

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS TO SCHOOL READINESS
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
A SOUTH CAROLINA NONPROFIT CORPORATION**

August 7, 2007

MINUTES

Voting Directors Present: Mr. Lewis Smoak, Vice-Chair
Representative Shirley Hinson
Mr. Henry Parr, Jr.
Dr. Floyd Creech
Ms. Lisa Van Riper
Ms. Linda O'Quinn
Ms. Sabine Lang
Dr. Francis Rushton
Ms. Marileen Chapman
Ms. Nicky Wallace
Ms. Julia-Ellen Davis
Ms. Judith Aughtry

Voting Directors Absent: Governor Mark Sanford
Senator Michael Fair
Senator John Matthews
Representative Bessie Moody-Lawrence
Dr. Thaddeus Bell
Ms. Katherine Davis
Rev. Reece Yandle
Ms. Kristin Hook
Supt. Jim Rex

Non-Voting Directors Present: Ms. Angela Flowers (designee, for Ms. John McGill, SC DMH)
Dr. Kathleen Hayes (Director, SC DSS)
Ms. Susan Jones (designee, SC DOT)
Ms. Lane Jeselnik (designee for Mr. Barry Russell, President, SC Tech College System)
Dr. Nancy Freeman, Regulatory Advisory Committee
Ms. Stephanie Frazier (designee for Dr. Gail Morrison, SC Commission on Higher Education)
Ms. Jennifer Buster (designee for Mr. Stan Butkus, SC DDSN)
Dr. David Goble, Director, SC State Library
Ms. Cindy Sweigart (designee for Mr. C. Earl Hunter, Director, SC DHEC)
Mr. Bobby Bowers, Director, SC B&CB/ORS
Mr. David Potter, SC Education Oversight Committee

Non- Voting Directors Absent: Mr. Robert Kerr, Director, SC DHHS
Mr. Lee Catoe, Director, DAODAS
Mr. Jim Griffith, Director, Transportation Assn. of SC
Dr. Paul Krohne, President, SC School Board Association
Mr. David Potter, SC Education Oversight Committee
Mr. Tim Ervolina, President/CEO, United Way of SC

Others Present:

Ms. Dorothy Davis, Beaufort County FS Partnership
Ms. Mary T. Jones, Colleton County FS Partnership
Ms. Dorothy Priester, Cherokee County FS Partnership
Ms. Deborah Padgett, Saluda County FS Partnership
Ms. Julia Nelson, Sumter County FS Partnership
Ms. Mamie Bostic, Darlington County FS Partnership
Ms. Kimberley Jordan, Kershaw County FS Partnership
Mr. Baron Holmes, SC Budget & Control Board/Office of
Research & Statistics
Ms. Patricia Caldwell, Newberry County FS Partnership
Mr. David White, Greenville County FS Partnership
Ms. Karen Martini, Chesterfield County FS Partnership
Mr. Jim Riddle, Lexington County FS Partnership
Mr. Spencer Scott, Florence/Marion County FS Partnership
Mr. Rick Noble, Richland County FS Partnership
Mr. Randall Johnson, Marlboro County FS Partnership
Rev. Alexis Pipkins, Jr., Lee County FS Partnership
Ms. Susan DeVenny, SC First Steps
Mr. Dan Wuori, SC First Steps
Mr. Rodney Jenkins, SC First Steps
Mr. Leon Love, SC First Steps
Ms. Beverly Mills, SC First Steps
Ms. Betsy Coleman, SC First Steps
Ms. Mary Anne Mathews, SC First Steps
Ms. Rogers Hewitt, SC First Steps
Ms. Betty Gardiner, SC First Steps
Ms. Samantha Ingram, SC First Steps
Ms. Joyce Johnson, SC First Steps
Ms. Betty Gardiner, SC First Steps
Ms. Tamala Toney, SC First Steps
Ms. Kelly Purvis, SC First Steps
Ms. Kelli Boniecki, SC First Steps
Ms. Barbara Black, SC First Steps

Call to Order

Mr. Lewis Smoak, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for their participation. Ms. Susan DeVenny then introduced new board members, Ms. Nicky Wallace and Ms. Julia-Ellen Davis. Ms. DeVenny also welcomed Dr. Kathleen Hayes, Director of SC DSS.

Approval of Minutes

Upon a motion by Representative Shirley Hinson and a second, the minutes of the May 17, 2007 meeting were approved as written.

Evaluation Committee

Ms. Lisa Van Riper began the Evaluation Committee report by giving an overview of the role of the Evaluation Committee and their specific role in responding to the 2006 High/Scope Report. She then gave a brief history on the previous evaluation in 2003 and described changes put into effect in order for First Steps to show expanded client-level outcomes in the 2009 evaluation. Ms. Van Riper then introduced Dr. Kimberly Browning of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation for her report on the one year anniversary report since the 2006 High/Scope Evaluation.

High/Scope Evaluation Update

Dr. Kim Browning provided background related to the 2006 evaluation and highlighted the actions taken by the Board, Evaluation Committee, and statewide First Steps staff to provide context for High/Scope's one year anniversary report.

Dr. Browning began by reviewing the statutory evaluation requirements, SC 59-152-160: Evaluation of Progress, “A program evaluation of the First Steps to School Readiness initiatives at the state and local levels must be conducted every three years by an independent, external evaluator under contract with the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees.” Additionally, the “purpose of the evaluation is to assess progress toward achieving the First Steps goals and to determine the impact of the initiative on children and families at the state and local levels.” Dr. Browning highlighted the uniqueness of the First Steps’ legislation regarding impact evaluation and stated that these requirements are creating higher standards for others across the nation.

Dr. Browning proceeded to review key findings of the 2006 High/Scope Evaluation, including:

- First Steps is successfully targeting “the poorest of the poor, and the neediest of the needy;”
- There is consistent evidence that enrollment in full-day 4K has positive effects on child outcomes;
- Some results suggest the ability of First Steps’ child care quality enhancement to improve child care quality-- particularly in areas related to cognitive outcomes for children;
- First Steps’ measurement and client data systems are inadequate to monitor long-term impact.

Dr. Browning then spoke about some of the issues raised in the High/Scope Report. The issues were:

- Integrity of some client-level data;
- Failure to collect certain types of client-level data;
- Over-reliance on outputs data (e.g. books distributed, home visits conducted, etc.);
- Lack of common, statewide programmatic requirements and evaluation measures;
- Need to continue focus on program quality;
- Need to improve statewide communication amongst First Steps partners.

Dr. Browning stated that she met with the Evaluation Committee in July 2006 to develop a proposed action plan to address the issues raised in the report. She stated that the Evaluation Committee decided the new changes must be implemented by the beginning of Fiscal Year 2008 in order for these changes to be reflected in the 2009 evaluation. Dr. Browning then reviewed a detailed list of completed actions taken since July 2006 to respond to evaluation issues identified in the report.

I. Issue: Due to incomplete data, many existing adult client records could not be matched to a corresponding child.

Action: First Steps and ORS staff have designed and launched a new client data site in which child records cannot be entered without a corresponding adult record, eliminating a threat to ongoing data quality.

II. Issue: First Steps clients inconsistently flagged in the SDE SASI database.

Action: Increased collaboration with SDE has resulted in enhanced SASI policies related to First Steps data and greatly increasing the agency’s ability to flag children who have received First Steps’ services before their matriculation into public schools

(ex: Countdown to Kindergarten data to be merged into SASI directly from First Steps database, 4K data to be entered under the direction of County Partnerships).

III. Issue: Missing or incomplete vendor data at the county level.

Action: In January 2007, First Steps implemented new data policies linking ongoing payment to the timely submission of complete client and outcomes data. Also, delinquent vendor funding is now frozen fourteen days after quarterly deadline.

IV. Issue: Integrity of data and client consent at the county level.

Action: There have been eight client data updates to Partnership Board Chairs and zero delinquent vendors since implementation. Examples of improvements include:

7,614 County Partnership records entered in January 2007.

Post policy implementation, number of records entered increased 43% to 10,930 (July 2007)

6,094 clients provided consent in January 2007.

Post policy implementation, client consent rose 61% to 9,795 (July 2007)

65.62% of statewide SSN entered in January 2007.

Post policy implementation, SSNs entered went up 11.74% to 77.36% (July 2007)

15 of 46 County Partnerships entered 80% or higher @client data in January 2007.

Post policy implementation, 25 of 46 (+66%) counties entered 80% or higher of client data.

V. Issue: Client level data not collected in all strategy areas (ex: child care strategies collected output data only).

Action: First Steps, ORS, and DSS staff have designed a new child care client data portion of the FS Data System for launch in July 2007. Also, have a system designed to share data with new DSS licensing system to minimize duplicate data entry.

VI. Issue: Data revealed mismatches between reported outputs data and actual client records.

Action: First Steps data policies have been further expanded to improve likelihood of disparities. First Steps and ORS staff launched system redesign that will gradually eliminate the original First Steps' outputs site. In the future, numbers will be generated from actual client records. Also, certain child care and parenting outputs have been eliminated.

VII. Issue: The absence of explicit statewide program evaluation standards and common short-term outcome measures threatened:

1. The quality of First Steps programming
2. The state board's ability to ensure programmatic accountability
3. The initiative's ability to measure its short-term outcomes

Action: After thorough review, the First Steps Board of Trustees passed statewide program and evaluation requirements in May 2007. These requirements are now incorporated into contracts for partnerships and vendors for FY08. Examples of common, statewide program requirements in prevalent strategy areas include:

- Required child care quality enhancement measures (ITERS, ECERS, FDCRS, SACRS and PAS);
- Required parenting measures for PAT, PCH, and Triple-P (KIPS and ACIRI);
- Required data sharing for School District Family Literacy with SDE (FLOIS).

VIII. Issue: Measuring outcomes for small or non-standard strategies.

Action: Strategy evaluation plans are required to be submitted to BOT Evaluation Committee for approval and/or technical assistance. The result of this will be all renewals will be outcomes-based in May 2008.

IX. Issue: First Steps would benefit from increasing its focus on program quality.

Action: Development and passage of FY08 BOT program requirements. The addition of state-level child care and parenting specialists to provide TA to Partnerships and formed a Strategic alliance with Vital Connections. First Steps created the SC Early Childhood Quality Standards Task Force. There is also random programmatic monitoring in FY08.

Dr. Kim Browning then gave a summary of program and evaluation changes.

- Explicit programmatic requirements incorporated into County Partnership and vendor contracts;
- Common, statewide evaluation measures;
- Increased state-level technical assistance and monitoring by strategy area;
- Groundwork laid for outcomes-based renewals - Spring 2008.

Dr. Kim Browning talked about the issue and continued need for increased communication at a time of such sweeping change. Dr. Browning reported on changes made since 2005 (regular conference calls and email updates, as examples). Dr. Browning also reported evidence of increase in communication to local Board Chairs and detailed the update to the bi-weekly "First Steps Notes" newsletter. Dr. Browning also noted the transition to a common @scfirststeps.org e-mail address to eliminate problems with statewide e-mail delivery and the introduction of the password protected intranet for First Steps staff.

Dr. Browning also noted the multiple meetings and trainings that have been either held or scheduled for FY07-08 and reviewed other changes that have occurred since the 2006 report was completed, including:

- Addition of state-level grants officer to assist with the writing of grants;
- Addition of a technology consultant to address recommendations outlined in First Steps' 2005 CIO technology data audit;
- Regional structure to enhance training and planning opportunities;
- Working to develop an Executive Director Leadership Council

Dr. Kim Browning described First Steps' changes as "thorough and thoughtful," noting changes had been at both micro and macro levels of the organization. Dr. Browning said, most importantly, that these changes had set new standards for evaluation across the nation among states working to improve early childhood programs and the assessment of their impact. Dr. Browning gave kudos to those who have worked to retool systems and implement changes in a short period of time, and gave kudos and encouragement to those who will be working with these new systems.

Dr. Kim Browning concluded her presentation by asking the audience if there were any questions. Hearing none, Mr. Lewis Smoak then thanked everyone involved in the First Steps organization for an intense year of re-evaluating the data system necessary to provide evidence of a strong return on our investment and a means to evaluate the impact on children's achievement.

Director's Report

Ms. Susan DeVenny introduced Mr. David Potter of the S.C. Education Oversight Committee who provided the Board with a brief overview of the Update to the Interim Report on the First Year Implementation of the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP).

After giving the background as to the statutory requirements for the evaluation, Mr. Potter made the following points:

- CDEPP is a two year pilot program providing high quality, full-day four year old kindergarten programs for at-risk children in 37 plaintiff districts. The State Department of Education (SDE) is responsible for implementation of CDEPP in public schools; the Office of First Steps implements program among non-public school providers.
- The purpose of the update to the interim report is to report progress made to-date; provide more accurate information from the CDEPP pilot's start-up year; identify additional issues revealed by the pilot; and describe planned evaluation activities for the January 2008 report to the General Assembly.
- Report findings are based on fiscal and student program participation data collected by SDE and OFS in March and April 2007. Discrepancies exist between the cumulative financial counts and the number of students enrolled in the schools at the 135th day of instruction.

Mr. Potter then reported the following updated findings:

- Based upon financial data provided by the SDE on July 19, 2007 and OFS on June 30, 2007, the state provided support for 3,241 children to participate in CDEPP – 2,932 in public schools and 309 in private settings.
- Approximately 55 percent (\$12,915,166.37) of the total appropriation for CDEPP was expended leaving a balance of \$10,660, 513.63.
- The unspent balance can be attributed to at least 3 factors: non-participation in CDEPP by eight eligible school districts; normal lag time in implementing a new program and approving eligible private providers; and difficulty in finding and enrolling children in either public or private programs.
- The financial systems set up with SDE and OFS to reimburse CDEPP providers were significantly different. Reimbursing school districts directly, SDE used a cumulative enrollment county that did not take into account the child's attendance or membership. In the second year, SDE will reimburse districts based on the child's attendance and membership. Reimbursing private providers through county First Steps partnerships, OFS based payments on actual invoices received using a pro-rated student attendance count.

Mr. David Potter provided everyone a chart titled, “CDEPP FY 2006-2007 Appropriations, Allocations, and Expenditures”.

Mr. David Potter then talked about the following key issues:

- The funding surplus from the first year of the CDEPP pilot emphasizes the need for increased marketing of the program to potential program providers and to families.
- The quality and completeness of the 2006-2007 program data improved substantially – the February 2007 interim CDEPP evaluation report noted a concern about the quality of program and student data.
- The available data do not provide clarity on the number of students in CDEPP who have disabilities and/or are not native speakers of English (LEP students). Additionally, the information on the kinds of services CDEPP participants who are LEP and/or have disabilities are receiving is incomplete. A more in-depth review of these issues will be reported in the January 1, 2008 report to the General Assembly.
- Among public and/or private providers, challenging issues remain licensing requirements; availability of qualified teachers; transportation costs; and marketing.

Adjournment

Mr. Lewis Smoak thanked Dr. Kim Browning and Mr. David Potter for their presentations. Mr. Smoak reminded the board of the upcoming Board of Trustees Retreat on October 24-25. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Lisa Van Riper, 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