



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

**Executive Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**  
November 19, 2020 8:30 a.m.

**Members Present**

Van Mansker

Mona Jackson

Marcus McBride

**Members Absent**

None

**Staff**

Bruce Watson

Jamie Phelps

Vicki Pugh

Becki Rutchland

Dawn Engel

Paula Rollins

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

Notification of this meeting was sent to the Pensacola News Journal for publication on October 20, 2020 and posted to the Coalition Public Calendar Board on October 22, 2020. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Mansker.

**II. Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**III. Consent Agenda**

Upon a motion made by Mr. McBride and seconded by Ms. Jackson, the Consent Agenda, consisting of the Agenda, the Minutes of the October 1, 2020 Executive Finance Committee Meeting, and the Financial Statements for June (end of fiscal year), August, and September was approved without objection. Mr. Watson noted that the July Financial Statement was presented at the October Executive Finance Committee meeting.

**IV. Status Reports**

- a. SR/VPK Fiscal Year Benchmark Report, Enrollment/Wait List Status Report, and Contracting Summary Report

1. SR/VPK Fiscal Year Benchmark Report:

One quarter of the way into the fiscal year, the Coalition is about \$180,000 dollar behind budget in total grant spending after being ahead in spending the first couple of months. To date nothing has been spent on staff doing SRPAs because assessments have only recently resumed after being suspended due to the pandemic. The Coalition is about \$200,000 dollars ahead in budgeted direct services and SLOTS are at almost 85% of expenditures. As a result of attrition of children from the First Responder/Health Care Worker Child Care Program, the Coalition has been able to start pulling from the Wait List. September was the first full month of spending for VPK this year. VPK administrative spending is at 9% but will slowly decrease as more VPK funding is spent on services.



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### 2. Enrollment/Wait List Status Report:

Currently, the Coalition has almost 3,200 children enrolled in the School Readiness Program, which is a down from a peak of 3,650 earlier this year. The higher number of enrollments was in part due to the suspension, earlier this year, of redeterminations coupled with bringing on First Responder children. Redeterminations resumed about six weeks ago and Mr. Watson commended the Eligibility team for their efforts toward processing the six-month backlog of work. As the Coalition pulls from the Wait List, the historical low uptake rate of about 30% remains. SRMT match applicants appear to have a higher acceptance rate. Going forward, the SRMT and regular BG8s will be listed separately on the Wait List report so that the numbers will be easier to track. The Coalition has pulled 365 children from the Wait List in the past month. To date, only 30 children have enrolled. Protective Services placements are going fairly well. There are usually about 15-20 Protective Services children that are not immediately placed which may be due to foster parents desiring a Provider that is relatively close to their home.

### 3. Contracting and Fraud Summary Report:

The Coalition added one new VPK Provider this month. Unfortunately, the new VPK Provider, Ivy League, lost their facility due to fire damage. Ivy League has since relocated to the former Faith Christian facility on Pace Boulevard. One new SR Provider was added and two more contracts are in process. One of the new Providers is a home that decided to recontract with the Coalition after receiving CARES funding.

## V. Committee Recommendations

None. Mr. Watson expressed concern that attendance at the Resource Development Committee has fallen off since the pandemic ensued earlier this year. The last meeting on November 17 was cancelled because only one person attended the meeting. Going forward, Mr. Watson is planning to send Outlook calendar invitations in addition to the email invitation to encourage attendance. Board attendance has experienced a similar decline during the pandemic.

## VI. Old Business

### a. COVID Impact on Operations

#### 1. Provider Payments

The OEL has decided to no longer pay for all enrollments when children are absent. Full enrollment payments are now restricted to Providers who completely close due to the pandemic. Last month absences were paid at 16 days per child, per month. This month absences are being paid at 14 days, and in December only 12 days of absences will be paid. In January absences will return to being paid per Rule at no more than 10 days per month. As the cases of COVID rise, there has been an increase in the number of Provider closures due to the pandemic. The Coalition is awaiting further information from the OEL regarding how the State plans to respond to the increased number of COVID closures. Over the last few weeks, the Coalition has seen an



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increase in the number of Providers and classrooms closed due to the pandemic. In one case, the Provider was forced to close because the staff person who tested positive for the virus was assigned to float from classroom to classroom and provide relief for breaks. The Coalition could face a similar problem if a staff member who has direct contact with many team members were to test positive. The possibility remains that the Coalition may be forced to close in response to exposure and resume operations with all staff teleworking, as was the case during the early months of the pandemic. Mr. Watson noted that the Coalition has remained fully operational during the pandemic, and another complete closure occurs, there should be no negative impact to operational capability.

### 2. Parent Fee Waivers

The OEL has determined that Parent Fee Waivers will end on December 31, 2020.

### 3. First Responder and Health Care Worker Child Care

The number of First Responder children (BG1-ESS) enrolled is 357, down from a peak of almost 500 enrollments earlier this year. The Coalition is awaiting further guidance on the end date for the First Responder program.

### 4. SRPA and Monitoring

The Coalition has recently resumed SRPA and Monitoring site visits. Initial focus has been on Providers who requested a second assessment due to scoring low last year. The score for one of the Providers rose to over a 5.0 so they will receive a 7% rate incentive. Mr. Watson noted that the higher score may be due to teachers staying more in the same classroom as opposed to moving from class to class. Ms. Engel noted that children also benefit from smaller class sizes due to the pandemic. With respect to Monitoring, the Coalition is ahead of some other Coalitions in the state. In response to the pandemic and to mitigate virus transmission, most Providers have modified their entry process and are conducting COVID screening in the parking lot prior to allowing entry to the facility. Mr. Watson noted that, unlike the Coalition which has reopened to the public, Providers have a static pool of children and are at less risk for random virus transmission so it should be safe for Coalition staff members to conduct monitoring visits.

#### b. Escambia Children's Trust Update

Mr. Watson was pleased to announce that the Escambia Children's Trust referendum passed. Currently, there is a group exploring the possibility of obtaining a loan from the County so that the effort may move forward and hire the Escambia Children's Trust staff members. The group is also working with the County Commissioners to identify five potential Board members as well as to identify 15 nominees for Governor to choose from for appointments to the council. Once the five statutory Board members are identified, the Children's Trust may move forward with business while the Governor selects Appointees. In Alachua County, the Governor's selection process took about fifteen months. The first funding for the Trust from property taxes will be received in October 2022 so it will be a couple of years before operations are fully up and running.



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### c. Coalition Operations

The Coalition is closely monitoring pandemic numbers and is poised to adjust operations in response. The reception area remains open to the public at this time. Shields are in place at the reception desks and staff and visitors are required to wear masks. Visitors are also required to sign in so the Coalition may conduct contact tracing in the event of possible exposure to the virus. A kiosk may be installed in the Administrative reception area for use by applicants who need computer access. The front meeting room in suite 220 has been retrofitted with three staff work stations with shields so that Eligibility and CCRR staff can assist applicants.

Although a few Coalition staff members have contracted COVID, there has been no risk of transmission to other staff members due to the individual circumstances of each case. On a related health and safety note, the Coalition commissioned an air quality study after staff members expressed concern that there may be mold and mildew in suite 210 after the Hurricane Sally water intrusion that occurred in the back offices. Mr. Watson was pleased to announce that results came back negative for mold and mildew in suite 210. The week after Thanksgiving, the same company will conduct air sampling in suite 220 due to concerns over the lingering odor from the fire damage.

### d. ED Evaluation – BOD Approval Pending

Mr. Watson reminded the Executive Committee that the annual ED Evaluation, which was previously approved by the Executive Committee, will be on the agenda for the next Board meeting in December.

## **VII. New Business**

### a. Notice of Award (NOA) Changes

The NOA continues to be changed. Currently, the Coalition has received combined funding in the amount of \$24,491,000 which is the highest amount of funding the Coalition has ever been granted. VPK spending is down statewide due to the pandemic. VPK enrollments are down about one third statewide. Mr. Watson noted that it will be interesting to see how FLKRS scores are affected by the lower number of children in VPK due to the pandemic. An additional \$50,000,000 of funding for increased SR rates has yet to be distributed. The OEL recently released a Market Rate Survey and, based upon comparison to thirteen other single-county Coalitions and the overall state averages, Escambia County has the lowest market rate in every care level. However, the Coalition does not have the lowest SR payment averages in the state because Escambia County rates are very close to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile. In order to raise rates in Escambia County, the Coalition would need to exceed the local 75<sup>th</sup> percentile rate. Currently, the Coalition's rate increase proposal is pending revisions and is in suspense at this time. Approximately 85-90% of Providers in Escambia County are also SR Providers and have chosen to charge the same rates as the Coalition. By contrast, Santa Rosa's rate is about \$10 dollars higher per child than Escambia County and fewer Santa Rosa Providers are open to School Readiness clients. In the next fiscal year, because every provider has to have a score of 4.0 or



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better on their SRPA, and if a provider scores 4.0 or better they get a 4% incentive, then effectively there will be a statewide rate increase of at least 4%. Mr. Watson noted that the 4% rate increase will show as a quality expense, as opposed to showing as a rate increase per se. Line item changes to the NOA this fiscal year are at an unprecedented high due to CARES funding as well as Match Funding in the amount of \$177,000 dollars. The county grant was for \$238,875 dollars again this year. About \$250,000 dollars of the NOA will be returned to the OEL as the money was allocated for the Rising Kindergarten Virtual VPK program but none of the local schools opted to participate in this program.

### b. CARES Phase IV

CARES IV funding will be distributed to all Providers, whether contracted or not, and the award amounts are identical for both contracted and non-contracted Providers. Award amounts range from \$500 dollars to \$3,250 dollars and are based upon DCF capacity. The Coalition anticipates routing applications soon and further anticipates distributing all of the funding before the end of December 2020.

### c. New Board Member

The Coalition is in receipt of a Board Member application for Mr. Roger Thompson. Mr. Thompson served with DCF for about 20 years and he participated as a Board member for the Coalition during most of his tenure at DCF. Mr. Thompson has previously served on the Executive Finance Committee and the Resource Development Committee for which he was the Chair. If Mr. Thompson's nomination is approved by the Board, it is possible that he may agree to fill the Vice Chair vacancy or the Resource Development Committee Chair position. Mr. Watson noted that he hopes that either Ms. Strumeyer or a Provider Representative will agree to be the Chair of the Resource Development Committee at some time in the future. Upon a motion made by Ms. Jackson and seconded by Mr. McBride, a motion to recommend to the Board to appoint Mr. Thompson as a Board member was passed without objection.

**Adjourn: Meeting was adjourned at 9:18 a.m.**

**Next Meeting: December 17, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. at the Early Learning Coalition Office, 3300 North Pace Boulevard, Suite 210, Pensacola, Florida 32505**