



Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 19, 2026

636 Rosewood or Virtual (via Zoom)

Trustees Present (12): Frances Brown Anderson, Dr. Robert Bank, Anthony Cantone, Jacque Curtin, Mary Lynne Diggs, Dr. James Durant, Jack McBride, Dave Morley (Chair), Roger Pryor, Dr. Edward Simmer, Sue Williams, Wes Wooten

Trustees Absent (10): Rep. Terry Alexander, Sen. Jason Elliott, Rep. Shannon Erickson, John Hayes, Sen. Greg Hembree, Constance Holloway, Jessica Mackey, Eunice Medina, Ellen Weaver, Dr. Amy Williams

Others Present (86): Rita Allison, Emika Aroh, Lauren Austin, Amanda Bailey, Gina Beebe, Althea Benson, Amber Bishop, Michelle Bowers, Salandra Bowman, Monica Branton-Pearson, Kippie Brown, John Browne, Tekethia Burrell, Dr. Crystal Campbell, Ashlyn Cobia, Beryl Collington, Kerry Cordan, Sarah Crawford, Dr. Taylor Dee, Linda Doherty, Paul Dowsakul, Robin Ebert, Sheneka Edens, Elliott Epps, Senekita Farmer, Jessica Fluker, Robin Frasier, Stephen Gilchrist, Caroline Goins, Rachal Hatton-Moore, Dorothy Henderson, Kenna Hoover, Samantha Ingram, Kiani J, Kristine Jenkins, Makayla Jones, Angelica Jules, Rosaland Kenner, Janice Kilburn, Deloris Knight, Candi Lalonde, Tamiko Lewis, David Lisk, Karen Martini-Waller, Kristen Martocchio, A Matthews, Joy Mazur, Shica McConner, Ivory Mitchell, Beth Moore, Marcia Nash, Nhi Ngo, Katie Nichols, Tami Nix, David O'Kelly, Karen Oliver, Kaylee Osbon, LaVonda Paul, Shayla Pettigrew, Alexis D. Pipkins, Duchett Polite, Dorothy Priester, Emily Prillaman, Marilyn Pyatt, Austin Reed, Kate Roach, Connie Rouse, Kathy Sanders, LaMyra Sanders, Olivia Sapier, Talisha Scott, Ashlee Simpkins, Martha Strickland, Molly Tuck, Molly Tuck, BJ Tucker, Katrina Valliere, Ann Vandervliet, Angela Walker, Betty Washington, Patti Wilkes, Anita Williams, Taylor Windell, Jade Wright, Tomeiko Wright, Baylis Wright

Meeting was called to order with a quorum present at 2:11 p.m. by Mr. Dave Morley.

Alexis D. Pipkins spoke during the public comment period. He asked if policies adopted by the Executive Committee need to go before the full board, as well as whether local partnerships are considered nonprofits or political subdivisions. He addressed how the compensation policies approved by the Executive Committee do not acknowledge level of education and asked for input at the local level.

A motion was made to accept the meeting agenda by Wes Wooten, seconded by Tony Catone. All voted in favor.

A motion was made to accept the consent agenda by Roger Pryor, seconded by Tony Catone. All voted in favor.

Chairman Morley gave an update from the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has been working to ensure compliance with Act 81 and update procurement policies. Personnel policies are still being created.

Wes Wooten gave an update from the Program and Grants Committee. The committee approved changes to the SCFS Program Guidelines. Kerry Cordan, Chief Partnership Officer, added that the Comprehensive Grant Application is out. The review process will consider prior year performance, use of data to drive decision making, accurate and strategic budgeting, and degree and approach for collaboration.

David O'Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, shared that the Formula Funding allocations were reviewed and approved for FY2026-2027. The audit report will be issued March 31st. The Local Partnership Financial System Implementation of SAGE is on track for set up, migration, training, and launch this spring. First Steps has spent 65.6% of its budget, making it on pace for the year. Mr. Morley asked Mr. O'Kelly to summarize the benefits of SAGE. He responded that it was more efficient, and early tests show that Local Partnerships find it intuitive and useful. Ann Vandervliet, Agency Director, commended the staff for the transition and their level of collaboration.

Government Liaison, Elliott Epps, gave the legislative report on behalf of Senator Greg Hembree. First Steps submitted budget proposals, and the state budget process will continue through May. First Steps will host a Legislative Breakfast on May 13th for members of the House and Senate. Mr. Epps and Ms. Vandervliet met with Representative Neil Collins about transferring funding for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program from the SC Department of Education to SCFS. Mr. Morley shared that one of the benefits of DPIL expansion is money for other programming. Ms. Vandervliet gave thanks to the partnership with legislators.

Molly Tuck, Director of Research and Evaluation, gave a presentation on the predictive power of SC's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). There is a strong relationship between outcomes on the KRA and 3rd Grade READY achievement. Internal research from SC Research and Evaluation showed that high dosages of either PAT or HIPPY, combined with FS 4K, were associated with children being up to 9 times more likely to demonstrate readiness. Mary Lynne Diggs asked whether there were efforts to include the founders of PAT in the pilot with the Department of Social Services (DSS). Ms. Vandervliet responded that they are exploring collaboration across agencies. Tony Catone, Director of DSS, added that they are trying to bring in new funders and utilize federally matched dollars, a partnership modeled after SCFS was already doing. Ms. Tuck gave an update that the new internal data system management program, Caseworthy, will go live July 1st.

Ann Vandervliet, agency director, presented "First Steps 4K: Then and Now." First Steps is now testing different doses of CLASS coaching and training to determine the intensity of support needed to raise instructional support among 4K teachers. By reducing some administrative requirements, First Steps increased on-site coaching in 4K classrooms. The 26-27 4K site contracts will require directors to report on teacher and assistant turnover in the new data system, so First Steps will be able to gain understanding of causes. Additional quality improvement tactics may be needed to strengthen the approach to individual and group training and strengthen the criteria used for 4K provider selection.

Ms. Vandervliet gave a quarterly update. First Steps hosted *Early Advantage: Foundations for South Carolina's Economic Vitality* in partnership with the SC Department of Education and the SC Department of Employment and Workforce. First Steps is implementing a new financial management system, SAGE, and a new internal data system, CaseWorthy. First Steps received a \$2.25M grant from the Leon Levine Foundation to implement a relationship-based continuum of birth to five services pilot within Chesterfield, Darlington, and Marlboro Counties for three years.

Mr. Morley asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting. Wes Wooten made the motion to adjourn the meeting of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees, seconded by Jack McBride. All voted in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:17 p.m.