



Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 18, 2026

Virtual (via Zoom)

Trustees Present (14): Representative Terry Alexander, Frances Brown Anderson, Tony Catone, Jacque Curtin, Mary Lynne Diggs, Dr. James Durant, John Hayes, Senator Greg Hembree, Jack McBride, Chairman Dave Morley, Roger Pryor, Dr. Brannon Traxler, Dr. Amy Williams, Sue Williams, Wes Wooten

Trustees Absent (6): Senator Jason Elliott, Representative Shannon Erickson, Constance Holloway, Jessica Mackey, Eunice Medina, Ellen Weaver

Others Present (70): Toni Able, Emika Aroh, Laura Baker, Iris Ballen-Morant, Victoria Barker, Gina Beebe, P. Black, Michele Bowers, Tekethia Burrell, Dr. Crystal Campbell, Kim Chariker, Kerry Cordan, Nora Curiel, Dr. Dawkins, Dwana Doctor, Rudell DuBose, Antionetta Duncan, Elliott Epps, Kathy Fitzgerald, Jessica Fluker, Rosa Fulmore, Quentin Gaddy, Betty Gardiner, Rebecca Goforth, Caroline Goins, Alisha Green, Santasha Highley, Kenna Hoover, Samantha Ingram, Kathy Jenkins, Kristine Jenkins, Lexi Jones, Elizabeth Kabalka, Janice Kilburn, Shaji Kuriakose, JaVonna Lewis, Kristen Martocchio, Morgan Maxwell, Joy Mazur, Tyshica McConner, Darnell Byrd McPherson, David O'Kelly, Karen Oliver, Janet Parenti, Felicia Patrick, LaVonda Paul, Shayla Pettigrew, Alexis D. Pipkins, Duchett Polite, Dorothy Priester, Emily Prillaman, Austin Reed, Cindy Riley, Kate Roach, Delores Rock, LaMyra Sanders, Olivia Sapier, Cheryl Scales, DeAcia Shipman, Sheila Silon, Martha Strickland, Cindy Taubenkimel, Nicole Thomas, Ann Vandervliet, Jo Wallace, Betty Washington, Deloris Washington, Patti Wilkes, Edward Williams, Jade Wright

Alexis Pipkins made a public comment. He raised concern about the impact of reduced Child Care Scholarships on local partnerships, particularly for rural communities. He asked where in the guidelines it prohibits local partnerships from spending scholarship funds.

Meeting was called to order with a quorum present at 2:28 p.m. by Chairman Dave Morley.

Chairman Morley asked to amend the agenda to combine item XII as part of item XI. Senator Greg Hembree made the motion, seconded by Frances Brown Anderson. All voted in favor.

Chairman Morley welcomed Dr. Brannon Traxler, Interim Director of the Department of Public Health, to the board.

Representative Terry Alexander asked for a response to Alexis Pipkins's public comment. Ann Vandervliet, Agency Director, responded that the question about childcare scholarships has been ongoing for the year. Representative Alexander asked if it was federal or state money, and Ms. Vandervliet answered it was federal and flows through to the state. Tony Catone, Director of the Department of Social Services, added that DSS is still providing monthly funds.

A motion to adopt the consent agenda was made by Jack McBride, seconded by Senator Hembree. All voted in favor.

Chairman Morley gave an update from the Executive Committee. This year, 95% of state funds are being allocated towards high-intensity, evidence-based programs. Last month, Parents as Teachers program asked First Steps to do a national joint press release because of the positive results of the KRA study. First Steps has been invited to meet with various state leaders in North Carolina through the Leon Levine Foundation.

Wes Wooten, Chairman of the Program and Grants Committee, shared an update. The committee focused on two main activities this quarter: approval of the FY26-27 Comprehensive Grant and Application Funding Awards and changes to Program Guidelines. The FY26-27 grant application process was competitive, with requests for READY totaling over \$4 million and requests for Innovation Investments totaling over \$8 million. Program Guideline changes included the removal of scholarships as a program and updated requirements for evidence-based scholarships for FY26-27.

Dr. Amy Williams, Vice Chairman, shared an update from the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee. Findings from an internal evaluation on the impact of combining Local Partnership parenting programs with 4K enrollment indicated that students enrolled in First Steps 4K and receiving a high dose of either Parents as Teachers (PAT) or Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youth (HIPPY) were 4-9 times more likely to demonstrate readiness on the KRA.

David O'Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, shared an update from the Finance and Administration Committee. The committee reviewed the audit finding which indicated First Steps did not timely close out its financial records and complete its Financial Statements and Audit Report draft for the year ended June 30, 2025. Mr. O'Kelly reviewed the progress to date in filling finance staffing vacancies and shared that management fully expects to comply with the reporting deadlines for the year ending June 30, 2026. The Local Partnership Financial System is on track.

Senator Greg Hembree gave a legislative update. The Senate and House budgets have not been finalized yet, and First Steps will operate under last year's budget in the interim. He commended the staff for a successful Legislative Breakfast which has over 225 legislators and staff members in attendance.

Three counties needed board approval of Formula Funding allocations. Kerry Cordan, Chief Partnership Officer, reported on proposals from Barnwell County, Darlington County, and Lancaster County, which were submitted by the deadline and met requirements. Ann Vandervliet added that some spending categories were capped that were not yielding the same results as high-intensity, evidence-based programs. Chairman asked if there was a motion to approve the three proposed 26-27 Local Partnership Funding Allocations for Barnwell, Darlington, and Lancaster Counties. Dr. Amy Williams made the motion, seconded by Jack McBride. All voted in favor.

Chairman Morley asked if there was a motion to move into Executive Session for the discussion of personnel matters for the proposed corrective action plan. Frances Brown Anderson made the motion, seconded by John Hayes. All voted in favor.

With no action taken in Executive Session, a motion to exit executive session was made by Jack McBride, seconded by Dr. Brannon Traxler. All voted in favor.

Upon leaving executive session, the following action was taken:

Dr. Traxler made the motion to approve the corrective action plan for Georgetown County First Steps, as presented, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Frances Brown Anderson seconded the motion, all voted in favor.

Ann Vandervliet gave the "Agency Director's Report." The First Steps 4K model has been strengthened by updating guidelines, and 4K Training has returned to in-person, smaller group learning experiences across six regional hubs. There was a 32% reduction in chronic absenteeism because of the "Every Day Leads the Way" campaign and utilizing real time data and monitoring by the 4K team. The number of new 4K sites and classrooms will increase. The number of children and families receiving evidence-based, high-intensity services because of increased Innovation Investment funding will increase from 219 to 910 in FY 26-27. Fewer Local Partnerships are investing in evidence-informed programs and/or programs that do not directly serve children. Ms. Vandervliet welcomed new staff and congratulated staff on promotions.

Mr. Morley recognized John Hayes for his service from 2017-2026. He also thanked Emily Prillaman, Board Liaison, who will be leaving First Steps in July. Mr. Morley asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting. Tony Catone 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 3:56 p.m.