



# EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

## Advanced Learning Academy: Appeal Hearing Minutes

July 25, 2016  
8:00 am

**Purpose:** Review the Coalition’s decision to terminate School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten contracts with the Appellant, Advanced Learning Academy, at 1012 Donald Road, North Fort Myers.

### Executive Committee Members Present

**Ashley Houk, Appeals Committee Chair** *Preschool Director, First Presbyterian Preschool*  
**Dr. Joseph Pepe,** *Health Dept. Administrator, Florida Dept. of Health in Hendry/Glades Counties*  
**Maggie Stevens,** *Principal, Early Childhood Learning Services, Lee County School District;*

**Appellant Present:** **Ms. Hope Castelli,** *Director/Owner, Advanced Learning Academy*

**Coalition Staff Present:** **Susan Block,** *CEO;* **Gayla Thompson,** *Chief Quality Officer;* **Ginger McHale,** *Executive Administrative Assistant. to CEO*

Agenda Items	Discussion	Action/Assignments
<b>Introductions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chairperson, Ashley Houk, led introductions at 8:05am</li> </ul>	
<b>Review of Hearing Procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ms. Houk reviewed the appeal hearing procedure, referring to the agenda provided to all participants.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Presentation by Early Learning Coalition Staff</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gayla Thompson, Chief Quality Officer, reviewed the background of the Coalition’s Decision to terminate the School Readiness (SR) and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) contracts with Advanced Learning Academy. The basis for termination was two (2) Class I licensing violations by the Department of Children and Families. Class I Violations are the most serious in nature, pose an imminent threat to a child including abuse or neglect and which could or does result in the death or serious harm to the health, safety or well-being of a child.</li> <li>• Ms. Block explained the Coalition’s rationale for determining the 3 year period when Advanced Learning Academy would be unable to contract with the Coalition to provide SR and VPK programs. The statewide contracts for both SR and VPK allow up to a five year termination period for programs violating the contract terms. The Coalition determined that the provider’s actions created an unnecessary and potentially serious threat to children, forgoing the basic responsibilities required by contract and in the care of young children. The Provider’s actions breached the trust of the Coalition in their ability to keep children healthy and safe. The Coalition is concerned about the ability of this provider to make sound decisions.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Presentation of Appeal by Advanced Learning Academy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Castelli presented her appeal.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Conclusion of Appeal Hearing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All in attendance, except the three committee members, were excused and left the room.</li> <li>• The committee members deliberated and came to a determination.</li> </ul>	<p>The committee drafted minutes for the appeal hearing and approved them. The original draft was signed by all three members of the committee.</p>

<p><b>Committee Decision</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Committee agreed with the Coalition and upheld the termination of School Readiness and VPK contracts with Advanced Learning Academy. However, the Committee overturned the length of the termination. The provider will be eligible to apply for contracts on July 21, 2017.</li> <li>• The Committee specifically stated these reasons in support of its decisions:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agreed that the violations jeopardize student safety;</li> <li>2. Reduced the length of termination in an effort to reduce impact on the local community and its families;</li> <li>3. Validated concerns for DCF Findings, including Ms. Castelli’s testimony;</li> <li>4. The Committee strongly believes that upholding the termination is consistent with the mission of the Coalition.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<p>Motion to accept the committee ruling by Dr. Pepe; Seconded by Ms. Stevens. Motion Approved.</p> <p>Ms. Block will communicate with the Provider within 24 hours. Ms. Houk will present findings at the September 14<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee and September 28<sup>th</sup> Board meetings.</p> <p>A letter will be sent to Ms. Castelli with the committee’s determination by Ms. Block.</p>
<p><b>Preparation of Appeals Hearing Committee Minutes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Committee prepared a final draft of the minutes of the appeals hearing.</li> </ul>	<p>Motion to accept the minutes by Ms. Stevens; Second by Dr. Pepe. Motion Approved.</p> <p>The Committee charged Ms. Block with typing of the minutes, as written. Ms. Block will post the approved minutes to the Coalition’s website.</p>
<p><b>Adjournment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Houk thanked the members for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 9:14 am.</li> </ul>	