

EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

10.30.2026 | Program Committee

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Welcome Message from the Program Committee Chair

Dear Program Committee Members,

Welcome to our October 30 meeting. With the school year well underway, we have an opportunity to consider how programs are progressing, what providers are experiencing, and where additional support can make a difference for children and families.

Our early learning community brings tremendous dedication to this work every day. Teachers, directors, family child care providers, and community partners help children build the skills and confidence they need while supporting families through the demands of everyday life. Thank you for the experience and perspective you bring to our discussions on their behalf.

As we review the Coalition's program updates and ongoing initiatives, I encourage you to share what you are seeing in your own settings and communities. What is working well? Where are barriers persisting? Your feedback helps connect our discussions about access, quality, and provider support to the needs across Southwest Florida.

Thank you for your continued time and commitment to this committee. I look forward to a thoughtful conversation and to continuing our work together in support of children, families, and the professionals who serve them.

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.

Program Services Department

Beth McBride, Chief Programs Officer

Utilization Report:

INFORMATIONAL ITEM

Utilization Report 10-19-26.pdf View PDF in Appendix or on Zeck.app

Utilization Report 10-19-26.pdf

Program Services Updates:

- VPK Unused Certificate Progress
- Updates to Lobby
- SR

Meeting Agenda & Adoption

Program Committee Meeting Agenda

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

January 29, 2027

Microsoft TEAMS meeting link

August 28, 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.

[08.28.2026] program-committee-meeting-minutes-DRAFT.pdf

[08.28.2026] program-committee-meeting-minutes-DRAFT.pdf View PDF in Appendix or on Zeck.app

Vote: Approval of the August 28, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Early Childhood Education

Sarah Bedard, Manager of Early Childhood Education

VPK Fast PM 1

Star Early Literacy - Coalition Summary

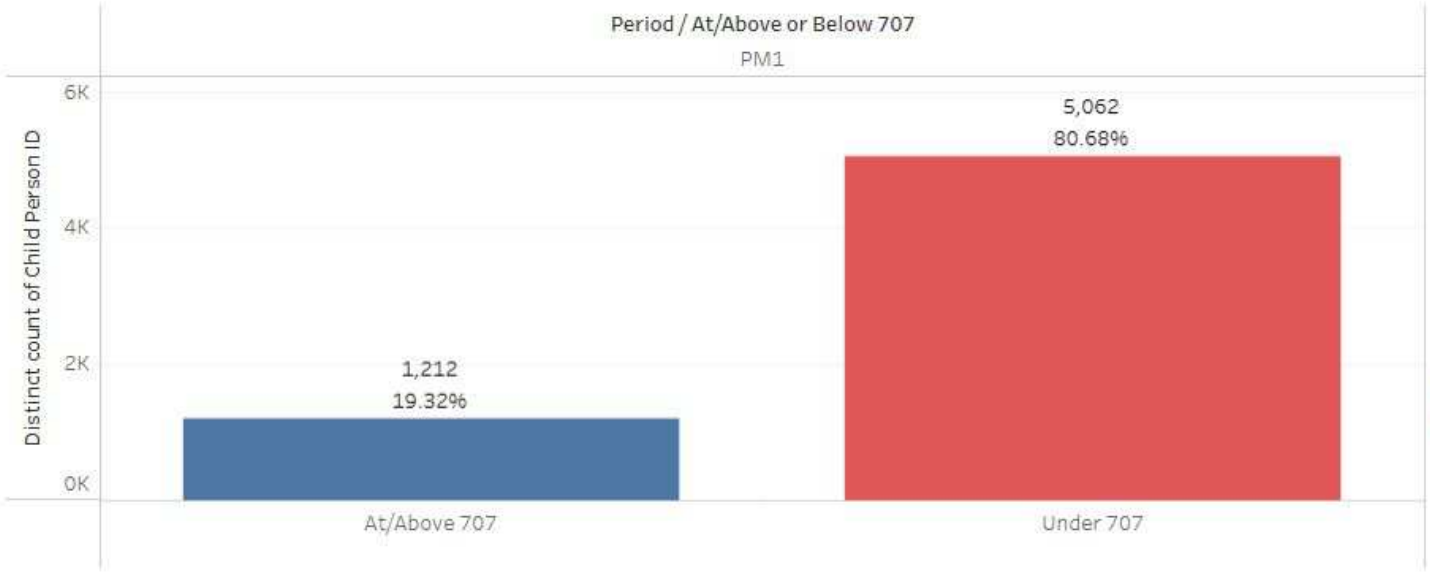
*Click a Coalition to Start...

Coalition Name	PM1 # Students Tested	PM1 # Students NPS	PM1 # Students Not Tested	PM1 Total Students	PM1 % Students Compliant
Statewide Total	6,274	107	372	6,753	94.5%
ELC of Southwest Florida	6,274	107	372	6,753	94.5%

At/Above or Below 707

Process Date 10/17/2026

Coalition: ELC of Southwest Florida County: All



Coalition Name: ELC of Southwest Flori...

County Name: (All)

Provider Type: (All)

At/Above or Below 707: At/Above 707, Under 707

Fast Program Year: 2026

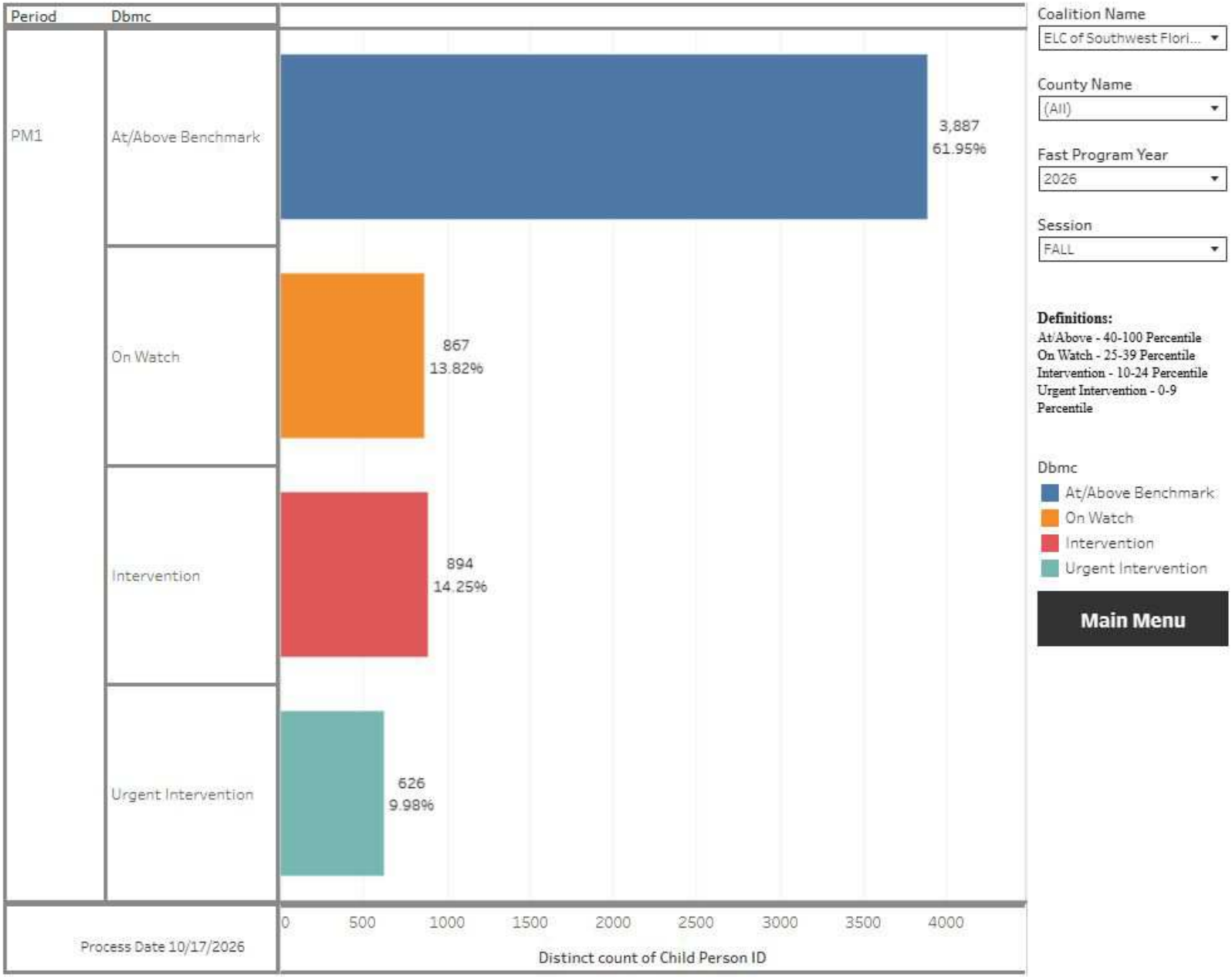
Session: FALL

Main Menu

Students above / Below 707

Coalition Name	County Name	Period	At/Above or Below 707	Provider Type: Center	Charter Public School	Family Child Care Home	Large Family Child Care H..	Private School	Public School
ELC of Southwest Florida	Collier	PM1	At/Above 707	208 20.23%	9 36.00%	1 10.00%		19 31.15%	66 11.15%
			Under 707	820 79.77%	16 64.00%	9 90.00%		42 68.85%	526 88.85%
	Hendry	PM1	At/Above 707	17 27.87%				2 11.11%	9 3.85%
			Under 707	44 72.13%				16 88.89%	225 96.15%
	Lee	PM1	At/Above 707	765 26.58%	26 11.35%			45 25.57%	45 4.74%
			Under 707	2,113 73.42%	203 88.65%	7 100.00%	5 100.00%	131 74.43%	905 95.26%

PM 1 Benchmarks



Child Assessment Differential

Providers who complete all checkpoints by October 31, 2026 can send proof of purchase to the ELC to be reimbursed for TSG.

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



THRIVE: Early Identification, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), ... cont.

- **THRIVE is moving from planning into implementation.** We are building a coordinated approach to help providers and families identify concerns early and connect children with practical, consistent support.

- **The work goes beyond screening and referral.** Our process includes understanding the concern, observing the child or classroom when appropriate, developing an Intervention Action Plan, supporting the adults implementing it, and reviewing the child's progress.

- **We have established a six-stage pathway:** Receive → Check & Route → Understand → Plan & Support → Review & Decide → Close/Transition. This gives staff and partners a shared process and clearer responsibility for follow-through.

- **Partnerships are central to the model.** We are coordinating Coalition support with the Health Planning Council's mental health consultation and our school district partners. We are clarifying roles, handoffs, and organization-specific parental authorization requirements.

- **Our immediate focus is making the process workable.** That includes clear referral guidance, consistent observation and intervention tools, progress monitoring, and communication so providers and families understand what happens next.

- **We are also developing the tracking infrastructure.** We need a reliable way to monitor referrals, assignments, authorizations, next steps, and partner handoffs so children do not lose support between organizations.

- **Provider input will help us strengthen implementation.** We want to understand what makes referrals easier, what support teachers need to use recommended strategies, and what communication is most helpful along the way.

- **The measure of success is whether support makes a difference.** We will look beyond referral counts to whether children receive timely assistance, teachers and families feel supported, and interventions produce progress.

Contracts and Professional Development

Sarah Bedard, Manager of Early Childhood Education

Contracts

VPK and SR New Provider Orientations will be held on the third Friday of each month. Whether you're new to your role or would like a refresher on ELC and DEL requirements, these sessions are a great opportunity to stay informed and connected. We strongly encourage new directors to attend.

To receive a link to the orientation contact: Faydra.Eliopoulos@elcofswfl.org or Meghan.Cole@elcofswfl.org

Professional Development

- upcoming professional-development opportunities;

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



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.

Strategic Initiatives

Melanie Stefanowicz, Chief Executive Officer

Strategic Initiatives: Implementation Status Update

Continuity of Operations Planning: The recent HPC-led COOP trainings provided valuable opportunities for providers to strengthen preparedness and continuity planning. Our next focus is helping providers complete and apply their plans, with technical assistance to address remaining needs.

Expanding Access in Hendry and Glades: We are engaging economic development, higher education, philanthropic, and school district partners to explore ways to increase School Readiness and VPK capacity. The goal is to identify feasible opportunities involving space, workforce, provider participation, and sustainable funding.

Exploring a Partnership with AMPACT: We are in exploratory conversations with AMPACT to learn more about its early learning model and assess its potential fit for Southwest Florida. The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe has already implemented the model and reported positive results. We will explore its experience, implementation requirements, and opportunities to support our local providers and children.

Exploring Substitute Staffing Options: We are exploring options for a substitute staffing system for early learning providers, including the potential use of Kelly Services. The goal is to help providers cover staff absences, maintain classroom continuity, and reduce disruptions for children and families. Exploratory discussions will consider provider needs, staffing qualifications, availability, and cost.

Business and Industry Engagement: We are developing our approach to January's *All in for Early Ed Day*. This provides an opportunity to connect early learning access with workforce participation and engage employers in practical solutions for working families.

Legislative Updates

4. AELC Early Learning Policy Roadmap_DRAFT_9.30.26.pdf View PDF in Appendix or on Zeck.app

Testimonials Needed

Questions for Providers:

- How do School Readiness reimbursement rates compare with your actual costs, and how does that affect the care you can offer?
- What would increased reimbursement allow you to do for children, families, or staff?
- Please share a concrete example that illustrates the impact?

2027 Florida Legislative Calendar

Interim committee weeks are scheduled for:

- November 30–December 4, 2026
- January 4–8, 2027
- January 11–15, 2027
- February 1–5, 2027
- February 8–12, 2027

- February 15–19, 2027. flsenate.gov

Regular Legislative Session

- **Begins:** Tuesday, March 2, 2027
- **Scheduled to end:** Friday, April 30, 2027.

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.

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

January 29, 2027, at 9:00 am

FY 26-27 Mtg Calendar.pdf

Early Learning Coalition
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

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.



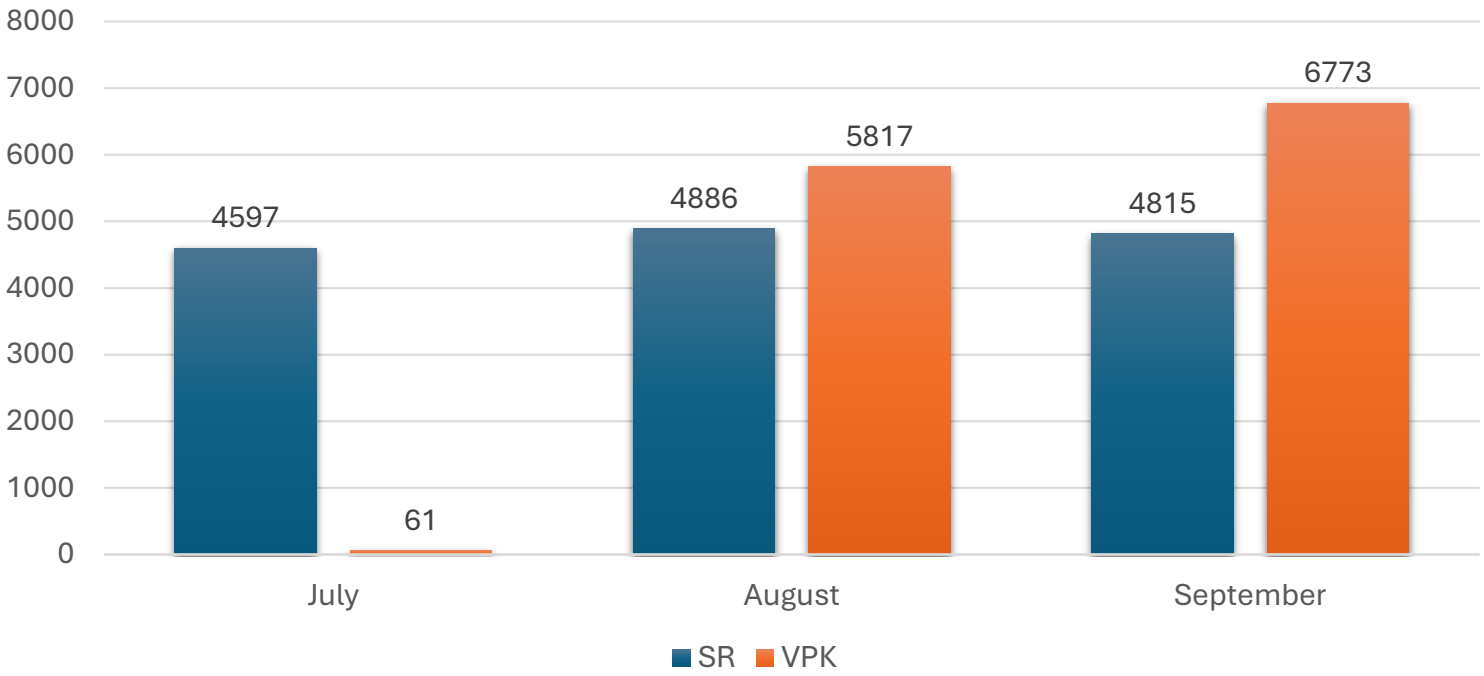
Early Learning Coalition

OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Utilization Report

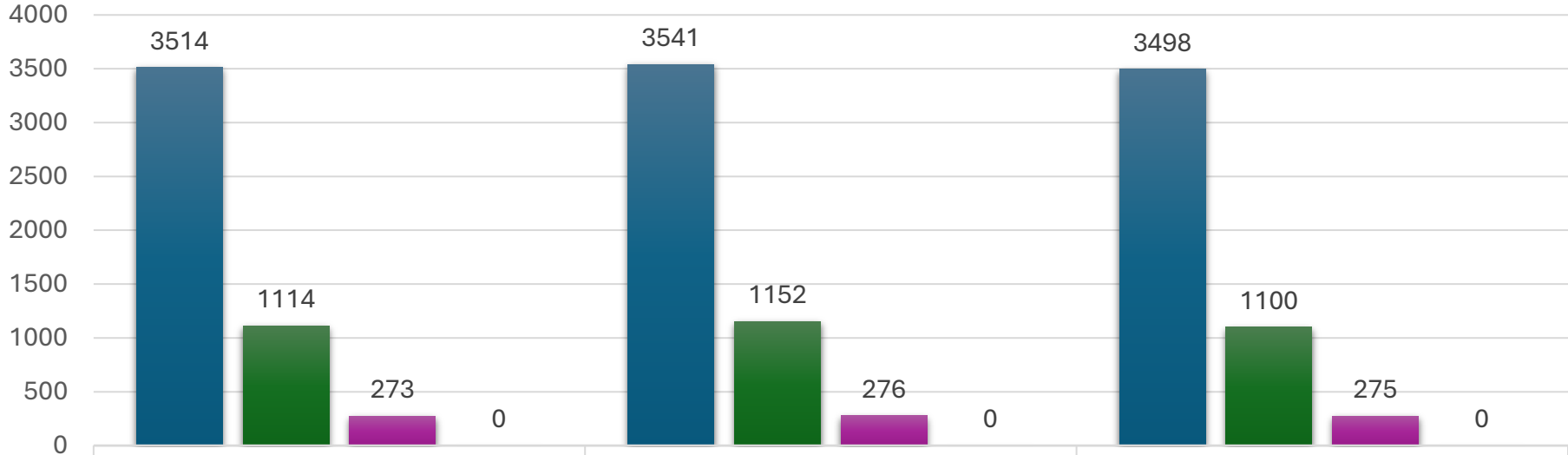
July 1st 2026 – September 30th 2026

of Children Paid between July 1st, 2026 – September 30th, 2026



As of 10/19/2026

of Children Enrolled in SR between July 1st, 2026 - September 30th, 2026 by Provider County



	July	August	September
Lee	3514	3541	3498
Collier	1114	1152	1100
Hendry	273	276	275
Glades	0	0	0

As of 10/19/2026

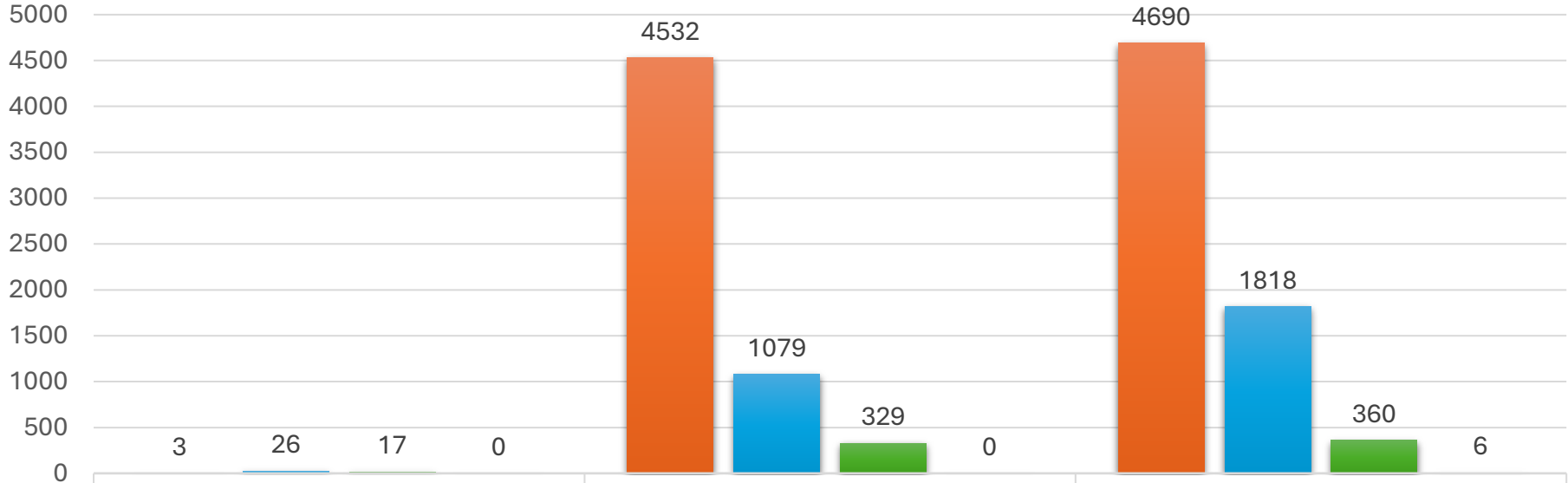
of children actively enrolled in SR between July 1st, 2026 – September 30th, 2026

5,525 children



As of 10/19/2026

of Children Enrolled in VPK between July 1st, 2026 – September 30th, 2026 by Provider County



Provider County	July	August	September
Lee	3	4532	4690
Collier	26	1079	1818
Hendry	17	329	360
Glades	0	0	6

As of 10/19/2026

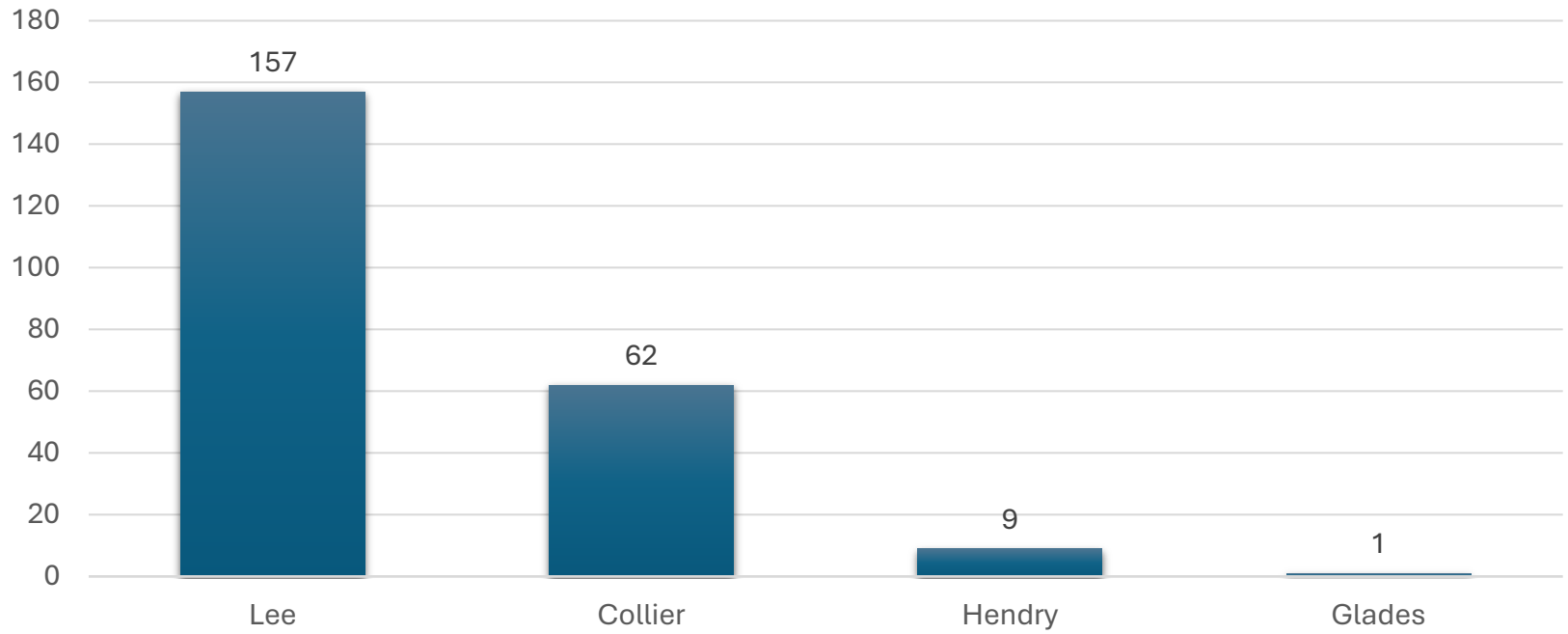
of children actively enrolled in VPK between July 1st, 2026 – September 30th, 2026

7,004 children

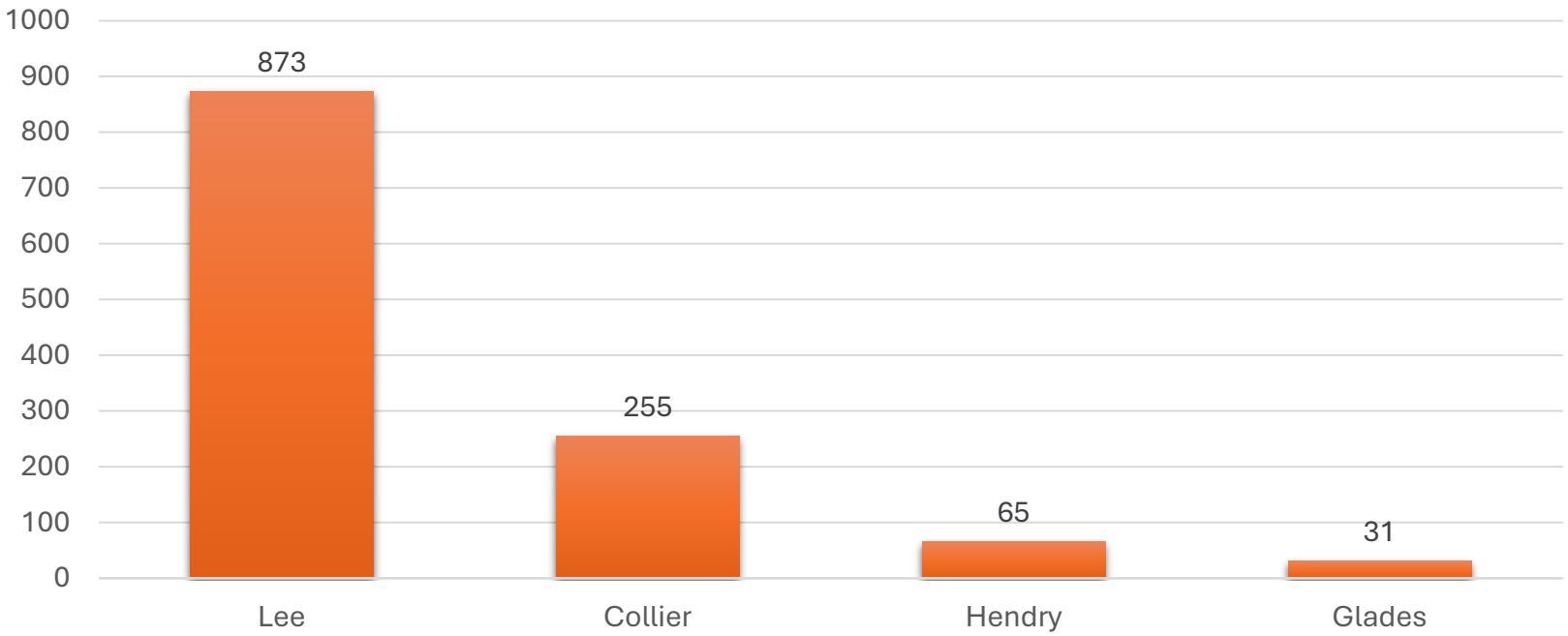


As of 10/19/2026

SR Unused Vouchers by Household County as of 10/19/2026



VPK Unused Vouchers by Household County as of 10/19/2026



As of 10/19/2026

# of SR Applications Submitted	# of Children on SR Waitlist
84 Applications	22 children

of Pending VPK Applications as of 10/19/2026

9

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

August 28th, 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 August 28, 2026, commencing at approximately 9:00 a.m. EDT, with in-person attendance at the Coalition's offices located at 2675 Winkler Avenue, Suite 300, Fort Myers, Florida 33901, and 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, Program Committee Chair
- Rodrigo Gamboa
- Stephanie Rode
- Jamie Schofield
- Danielle Cwikla

- Angela Anderson
- Amanda Thomas
- Kimberly Lonergan
- Stacie Britton
- Joanne Pachiva
- Damaris Boone

Coalition Staff present:

- Dr. Melanie Stefanowicz, Chief Executive Officer
- Dr. Beth McBride, Chief Program Officer
- Cheryl Carpenter, Chief of Early Childhood Education
- Michelle Aguiar-Flenniken, Manager of Early Childhood Education
- Sara Bedard, Manager of Early Childhood Education

Presiding Officer; Secretary

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

Bethany called the meeting to order at approximately 9:00 a.m. EDT.

Welcome & Public Comment

Bethany welcomed the committee members and attendees. She recognized the work of providers and community partners in supporting summer learning

through School Readiness, Summer VPK, and Summer Bridge programs, as well as their efforts to help children and families transition into the new program year.

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

Meeting Agenda Adoption

The August 28, 2026, Program Committee meeting agenda was presented for adoption. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of the June 5, 2026, Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the June 5, 2026, Program Committee meeting were presented for review. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the agenda was approved as presented.

Program Services Department

The committee reviewed Program Services utilization data for the final quarter of the 2025–2026 fiscal year and the beginning of the 2026–2027 fiscal year, with current reporting through August 21, 2026. The report included School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten participation, county-level enrollment, unused vouchers, applications, and the School Readiness waitlist.

The committee also received an update regarding changes to the VPK enrollment process and implementation of Microsoft Bookings to schedule client appointments with Program Services Specialists. The update addressed communi-

cation with providers and families, appointment scheduling, and questions or concerns requiring additional assistance.

No formal action was taken or required.

Early Childhood Education Department

The committee reviewed VPK performance metrics. The report indicated that 93 percent of providers met or exceeded expectations. Members also received information regarding provider performance designations and associated CLASS scores.

The committee was advised that the Coalition would not purchase a Coalition-wide Teaching Strategies GOLD subscription for the 2026–2027 program year. Providers wishing to continue using GOLD could purchase subscriptions directly from Teaching Strategies at a cost of $15.95 per child, per year.

Potential reimbursement at the end of the program year would depend upon available funding, provider eligibility, required documentation, and successful completion of established participation, performance, and completion requirements. Reimbursement would not be automatic, and additional guidance would be provided separately.

No formal action was taken or required.

Contracts and Professional Development

The committee received an update regarding completion of provider contracts for the 2026–2027 program year. The Coalition reported 62 new contracts, in-

cluding new providers and existing providers adding either a School Readiness or VPK contract.

Discussion addressed the continuing need for additional early learning capacity in Hendry and Glades Counties. Members identified vacant RCMA space in Hendry County and discussed engaging local churches to help reach families and increase awareness of School Readiness services.

Provider contracting discussion also included adding slots for different levels of care and starting or stopping advance payments.

The committee reviewed upcoming professional-development opportunities, including training on effective interactions, First Aid/CPR, classroom transitions, emergency preparedness, music in early childhood, and self-regulation.

The Connect with Your CLASS series would resume on September 9, 2026, with an English-language CLASS Overview session. Additional planned topics included meaningful learning experiences, open-ended materials, child perspective, nature and science, engaging learning environments, and managing challenging behaviors.

Discussion included participation of approximately 20–30 participants, availability of some DCF training, and technical assistance related to CLASS, classroom arrangement, and intervention support.

The committee also reviewed expectations for provider reimbursement communication and escalation. When a reimbursement is delayed, cannot be processed, or requires correction, providers should receive notice identifying the affected payment period, the reason for the issue, required corrective action or documentation, and a Coalition contact for assistance.

The Coalition was formalizing internal notification, follow-up, and escalation procedures, with additional written guidance to be provided when finalized.

No formal action was taken or required.

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

The committee received an update regarding THRIVE and the Coalition's transition from initial planning to implementation of a coordinated Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

The framework extends beyond screening and referral to include understanding the child in context, developing practical intervention strategies, supporting implementation, monitoring progress, and determining whether services should continue, be modified or intensified, transition, or close.

The committee reviewed the anticipated referral and support process, including parent or guardian authorization, consultation with providers and teachers, observation when appropriate, intervention planning, coaching, progress monitoring, and documented follow-up decisions.

Implementation priorities included finalizing referral criteria and routing procedures; clarifying authorization requirements and partner responsibilities; standardizing observation, intervention-planning, and progress-monitoring tools; establishing case review; and developing provider guidance.

Provider input was invited regarding referral information, classroom observation, follow-up communication, implementation barriers, coaching needs, and potential THRIVE training opportunities.

No formal action was taken or required.

Strategic Initiatives

The committee received an implementation update regarding provider-focused initiatives funded through the Hurricane Impact Disaster Grant, including Continuity of Operations Plan reviews, grant application evaluations, and processing of approved payments.

The Coalition acknowledged that reviews and payments were behind the anticipated schedule. Leadership was reviewing pending submissions, confirming their status, resolving documentation issues, prioritizing completed requests, and strengthening tracking and accountability.

Providers with outstanding items would receive direct communication regarding submission status, additional requirements, and next steps.

The committee also received an update regarding Program Accountability Monitoring.

No formal action was taken or required.

Legislative Updates

The committee received an overview of preparations for the 2027 Legislative Session and issues the Coalition would continue to monitor.

Areas of interest included School Readiness and VPK funding and reimbursement rates; access to funded services; VPK accountability and progress monitoring; early childhood workforce recruitment and retention; provider adminis-

trative requirements; and early identification and services for children with additional needs.

Providers were encouraged to share practical examples of operational barriers and emerging policy concerns to help inform the Coalition's legislative priorities.

No formal action was taken or required.

New Business

Bethany invited members to share provider perspectives and system feedback, including enrollment and access concerns, Coalition processes, reimbursement and contracting issues, workforce needs, and THRIVE implementation.

No formal action was taken or required.

Next Meeting Scheduled

The section, Next Meeting Scheduled , was presented. A full discussion followed. No formal action was taken or required.

Next Meeting & Adjournment

The next Program Committee meeting was scheduled for October 30, 2026, at 9:00 a.m., with in-person and virtual attendance options available. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the agenda was approved as presented.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:06 a.m. EDT.

Respectfully submitted,

EARLY LEARNING POLICY ROADMAP

Investing Today for Brighter Tomorrows

AELC

CHILDREN
FAMILIES
STRONGER COMMUNITIES
A BRIGHTER FLORIDA

2027–2028

SR Eligibility

- Expand access to School Readiness from 0–85% of State Median Income.
- Create a seamless continuum of care with graduated parent copays.
- Strengthen parent choice and support family economic mobility.

Provider Reimbursement Rates

- Increase provider reimbusrement rates to better reflect the cost of care.
- Strengthen the early learning workforce and support competitive teacher pay.
- Improve provider stability and protect families' access to early learning.

Shift Nonrecurring Pots for Quality Performance Incentive and Gold Seal to Recurring Funding

- Move Quality Performance Incentive and Gold Seal funding from nonrecurring to recurring.
- Create stable, predictable funding for quality incentives.
- Strengthen the long-term sustainability of Florida's quality early learning system.

2029–2030

Increased Investment and Access to Early Childhood Education

- Increase state investment in early childhood education.
- Expand access and support the early learning workforce.
- Drive economic mobility and improve kindergarten readiness for all children.

Additional Priorities

- *To be determined.*

2031+

Additional Priorities

- *To be determined.*



A high-quality, accessible, and sustainable early learning system that prepares every child for success in school and in life.

STRONG FOUNDATIONS. BRIGHTER FUTURES.

À LA CARTE OPPORTUNITIES (ALL YEARS)

- Parenting Plan/ Child Support Enhancements
- VPK Quality Differentials
- Increased SR Quality Differentials
- Online Testing for DCF Intro Courses
- DCF Licensing Ratios for 2-Year-Olds
- 2 Year Grant Cycle
- Revert & Reappropriate
- Fund Balance
- Reob/Deob Flexibility

CHILDREN THRIVE | FAMILIES SUCCEED | COMMUNITIES GROW | FLORIDA PROSPERS

DRAFT