



Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 4, 2025

The Graduate Hotel Columbia

Trustees Present (13): Rep. Terry Alexander, Frances Anderson, Tony Cantone, Jacque Curtin, Mary Lynne Diggs, Dr. James Durant, Sen. Jason Elliott, John Hayes, Jack McBride, Dave Morley (Chair), Dr. Amy Williams (Vice Chair), Wes Wooten, Sue Williams

Trustees Absent (11): Dr. Robert Bank, Rep. Shannon Erickson, John Hayes, Sen. Greg Hembree, Constance Holloway, Jesica Mackey, Eunice Medina, Janie Neeley, Roger Pryor, Dr. Edward Simmer, Ellen Weaver

Others Present (26): Alisha Green, Bett Williams, Betty Gardiner, BJ Tucker, David Lisk, David O'Kelly, Diamond Samuel, Dorothy Priester, Dr. Emika Aroh, Emily Prillaman, Gina Beebe, Jade Wright, Karen Oliver, Kate Roach, Kenna Hoover, Dr. Kerry Cordan, Laura Baker, Martha Strickland, Michele Bowers, Molly Tuck, Samantha Ingram, Sarah Crowne, Sue Williams, Tammy Graham, Teke Burrell, Van-Kim Lin

Meeting was called to order with a quorum present at 12:31 p.m. by Mr. Dave Morley.

A motion was made to accept the meeting agenda by Mr. Jack McBride, seconded by Mr. Wes Wooten. All voted in favor.

A motion was made to accept the consent agenda by Dr. James Durant, seconded by Ms. Frances Anderson. All voted in favor.

Chairman Morley gave an update from the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has been determining compensation for executive directors. Representative Terry Alexander asked what the goal was, and Mr. Morley and Ms. Ann Vandervliet clarified that the committee was making efforts towards fairness.

Mr. Wooten, chairman of the Program and Grants Committee, shared an update. In September the Board approved changes to the program catalog. In November the Program and Grants committee reviewed and approved updates to the Program Guidelines reflecting those changes. The local partnership team has also been working on several data-driven projects.

Vice Chair Dr. Amy Williams gave an update from the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee. She shared that the results of Child Trend's study of Parents As Teachers were favorable and showed that the program supported school readiness at the appropriate dose.

Chief of Finance David O'Kelly shared that the Fiscal Year 24-25 Audit Report is nearly complete. Mr. Kelly announced two new hires, the Director of Finance and a Fiscal Analyst. The Fiscal 26-27 Budget request has been submitted to the SC Executive Budget Office and presented to the Governor's Office and Education Oversight Committee. Progress has been made to implement a new software system for the financial systems of local partnerships. Through September, First Steps has

spent 31% of its budget, making it ahead of pace due to 4K expenditures. Mr. Morley asked how much of the budget was private funding, and Mr. O’Kelly responded that it was about \$8 million.

Government Liaison Elliott Epps gave the legislative report on behalf of Senator Greg Hembree. Mr. Epps reported that First Steps will submit budget proposals to the House Ways and Means Committee. First Steps will host a Legislative Breakfast on May 13th for members of the House and Senate. With Innovation Investment funding from the SC General Assembly, 20 counties are utilizing formal collaboration agreements.

Molly Tuck gave an update on the Strategic Plan. She reported that there has been a 60% reduction in the number of students with 10 or more absences compared to this time last year. First Steps has implemented a CLASS pilot to measure teacher-child interactions. The 79 randomized 4K classrooms completed their initial CLASS observations in October. An intervention will occur in January and March, and the next round of observations will occur in April. Innovation Investment funding has allowed First Steps to serve 609 new children in high-intensity, evidence-based programs. First Steps has implemented a waitlist pilot in two school districts (Aiken and Lexington) and will expand into additional districts next year. Rep. Terry Alexander asked what was being done about decreasing teacher turnover, and Ms. Tuck replied that baseline data is still being collected. Mary Lynn Digges, HeadStart Director, suggested joint trainings. Ms. Vandervliet added that the Early Childhood Advisory Council could support enrollment and awareness-building of the early childhood education profession to recruit more teachers with baccalaureate degrees.

Sarah Crowne and Van-Kim Lin from Child Trends presented the findings from the Parents As Teachers Evaluation. Children who received a high dose of PAT had a higher likelihood of scoring demonstrating or approaching kindergarten readiness and a lower likelihood of being chronically absent, compared to non-PAT children.

Ann Vandervliet, agency director, gave the “Agency Director’s Report.” She shared organizational updates and reported that the agency has focused on strengthening staff through new hires. First Steps will be building relationships with the General Assembly and corporate leaders through Early Advantage: Foundations for South Carolina’s Economic Vitality with Tom Barkin, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond on February 3rd. First Steps supported relationships across South Carolina’s early childhood system by participating in all joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children and Families.

Mr. Morley asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Williams made the motion to adjourn the meeting of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees, seconded by Sue Williams. All voted in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:43 p.m.