

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
- Rodriguo 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,

