

WINTER, 2024 Newsletter

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## A message from our CEO

Greetings, Early Learning Coalition Advocates!

As we stride into the new year, it's a pleasure to provide you with a comprehensive update on the work and accomplishments of the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida (ELCSWFL) since last November. Your unwavering support and dedication continue to drive our mission forward, ensuring that every child in our community has access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

### Investment Through ARPA Funds

In line with our commitment to serving families effectively, we're thrilled to announce that the ELCSWFL has successfully leveraged funds allocated through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). These funds have been instrumental in expanding our services and support systems, particularly in light of the ongoing economic challenges faced by many families in our region.

### Expansion of Support to Families

Utilizing School Readiness Match funds, we've made significant strides in supporting families up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This initiative reflects our dedication to inclusivity and ensuring that economic barriers do not hinder access to quality early learning experiences for children in our community.

### Legislative Advocacy and Impact

The current legislative session has presented several opportunities for advocacy and policy advancement in the early childhood education landscape. Here's a high-level overview of some key legislative developments:

**Revised Definitions and Sliding Fee Scale:** Proposed revisions seek to redefine "economically disadvantaged" from 150% FPL to 55% SMI and establish a uniform sliding fee scale with copayments that adjust according to income levels. These changes aim to streamline access to assistance programs and ensure equitable distribution of resources.

## In This Issue



Community partners support early childhood literacy.

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Staff Development Day highlights how young children learn.

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Lobby renovation streamlines

Enhanced Reimbursement Rates: Efforts are underway to revise reimbursement rate language, with a focus on setting rates based on the actual cost of care by June 1, 2024. This initiative aims to provide fair compensation to early learning providers, fostering sustainability and quality improvement across the sector.

Quality Improvement Measures: Legislative proposals include measures to expand allowable requirements for summer Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) instructors, align professional development with recognized standards such as TEACH and career pathways, and modify allowable quality activities to meet early learning standards. These initiatives are geared towards enhancing the overall quality of early learning experiences and fostering continuous improvement within the sector.

VPK Accountability Metrics and Summer Bridge Programs: The legislation also addresses VPK accountability metrics, clarifying the calculation of composite scores and issuing VPK designations starting from the 2024-25 program year. Additionally, a summer bridge program is proposed for students scoring below the 20th percentile on PM3 assessments, aiming to provide targeted support and intervention to enhance school readiness.

At the ELCSWFL, we remain actively engaged in advocating for policies and initiatives that prioritize the well-being and development of our youngest learners. Your continued support and engagement play a vital role in driving positive change and ensuring a bright future for all children in Southwest Florida.

**Thank you** for your unwavering commitment to early childhood education and for being valued partners in our journey towards building a stronger, more equitable community.



**Melanie M. Stefanowicz, Ed.D.**  
**CEO, Early Learning Coalition of SWFL**

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The ARPA grant helps Pre-K classrooms.  
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