



Item:

Early Childhood Learning Collaborative September 2026 Update

Requested Action:

1. The Board is requested to receive the update.

Key Outcomes:

End of the Fiscal Year meeting was held with the Early Childhood Learning Collaborative on Sept 15, 2026. The Collaborative reviewed FY 2025–26 progress and began identifying priorities for FY 2026–27. Below are meeting highlights.

Project Connect Status

Project CONNECT planning meetings are expected to begin in October upon contract execution, with implementation targeted for March 2027. These dates remain planning targets.

- **Implementation Strategy:**
 - Utilizing evidence-based resources from Anita Zucker Center.
 - Partnering with the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County to prepare Practice Based Coaches and identify the first three implementation sites.
 - Focusing on early identification via ASQ screening and providing "just-in-time" supports.
 - Providing professional development for directors and teachers on inclusive environments and embedded instruction.

Early Educators Work Group

- **Priority Shift:** After aligning with Project Connect, the group focused on expanding access to non-traditional care (evening, weekend, overnight) for essential workers in family-based homes.
- **Key Requirements:** Expansion of these services requires sustainable funding and a pipeline of trained professionals rather than new expensive infrastructure. They have shared their findings and discussions with County staff for planning.
- **Goal:** Improve kindergarten readiness by aligning educators, leaders, coaches, and families.

Emerging Priorities for FY 2026–27

The Partners proposed developing a common understanding of readiness and mapping existing early learning, literacy, family support, professional development, and early intervention resources. This proposed first step would help partners identify gaps, strengthen connections, and select one achievable action for the next 6–12 months.

Educator support remains a concern, including professional learning, recognition, compensation, and assistance with children's behavioral and social-emotional needs.

Partners also emphasized support for children with emerging needs who do not qualify for formal services and ensuring that families feel valued and connected to assistance.

Partners are considering a potential goal of: Increase kindergarten readiness by connecting families, early learning educators, schools, coaches, and community resources around a shared understanding of what kindergarten readiness looks like and how we can better support children and educators.

Strategic Decisions & Agreements

- **Communication Strategy:** The group agreed to move beyond quantitative data to include storytelling and qualitative data to better communicate the impact on families and teachers.
- **Partner Re-engagement:** Partners will personally reach out to former collaborators to invite them back, providing a clear message on the value and progress of the group.
- **Meeting Cadence:** The full collaborative will meet 3-4 times per year, while smaller work groups will meet more frequently based on project stages.
- **Community Conversation on Childcare Planning:** Confirm a small workgroup of Early Learning Educators and Advocates to help plan. Coordinate the next Community Conversation potentially on January 25, 2027 during the statewide All In For Early Learning Day.

Next Steps

- **November/December Meeting:** The full collaborative will reconvene in November/December to discuss the January in-person event and review progress from the work groups.
- **Implementation:** Project Connect is expected to move into full planning in October, with implementation targeted for January, February, or March of next year.

Tentative Schedule Full Collaborative

- November 4, 2026
- December 15, 2026
- January 25, 2027 Community Conversation on Child Care: All In For Early Learning
- April 26, 2027
- August 23, 2027

Programmatic Impact:

Fiscal Year 26-27

Goal 1: Children and youth are healthy and have nurturing caregivers and relationships.

Focus Area: Children and Youth with Special Needs

Indicator: Enhance efforts in Alachua County focused on serving children with special needs. The CTAC aims to learn more about community needs in this area and convening partners to address them.

Goal 2: Children and youth can learn what they need to be successful.

Focus Area: Early Learning

Indicator: Kindergarten readiness, VPK participation

Fiscal Impact:

Fiscal Year 2026-2027 \$0.00

Recommendation:

Receive the report.