



Meeting of the Board of Trustees

December 3, 2021 2:00 PM

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83167970396?pwd=RFRxK3IEZGJacXRLdkR5ckRmT1dWdz09>

AGENDA

- I. Roll Call (Georgia Mjartan)
- II. Public Comment Period
The public is invited to provide comments relevant to the SC Early Childhood Advisory Council and/or South Carolina First Steps during this period. Members of the public wishing to speak must either email ajones@scfirststeps.org or notate their interest in speaking in the comment box on Zoom *prior* to the start of the meeting. Comments should be limited to no more than three minutes per speaker.
- III. Call to Order and Approve Agenda (David Morley)
Motion: To adopt the agenda as submitted
Motion: To adopt the October 21, 2021 minutes as submitted
Attachments: October 21, 2021 Minutes
- IV. Parents as Teachers External Evaluation FY16-17 through FY18-19 (Dr. Cheri Shapiro, University of South Carolina; Drs. Kristi Manseth and MacKenna Perry, Pacific Research Evaluation)
Attachments: Parents as Teachers Evaluation Summary; Parents as Teachers Evaluation Full Report (separate document)
- V. Executive Committee Report (David Morley)
Motion: To approve the SCFS Bonus Policy
Motion: To approve the 2022 SC First Steps Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council 2022 meeting dates
Attachments: Executive Committee Report, Executive Committee Meetings Minutes, SCFS Policy 3.18 – Pay for Performance Increase, SCFS Policy 3.19 – Bonus Policy, SC First Steps Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council 2022 Meeting Schedule
- VI. Consent Agenda: Motions Recommended by Committees (David Morley)
 - a. **Motion:** To approve the SCFS Pay for Performance Increase Policy (Executive Committee recommends)
 - b. **Motion:** To approve the 16 Local Partnerships for waivers to carry forward FY21 grant funds to be expended in FY22 according to the plans submitted to this committee by Abbeville, Aiken, Allendale, Barnwell, Berkeley, Chester, Clarendon, Fairfield, Greenwood, Horry, Jasper, Marion, Oconee, Pickens, Sumter, and Union County First Steps. (Program and Grant Committee recommends)
- VII. Finance and Administration Committee (Walter Fleming)



Attachments: Finance and Administration Committee Report, Finance and Administration Committee Meeting Minutes, FY 2022 Financial Status Report as of October 31, 2021, FY 2022 Donations Report as of October 31, 2021

- VIII. Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee (Jennifer McConnell)
Attachments: Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee Report, Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee Meeting Minutes
- IX. Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee (Dr. Amy Williams)
Attachments: Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Report, Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Meeting Minutes
- X. Legislative Committee (Sen. Gerald Malloy)
- XI. Executive Director's Report (Georgia Mjartan)
Attachments: Executive Director's Report– Year In Review
- XII. **Motion:** To adjourn the meeting of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees



Board of Trustees Meeting

October 21, 2021

2:00PM

<https://zoom.us/j/92196505922?pwd=WnA4MFlyZWJXWmFJU21xK2YzWndFdz09>

Draft Minutes

Members Present (19):

Dave Morley, Chair
Dr. Shelley Canright
Sen. Gerald Malloy
Rep. Rita Allison
Dr. David Mathis
Robert Kerr
Mary Lynne Diggs
Sue Williams
Michael Leach

Dr. Edward Simmer
Walter Fleming
Tim Holt
Jennifer McConnell
Dr. Amy Williams
Jessica Mackey
John Hayes
Nicole Wynkoop
Alexia Newman

Roger Pryor

Members Absent (4):

Sen. Greg Hembree
Rep. Jerry Govan
Dr. Michelle Fry
Janie Neeley

Attendees (74)

Georgia Mjartan
Abby Thorman
A Brewton
Amanda D. Scott
Amber Gillum
Amy Engle
Avian Jones
Beth Moore
Betty Gardiner
Bett Washington
Bill Potapchuk
Blaine Van Dyne
Brittany Bush
Candi Lalonde
Carletta Isreal
Cassie Barber
Chastine Dickey-Jackson
Dr. Chelsea Richard
Cheryl Scales-Chavis
Christy Stanton
Cindy Ellis
Cindy Galloway
Cindy Kellett
Cindy Riley

Derek Cromwell
Dione Brabham
David Mathis
Dorian Young
Dorina Frase
Dorothy Priester
Eunice Medina
Gina Beebe
Janice Kilburn
Jared Busker
Jasmin Tucker
Jennifer Williams
Jon Artz
Joy Mazur
Joyce Kimrey
Justin Siuba
Karen Oliver
Kate Roach
Kathy Fitzgerald
Dr. Kerry Cordan
Kim Archung
Kim Trudell
Kristen Martocchio
LaMyra Sanders

Laura Baker
Lavinia Tejada
Leah Crosby
Leesa Aiken
Lexi Jones
Lis Guimaraes
Marc Drews
Mark Barnes
Martha Strickland
Marcia Cohens
Peggy Ball
Pierce McNair
Rachal Hatton-Moore
Rogers Pender
Rusty Monohollon
Sally Cauthen
Samantha Ingram
Sarah Crawford
Sarah Eargle
Shayla Pettigrew
Sheila Cornwell
SheKiah Reese
Stacy Greenwalt
Suzanne McGougan

Tiffany Outlaw
Valencia Johnson

Ms. Jones conducted a roll call.



Ms. Jones reported there were no members of the public that requested to speak.

Dr. Canright called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. Dr. Canright requested a motion to adopt the agenda. Dr. Mathis provided the motion. Ms. McConnell provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.

Dr. Canright asked for a motion to approve the August 19, 2021 minutes. Dr. Mathis provided the motion. Mr. Holt provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.

Dr. Canright reported on the Executive Committee and welcomed to the board Dr. Michelle Fry, Director of the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs.

Dr. Canright asked for a motion to approve the following consent agenda. Ms. McConnell provided the motion. Dr. Williams provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.

Consent Agenda: Motions Recommended by Committees (David Morley)

- a. Motion to prohibit the following local partnerships from being awarded future competitive and targeted grants from South Carolina First Steps until all of the partnerships' issues contained in their Corrective Action Plans and until any pending investigations are resolved; Unresolved Fiscal Year 19 corrective action and unresolved OIG investigation- Abbeville County FS and Greenwood County FS; New unresolved Fiscal year 21 Corrective Action- Barnwell County FS, Horry County First Steps, Jasper County FS, and Kershaw County FS. (Programs and Grants Committee recommends)
- b. Motion to accept the Early Childhood Innovation Grant Awards to 5 applications representing the following 7 Local Partnerships as recommended by the SC First Steps grant review committee- Chesterfield, Anderson, Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester, Cherokee, and Colleton County Local Partnerships. (Program and Grant Committee recommends)

Mr. Fleming reported on the Finance and Administration Committee. He discussed the FY 2020-2021 Financial Audit in which the agency did not have any findings for its fifth year. He provided a financial update, information on the 2022-2023 budget request, and the conclusion of the Inspector General's investigation into two local partnerships.

Ms. McConnell reported on the Local Partnerships Programs and Grants Committee. She reviewed the changes for two partnerships, the program standard changes to the HIPPIY program, and a new program standard to SCPV. Mr. Cromwell reviewed the FY21 corrective action plans for the affected local partnerships and reviewed partnership vacancies and local partnership board terms.

Dr. Williams reported on the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee and shared that the committee discussed the possibility of forming a scientific advisory task force.

Sen. Malloy provided a legislative update and acknowledged their support of the agency and its budget request for FY 2022-2023.



Ms. Mjartan provided the Executive Director's report with information on the budget request which includes a \$6 million request in recurring funds to support the needs of the local partnerships. She provided an update on the plans for ESSER III funds, the creation of the new Catch-up to Kindergarten, and the improvements to the AmeriCorps and HIPPIY programs. Ms. Mjartan shared updates on First Steps 4K and information on the First Steps Literacy Campaign. She asked the board for volunteers to read to children in First Steps 4K classrooms during the MLK Day of Service. Ms. Mjartan shared information on the spring fundraiser that will benefit the local partnerships, introduced new team members, and reviewed vacancies.

Dr. Canright asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. McConnell provided the motion. Ms. Williams seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 pm by Dr. Canright

External Evaluation Summary

Parents as Teachers

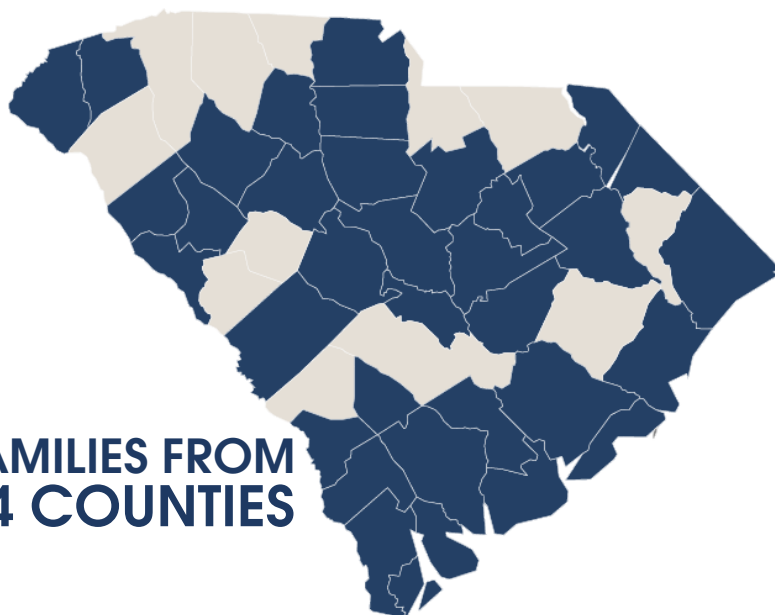
South Carolina First Steps

Since 1999, South Carolina First Steps (SCFS) has worked to support school readiness of young children across the state. As the state office for the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, PAT is SCFS's most commonly offered and highest funded parenting program. To evaluate program effectiveness, SCFS commissioned an external evaluation of the Parents as Teachers program, focusing on the period of July 2016 to June 2019.

2,150

**FAMILIES SERVED
FROM 2016 TO 2019**

The average family was enrolled for 1.7 years total. Children averaged 1.25 years old at enrollment.



Over three years, South Carolina families received a total of:

- **61,969** home visits from parent educators
- **68,954** hours of home visit time
- **1,000** group parent education sessions
- **6,131** child development screenings
- **12,633** referrals to other resources
- **704** childcare scholarships

OUT OF 21 RISK FACTORS FOR EARLY SCHOOL FAILURE, THE AVERAGE FAMILY ENROLLED IN THE PROGRAM EXPERIENCED **3 OR MORE**.

81.3%

MADE <\$15,000 PER YEAR

64.9%

WERE SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

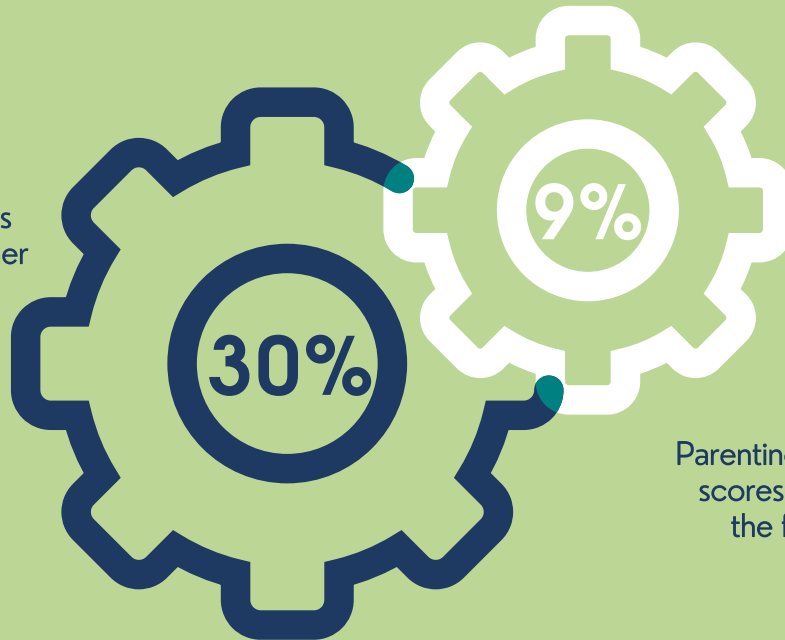
Program Outcomes

To understand how the PAT program may benefit families, the evaluation team looked at outcomes for both parents and children. Important questions for future research include whether benefits may be even stronger over time and how child, family, and program factors relate to key outcomes.

Average parenting quality and interactive reading scores increased from the first assessment to the final assessment.



Interactive reading scores were as much as 30% higher at the final assessment.



Parenting quality assessment scores were 9% higher at the final assessment.

Program participation was significantly related to school and well-child visit attendance rates.



PAT program students were present for a significantly higher percentage of school days than their like peers. On average, PAT students missed less than 6% of school days.



Children of PAT families who were enrolled in Medicaid attended the recommended number of well-child visits at a significantly higher rate than their like peers. On average, PAT children met approximately half the recommended visits, while non-PAT children met only one-third.



There was no evidence that participating in the PAT program impacted scores on a kindergarten readiness measure or number of child maltreatment reports.



To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees
From: David Morley, Chairman, Executive Committee
Date: November 22, 2021
RE: Executive Committee Report

The Executive Committee of the Board of South Carolina First Steps met on November 18, 2021. Minutes from the meeting are attached. With a quorum present, the committee voted to approve the following motions:

Jennifer McConnell motioned, Walt Fleming seconded, unanimous approval:

Proposed motion to add two key measures of success to the South Carolina Birth through Five plan:

1. While increasing kindergarten readiness for all students, reduce the disparity between Black and white kindergartners by 25%, from 18% to 13.5%, by 2027.
2. While increasing kindergarten readiness for all students, reduce the disparity between Latino and white kindergartners by 25%, from 22% to 16.5%, by 2027.

Dr. Shelley Canright motioned, Jennifer McConnell seconded, unanimous approval:

Motion to approve the Pay for Performance Increase Policy.



**Executive Committee Meeting
November 18, 2021 at 11:00 am by Zoom**

Minutes

The meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of South Carolina First Steps was called to order at 11:06 by Chairman Dave Morley. Members present were David Morley, Dr. Shelley Canright, Jennifer McConnell, and Walt Fleming. Members absent were Dr. Amy Williams, Sen. Gerald Malloy. Executive Director Georgia Mjartan was present.

Executive Director Georgia Mjartan provided information on the agency's budget request and presentation of the request to the Governor's Office and the Education Oversight Committee. Mjartan updated the members on questions, concerns, and feedback from legislators, First Steps Executive Directors, and others regarding legislation governing local partnership boards - Section 59-152-60, Local First Steps Partnership Boards. Given the amount of interest, concern, and suggestions for improving the structure of local partnership board governance, staff are working to provide suggested amendments to this statute. There will be a process by which staff share the proposed amendments with legislators, involve key stakeholders, notably local First Steps partnerships, and the board, and through this process, work toward a legislative solution, ideally as early as this coming 2022 session. The members of Executive Committee were supportive of this approach.

Next, Mjartan brought to the committee the following items for discussion and action, arising from a lengthy Early Childhood Advisory Council meeting in October in which this one measure of success from the South Carolina First through Five Plan was tabled for further discussion and consideration. The proposed motion to replace the tabled item were:

Proposed motion to add two key measures of success to the South Carolina Birth through Five plan:

1. While increasing kindergarten readiness for all students, reduce the disparity between Black and white kindergartners by 25%, from 18% to 13.5%, by 2027.
2. While increasing kindergarten readiness for all students, reduce the disparity between Latino and white kindergartners by 25%, from 22% to 16.5%, by 2027.

The motion and an accompanying data summary on the topic were presented and discussed. Chairman Morley proposed the addition of a statement to indicate that "any racial or ethnic disparity is unacceptable" and that by proposing these measures of success in a five-year plan, "we are taking our first steps" toward the vision of eradicating the disparity completely. It was decided that this language would be included in the plan, but not embedded in the metrics

SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS – AGENCY POLICY

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Policy Title: | DRAFT Pay for Performance Increase | | |
| Policy Number: | 3.18 | Effective Date: | January 1, 2022 |
| Related Procedures | 3.17 – Pay for Performance Procedure | | |
| Regulation References: | SC Code of Laws Section 8-1-160 | | |
| SCFS Executive Director Approval Date: | | | |
| SCFS Board of Trustees Approval Date: | | | |
| Revisions Dates: | | | |

THE LANGUAGE USED IN THIS DOCUMENT DOES NOT CREATE AN EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT BETWEEN THE EMPLOYEE AND THE AGENCY. THIS DOCUMENT DOES NOT CREATE ANY CONTRACTUAL RIGHTS OR ENTITLEMENTS. THE AGENCY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REVISE THE CONTENT OF THIS DOCUMENT, IN WHOLE OR IN PART. NO PROMISES OR ASSURANCES, WHETHER WRITTEN OR ORAL, WHICH ARE CONTRARY TO OR INCONSISTENT WITH THE TERMS OF THIS PARAGRAPH CREATE ANY CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT.

POLICY

The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness (SCFS) establishes a policy and procedure for pay for performance salary increases for specified employees of the South Carolina First Steps, pursuant to Section 8-1-160 of the South Carolina Code of Laws.

DEFINITIONS

Classified Position: A position that has been assigned to a classified State title and a State class

Full-Time: An employee with weekly working hours totaling a minimum of 37.5 hours.

Full-Time Equivalent (FTE): A position authorized by the General Assembly which is expressed as a numerical value as a percentage of time in hours and of funds.

Probationary Period: An initial working test period of employment in an FTE position with the state of not more than 12 months duration for non-instructional personnel or the academic year duration for instructional personnel.

Temporary Employee: a full-time or part-time employee who does not occupy an FTE position, whose employment is not to exceed one year, and who is not a covered employee.

Temporary Grant Employee: a full-time or part-time employee who does not occupy an FTE position and is hired to fill a position specified in and funded by a federal grant, public charity grant, private foundation grant, or research grant and who is not a covered employee

Time-Limited Project Employee: a full-time or part-time employee who does not occupy an FTE position who is hired to fill a position with time-limited project funding approved or authorized by the appropriate State authority, and who is not a covered employee.

A. Eligibility

All employees of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness who meet one of the following criteria are eligible for consideration for a pay for performance salary increase.

SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS – AGENCY POLICY

- a. Is a full-time FTE employee who has completed their probationary period and has been employed by the agency for a minimum of one continuous year.
- b. Is a full-time temporary, time-limited, or temporary grant employee who has been employed by the agency, full-time, for a minimum of one continuous year.

B. Criteria for Pay for Performance

Classified and Unclassified staff receiving a pay for performance salary increase must meet three or more of the following criteria, one of which must be a documented appraisal of performance as indicated in item C:

- i. A significant increase in service or productivity through innovation;
- ii. Demonstrated positive attitude and spirit of service and cooperation;
- iii. A record of exceptional service;
- iv. A substantial contribution to the goals of the organization through the performance of special assignments or the provision of exceptional customer service not previously included in performance objectives

C. Required

For classified staff and unclassified staff: A rating of “Successful” or above on the most recent performance appraisal within the last twelve months. A “Successful” or above rating does not automatically qualify an employee for a pay for performance salary increase.

D. Amount of Salary Increase

Pay for performance salary increases for classified and unclassified staff shall not exceed 15% of an employee’s base salary per the State Human Resources Regulations. Increases in excess of 15% will be approved only with exceptional justification. Increases for classified staff are also limited by the pay range for the position; increases may not place the employee’s salary above the maximum level of the pay band. All increases for classified and unclassified staff are authorized by the Executive Director and reviewed by the Division of Human Resources for equity, market factors, years of experience, and time in position.

E. Funding, Frequency, and Effective Date of Pay for Performance Increases

- a. Pay for performance salary increases are conditional upon the availability of funds.
- b. For classified and unclassified staff, only one pay for performance salary increase may be granted to an eligible employee during a 12-month period.
- c. Pay for performance salary increases will be effective on the pay period coincident with or immediately following approval by the Executive Director.

REFERENCED PROCEDURES

3.17 – Pay for Performance Increase

SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS – AGENCY POLICY

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Policy Title: | DRAFT Bonuses | | |
| Policy Number: | 3.19 | Effective Date: | January 1, 2022 |
| Related Procedures | 3.18 – Bonus Procedure | | |
| Regulation References: | Employee Bonuses Proviso | | |
| SCFS Executive Director Approval Date: | | | |
| SCFS Board of Trustees Approval Date: | | | |
| Revisions Dates: | | | |

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POLICY

The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness (SCFS) establishes a policy and procedure for bonuses for specified employees of the South Carolina First Steps, pursuant to the South Carolina Employee Bonuses Proviso.

DEFINITIONS

Bonus: A lump sum payment for an eligible employee for exceptional service.

Full-Time: An employee with weekly working hours totaling a minimum of 37.5 hours.

Full-Time Equivalent (FTE): A position authorized by the General Assembly which is expressed as a numerical value as a percentage of time in hours and of funds.

Permanent Status: the status attained by an employee upon completion of a probationary or trial period in a class or an unclassified State title

Time-Limited Employee: A full-time or part-time employee who does not occupy an FTE position who is hired to fill a position with time-limited project funding approved or authorized by the appropriate State authority, and who is not a covered employee

Temporary Grant Employee: a full-time or part-time employee who does not occupy an FTE position and is hired to fill a position specified in and funded by a federal grant, public charity grant, private foundation grant, or research grant and who is not a covered employee.

A. Eligibility

All permanent status employees of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness who are full-time in FTE, time-limited, temporary, or temporary grant positions are eligible for consideration for a bonus provided their base salary is less than \$100,000 per year.

B. Approval Criteria

SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS – AGENCY POLICY

Bonuses may be awarded to recognize the accomplishments and contributions of individual employees for:

- a) Contributions to increased organizational productivity
- b) Development or implementation of improved work processes
- c) Exceptional customer service
- d) Realized cost savings
- e) Other specific contributions to the success of the organization

C. Amount and Frequency of Bonuses and Source of Funds

- a. An employee may receive more than one bonus in a fiscal year; however, the total amount of the bonuses received for the fiscal year may not exceed \$3,000.
- b. State, federal, and other sources of revenue may be used to award bonuses.
- c. A bonus is not part of an employee's salary base and is not earnable compensation for purposes of employee and employer contributions to the respective retirement systems.

D. Approval Authority

Bonuses will only be made at the recommendation of the supervisor and manager. The executive director is the final authority responsible to approving employee bonuses.

REFERENCED PROCEDURES

3.18 – Bonuses Procedure



2022

Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council

Meeting Dates

Meetings will be held at 2 p.m.

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| FEBRUARY 17, 2022 | BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL |
| APRIL 21, 2022 | BOARD OF TRUSTEES RETREAT EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL |
| JUNE 16, 2022 | BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL |
| AUGUST 18, 2022 | BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL |
| OCTOBER 20, 2022 | BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL |
| DECEMBER 1, 2022 | 2022 SC SUMMIT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD |
| DECEMBER 2, 2022 | BOARD OF TRUSTEES ANNUAL MEETING EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL |



To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees

From: Walter Fleming, Chairman, Finance and Administration Committee

Date: November 17, 2021

RE: Finance and Administration Report

The Finance and Administration Committee met via Zoom conference call on November 17, 2021 to receive updates from staff. Detailed meeting minutes are attached. The committee brings forward no action items, and the following updates.

First Steps State Office

Financial Report

2021-22: The YTD financial report was reviewed by Mr. Barnes. The organization continues to be in excellent financial condition, and our expenditures are below expectations as we work to expand our 4K Program statewide.

Other Items

Mr. Barnes gave us an update on the 2022-23 State Budget Request, and issues regarding two of our Local Partnerships and their work to implement their corrective action plans. In addition, he mentioned the work to secure the ability of the staff in the Local Partnerships to participate in the State Retirement System. That work is continuing.



Minutes from Finance and Administration Committee Meeting

November 17, 2021

Members present: Walter Fleming, Chairman, Tim Holt

Members not present: N/A

Nonmembers present: Mark Barnes, Director of Administration; Lavinia Tejada, CPA, Director of Finance and Audits

With all public notices being provided, the Zoom meeting was called to order by Walter Fleming at 10:00 am.

First Steps State Office

Financial Report

The YTD financial report for 2021-22 was reviewed by Mr. Barnes. He shared that the expenditures for the year to date are less than the budget. This is due, in part, to the statewide expansion of the 4K Program. This is our first year of statewide expansion in the middle of a continuing pandemic. Our 4K staff is working hard to increase the number of centers, and students enrolled in the program. At this point we have more students enrolled than at anytime in the past, as well as the highest number of classrooms and centers. He mentioned the updated Donations Report was also included.

State Budget Update

Mr. Barnes reminded the group of the single state budget request that was submitted to the Governor's Office for the upcoming 2022-23 state fiscal year. The request is for \$6 Million in recurring funds for the Local Partnerships. These funds would be used for two purposes, they include targeted or competitive grants, and for capacity and infrastructure with some of the funds being available to use for monitoring and support. In addition, we requested some proviso changes that would increase the amounts paid to the 4K providers for transportation, tuition, and class-room start-up funds. We met with the Governor's Office last month to present our request and have shared the request with the Education Oversight Committee as well. We will meet with staff from the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee early in December. He reminded the Committee that we did not ask for any 4K funds as we will have enough carryforward along with the new recurring amount to cover the costs for the next fiscal year, 2022-23. Mr. Barnes mentioned there will be a significant surplus in the state budget for the upcoming year, according to the Bureau of Economic Advisors.

Local Partnerships

Update on Greenwood and Abbeville County First Steps Partnerships

First Steps State Office staff are following up on the Corrective Action Plans established by the two Local Partnerships. The Corrective Action Plans and their timelines, which were established by the

Partnerships, will be completed by June 30, 2022. One of the items that was listed in the plans was Conflict of Interest Training for the two Boards and their staff members. An attorney was hired to do this training, it has been scheduled, and it will be conducted in the next four weeks. It was also mentioned that the 2020 Financial Audits are in the process of being finalized for these two Local Partnerships. This was delayed by the Auditor as he wanted to wait until the Inspector General's Investigation and Report was completed. We expect these soon.

Local Partnership Retirement Efforts

The State Office is continuing work with their attorney to assist with supporting Local Partnership staff to be eligible to enroll in the state's retirement system. Mr. Barnes mentioned to the Committee of the efforts to request an opinion from the Attorney General's Office for information on the classification of the Local Partnerships, which has been submitted, and at the same time reviewing potential changes to First Steps statutes which would change their status to PEBA and therefore allow the Local Partnerships to participate in retirement. The State Office has held a meeting, where all the Local Partnership Executive Directors were invited, to get feedback on things that needed improvement related to their Boards of Directors. In addition, there was considerable discussion during an Executive Director's Zoom Call on Tuesday, the 16th of November. We will use the feedback we received to inform our work in any statutory changes we would request from the General Assembly.

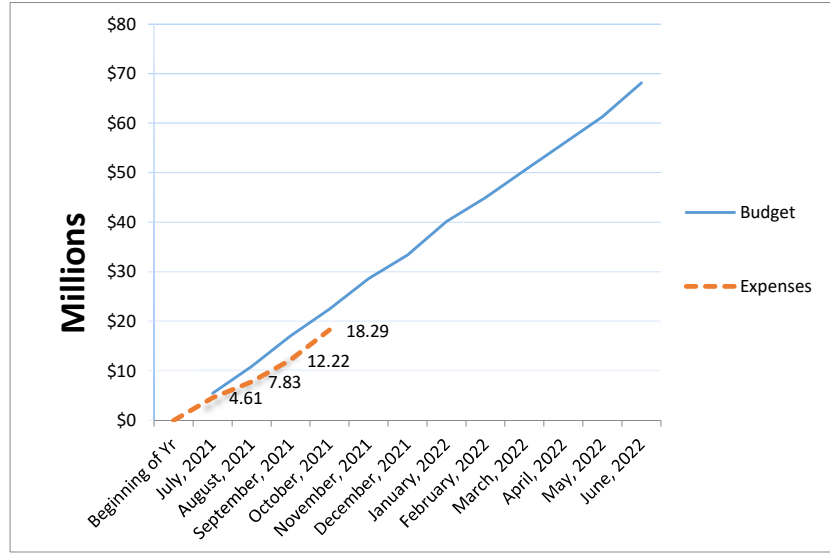
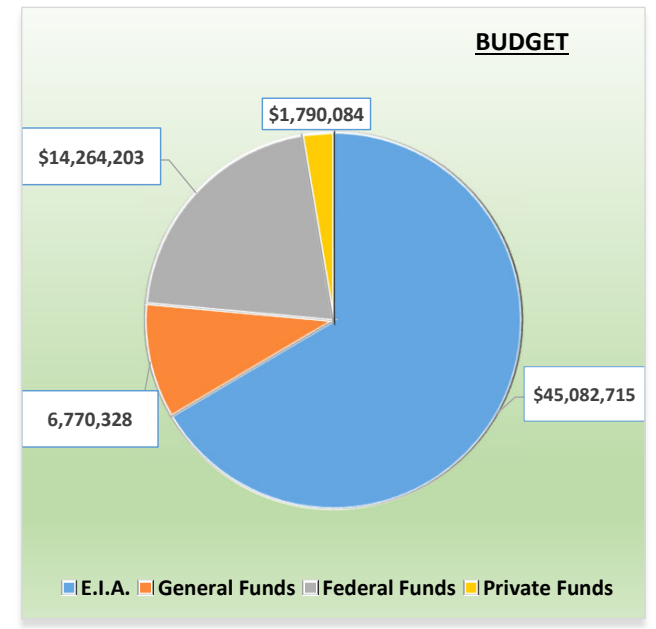
4K Program

Staff gave an update on the program's status. This included an update on the statewide expansion efforts.

Other

Mr. Barnes gave an update on several other unrelated matters.

With no further business to discuss, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:30.



**As of
October 31, 2021**

| Spending Rates | |
|----------------|-----|
| Projected | 33% |
| Actual | 27% |

| PROGRAMS / OPERATIONS | STATE APPROPRIATIONS | | | FEDERAL GRANTS | | | PRIVATE FUNDS | | | GRAND TOTAL | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| | Description | Budget | Expended | Balance | Budget | Expended | Balance | Budget | Expended | Balance | Budget | Expended | Balance |
| LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS | 14,435,228 | 5,572,924 | 8,862,304 | 2,025,313 | \$ 2,025,313 | - | | | | | 16,460,541 | 5,572,924 | \$ 10,887,617 |
| LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS SUPPORT & TECH ASST. | 2,896,900 | 720,055 | 2,176,845 | 3,385,280 | \$ 3,385,280 | 198,393 | - | 198,393 | | | 6,480,573 | 720,055 | \$ 5,760,518 |
| PRIVATE 4-K | 32,014,655 | 10,846,885 | 21,167,770 | 5,307,914 | 5,307,914 | - | | | | | 37,322,569 | 10,846,885 | \$ 26,475,684 |
| EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL | 193,500 | 15,679 | 177,821 | 2,531,685 | 531,630 | 2,000,055 | 130,000 | | 130,000 | | 2,855,185 | 547,309 | \$ 2,307,876 |
| AMERICORPS | | | | 326,703 | 50,572 | 276,131 | | | - | | 326,703 | 50,572 | \$ 276,131 |
| POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY | 2,557,208 | 516,553 | 2,040,655 | 687,308 | 687,308 | | 1,461,691 | 37,184 | 1,424,507 | | 4,706,207 | 553,736 | \$ 4,152,471 |
| GRAND TOTAL: | 52,097,491 | 17,672,096 | 34,425,395 | 14,264,203 | 582,202 | 13,682,001 | 1,790,084 | 37,184 | 1,752,900 | | 68,151,778 | 18,291,481 | \$ 49,860,297 |

Notes:

1) Local Partnerships:

- a. Funding Sources: Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funds
- b. Formula allocation cash advances are disbursed on a quarterly basis
- c. Expenditures reflect disbursements from SC First Steps (state-level)
- d. Does not include local-level actual expenses to staff and vendors

2) Private budgets based on Projected Fund Raising and income & prior year cash.

| | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 45,327,163 | E.I.A. |
| 6,770,328 | General Funds |
| 14,264,203 | Federal Funds |
| 1,790,084 | Private Funds |
| 68,151,778 | |

3) LP Support & Technical Assistance

- a. Contracted accounting firm (Manley Garvin, LLC)
- b. Accounting Software network support & Data Housing
- c. Programmatic data housing & network support

Federal Funds:

| | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| AmeriCorps: | 326,703 |
| SLDS: | 173,017 |
| PDG: | 5,686,573 |
| 10% Quality | 339,517 |
| ESSER Funds | 4,485,914 |
| GEER Funds | 3,252,479 |
| | 18 |
| | 14,264,203 |

3) LP Support & Technical Assistance (cont.)

- d. Workers' compensation insurance coverage
- e. External programmatic evaluation
- f. Financial audits-annually each LP
- g. Does not include local-level actual expenses to staff and vendors
- h. OFS program & finance staff (payroll, rent, contractual, supplies, travel, etc)
- i. Includes LP Countdown to Kindergarten program

- 4) State Appropriations Include EIA Funds and General Funds.**
- 5) \$3.2 mil. in GEER Funds were awarded April 1 (reimbursable)**

Donations

FY 2022



As of October 31st, 2021

| DATE RECEIVED | GENERAL | DONOR/PAYOR | FUNDS | PURPOSE / COMMENTS |
|---------------|---------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Jul 19, 2021 | 25 | Cindy Kellet | Unrestricted | SC First Steps |
| Jul 19, 2021 | 1,000 | Brady Thomas | Restricted | Hampton County First Steps |
| Aug 1, 2021 | 10 | Catherine Morton-FrontStream | Restricted | Berkeley County First Steps |
| Aug 24, 2021 | 975 | Jim & Melinda Robertson-NFG | Unrestricted | SC First Steps |
| Aug 24, 2021 | 20 | James Rickenbaker-NFG | Restricted | Orangeburg County First Steps |
| Aug 24, 2021 | 96 | Blackbaud Giving Foundation | Unrestricted | SC First Steps |
| Aug 24, 2021 | 125 | Flour Enterprise-The Benevity | Unrestricted | SC First Steps |
| Sep 1, 2021 | 10 | Catherine Morton-FrontStream | Restricted | Berkeley County First Steps |
| Oct 14, 2021 | 100 | Flour Enterprise-The Benevity | Unrestricted | SC First Steps |
| Oct 18, 2021 | 10 | Catherine Morton-FrontStream | Restricted | Berkeley County First Steps |
| Oct 18, 2021 | 25 | James Rickenbacker-Orangeburg Co. | Restricted | Orangeburg County First Steps |
| Oct 18, 2021 | 25 | Sharon Daniels -Orangeburg Co. | Restricted | Orangeburg County First Steps |
| Oct 18, 2021 | 100 | Chris Vanderford-Greenwood Co. | Restricted | Greenwood County First Steps |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

\$ 2,521



To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees

From: Jennifer McConnell

Date: November 18th, 2021

RE: Local Partnerships Program and Grants Committee

The Local Partnerships Program and Grants Committee met on November 18th, 2021. Minutes of the meeting are attached. The following motion was approved unanimously; 16 counties requested waiver due to Covid for Carry forward amounts from FY21.

Local Partnerships Carry Forward Waiver Request

- 16 Local Partnerships (see attached) have requested waivers to carry forward FY21 grant funding to be used in FY22 due to these covid barriers.

***Motion to approve the 16 Local Partnerships request for waiver to carry forward FY21 grant funds to be expended in FY22 according to the plans submitted to this committee by- Abbeville, Aiken, Allendale, Barnwell, Berkeley, Chester, Clarendon, Fairfield, Greenwood, Horry, Jasper, Marion, Oconee, Pickens, Sumter, & Union County First Steps.**

Motioned by Roger Pryor, seconded by John Hayes.
Motion passed unanimously.

Derek Cromwell- Chief Partnership Officer Update

Derek talked about his vision of Relationships, Support and Accountability and how it is the cornerstone of Local Partnerships. He also talked about the working groups that have been formed and how they strengthen our internal operations and processes to help us better serve our Local Partnerships. The working groups are:

- Process Improvement Working Group
- Recruitment materials working group
- Grant Process Working Group
- Also, in the works:
 - Local Partnerships Communications Plan- internal and external
 - Program Modeling Tool
- Lastly, as we strengthen our internal processes, we also understand our foremost responsibility- Fiduciary oversight.
 - Created a working group to develop a Local Partnership Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.
 - Boots on the ground monitoring- ready for FY23.
 - Ensure the integrity of data being reported by LP's.
 - Ensure that state resources are being used in an appropriate manner
 - Ensure that the granted funds are being used as described in grant applications.



Betty Gardiner- Director of Grantmaking and Development

Betty Gardiner gave an update on the ESSER III Grant process. The purpose of the grant is to expand high intensity, evidence-based parenting programs in a 3-year funding for high poverty, rural and low KRA counties. We have received 45 applications. The funding requested is \$14.3million in requests vs. \$4.9 million in funding available. Betty then went over the selection process. The applications were divided into groups based on Need Scores.

Program officers and parenting staff scored the applications based on the following:

- Demonstration of need/target population
- Recruiting/retaining families
- Recruiting/retaining workforce
- Budget

The applications needed a minimum average score as well as other considerations to advance; they were

- Past efforts at applying for funding
- Past performance with parenting programs
- Fiscal capacity

Anticipate awards to be made early December.



Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee Meeting

November 18, 2021
Zoom Webinar
11:30am- 1:00pm

Minutes

Attendance:

Board Presence: Chair Jennifer McConnell, Shelley Canright, Roger Pryor, John Hayes

State Staff Presence: Derek Cromwell, Betty Gardiner, & Kathy Fitzgerald

Meeting was called to order at 11:37 am by Shelley Canright

Derek Cromwell- Chief Partnership Officer Update

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- Budget

The applications needed a minimum average score as well as other considerations to advance; they were

- Past efforts at applying for funding
- Past performance with parenting programs
- Fiscal capacity

Anticipate awards to be made early December. Some local partnerships will be contacted to discuss budget and other considerations.

The floor was then hand back to Derek Cromwell for one action Item.

Action Items

1. Covid waivers for Carry Forward

- Because of Covid-19, since March of 2020, that effected FY20 and FY21, Local Partnerships have had a difficult time in expending grant funds for various reasons.
 - 16 Local Partnerships (see attached) have requested waivers to carry forward FY21 grant funding to be used in FY22 due to these covid barriers.
 - Abbeville, Aiken, Allendale, Barnwell, Berkeley, Chester, Clarendon, Fairfield, Greenwood, Horry, Jasper, Marion, Oconee, Pickens, Sumter, & Union.



- One time waiver to allow the identified counties an opportunity to expend the carry forward funds.
- FY22 will be judged as normal unless otherwise decided by this committee and Board.

***Motion to approve the 16 Local Partnerships request for waiver to carry forward FY21 grant funds to be expended in FY22 according to the plans submitted to this committee by- Abbeville, Aiken, Allendale, Barnwell, Berkeley, Chester, Clarendon, Fairfield, Greenwood, Horry, Jasper, Marion, Oconee, Pickens, Sumter, & Union County First Steps.**

Motioned: Roger Pryor
Seconded: John Hayes
All voted Yes

This was the last Program and Grants Committee Meeting for 2021 Jennifer McConnell and Derek Cromwell will discuss when the next Program and Grants meeting will be.

Meeting was called to adjourn at 12:04 by Shelly Canright



Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee

Chairwoman's Report

Chairwoman: Dr. Amy Williams

Date: December 3, 2021

The meeting was held on Monday, November 8, 2021 from 1-2PM via Zoom. Alexia Newman and I were present. The main topic of discussion was the Birth through Five plan's key measure of success related to racial and ethnic disparities in kindergarten readiness. This discussion included staff from the Department of Education, First Steps, and the Early Childhood Advisory Council. Details of the discussion are included in the meeting minutes, and the proposed key measures of success will be discussed during today's Early Childhood Advisory Council.

I also want to acknowledge that today's presentation about the Parents as Teachers External Evaluation is the result of the work of this committee. Annually, this committee recommends the subsequent year's prevalent program evaluation to the Board. A prevalent program is defined as >10% of the total state funding spent by Local Partnerships. For the next prevalent program evaluation, the University of South Carolina's Institute for Families in Society has been commissioned to evaluate our average \$2.5 million investment per year in child care technical assistance and training. Last fiscal year, these programs directly impacted 7,345 teachers and directors with a breadth of services that span high-intensity, on-site coaching to professional development trainings and indirectly impacted over 60,000 children through their classrooms. This evaluation will take a mixed methods approach and will be completed by November 1, 2022.



Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 8, 2021, 1-2PM via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Dr. Amy Williams; Alexia Newman

Committee Members Absent: Janie Neeley; Jessica Mackey; Dave Morley

Staff Present

- First Steps
 - Georgia Mjartan
 - Martha Strickland
 - Dr. Chelsea Richard
 - Lexi Jones
- Early Childhood Advisory Council:
Karen Oliver
- Department of Education
 - Dr. David Mathis
 - Wendy Burgess
 - Tina Shaw
 - Brandon Loudermilk
 - Community Building Institute:
Bill Potapchuk

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 1:07PM. The main topic of discussion was the Birth through Five plan's key measure of success related to racial and ethnic disparities in kindergarten readiness. At the October 21, 2021 meeting, the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) voted on the plan's principles, objectives, strategies, and key measures of success. One key measure related to kindergarten readiness was approved ("Increase the percentage of incoming kindergartners who are ready for school from 27.0% to 40.0%"); while another was not approved ("Reduce the racial/ethnic gaps in kindergarten readiness by 4% respectively, from 18% to 14% between white and Black kindergartners and from 22% to 18% between white and Latino kindergartners"). Here, "ready for school" is defined as "Demonstrating Readiness" on the South Carolina Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).

The discussion opened with a presentation from the Department of Education staff about kindergarten readiness and the administration of the KRA. KRA version 1.5 was used in the 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021 administrations; KRA version 1.5 short form was used in 2020. In 2022, KRA version 2.0 will be introduced, but the scores will be comparable to those from version 1.5. Further, it was explained that the designation of "demonstrating readiness" is not a moving target and is set by the assessment developers (states of Maryland and Ohio). In South Carolina, the KRA is given within the first 45 days of school. The Department of Education did a recent survey of districts related to their typical day of KRA administration. These results are forthcoming. The presentation also included description of the allowable supports for students with disabilities and multilingual learners, which are designated on an item-by-item basis and tracked for each student. For multilingual learners, it should be noted that the KRA is administered exclusively in English.

The discussion then shifted to the KRA data over the past four years of administration. From 2017 through 2019, the percentage of incoming kindergartners "demonstrating readiness" grew approximately 1% per year. Different approaches to the measure were discussed next. It was agreed



that it should be presented as a five year goal, i.e., “by 2027”, to be parallel with the other key measures of success. It was also discussed whether it should be framed as a “reducing a gap” or “achieving an outcome” and as one measure (both Black and Latinx kindergartners in one measure) or as two separate measures. Brandon from the Department of Education recommended it be one measure with the same eventual outcome for both Black and Latino kindergartners. Georgia from First Steps recommended it be two separate measures framed as both reducing a gap and achieving an outcome.

Throughout, there was discussion about further ways to disaggregate the data, like by domain, district, school, and by early childhood experience, to identify common community resources in places where things are going well. Dr. Williams asserted there is a fine balance we need to strike between being ambitious, but not get too far away from what is realistic, as to not be taken seriously. The meeting ended with an acknowledgment that this will be an ongoing, continuing discussion with the Interagency Collaboration and Executive Committees of the Board and will ultimately be brought to the ECAC at their December 3rd meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 2:00PM.



Fiscal Year 2021 Year in Review

South Carolina First Steps: Working Together So Every Child Reaches Their Highest Potential

South Carolina First Steps is the state's only dedicated, comprehensive early childhood initiative focused on getting children ready for success in school and life. As both a state agency and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, First Steps works with families, early educators, and partners statewide to support children from birth through age five.

In FY2021, South Carolina First Steps directly served 37,163 children birth through age five with programs that improve children's health, strengthen families, expand access to quality child care, increase participation in four-year-old kindergarten, and help transition rising kindergartners into school. The agency's work with child care teachers, early educators, and child care providers impacted an additional 60,000+ children whose teachers and caregivers participated in First Steps teacher training and child care quality enhancement programs.

The impacts of COVID-19 were significant for families with young children who were faced with school and child care closures, economic and health hardships, and increased stress and anxiety. South Carolina First Steps stepped up to address these challenges, supporting families through evidence-based parenting programs, quickly reopening First Steps 4K programs in-person with health and safety protocols in place within just weeks of the initial public school closures, and expanding services to meet the increased needs of parents and their young children. The result was that despite COVID-19, First Steps experienced a year of significant programmatic growth, serving 21.5% more children directly and 50% more children indirectly than last fiscal year.

Despite all of the challenges associated with being an in-person, social service and education agency during COVID-19, for First Steps, FY 2021 was marked by:

- Establishing new programs and initiatives
- Expanding the reach of our existing programs
- Securing the largest funding amount in fifteen years and diversified sources with non-state funds
- Increasing our reach and collaborative relationships with national partners
- Advancing the agency's research agenda
- Enhancing the public's awareness of our programs
- Improving our accountability
- Growing our team (and needed new space!)

Beginning on June 1, 2020, just two and a half months after statewide school closures, 4-year-old students resumed participation in full-day, in-person, 5-day per week First Steps 4K programming safely during a global pandemic. First Steps' decision to reopen in-person closed the gap in kindergarten readiness for children in poverty.

First Steps 4K is closing the gap in kindergarten readiness for children in poverty.

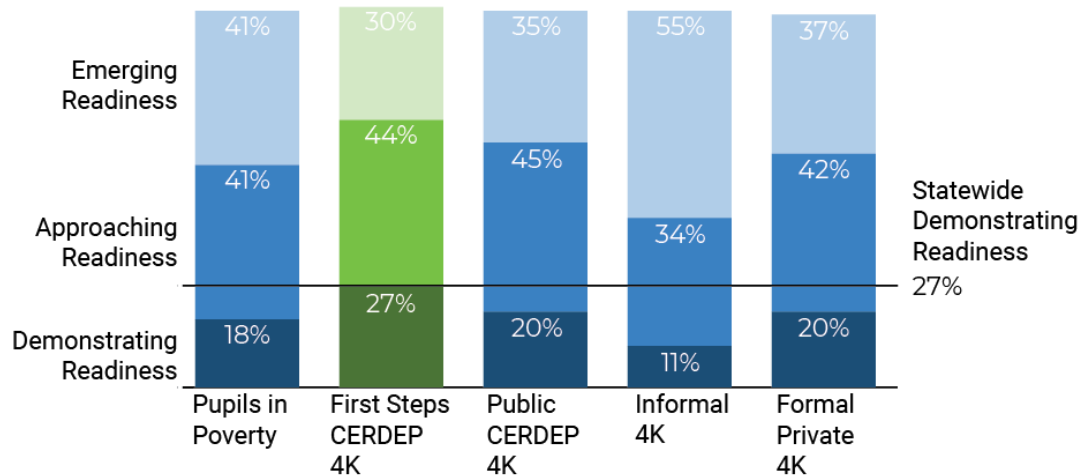


Figure. Pupils in Poverty (PIP) Overall Modified KRA Results Compared to PIP Served in CERDEP-Funded and Non-CERDEP-Funded Programs

Data Source: EOC KRA Fall 2020 Report

During FY21, First Steps...

- Served 37,163 children directly through our local partnerships and First Steps 4K
 - Enrolled 2,588 students in in-person, full-day 4K in 232 classrooms within 211 private, non-profit, and faith-based First Steps 4K providers
 - Served 3,472 in high-intensity programs through our local partnerships, which includes evidence-based home visiting and early care and education programs
- Reached an additional 60,000+ children indirectly
 - Hosted over 2,066 hours of professional development for child care providers through on-site technical assistance via local partnerships
 - Hosted over 60 hours of professional development for child care providers through annual First Steps 4K Teacher and Leadership virtual academies



Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette reads during MLK Service Week to First Steps 4K students at First Nazareth Child Development Center in Columbia



Established New Programs and Initiatives

- Established the First Steps AmeriCorps program, the largest AmeriCorps program in South Carolina. Thirty-one members served in roles ranging from parent educators to community education and outreach members.
- Introduced a new internationally recognized parenting model to the state, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI). HIPPI is an evidence-based home visiting program that emphasizes a peer-to-peer, parent-to-parent approach through our AmeriCorps parent educator members, who served 40 families in five counties last year.
- Began a new partnership with the Department of Social Services to build a new child care scholarship opportunity for families enrolled in First Steps 4K. Siblings, ages 0-12, of next year's First Steps 4K students will automatically qualify for free child care or after school scholarships. This unique partnership, called 4K + Siblings, has caught national attention.
- Created the state's first two-generation office focused on coordinating cross-agency work, system-wide adoption of policies, programs and approaches that benefit whole families, specifically young children and the adults in their lives.

Because of First Steps AmeriCorps Members,
12,227
families received information / education

Expanded the Reach of our Existing Programs

- Expanded our home-grown school transition program, Countdown to Kindergarten, serving 447 children in 14 counties in Summer 2020.
- Granted over \$1.0 million in competitive grants to fifteen local partnerships to expand evidence-based parenting programs, family support services, and community outreach efforts.
- Awarded a grant of over \$17,000 to increase enrollment in First Steps 4K through a center expansion grant at Fort Lawn Community Center in Chester County.



Countdown to Kindergarten Home Visit in Lancaster County

Secured Largest Funding Amount in Fifteen Years and Diversified Sources with non-State Funds

- Secured \$17.6 million total in state, federal, and private funds - for our 46 local partnerships to establish, deliver, and expand parenting programs, child care scholarships, child care quality enhancement, child care teacher training, and other supports. Notable highlights include:
 - Securing \$2.3 million from The Duke Endowment and \$1.5 million from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation for a three-year project, Connected Families, involving multiple agencies (First Steps, South Carolina Departments of Social Services and Mental Health) and intervening in the lives of families with young children involved in child welfare as "family preservation" cases. The privately-funded project is



anticipated to save significant state funds in the short- and long-term as a prevention, parenting, and behavioral health program.

- With \$337,600 in competitive grant funding from Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of South Carolina, deployed a multi-county project focused on early childhood health and development for Hispanic families, in partnership with PASOs.
- Through fundraising campaigns and individual donor development efforts, began building a base of private, individual donors resulting in a successful and fully-funded AmeriCorps MLK Day of Service Read-Along and Book Distribution, additional funds for rural and smaller local partnerships, and more resources available for competitive grants to partnerships.
- Secured over \$44,000 in private funds from 2 foundations, 6 corporations, and 72 unique individuals.
- For every dollar of state funding, local partnerships leveraged \$1.24 in private funds and in-kind contributions.
- Developed plans for, obtained, and began deploying new, federal funding for early childhood programs and services over the next three years, including the following:
 - \$5.0 million in Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Funds for First Steps 4K extended day and year
 - \$14.7 million in ESSER III Funds (over 3 years) for early childhood health, parenting, transitions, 4K language and literacy, and home visiting programs. and school year in First Steps 4K centers
- Retained or renewed for additional years of funding competitive federal grants to increase access to quality early learning programs and increase coordination and collaboration across the early childhood system, including an early childhood data system that will be integrated with the K-12 longitudinal data system:
 - Preschool Development Grant, in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Social Services
 - Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant, in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education

For every
\$1.00
 in state funds,



First Steps Local
 Partnerships leveraged
\$1.24
 in private funds and in-kind
 contributions

Increased Reach and Collaborative Relationships with National Partners

- Launched Your Voice Matters at First Steps thanks to a grant from the Fund for Shared Insight, which coaches our staff through the development and dissemination of high-quality feedback loops with our clients
- Received technical assistance from the Alliance for Early Success for the following priorities:
 - Expand state-funded, full-day, 4-year-old kindergarten for Medicaid eligible children in both public schools and private child care centers.
 - Increase funding for SC First Steps and the South Carolina Department of Social Services to increase the availability of programs that support young children and their families at the local level.
 - Request recurring funding to support the system building efforts of the Early Childhood Advisory Council.
- Established a national profile for South Carolina First Steps and the state’s early childhood programs, services and systems at large through national presentations (American Enterprise Institute, SXSW Education 2021), blogs (National Institute for Early Education Research), interviews (Bipartisan Policy Council), national leadership networks (Hunt Institute, Aspen Institute), the convening of state teams focused on early childhood (Education Commission of the States, First Children’s Finance ECE Business Collaboratory), and the sharing of South Carolina models with other states (Texas, New Jersey).

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

97% of [Parents as Teachers families in nine counties](#) said their parent educator always treats them with respect.

Advanced the Agency’s Research Agenda

- Conducted a statewide survey, called “[Build it Back Better](#),” to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on families with young children’s wellbeing and child care arrangements. Noteworthy highlights of this effort include:
 - A virtual press conference attended by 180+ people that lifted up the voices of South Carolina families
 - Dissemination of a full-report, an executive summary, and five research briefs to state and national partners
 - At least four pieces of earned media, including an [article in The State newspaper](#)



Highlight of “Build It Back Better” Results

- Published one peer-reviewed article, entitled “Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Health Care Access Are Associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences” in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, which suggests that adverse childhood experiences may be underrecognized as a barrier to health care access for adults.
- Commissioned the Institute for Families in Society at the University of South Carolina to evaluate kindergarten outcomes of our largest home visiting program, Parents as Teachers. The results of this evaluation will be available by November 1, 2021.
- Presented at the Children’s Trust of South Carolina’s Building Hope Conference with an oral presentation entitled, “Ready and Resilient! Children, Families, and Teachers Get Ready for Kindergarten”

Enhanced the Public’s Awareness of our Programs

- Unveiled a new agency website, which included the launch of the First Steps Fox, the agency’s “mascot” and spokes-animal for outreach and parental knowledge-building.
- Increased the reach of our communications efforts through
 - 43 pieces of earned media across all print, broadcast, and online media outlets
 - 4,398 newsletter subscribers
 - 7,240 followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
- Launched the “Countdown to Kindergarten” public awareness campaign, which shared easy ways for parents to support their rising kindergartner’s school readiness at home and [additional resources](#), for the ten weeks leading up to the first day of school.
- Expanded awareness of [Palmetto Pre-K](#), through radio and social media advertising. Palmetto Pre-K, a one-stop shop for finding free educational Pre-K programs, has generated over 10,000 leads since inception in early 2020.
- Procured a vendor to develop First Five SC, the portal into the entirety of the early childhood state system (beyond Pre-K and inclusive of health, nutrition, early intervention, home visiting, and child care). The project is off to a great start, with most of the public programs’ eligibility criteria mapped and on track to launch by January 2022.



The First Steps Fox

Improved our Accountability

- Hosted seven virtual Board to Board meetings (one for each local partnership region) that gave local First Steps’ boards and the First Steps’ Board of Trustees a chance to network, ask questions, and solve problems collaboratively.
- Began multi-year process of building a new First Steps program and case management system with AnLar. The First Steps’ Knowledge, Information, and Teaming System (KITS) will support the work of First Steps teams at the state and local level in implementing and monitoring our programs across the state.
- Completed first year of implementation of the agency’s five-year strategic plan, *Every Child Ready*. Execution occurred across all four strategic priorities:
 - (1) ensure children are ready for kindergarten



- (2) close gaps through equity: a fair chance for every child
- (3) increase funding for First Steps' investment in early childhood
- (4) create a coordinated and family-centered early childhood system.
- Finalized and made publicly available 46 three-year comprehensive plans (FY21-23), one for each local partnership, which utilized a locally-driven needs and resource assessment process and is tied directly to the state's strategic plan.
- Started to build the foundation for the South Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System (SC ECIDS) and established the Early Childhood Advisory Council as the governing body for the early childhood system data governance, including staffing a data governance coordinator. As approved by the board, the goals of the SC ECIDS are to:
 - (1) create standard definitions and reports for evidence-based decision making
 - (2) achieve equity by supporting stakeholders in identifying and resolving disparities
 - (3) inform policies and practices to support children, families, and communities
 - (4) connect early childhood data into longitudinal data systems
 - (5) understand the impacts of investment from Birth through Workforce
 - (6) improve the quality of life for all South Carolinians.
- Made significant progress toward the development of the state Birth through Five strategic plan, as requested by Governor Henry McMaster and the General Assembly.

Grew our Team and Secured New Space

- Increased the State Office staff by 10 to now include internal capacity for evaluation, research, grant making, and development, filled vacancies throughout the organization, and transitioned staff from hourly to full-time roles. Notable new staff include members of the leadership team:
 - Derek Cromwell serves as the Chief Partnership Officer overseeing funding and support for the state's 46 First Steps local partnerships, one per county, with a total budget of approximately \$17 million. Cromwell comes to SC First Steps from the AARP Foundation in Little Rock, AR, where he was Project Director. Derek has a combined 24 years of experience in a variety of public and nonprofit organizations in program leadership roles, including: the Corporation for National and Community Service (now known as AmeriCorps), Heifer International, The American Red Cross, the Area Agency on Aging, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program. Derek is a veteran of the United States Air Force, where he served 10 years as a first responder. He is a 2006 graduate of the University of Phoenix, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management.
 - Karen Oliver manages the ECAC's grant-funded activities, provides information about the early childhood state system to policymakers and leaders and facilitates progress toward early childhood system goals. Oliver brings more than 20 years of experience working with human service organizations. She was most recently the Senior Director of Community Resources at the United Way of the Midlands, where she directed community collaborations, volunteer engagement, grant making and evaluation. Oliver's volunteer roles include six years as a Commissioner on the SC Commission on National and Community Service and participation on the 2020 Columbia Counts Census Committee. Oliver has a Master of Social Work from



University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Arts from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

- Welcomed three new appointees to the South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees. Senate President Harvey Peeler appointed John Hayes to the role of “Early Childhood Educator” and Jesica Mackey to the role of “Parent of a Young Child.” Governor Henry McMaster appointed Janie Neeley to the role of “Parent of a Young Child.”
- Planned to move our office to a new location, 636 Rosewood Drive, which will feature space large enough to convene our Board and all-staff meetings.