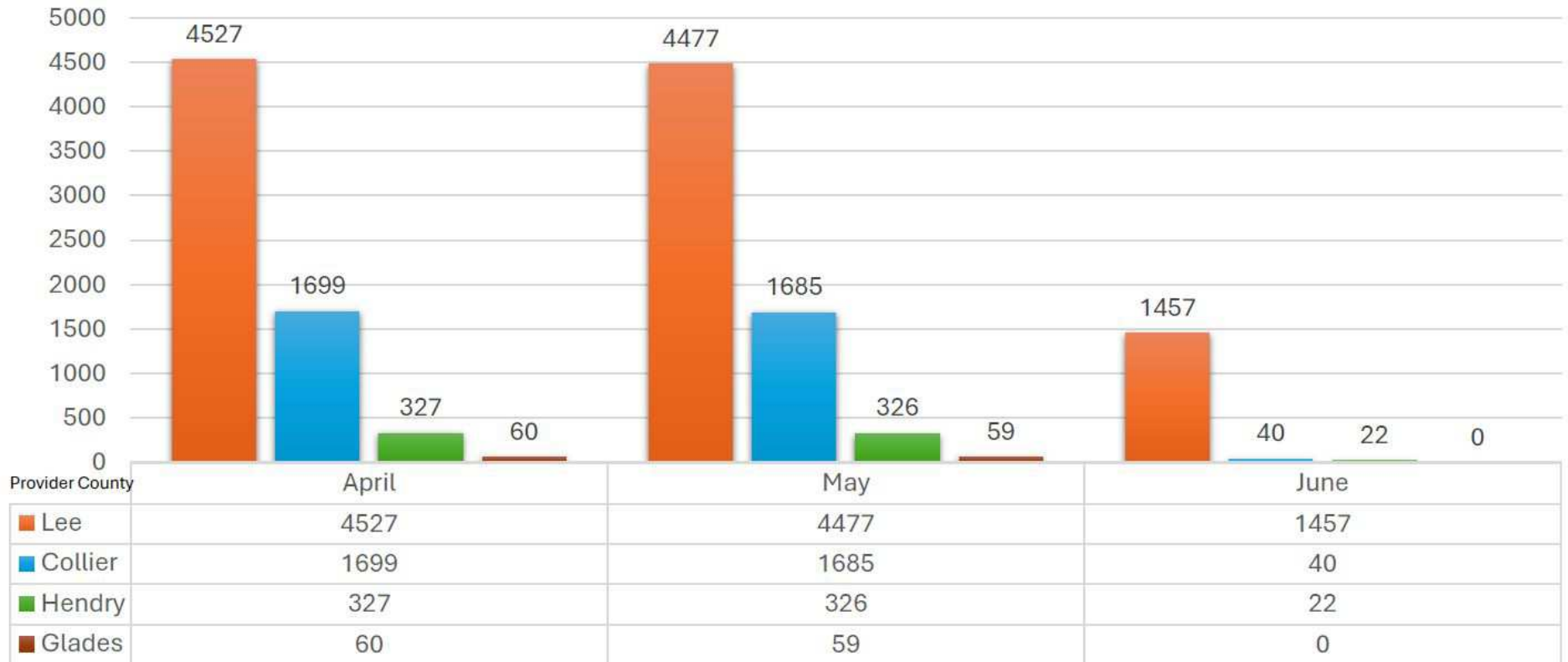
293
Applications

of Children on
SR Waitlist

15 children

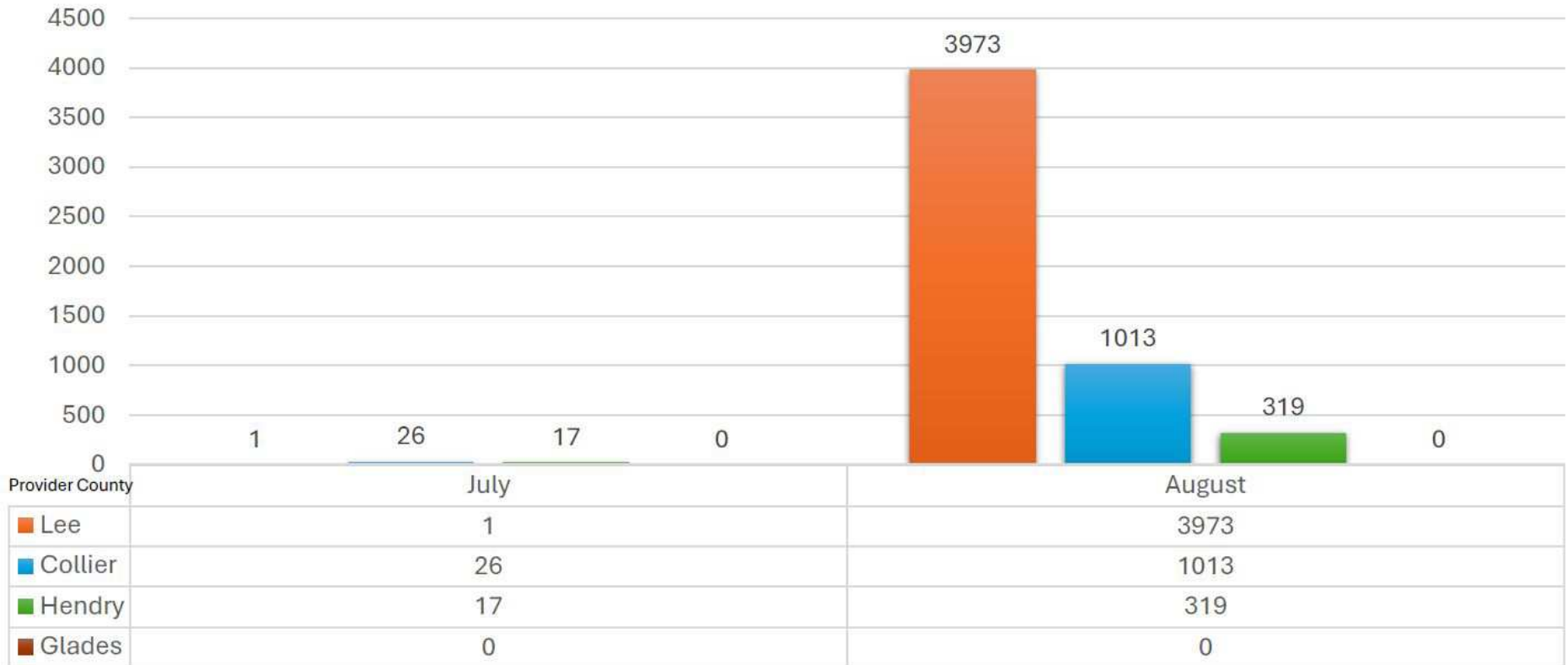


of Children Enrolled in VPK in Q4 of FY (April 2026-June 2026) by Provider County

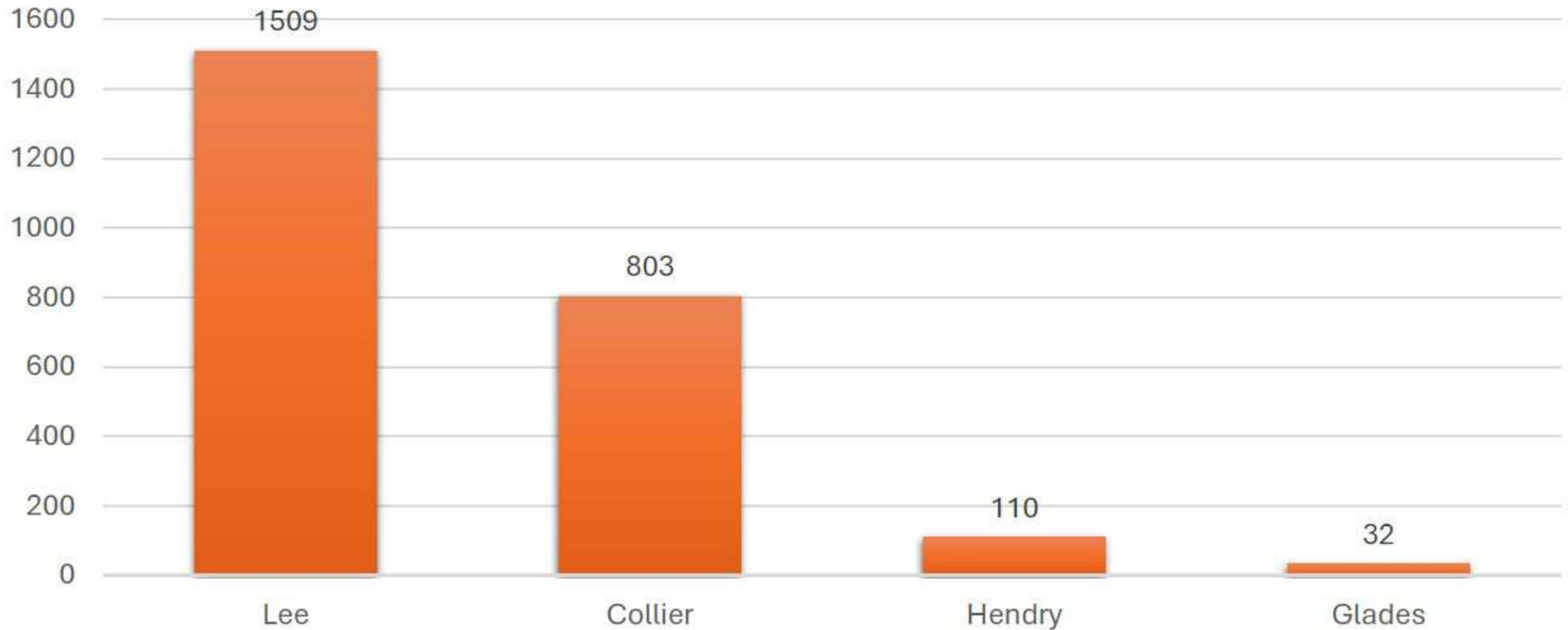




of Children Enrolled in VPK YTD (July 1st, 2026 - August 21st, 2026) by Provider County



VPK Unused Vouchers by Household County as of 8/21/26



Program Services Updates:

- **VPK Enrollment Process**

what is changing in the VPK enrollment process;

- **Implementation of the use of Microsoft Bookings to schedule client appointments with Program Services Specialists**

when the change becomes effective;

what providers need to do differently;

what families will experience;

how Bookings will affect provider referrals or family assistance; and

where providers should direct questions or escalations.

Early Childhood Education

Brenda Griffin, Director of Early Childhood

VPK Performance Metrics

Designation	Percent of Providers	Provider Count
Excellent	32%	81
Above Expectations	35%	88
Meets Expectations	26%	67
Below Expectations	2%	6
Unsatisfactory	1%	2
Incomplete	4%	9

93% of providers met or exceeded expectations!

Designation	CLASS Score
Excellent	5.74
Above Expectations	5.34
Meets Expectations	5.11
Below Expectations	4.85
Unsatisfactory	4.86

[View table at Zeck.app](#) 

Child Assessment

The Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida will not be purchasing a Coalition-wide Teaching Strategies GOLD subscription for the 2026–2027 program year.

Providers that wish to continue using Teaching Strategies GOLD may purchase subscriptions directly from Teaching Strategies at a cost of **\$15.95 per child, per year.**

To purchase or renew, providers should contact:

Stephanie Joseph

Senior Renewals Representative

Teaching Strategies

Stephanie.j@teachingstrategies.com

628-333-4404

When contacting Teaching Strategies, please be prepared to provide the total number of children for whom you need GOLD access.

Potential Coalition Reimbursement

Providers that elect to purchase Teaching Strategies GOLD directly **may be eligible for reimbursement from the Coalition at the end of the program year, contingent upon the availability of funding and successful completion of established Teaching Strategies GOLD performance, participation, and completion requirements.**

Reimbursement is not automatic and will be subject to available funding, eligibility requirements, required documentation, and verification that applicable performance and completion requirements have been met. Additional information regarding the reimbursement process and requirements will be provided separately.

Contracts and Professional Development

Brenda Griffin, Director of Early Childhood

Contracts

All contracts for the 26.27 school year were completed.

We have signed 62 new contracts. These include a combination of new providers and existing providers that added either a School Readiness (SR) or Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) contract.

- new providers;
- existing SR providers adding VPK;
- existing VPK providers adding SR;
- any areas where capacity is still needed;
- recurring contracting issues providers should know how to avoid.

Professional Development

- upcoming professional-development opportunities;

Training opportunities are here!!

 **Currently on the website:**

✦ **Pre-K 2nd Edition Crosswalk – English**

 August 27 |  6:30 PM

✦ **Effective Interactions in Pre-K – English**

 September 10 |  6:30 PM

✦ **Effective Interactions in Pre-K – English**

 September 24 |  6:30 PM

♥ **First Aid/CPR (Monthly)**

 **COMING SOON: IN-PERSON TRAININGS!**

Keep an eye on the website for upcoming **in-person learning opportunities:**

 **Transitions in the Preschool Classroom**

 **Emergency Preparedness**

 **Music in Early Childhood**

 **Self-Regulation**

 **STAY CONNECTED!**

Visit the ELC Website regularly for the training calendar and registration information.

Connect with your class



Based on your feedback, upcoming topics will include:

- **September 2026:** CLASS® Overview
- **October 2026:** Meaningful Experiences for Infants, Toddlers, and Pre-K Children
- **November 2026:** Open-Ended Materials
- **December 2026:** What Does Child Perspective Look Like?
- **January 2027:** Noticing Nature and Science: Inspiring Wonder and Awe in Our Youngest Learners
- **February 2027:** Creating Engaging Learning Environments for Children
- **March 2027:** Managing Challenging Behaviors
- **April 2027:** Discovering the World Through Our Senses



First Session of the 2026-2027 School Year



September 9th – English Session



Topic: CLASS Overview

We can't wait to see you!



Don't miss it!

- participation or completion data;
- required versus optional training;
- planned supports for directors and teachers; and

- What training is most needed?

Provider Reimbursement Communication and Escalation

3rd Business Day Requirement

The Coalition recognizes that timely and transparent communication regarding reimbursement is an important part of its partnership with contracted providers.

When a reimbursement is delayed, cannot be processed, or requires provider correction, the Coalition's expectation is that the provider will be notified. The notification should identify the payment period affected, explain the reason for the issue, describe any action or documentation required from the provider, and provide a Coalition contact for questions or assistance.

Providers should not first learn that a reimbursement has been delayed or withheld through the absence of an expected payment.

The Coalition is formalizing its internal notification and escalation procedures to ensure consistent expectations regarding:

- when and how providers are notified;
- the information included in the notification;
- the opportunity and timeframe to correct an issue;
- follow-up on unresolved reimbursement matters; and
- escalation when a payment issue may affect provider operations or services to families.

Additional written guidance, including designated points of contact and escalation procedures, will be provided once the process is finalized.

THRIVE: Early Identification, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), & Child Intervention

What will happen when I refer a child, what will be expected of me, and how will I know whether the intervention is working?

THRIVE: From Introduction to Implementation

At the June Program Committee meeting, members received an introduction to THRIVE and the Coalition's transition to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Since that time, the Coalition and its partners have continued developing the roles, processes, and tools needed to move THRIVE from concept to implementation.

THRIVE is intended to provide a coordinated pathway for identifying children's needs early, developing practical supports, and helping early learning providers and families respond before concerns become more significant. The process extends beyond screening and referral. It includes understanding the child in context, developing and implementing appropriate strategies, monitoring the child's response, and determining whether supports should be continued, modified, intensified, transitioned, or closed.

What Providers Can Expect

When a child is referred to THRIVE, the process may include:

- review of the referral and available developmental, behavioral, or educational information;
- communication with the child's parent or guardian and confirmation of required authorization;
- consultation with the provider and classroom teacher;

- observation of the child in the early learning environment, when appropriate;
- identification of the child's strengths, needs, and relevant classroom factors;
- development of specific strategies or an intervention plan;
- support and coaching for the adults implementing the strategies;
- collection and review of progress-monitoring information;
- follow-up to determine the child's response; and
- a documented decision to continue, modify, intensify, refer, transition, or close services.

The provider's knowledge of the child and classroom environment is essential throughout this process. THRIVE is not intended to place responsibility for resolving complex concerns solely on the teacher or provider. It is designed to create a shared support structure around the child, family, and early learning setting.

Current Implementation Priorities

The Coalition and its partners are currently working to:

- finalize referral criteria and routing procedures;
- clarify parent authorization requirements at each stage;
- define the roles of Coalition staff, licensed professionals, school district partners, providers, and families;
- standardize observation, intervention-planning, and progress-monitoring tools;
- establish a consistent case-review process;

- develop provider-facing guidance and referral resources; and
- ensure that referrals do not end with a recommendation, but lead to appropriate support, follow-up, and documented next steps.

Provider Discussion

As THRIVE moves into implementation, the Coalition would like provider feedback on the following questions:

- What information would providers need before deciding to make a THRIVE referral?
- What would make classroom observation and follow-up support workable in a provider setting?
- What communication should providers expect after submitting a referral?
- What barriers could prevent a teacher or director from implementing recommended strategies?
- What tools, coaching, or follow-up would help providers use intervention plans consistently?
- **Would a provider training day on THRIVE be helpful?**

Strategic Initiatives

Melanie Stefanowicz, Chief Executive Officer

Strategic Initiatives: Implementation Status Update

25/110

The Coalition continues to implement several provider-focused initiatives funded through the Hurricane Impact Disaster Grant. This work includes review of provider Continuity of Operations Plans, evaluation of grant applications, and processing of approved grant payments.

The Coalition recognizes that the review and payment process is behind the schedule originally anticipated. We understand that providers have invested time in completing applications, developing or updating their Continuity of Operations Plans, purchasing approved items, and submitting required documentation. Providers reasonably expect timely review, clear communication, and prompt payment once all requirements have been satisfied.

Coalition leadership is reviewing the outstanding workload and internal processes to move the remaining evaluations and payments forward. This review includes:

- identifying all pending applications, COOP evaluations, and payment requests;
- confirming the status of each submission;
- resolving incomplete or unclear documentation directly with the affected provider;
- prioritizing completed submissions that are ready for payment;
- establishing clearer communication regarding status and next steps; and

Strategic Initiatives cont.

- strengthening internal tracking and accountability for the remaining grant work.

Providers with pending items will receive direct communication regarding the status of their submission and any additional information or action needed. The Coalition will continue providing updates as the outstanding reviews and payments are completed.

We appreciate the patience of our providers and recognize our responsibility to complete this work as promptly and transparently as possible.

- Revised target date for clearing the backlog

Legislative Updates

Legislative Outlook: Preparing for the 2027 Session

With the 2026 Legislative Session concluded, attention is beginning to shift toward development of priorities for the 2027 Session. At this early stage, specific early learning legislation has not yet been introduced. The coming months will provide opportunities for early learning coalitions, providers, families, and community partners to help inform the issues considered by state policymakers.

The Florida Legislature will hold its organizational session on November 17, 2026. Interim committee meetings will begin later in November and continue through February. The 2027 Regular Legislative Session will convene on March 2, 2027. [Florida Senate interim schedule](#)

Issues on the Horizon

The Coalition will continue monitoring developments that may affect early learning providers and families, including:

- funding and provider reimbursement rates for School Readiness and VPK;
- access to School Readiness services and the availability of funded slots;
- VPK accountability, performance expectations, and progress-monitoring requirements;
- recruitment, preparation, and retention of the early childhood workforce;
- provider administrative and compliance requirements;
- early identification, developmental supports, and services for children with additional needs; and

- implementation of state and federal requirements affecting the cost, availability, and quality of early learning services.

As specific proposals emerge, the Coalition will evaluate their potential effect on children, families, providers, and the regional early learning system and will keep the Program Committee informed.

Provider Perspective

Providers are encouraged to identify emerging concerns, operational barriers, or policy issues that should be monitored as priorities for the 2027 Legislative Session. Practical examples from providers can help the Coalition understand how state policy decisions affect classrooms, businesses, educators, and families.

New Business

Dr. Bethany Quisenberry, Program Committee Chair

Provider Perspectives and System Feedback

The Program Committee brings together contracted early learning providers and Coalition leadership to strengthen the systems serving children and families across Southwest Florida. Provider members offer an essential perspective because they experience Coalition processes, state requirements, workforce challenges, and family needs in daily practice.

This standing agenda item provides time for providers to identify patterns, emerging concerns, and opportunities for system improvement. The purpose is not only to discuss individual circumstances, but to help the Coalition recognize issues that may affect multiple providers, create barriers for families, or require clearer communication, additional support, or process improvement.

For this meeting, members are invited to share feedback regarding:

- the start of the new SR and VPK program year;
- changes or patterns in family enrollment and access;
- Coalition processes that are working well or need consideration;
- recurring communication, contracting, reimbursement, or service-delivery barriers;
- workforce or professional-development needs;
- questions or implementation concerns related to THRIVE; and
- emerging issues the Coalition should monitor or address.

New Business cont.

When an issue requires additional research or involves provider-specific or confidential information, Coalition staff may follow up outside the meeting and report any broader system-level findings or improvements at a future meeting.

Next Scheduled Meeting & Adjournment

October 30, 2026, 2026, at 9:00 am



FY 26-27 Mtg Calendar.pdf



FISCAL YEAR 2027 (2026-2027)

Program, Events, Human Resources, and Nominations & Bylaws Committees Meeting Calendar

Program 9:00 – 11:00 am Hybrid Meetings	Events 8:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m. *In-person meetings	Human Resources 1:30 p.m.-2:30 p.m. Hybrid Meetings	Nominations & Bylaws 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Hybrid Meetings
August 28, 2026 Friday Agenda Deadline: August 20, 2026	September 2, 2026 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: August 20, 2026	September 2, 2026 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: August 20, 2026	September 2, 2026 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: August 20, 2026
October 30, 2026 Friday Agenda Deadline: October 21, 2026	November 4, 2026 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: October 21, 2026	November 4, 2026 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: October 21, 2026	November 4, 2026 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: October 21, 2026
January 29, 2027 Friday Agenda Deadline: January 20, 2027	February 3, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: January 20, 2027	February 3, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: January 20, 2027	February 3, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: January 20, 2027
April 2, 2027 Friday Agenda Deadline: March 23, 2027	April 7, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: March 23, 2027	April 7, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: March 23, 2027	April 7, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: March 23, 2027
May 28, 2027 Friday Agenda Deadline: May 18, 2027	June 2, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: May 18, 2027	June 2, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: May 18, 2027	June 2, 2027 Wednesday Agenda Deadline: May 18, 2027

Hybrid meetings will be hosted using the Microsoft TEAMS platform.

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

June 5th, 2026

Time and Place of Meeting

A meeting of the Program Committee of the Board of Directors of the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida was held on June 5, 2026, commencing at approximately 9:00 a.m. EDT at the Coalition's offices located at 2675 Winkler Avenue, Suite 300, Fort Myers, Florida 33901, with virtual participation available through Microsoft Teams.

Call to Order; Roll Call

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

- Bethany Quisenberry
- Porte, Chantal
- Tara Sherrod
- Rodrigo Gamboa Dominguez
- Rebecca McKellar
- Stephanie Rode
- Schofield, Jamie
- Cwikla, Danielle
- Angela Anderson
- Jamie Slack
- Amanda Thomas

Coalition staff present:

- Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz, Chief Executive Officer
- Dr. Elizabeth McBride, Chief Programs Officer
- Cheryl Carpenter, Chief of Early Childhood Education
- Brenda Griffin, Director of Early Childhood Education
- Danna Breeden, RN

Presiding Officer; Secretary

Dr. Bethany Quisenberry presided as Chair of the meeting. Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz served as recording secretary and kept the minutes.

A quorum being present, Beth called the meeting to order at approximately 9:00 am EDT.

Welcome and Public Comment

Chair Quisenberry welcomed the committee members and attendees. She reflected on the committee's work throughout the year related to quality, access, accountability, provider support, and the evolving needs of children and families. She also recognized the Coalition's Annual Early Learning Conference scheduled for the following day and thanked members for their continued service and insight.

No public comments were received. No formal action was taken or required.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

The June 5, 2026, Program Committee meeting agenda was presented for adoption.

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the agenda was unanimously approved as presented.

Approval of the April 14, 2026, Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the April 10, 2026, Program Committee meeting were presented for review.

Upon a motion duly made by and seconded, the April 10, 2026, meeting minutes were unanimously approved [as presented/as amended].

Program Services Department

Dr. Elizabeth McBride, Chief Programs Officer, presented Program Services utilization data for the period of July 1, 2025, through May 20, 2026. The committee reviewed School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten enrollment, participation, and waitlist trends.

Dr. McBride also presented the Program Services year-in-review report. From July 1, 2025, through May 26, 2026, Program Services processed 15,111 applications representing 18,631 children. Staff reported an increase in at-risk referrals involving families experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Operational improvements included a significant reduction in VPK application processing times, a targeted staff processing day to eliminate the VPK application backlog, expanded use of electronic communications for School Readiness redetermination notices, and adjustments to application and enrollment processes intended to improve efficiency and customer service.

A discussion followed. No formal action was taken or required.

Early Childhood Education Department

Brenda Griffin, Director of Early Childhood Education, presented updates regarding Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations and performance. The committee reviewed statewide and Southwest Florida observation data and average CLASS scores for the 2025-2026 program year.

The Coalition had completed approximately 99 percent of its projected observations as of the reporting date. Southwest Florida's average CLASS scores remained generally consistent with statewide averages.

A discussion followed. No formal action was taken or required.

Contracts and Professional Development

Ms. Griffin provided updates regarding the 2026-2027 School Readiness and VPK provider contracting processes.

Providers electing to use a thirteenth professional development holiday will be required to provide the associated professional development agenda during monitoring. Provider contract-orientation resources are available through the Coalition's website.

The committee was also advised that providers interested in an advance-payment option must consult with Dr. Stefanowicz before contract certification.

Danna Breeden provided health and safety updates.

A discussion followed. No formal action was taken or required.

Early Identification, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and Child Intervention

Cheryl Carpenter, Chief of Early Childhood Education, presented the Coalition's developing framework for early identification, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and child intervention.

The framework is intended to create a more integrated system for identifying concerns early, supporting providers and families, and connecting children with the appropriate level of intervention. Developmental screening, Teaching Strategies GOLD, and VPK FAST assessments were described as important components of the early-identification system, with an emphasis on ensuring that assessment and screening information leads to appropriate action.

The committee reviewed the three tiers of support:

Tier 1: Universal supports and effective practices available to all children and providers;

Tier 2: Targeted support when concerns emerge, including coaching, accommodations, consultation, and family or provider support; and

Tier 3: More intensive or specialized intervention, including THRIVE referrals, school-district coordination, and developmental or behavioral services.

THRIVE will expand the Coalition's capacity to respond to children's social-emotional, behavioral, developmental, and family-resilience needs through community partnerships. Agreements with local school districts will establish more formal pathways for early identification, evaluation, and referral so that young children in community-based settings are not overlooked or delayed in receiving appropriate support.

A discussion followed. No formal action was taken or required.

Strategic Initiatives

Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz, Chief Executive Officer, presented updates regarding Coalition governance and strategic initiatives.

Governance Update

The committee received an update regarding two Board representation categories:

- Dr. Derek Burkholder, private for-profit organization representative; and
- Rodrigo Gamboa, former School Readiness or VPK provider representative.

Disaster Relief Grant and Continuity of Operations Planning

Melanie Stefanowicz provided an update on the Coalition's Disaster Relief Grant activities and the Continuity of Operations Planning initiative for providers. Provider workshops were scheduled for June 25 and July 18, 2026.

The initiative is designed to help early learning providers strengthen emergency preparedness, operational continuity, and long-term organizational resilience.

Legislative and Budget Update

The committee reviewed state budget information available as of May 29, 2026. The Voluntary Prekindergarten Base Student Allocation increased from

\$2,586 to \$3,029.

The Coalition's VPK allocation increased from approximately \$22.38 million for FY 2025-2026 to approximately \$23.22 million for FY 2026-2027, an increase of approximately \$834,687.

School Readiness funding remained essentially level. The Coalition's FY 2026-2027 School Readiness allocation was approximately \$39.50 million, representing a decrease of approximately \$28,117, or 0.07 percent, compared with the prior year's total available funding.

School Readiness Birth-to-Age-Three Capacity Building Grant

The Coalition awarded 25 grants totaling \$441,000 through the School Readiness Birth-to-Age-Three Capacity Building Grant initiative.

The committee also received an update regarding the return of the Coalition's backpack initiative.

A discussion followed. No formal action was taken or required.

New Business

Beth invited members to raise new business.

No new business was presented. No formal action was taken or required.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next Program Committee meeting was scheduled for August 28, 2026, at 9:00 a.m., with in-person and virtual attendance options available.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:00 am.

Respectfully submitted,

