



EARLY LEARNING  
COALITION  
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

## News from The Early Learning Coalition SWFL

*Spring, 2022*  
*Here's what's happening at the ELC*

Visit our Website

### **New FL Education Commissioner** *Sen. Manny Diaz*

The **State Board of Education** has appointed Se. Manny Diaz, R-Hialeah as Florida's next education commissioner. He replaces Commissioner Richard Corcoran in that position. He is the state's first Hispanic education commissioner.

Diaz was elected to the Senate in 2018 after serving in the House for six years. He is a former classroom teacher who works as an administrator for Doral College. Diaz will assume his duties on June 1, 2022.



*Sen. Manny Diaz (photo courtesy The Florida Channel)*

### **A Fond Farewell** *Outgoing Board Member*

ELC Interim Board Chair, Marshall Bower, and Susan Block, CEO, present outgoing board member Joe Paterno with a clock to acknowledge his **seventeen years** of service on the ELC board.

Mr. Paterno was a founding member of the ELC Board. He is also retiring as the Executive Director of **CareerSource of Southwest Florida**. Wishing him all the best!



*(l-r) Joe Paterno, Susan Block, Marshall Bower*

### **Lunch & Learn** *Future Ready Collier Event*

In March, our CEO, Susan Block joined Chancellor of Early Learning, Matthew Mears as a panelist for Future Ready Collier's series

## Lunch & Learn

EARLY LEARNING:  
EDUCATIONAL &  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



"HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES ARE ESSENTIAL. IF WE WANT TO REDUCE POVERTY, THE EASIEST STRATEGY WOULD BE TO INVEST HEAVILY IN CHILDREN SO THEY CAN BECOME SELF-SUSTAINING EARNERS IN ADULTHOOD."

**SUSAN BLOCK**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Early Learning Coalition  
of Southwest Florida

MARCH 8, 2022  
12-1 PM, VIRTUAL  
FUTUREREADYCOLLIER.ORG

"Lunch & Learn." This virtual event focused on how quality early learning opportunities can often spell the difference between perpetuating a cycle of poverty and increasing the chances of achievement and productivity in life. There is a growing understanding that investing in early education is key to future economic stability. Curious to learn more? You can [watch it here](#)

## Business Breakfast

### *Save the Date*

Join us on August 5, 2022 to catch up with leaders in our community who care about the future of our youngest learners - and how they will impact our future.

# SAVE THE DATE

## AUGUST 5, 2022

Join us for a Business Breakfast to hear education leaders discuss how quality early learning builds a stronger economy - from the ground - UP!

*Where: Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre*  
*Keynote Speaker: Armando Llechu,*  
*Chief Officer Hospital Operations &*  
*Women's and Children's Services at Lee*  
*Health*



## Literacy Buddy Program

### *Another Great Year!*

A hearty "thank you" to all the participants in the 14th year of the Literacy Buddy Program!

The **Literacy Buddy Program** focuses on developing children's correspondence, communication and writing skills. The program is a voluntary activity for preschools under contract with the Coalition. The focus is on children aged, 3, 4 and 5.

Children write letters, and adult volunteers write back and send a book based on the child's interests. These books are the child's to keep, to take home and share with their family. This exchange takes place three times during the school year.

This year, **847** adult volunteers were paired with **1,053** children and delivered **3,159** high-quality books!



## **Touch-a-Truck** **Family Fun**

What's more fun than...pretending to drive the firetruck?

In April, we joined children and families for hours of fun learning about the cars, trucks, helicopters, and the people who work on them.

Children took some time-out in the shade to color the ELC's Giant Mural, while parents/guardians learned about the **School Readiness** and **Voluntary Prekindergarten** (VPK) Programs.

*The Touch-A-Truck* event was hosted by Pediatric Dentistry of Florida in Fort Myers



*Visiting the ELC of SWFL tent to cool off and color the giant mural.*



*Roller truck fun!*



*Can I pretend to be a helicopter pilot?*

## **Butterfly Garden** **A Living Lesson**

Something's in the air at Deana's Country Kids in North Fort Myers – it's a butterfly garden!

Learning about nature and life cycles is important to encourage children's curiosity. Butterflies are an excellent example of an observable life cycle. Respect for nature and how it works learned from a young age promotes the preservation of our world and appreciation of outdoors.



Garden construction was facilitated with a grant administered through the Early Learning Coalition SWFL.

## **New Campus**

## At Guadalupe Center



Lots of cheers for the grand opening of the new Otterloo Family Campus for Learning at the **Guadalupe Center** in Immokalee. This expansion will permit more students, age 5 and under, to participate in the Center's early education program. It will also provide after-school tutoring.

Guadalupe Center named the campus in honor of Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo, whose \$5 million matching gift helped launch the project. Barron Collier Companies donated 9.5 acres for the new center.

## Looking Forward

### *Our Business Breakfast Returns!*



The Early Learning Coalition of SWFL is pleased to announce our 2022 Business Breakfast will be held Friday, August 5 at the Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre in Fort Myers.

We invite you to dig into a delicious breakfast, mingle with friends and colleagues, and listen to our featured speakers. We also honor Joe Paterno, Former Exec. Dir. of CareerSource Florida, as an ELC *Early Learning Champion*.

It's a good way to start your morning, and to learn how quality preschool experiences can be the building blocks to a stronger local economy.

We hope to see you there! To register for this event, please click [here](#):

Susan Block, CEO  
Early Learning Coalition SWFL

Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida  
(239) 935-6100 | ELCofSWFL.org

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