

SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS TO SCHOOL READINESS
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES
APRIL 21, 2005
SC DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH
2414 BULL STREET, COLUMBIA, SC 29201
ROOM 323

Call to Order

Mr. Lewis Smoak called the meeting to order and thanked Ms. Sabine Lang, Managing Director of Lang-Mekra North America, for hosting the Board of Trustee's meeting. Mr. Smoak also welcomed Early Childhood and ECERS experts and thanked everyone in attendance. Anyone that had not had the opportunity to tour Palmetto Montessori School of Ridgeway at Lang-Mekra were encouraged to join the afternoon tour.

Approval of Minutes

Upon a motion by Mr. Dan Wuori and a second to the motion, the minutes of the March 17, 2005, meeting were approved as written.

Committee Reports

Strategic Planning Committee

Mr. Cory began the report from the Strategic Planning and Administration Committee by asking Mr. Leon Love to give an overview of Lottery Strategy #8. Mr. Love reported that \$990,000.00 had be set-aside for county strategies. County partnership had been asked to submit proposals that include the 50% match and that counties had responded requesting \$2.1 million dollars in lottery funds. If approved the, \$2.1 million dollars would generate over \$4 million dollars in services to children. This request represented \$1.2 million dollars above the amount allocated from the \$3 million dollar challenge grant provided by the legislature.

Mr. Love reminded the group that the legislature had also made a one-time appropriation of \$2 million dollars from lottery funds through the EIA program.

A hand out was distributed with a motion for the Board's consideration. The motion also includes a recommendation to use EIA funds to bring counties to a minimum level of one hundred ninety five thousand dollars. (\$195,000.00)

Mr. Cory asked for questions or comments. Mr. Cory stated that before the board is asked to consider the motion he would like to discuss the subsidy to the counties. Mr. Cory reported that all counties are funded through a formula, which was developed in 1999 when the First Steps Board was first formed. Mr. Cory reported that the formula has facets mandated by the legislation to be considered in providing funds to counties in an equitable manner and that this information had been distributed to the board in prior board meetings. Mr. Cory reported that those facets result in smaller counties getting more per capita on children age birth – 5 than larger counties and stated that this was deliberate because smaller counties with a smaller amounts to allocate naturally have more administrative expense as a percentage. Mr. Cory reported that in the beginning First Steps went through 2 to 3 years growth operating at a level of \$35M to distribute to county partnerships. The year after that First Steps had \$18M to distribute to partnerships and focused on the fact that with \$18M to distribute, there were a number of counties that were going to get less funding. Mr. Cory reported that Rodney Jenkins and his staff was asked to do some analysis, in terms of what it would take to have a meaningful operation in any county in the state because First Steps is legislatively mandated to have a partnership and operations in every county. It was decided that every partnership

would receive \$200,000.00, and beyond that, use the formula to allocate the remainder of funds among all county partnerships. Mr. Cory reported the results was larger counties got slightly less than they would have if we used the formula across the board and of course the smallest at that time was 15 counties who got a minimum of \$200,000.00 each and that used funds of roughly half-million dollars. We took half-million dollars from larger counties – gave it to the smaller counties which farther resulted in their getting a lot more per capita than larger counties. The following year First Steps was faced with the same dilemma and continued to subsidize the smaller counties and utilized private funds that were available from corporate contributions. Mr. Cory reported it is the opinion of the Strategic Planning and Administrative Committee that we cannot continue to subsidize county partnerships any longer, it is inequitable from the stand point of a uniform approach across the state utilizing the factors we feel are meaningful and appropriate to be used which are: population, average income per capita, unwed mothers, low birth weight and children in third grade getting free and reduced lunch. He stated it is believed that the best indicator of at risk children is the number or percentage of those receiving free and reduced lunch. He reported that we are now faced with the same dilemma and realize this is a situation we are going to have to live with for a while and that the subsidies may not be continued beyond this year. Mr. Cory reported that the Strategic Planning and Administration Committee recommend that it be reduced from \$200,000.00, the subsidies not \$200,000.00 per county, but the subsidies results in every county getting at least \$200,000.00 and vary depending on what the formula would be otherwise, so we are suggesting that we take the amount needed from the coming appropriation from the EIA funds, which are non recurring funds take enough needed to bring every county up to a level of \$195,000.00 rather \$200,000.00. Mr. Cory presented the motion which is that we spend \$2,194,000.00 in Strategy #8, all to be matched by the counties. He reported that 20 out of 46 counties presented proposals by the April 15, deadline. The proposals have not been fully analyzed and evaluated at the State level. We are authorizing our staff to review and analyze these proposals for possible opportunities for additional collaboration, and cost savings. Additionally we approve using funds from the \$2 M EIA non-recurring FY'06 allocation to bring 16 county allocations to \$195,000.00.

Mr. Smoak asked for questions or comments from the board and stated that the Strategic Planning Committee believe the various programs from these 20 counties will go to the program committee for approval by the board. Mr. Miller asked how much effect discontinuing subsidies would have on the smaller counties? Mr. Cory stated that those counties would have minimum or no programs, they would be functioning to promote collaboration and basically have the staff working with the partnership board to continue to promote early childhood in those counties, but as far as funding programs, there will be very little. Mr. Miller stated that's basically really hard and for some of these counties First Steps may be there only hope. Mr. Smoak explained what the recommendation does, is instead of a minimum of \$200,000.00 going to any of the counties who otherwise, under the formula, wouldn't be entitled to that much. He stated that some would only be entitled to \$112,000.00 or \$120,000.00, the message we are trying to send is forcing regionalization on some of the smaller counties now to allow us to work towards moving closer to this percentage set for administrative expenses, which a number of counties now exceed. Mr. Smoak explained that the Strategic Planning Committee want to begin moving counties in the direction of regionalization but not to such a degree as to eliminate any of the counties or their programs. Mr. Miller stated philosophically, those counties are the ones that really need us and to send a message that we are going to reduce their ability to provide services, is not a good message and we need to help them understand that 's not our intent and give them options or help them do this. Mr. Miller stated that he didn't have a problem with subsidizing the small counties, as they need help. He stated the larger counties have the ability to obtain more funds and services. Mr. Parr stated that the way he understands it, we are encouraging the smaller counties to get together with other small counties and share an executive director as they cut their administrative costs and we are not expecting their programs to be cut? Mr. Smoak confirmed. Mr. Cory stated that First Steps state office doesn't have any basis, rights, authority or anything else to tell counties what to do or how to do it, so that needs to be very clear. Mr. Cory reported the legislation mandates creating a county partnership in every county, and hiring the staff they need to carry out their functions, we can only make suggestions. He stated the larger counties are in a pool fund that make up the subsidies, somewhere between \$530,000.00 and \$733,000.00. He stated we have the number for \$190,000.00 subsidization, which is \$500,000.00 plus and the number for \$200,000.00 subsidization which is \$733,000.00. \$195,000.00 falls somewhere in between that so that means somewhere between \$500,000.00 and \$700,000.00, the subsidy won't be available to all the other counties that it would have been if we didn't do the subsidy. Therefore, all the other counties potentially have less so it doesn't help

the larger counties. Mr. Cory stated the other side is how do you look at an at-risk child in the larger county and say they get fewer funds to help them than an at-risk child in a smaller county? How do you discriminate like that? Mr. Miller stated he feels that a child in a larger county has more means available, more opportunity for resources than a child in the small county even though they are not getting the subsidies. Mr. Cory stated he believes that in a larger county at-risk children are more difficult to identify due to population whereas in smaller counties the at-risk child is just known, because you have better networking and a smaller population to deal with. Mr. Miller then asked if they were going to drop it and move forward? Mr. Smoak replied they would move forward and vote. Mr. Miller stated he wanted to be sure the counties know this is a one-time allocation as we've been here before and doesn't want it to happen again. He stated the counties need to understand that this is not a cut; this is a one-time allocation! Ms. Mary Lynne Diggs advised that she had had the privilege to review grants from both the small and large counties and would like to say they were excellent, they've all done a good job of seeking to collaborate. She stated she also recognizes those very small counties who are receiving subsidies, have all but maxed out on collaboration. Their partners may not have anything else from which to draw funds and with the small counties they've cut staff hours. Ms. Diggs stated that the large counties didn't have to do that and feels a little uncomfortable moving forward while small counties have an Executive Director paid on a 32 hour scale doing a 50 hour week, with the next county paying on a 40 – 45 hour scale doing a 50-plus hour week and asking the staff to be in-kind and more committed. I'm a little concerned as I've seen those budgets, seen the collaboration and what local entities, school districts, Rotary Clubs and Head Start partners have done to make up the difference and our school districts don't have a different commitment. She went on to say, sometimes the only way there's a full-day-pre-K class is through collaboration among and between First Steps and the school districts and I hope that as you go forward you will look at this because larger counties have an opportunity to provide 4K. Ms. Kristin Hook stated she believe we shouldn't make generalizations because one of the larger counties (Lexington) cut their staff substantially, share office space with Saluda County and have a lot of in-kind work done by staff and Director. Mr. Smoak stated that at least 90% of the board are from larger counties and are agreeing to continue. Instead of \$200,000.00, let's continue at the \$195,000.00, so I think there is sensitivity to the issues in smaller counties and we want to realize that. We also want them to do as much in the way of collaboration as they possible can and also understand that they may need to be at everybody's level and need to be looking at shrinking administrative costs, if possible. It's not an easy problem but until our legislative efforts are more successful its one of those things we have to deal with. At this time, Mr. Smoak asked if everyone was ready to vote, a vote was taken on the motion and approved.

Mr. Cory reported that the Strategic Planning Committee is now reviewing initial drafts of next year's budget, RFM renewal contracts, etc., and that county audits have begun for the current fiscal year.

Program and Grants Committee

Ms. Doris Ballard, Chair, reported as information only; on reallocation funds greater than 15%, the State office approves the request to reallocate funds from Kershaw County to provide approximately 10 transitional childcare scholarships for eligible recipients through a partnership with DSS. Ms. Ballard called the Board's attention to upcoming conference calls related to the Renewal Process in which 12 counties will be reviewed and reported that the dates are May 4, 2005 and June 2, 2005 at 3:30.

Evaluation and Accountability Committee

Mr. Walt Miller, Chair, reported that First Steps is very excited to have Dr. Debby Cryer, ECERS author and scientist, from Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, visiting with us today and look forward to hearing her report on ECERS. Mr. Miller reported that First Steps still does not have data from SCRA and hope to have it soon. Mr. Smoak asked when the High/Scope report is due. Ms. DeVenny stated that the High/Scope report is due in the General Assembly the first day of next year and that the draft should be in this fall.

Executive Committee

Mr. Dan Wuori, reported that the Executive Committee met by conference call to discuss activity regarding a legislative provision relating to the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). Mr. Wuori reported that members of the legislature had suggested that it would be helpful if the First Steps Board would take a position to help provide guidance, in terms of First Steps stand on the use of ECERS. Mr. Wuori reported that this motion was passed by the Executive Committee and is now being passed along as information. It reads: In recognition of the established links between early childhood program quality and student readiness outcomes, the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees supports the South Carolina Department of Education's continued use of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale revised ECERS-R as a means to which to measure and promote research based best practices within the state's early childhood's classrooms.

Mr. Smoak stated that this board should have a comprehensive plan to present to the General Assembly and the Governor before the end of the year. A comprehensive look stating what the First Steps board feels should be done about early childhood education in South Carolina and what the legislation should fund, along with costs and various pieces. Mr. Smoak reported that the Strategic Planning Committee is unanimous in attempting to get this effort underway. He reported that Ms. DeVenny calls this a BLUEPRINT II, as First Steps undertakes this effort and as the only state agency in SC whose sole responsibility is early childhood education he views this as First Steps responsibility and obligation and believes the legislature would welcome a detail study that has inputs from all of the parties and all players in early childhood education and then a comprehensive plan. Let's say it's a five year plan or get review every two years or something like that that we could give them and they could hopefully accept it and we vote on and have some comfort with that have a lot of input and a lot of thought with the best people in the field involved in it. So we will be undertaking that kind of effort as well as it should coincide nicely with High/Scope and other reviews that we have out there. Mr. Miller asked if this was a plan for First Steps or is a plan for all early childhood providers in the state? Mr. Smoak stated that it is more of a comprehensive plan, not just what First Steps would do but looks at the role of what the legislature should be doing from an overall standpoint with respect to early childhood care. Mr. Smoak stated that he feels the legislature needs to do this and would welcome it. Possibly have the legislature have some hearings, bring in experts to testify, have a lot of support for the effort from all walks of early childhood education and have them all considered in the process. Mr. Smoak stated that if we can't make a really significant change in early childhood education in SC, we are all wasting our time. We need to change the state as far as I am concerned, as far as early childhood is concerned. I believe we have been charged to do this by the legislation.

Director's Report

Ms. Susan DeVenny, Director, thanked everyone for attending and in particular Ms. Sabine Lang and her management team for hosting the board meeting. She thanked Ms. Renee Crain, Director of Palmetto Montessori School of Ridgeway, for allowing First Steps board members to tour the Montessori school on site and invited anyone who would like to tour the Montessori school to do so after the board meeting ends. Ms. DeVenny issued a special "thank you" to Dr. Debby Cryer, one of the three principal authors of the ECERS instrument, as well as a researcher and scientist at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute and experts from Kaplan Early Learning Company, Mr. Larry Griffin, Director of Assessment, and Ms. Leigh Zaleon, Director of Child Development. Ms. DeVenny stated that a number of guests were present who serve in varying ECERS capacities, members of the State ECERS team, center directors and people that use ECERS everyday. Ms. DeVenny recognized Ms. Penny Danielson, Vital Connections, Ms. Susan Graham, Director, USC/Gateway Child Development Center, Ms. Cindy Seagle, Spartanburg Center for Excellence, Dr. Linda Mims, Director, SDE Office of Early Childhood Education, Mr. Cody Carlton, ECERS trainer, Office of Early Childhood Education, Ms. Debi Dye, Ms. Dawn McCutchen, and Ms. Heather Chapple, Berkeley County Schools, Ms. Trista Davis, Early Learning Family Daycare and Ms. Rogers Hewitt, Richland County First Steps Partnership.

Dr. Debby Cryer gave a presentation and report of ECERS. Dr. Cryer reported that ECERS was developed with three purposes. She stated the scale was developed to help practitioners do the things they need to do to have children become successful across a wide variety of outcomes that are required in success, not just in pre-school but throughout school and their adult life. Dr. Cryer reported as soon as the scale was developed and practitioners began using the scales they realized that quality child care does make a difference in children succeeding. Dr. Cryer reported that ECERS has been validated and from a research point of view ECERS is a test! ECERS is the only measure that has been tried over and over across all different situations and still always predicts the same thing. It is related to what happens to the kids, not just in childcare but throughout school. As a matter of fact the Early Childhood measure, the ECERS score relates more strongly to a child's success in second grade than the quality of their kindergarten. The scales measure the childhood years. There are very specific indicators on the scale that relate to whether quality is being produced. She reported that the scale works across all cultures and countries because it is very flexible and determines if very young children are getting what they need for success in specific areas such as academics, communication, relationships and physical well being. Dr. Cryer explained that the scale measures 43 items as described in the ECERS instruction book. To get your whole score you add all scores for all items and get an average. The scale is designed so that teachers can use it and are easy to observe. Three main things that kids need for success 1) how well children protected, 2) whether children have the opportunity to learn what they need to learn at the time they need to learn it, 3) things children need to be secure within themselves and in relationships.

After a long discussion involving ECERS experts, trainers and teachers reporting on the benefits and successes of ECERS the meeting was adjourned.

Daniel F. Wuori, Secretary
South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board
Of Trustees, a South Carolina Nonprofit Corporation

Lewis Smoak, Vice Chair
South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board
Of Trustees, a South Carolina Nonprofit Corporation