



Location: 1130 N Eglin Pkwy, Shalimar, FL 32579

Date: 2.3.26

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Board Approved: 5.5.26

Coalition Board Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present:

Amanda Grandy, Private Sector - Gubernatorial Appointee, Chair
Lindsay Roberts, Private Sector - Osprey Title, Vice-Chair
Jeff Brown, Private Sector - Bridging Analytics, LLC
Shea Boykin, Private Sector - Okaloosa County Teachers Federal Credit Union, Secretary
Michele Burns, CareerSource Okaloosa Walton
Caroline Durkee, Walton County Commissioner's Appointee (Via Zoom)
Kathy Curry, Representative of faith-based childcare providers
Beth Brant, Private Sector - Poly, Inc.
Melissa Sidoti, DCF Regional Administrator Delegate Appointee
Julie Webb, Private Sector - Advanced Sacred Hope Academy (ASHA)
Kim Cox, Private Sector - Origin Bank
Victoria Ebert, Private Sector - Phm Management (Via Zoom)
Brittany Wyatt, Northwest Florida State College President's Appointee
Emily Edge, Early Steps – Representative for an Agency Serving Children with Disabilities
Gabrielle Griffith, Private Sector - 850 Therapy, LLC (Via Zoom)
Bambi Sealy, DCF District Administrator Appointee
Kristen Murdy, Representative of private for-profit childcare providers (Via Zoom)

Board Members Absent:

Ardelle Bush, Private Sector - Healthy Start
Amanda Negron, Private Sector - HSU Foundation
Gretta Barrett, Private Sector - Coldwell Banker Realty
Sarah Davis, Private Sector - Gubernatorial Appointee
Amanda Colwell, Okaloosa County Health Department Appointee
Kim Gillis, Head Start Appointee
Amy Bowles, Okaloosa County Schools Appointee

Coalition Team Present:

Dana Hodges, CEO
Tara Thomson, CFO
Deanna Hernandez, Executive Administrator

Public Present:

Nick Pereda, MKA
Rich Cassidy, MKA

Quorum:

Quorum established 11:03 a.m.

- I. Call to Order – Amanda Grandy, Chair
The meeting is called to order at 11:04 a.m.



II. Consent Agenda*

a. Motion to Accept the agenda.

Beth made the motion to approve the Agenda with changes.
Motion is carried by unanimous vote.

b. Minutes Coalition Board Meeting, October 28, 2025

Lindsay R. made the motion to approve the Meeting Minutes as presented.
Motion is carried by unanimous vote.

c. Summary of Executed Contracts

One major update was the renewal of the Meigs Executive Park office lease. Following consultation with DEL, approval was granted for a two-year renewal. This will be the final two year option.

d. Status of Agency & Monitoring

Finance Monitoring has been completed, and the final report is pending. The annual audit report will be presented later in the meeting by the Moss Krusick & Associates Auditors.

III. Treasurer's Report

a. Quarterly Financial Report*

Cathie Odom reports that the program year is 50% complete as of 12/31/25 and we are within the target of all our restrictions and benchmarks for DEL. Everything is on track with no issues.

Kim C. made the motion to accept the Quarterly Financial Report as presented.
Motion is carried by unanimous vote.

b. Local SR Match Report

It is reported that enrollment of Match families is ongoing and that all donor targets and required thresholds continue to be met. Also noted is an anticipated shift in funding sources for the upcoming fiscal year, as we anticipate the Walton County Boards of County Commissioners may no longer have nonprofit funding available. Efforts are underway to identify and secure additional funding streams to support the Match program.

IV. New Business

a. Auditor's Report*

Rich Cassidy from MKA reviewed the audit report with the Board and reported that there were no findings.

Kim C. made the motion to approve the Financial Monitoring Results Report as presented.
Motion is carried by unanimous vote.



b. Board Member Recognition

We would like to formally recognize Kim Gillis of Tri-County Head Start for her dedicated service throughout her four-year term and note that the position will transition to the Okaloosa County Head Start Director.

We would also like to recognize Ardelle Bush of Healthy Start for her service and collaborations, who will be retiring prior to our next Board meeting. We wish her the best on this next chapter in her life.

V. Old Business

a. Enrollment Update

It was reported that enrollment efforts are ongoing. Due to a statewide decline in enrollments, the Coalition is working closely with providers to identify alternative strategies to support their success and to ensure the children are ready for Kindergarten.

To support increased enrollments, the Coalition has contracted with Cumulus Media for billboard and radio advertising. Yard signs will be provided to all contracted providers, and flyers are being distributed to select local businesses.

VI. Department Updates

a. Compliance and Eligibility

The Eligibility Dept reported that work is underway on provider profiles for the 2026–27 school year, as well as VPK applications. The internal deadline to complete all provider profiles is the end of April, ahead of the DEL deadline of May 30, 2026. Weekly reminders are being sent to providers via Constant Contact and Facebook, and follow-up calls will begin next week for providers who have not responded.

The Compliance Dept reported the addition of several new contracted providers. It was noted that several providers have closed due to low enrollments, including two in the Fort Walton Beach area and three in Crestview. The Coalition met with representatives from Eglin Air Force Base to discuss offering a VPK summer program and program openings for the 2026–27 school year.

b. Education

The Education Dept reported that training attendance has increased during the current program year. VPK FAST testing is on track, with PM2 assessments tracking toward 100 percent completion; approximately 80 percent of classrooms have already been completed. All providers have been notified multiple times of their open and close testing window dates, and reminder phone calls have been made to providers who have not yet begun testing.

CLASS assessments, both in-house and contracted, are progressing as scheduled, with a goal of completing all assessments by April 30, 2026.

It was also reported that two Hatch tables are currently not being utilized due to the age ranges of children served by contracted family childcare homes. A notice was sent to providers requesting submissions outlining their interest and proposed use of the tables. Submissions are already being received, and the Program Committee will meet on



February 19, 2026, to review the submissions and determine the two recipients.

VII. CEO Updates

a. Event Updates

A brief summary of recent events along with details for upcoming event dates, and a sign-up sheet was circulated. Board participation during Literacy week was strong, the children enjoyed having the board members reading to them.

Dana, who has been participating in the Florida Early Childhood Advocacy Fellowship program, will attend the program's graduation ceremony in Tallahassee during Children's Week.

It is also noted that the 2026 Run4Health 5K, presented by the Okaloosa County Community Health Improvement Partnership (OCHIP) is scheduled for Saturday, April 18, 2026, in Niceville, FL. There are sponsorship opportunities, board participation is highly encouraged. The proceeds generated will benefit the SAFE Start Grant administered by the OCHIP and the Coalition to provide funding for childcare providers to enhance safety and security at their facilities.

b. Legislative Updates

AELC Advocacy Committee is currently monitoring a number of House and Senate bills that will impact Early Learning.

c. Team Updates

The open Chief Financial Officer position has been filled by Tara Thomson, who joins the Coalition from Northwest Florida State College. Ms. Thomson was introduced to the Board and provided a brief overview of her professional background.

d. VPK Updates

As previously noted, VPK enrollments have declined, consistent with trends across the state. To support children and families, the Coalition is implementing Transition to Kindergarten and Transition to VPK projects. Letters of encouragement from CEO Dana Hodges and Okaloosa County Superintendent Chambers were sent to every child who attended VPK in Okaloosa County this year, in both English and Spanish.

In partnership with the Okaloosa County School District and the Okaloosa County School Foundation, the Coalition hosted a movie showing to inform families that the VPK program is available both in public schools and in childcare facilities and supported Transition to Kindergarten.

Additionally, in collaboration with Highlights Early Learning, customized boxes of magazines are being sent to every provider in both Okaloosa and Walton Counties with a 3-year-old classroom to encourage family engagement and provide information about the VPK program. Additional magazines will be sent to every child who is currently in VPK to provide transition to kindergarten information as well as school readiness (SR) information.

VPK Readiness rates were released, Walton County saw an increase in scores while Okaloosa County maintained its scores.



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VIII. Action Items

a. Increase SR & VPK Enrollments

Efforts to increase enrollments are ongoing. The Coalition will partner with Studer Institute to include information in the "Build a Brain Bags," early literacy gift bags provided to every woman who gives birth at the Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast hospital in Miramar Beach.

b. Early Educator Workforce

As part of our recruitment effort, our Stakeholder group has created a flyer to distribute to all the high schools to raise awareness of Early Education as a rewarding career choice. We will also be participating in the College Career Fair to promote early education and support the T.E.A.C.H program.

c. Leverage Community Partners

Board members were encouraged to leverage their personal and professional networks to raise awareness of the Early Learning Coalition, support Match funding efforts, and assist with board member recruitment.

IX. Public Comment

Julie Webb of ASHA requested suggestions on how to promote having a Behavioral Therapist provide teacher training on managing behavioral situations.

X. Adjournment

Amanda adjourned the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Deanna Hernandez
Executive Administrator