



Meeting of the Board of Trustees

Thursday, September 24, 2026, 2-4 PM

Virtual (Zoom)

<https://us06web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/ZwHwWF9eS-OoP0tj6gHNtw>

AGENDA

I. Roll Call Samantha Ingram, Board Liaison

II. Public Comment Period

The public is invited to provide comments relevant to the South Carolina First Steps and/or SC Early Childhood Advisory Council during this period. Members of the public wishing to speak must sign up before the meeting. Comments should be limited to no more than three minutes per speaker.

III. Call to Order and Approve the Agenda David Morley, Chairman

Motion: To adopt the agenda as submitted

IV. New Trustee Introductions David Morley, Chairman

Karen Brackett-Browning, CEO, Carolina Community Actions, Inc.

(early childhood educator, appointed by Governor)

Tyler Williams Stokes, Senior Banker II, Bank of America

(business representative, appointed by the Governor)

Melanie Gambrell, Director, Office of Mental Health, SC Dept. of Behavioral Health & Development Disabilities (by virtue of position)

V. Consent Agenda Chairman Morley

Motion: To adopt the consent agenda as submitted

a. To adopt the Board of Trustees meeting minutes from June 18, 2026.

b. To approve minutes from the Executive Committee Meeting for the August 19, 2026, August 27, 2026, September 9, 2026 and September 14, 2026 meetings.

c. To approve the corrective action plan for Kershaw County First Steps recommended by the Local Partnership and Grants Committee on September 3, 2026.

VI. Proposed 26-27 SCFS Board Meeting Schedule

VII. Renovation request from Laurens County First Steps

Per SECTION 59-152-120. Local partnerships; funding use restrictions. Funds received by a local partnership may not be used for capital expenses, new construction, or to renovate, refurbish, or

upgrade existing facilities without prior approval by the SC First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees. 1999 Act No. 99, SECTION 2; 2014 Act No. 287 (H.3428), SECTION 15, eff June 18, 2014

Laurens County First Steps has submitted a request for \$9,124.01 needed for an office relocation due to black mold in existing office. The local school district has donated new space. The request is for moving, painting and related expenses. LCFS has the funding within its administrative fund.

- VIII. Executive Committee Report Chairman Morley
- IX. Program and Grants Committee Report Kerry Cordan, Ph.D., Chief Partnership Officer
- X. Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Report Dr. Amy Williams, Committee Chair
- XI. Finance and Administration Committee Report Jessica Mackey, Committee Chair
- XII. Legislative Report Senator Greg Hembree
- XIII. Proposed Executive Session to discuss Local Partnership Contract Matters Chairman Morley
- XIV. Agency Director Report Ann Vandervliet
- XV. Special Recognition for Martha Strickland Proclamation Recognizing Martha Stickland's 13 years of service to families in Richland County Jessica Mackey
- XVI. Adjournment Chairman Morley
- Motion: To adjourn the meeting of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees

Attachments:

- SC First Steps Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – June 18, 2026
- Executive Committee Minutes – August 19, 2026
- Executive Committee Minutes – August 27, 2026
- Executive Committee Minutes – September 9, 2026
- Executive Committee Minutes – September 14, 2026
- Proposed 26-27 Board of Trustees Meeting Schedule
- Laurens County First Steps Funding Request
- Executive Committee Report
- Program and Grants Committee Report
- Program and Grants Committee Meeting Minutes – September 3, 2026
- Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Report
- Finance and Administration Committee Report
- Legislative Report
- Agency Director Report



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.



Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

August 19, 2026, 10:30 AM via Zoom

Members Present: Dave Morley, Wes Wooten, Jesica Mackey, Dr. Amy Williams

Staff Present: Ann Vandervliet, Kerry Cordan, Ph.D., Samantha Ingram, Tekethia Burrell

Dave Morley called the meeting to order with a quorum present at 10:37 a.m.

The committee decided to schedule a separate meeting to discuss the personnel matter on the agenda.

Dave Morley asked for a motion to enter executive session for the discussion of the proposed 26-27 budget for Florence County First Steps, the local partnership executive director new hire compensation request for York County First Steps and Chester County First Steps, to receive correction action updates for Marion County First Steps, York County First Steps, and Georgetown County First Steps and to discuss a SC First Steps Personnel Matter. A motion was made by Wes Wooten and seconded by Jesica Mackey.

With no action taken in executive session, a motion to exit executive session was made by Jesica Mackey, seconded by Dr. Amy Williams, all voted in favor.

Upon leaving executive session, the following action was taken:

Wes Wooten made the motion to approve the proposed compensation request for the new executive director for Chester County First Steps as submitted by the local partnership board and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees due to the urgency of the matter. Jesica Mackey seconded the motion, all voted in favor.

Wes Wooten made the motion to not approve the executive director compensation for York County First Steps and to request additional information for the local partnership board and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees due to the urgency of the matter. Jesica Mackey seconded the motion, all voted in favor.

Wes Wooten made the motion to approve the proposed FY26-27 budget for Florence County First Steps as submitted by the local partnership, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees due to the urgency of the matter. Jesica Mackey seconded the motion, all voted in favor.

Ann Vandervliet gave an Agency update. The SC State Budget was approved this week and includes funding for 4K expansion to families up to 300% FPL, funding to coordinate a CLASS driven quality improvement with the SC Department of Education and to fund additional teacher retention stipends. The allocation also includes \$5M to support Innovation Investments through local partnerships.

Dr. Amy Williams made the motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:32 a.m.



Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

August 27, 2026, 8:30 AM via Zoom

Members Present: Wes Wooten, Jesica Mackey, Dr. Amy Williams

Members Absent: Dave Morley

Staff Present: Ann Vandervliet, Kerry Cordan, Ph.D., Samantha Ingram, Diamond Samuel

Dr. Amy Williams called the meeting to order with a quorum present at 8:33 a.m.

Dr. Amy Williams asked for a motion to enter executive session for the discussion of the proposed 26-27 budget for Georgetown County First Steps, and the local partnership executive director new hire compensation request for York County First Steps. A motion was made by Wes Wooten and seconded by Jesica Mackey.

With no action taken in executive session, a motion to exit executive session was made by Jesica Mackey, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Upon leaving executive session, the following action was taken:

Jesica Mackey made the motion to approve the proposed FY26-27 budget for Georgetown County First Steps as submitted by the local partnership, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees due to the urgency of the matter. Wes Wooten seconded the motion, all voted in favor.

Jesica Mackey made the motion to approve the Executive Director compensation for York County First Steps and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees due to the urgency of the matter. Wes Wooten seconded the motion, all voted in favor.

Dr. Amy Williams made the motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:54 a.m.



Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

September 9, 2026, 10 AM via Zoom

Members Present: Dave Morley, Wes Wooten, Jessica Mackey, Dr. Amy Williams

Staff Present: Samantha Ingram

Dave Morley called the meeting to order with a quorum present at 10:10 a.m.

Dave Morley asked for a motion to enter executive session for the discussion of the Agency Head Performance Mid-Year Review document. A motion was made by Dr. Amy Williams and seconded by Wes Wooten.

With no action taken in executive session, a motion to exit executive session was made by Jessica Mackey, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

The committee scheduled a work session for Monday, September 14 to finalize the mid-year performance document.

Dr. Amy Williams made the motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:07 a.m.



Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

September 14, 2026, 8:30 AM via Zoom

Members Present: Dave Morley, Wes Wooten, Jessica Mackey, Dr. Amy Williams

Staff Present: Samantha Ingram, Molly Tuck

Dave Morley called the meeting to order with a quorum present.

The committee discussed and finalized the agency director's mid-year review performance document for submission to the Agency Head Salary Commission. No action was taken during the meeting.

Dr. Amy Williams made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Wes Wooten.

All voted in favor, and the meeting adjourned at 10:38 a.m.



SC First Steps Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council 2026-2027 MEETING SCHEDULE

As of September 24, 2026

Thursday, September 24, 2026	SC Board of Trustees/ECAC Meetings, 2-4 PM (virtual)
Thursday, December 3, 2026	SC Board of Trustees/ECAC Meetings, 12:30-2:30 PM (in-person) at the Graduate, Columbia, SC
Thursday, March 18, 2027	SC Board of Trustees/ECAC Meetings, 2-4 PM (hybrid), 636 Rosewood Dr., Columbia, SC
Thursday, June 17, 2027	SC Board of Trustees/ECAC Meetings, 2-4 PM (virtual)



September 24, 2026

To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees
From: Wes Wooten, Committee Chair
RE: **Local Program and Grants Committee Report**

The LP Program and Grants Committee met on September 3, 2026 to discuss year-end program data. Discussion included:

- Kershaw County Local Partnership was recommended for Corrective Action based on FY25-26 programmatic data. This partnership will receive a Corrective Action Plan to support monitoring, coaching, and alignment with program guidelines in the current program year.
- Ten local partnerships will receive specific coaching related to programmatic metrics that require attention in FY26-27. These partnerships will receive coaching through dedicated meetings and site visits to support compliance.
- An update on children and families served last year through Innovation Investments and projections for FY26-27 was provided.

Innovation Grant Update

FY26 Innovation Grant Summary

Across 18 local partnerships, the FY26 Innovation Grant awarded \$3,573,067 and served 570 children (529 families) through HIPPY, Parents as Teachers, LEAP for K, Nurse-Family Partnership, Strengthening Families, and Program Support investments.

By Program

Program	Local Partnerships	Grant Award	Children Served	Families Served	% of Projected Goal	Visits Conducted
HIPPY	13	\$2,074,944	383	381	104%	9,856
LEAP for K	1	\$55,000	38	—	95%	—
Nurse Family Partnership	1	\$100,000	7	28	112%	269
PAT	4	\$788,091	117	95	95%	1,311
Program Support (3K Curriculum and 4K Prep)	2	\$375,032	45	44	95%	—
Strengthening Families	1	\$180,000	25	25	100%	11
Program-Wide Total	18 counties	\$3,573,067	570	529	93%	11,831

% of Projected Goal reflects the average of each grant agreement's individual performance against its projected-to-serve target. Program Support (3K/4K Prep) is infrastructure funding without a direct child- or family-served target, shown as N/A. Data of impact on

By County & Collaborating Partners

County	Collaborating Partners	Programs	Grant Award	Children Served	Families Served	% of Projected Goal	Visits
Allendale	Hampton Allendale County School District	HIPPY LEAP for K	\$327,400	110	68	105%	1,964
Berkeley	Charleston	PAT	\$430,000	88	66	132%	965
Charleston	Berkeley	Program Support (3K Curriculum and 4K Prep)	\$375,032	45	44	95%	
Greenwood	Edgefield, Saluda	HIPPY	\$288,523	54	53	93%	1404
Greenville	Spartanburg, Laurens, Oconee, Pickens, Anderson	HIPPY	\$983,951	199	202	110%	4,936
Kershaw	Richland	PAT	\$192,391	6	6	24%	36
Lee	Sumter	Strengthening Families	\$180,000	25	25	100%	11
Pickens	Prisma	Nurse Family Partnership	\$100,000	7	28	112%	269
Sumter	Lee	PAT	\$165,700	23	23	92%	310
Williamsburg	Georgetown	HIPPY	\$530,070	58	58	100%	1,936
Program-Wide Total			\$3,573,067	570	529	93%	11,831

FY27 Innovation Grant — What's Coming

FY27 planning reflects continued expansion of HIPPY, PAT, and LEAP for K into additional counties, plus the addition of HealthySteps as a new Innovation-funded program. Across 9 lead-county partnerships and 13 grant agreements, FY27 is projected to serve 5,278 individuals with \$5,555,059 in awarded Innovation Grant funding.

Lead County	Collaborating Partners	Program	Projected to Serve	Grant Award Amount
Allendale	Barnwell, Bamberg	HIPPY	91	\$412,055
Allendale	Barnwell	LEAP for K	76	\$147,730
Anderson	Greenville	HealthySteps	1,100	\$152,250
Berkeley	Charleston, Dorchester	HealthySteps	3,000	\$540,576
Berkeley	Charleston, Dorchester	PAT	50	\$252,000
Darlington	Marlboro, Chesterfield	PAT	28	\$200,000
Greenville	Laurens, Oconee, Pickens, and Anderson	HIPPY	190	\$1,110,895
Greenwood	McCormick	HIPPY	55	\$296,927
Jasper	Beaufort, Hampton	HIPPY	70	\$455,000
Spartanburg	Cherokee, Union	HIPPY	91	\$326,868
Spartanburg	Cherokee, Union	HealthySteps	350	\$366,758
Williamsburg	Georgetown	HIPPY	85	\$650,000
Williamsburg	Georgetown	PAT	92	\$644,000
Program-Wide Total	9 lead counties		5,278	\$5,555,059



Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee

September 3, 2026, 1:00PM

Virtual

Members Present: Wes Wooten, Jack McBride, Roger Pryor

Staff Present: Kerry Cordan, Kate Roach, Jade Wright, Jessica Fluker

Wes Wooten called the meeting to order with quorum present at 1:04 p.m.

Kerry Cordan, Chief Partnership Officer, reviewed the process for corrective action and presented recommendations for programmatic corrective actions and recommendations for coaching to the committee.

Following a discussion, Roger Pryor made the motion to approve the corrective action determination as recommended for Kershaw County First Steps. As a result of corrective action, the local partnership affected is not eligible to apply for competitive or targeted grants until they have satisfactorily resolved the deficiencies noted on their corrective action plan as determined by SC First Steps state staff. Jack McBride seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Jade Wright, Director of Innovation, presented an overview of the Innovation Investment projects and children reached for FY25-26. She also presented the projected reach for FY26-27 Innovation Investment projects. Once the financial data are finalized, additional information will be presented regarding cost per unit for program implementation.

With no additional action required, Wes Wooten made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:41p.m. Jack McBride seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Programmatic Corrective Action Recommendations

Presented to the SC First Steps Board of Trustees Program and Grants Committee

September 3, 2026

Corrective Action Process		
At the conclusion of the program year, program data are reviewed for compliance with established metrics for each program based on the corresponding Program Guidelines (FY26). Each program metric within a program is evaluated separately for meeting the minimum expected value (e.g., 1.8 home visits per month for PAT). For each program, the partnership is given a rating of Good Standing (meets or exceeds minimum value for each metric), Coaching (1-2 metrics are below the minimum expected value), or Corrective Action (3 or more metrics are below the minimum expected value). For those in Good Standing, no additional follow-up is required. For those receiving Coaching, Program Officers and Program Leads will develop a documented coaching plan to provide strategic support in meeting the metrics by established timelines. For those receiving a Corrective Action, the LP team will develop a Corrective Action Plan to include coaching and deliverables by established timelines.		
Partnerships Recommended for Corrective Action		
Local Partnership	Program	Metrics below minimum expectation
Kershaw	Parents as Teachers	Families with 1 Risk Factor <100% Families with 2+ Risk Factors <60% ASQ3 completed <60% ASQ:SE2 completed <60% LSPs completed <60%
Partnerships Recommended for Coaching		
Local Partnership	Program	Metrics below minimum expectation
Allendale	Nurturing Parenting	documentation of pre/post AAPI and NSCS
Colleton	Nurturing Parenting	documentation of pre/post AAPI and NSCS
Dillon	Nurturing Parenting	documentation of pre/post AAPI and NSCS
Dorchester	Child Care Coaching	Visits per month < 2/month No ERS assessments entered
Marion	Nurturing Parenting	documentation of pre/post AAPI and NSCS
Charleston	Child Care Coaching	visits per month aligned with the QC rating
Horry	Enhanced Early Ed	program discontinued but will monitor LEAP for K program implementation
Lee	Health Services Coordination	documentation of assessments and referrals
Chester	Child Care Training	proper data entry
	Countdown to Kindergarten	failure to notify SCFS of discontinuation of program
Abbeville	Countdown to Kindergarten	failure to notify SCFS of discontinuation of program
Note: ASQ-3: Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3; ASQ:SE2: Ages and Stages: Social Emotional-2; AAPI: Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory; NSCS: Nurturing Skills Competency Scales; LSP: Life Skills Progression		



September 24, 2026

To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees
From: David Morley, Chairman
RE: **Executive Committee Report**

The SCFS Executive Committee met Aug. 19, 2026, August 27, 2026, September 9, 2026, and September 14, 2026. Minutes from meetings where time sensitive action was taken on behalf of the Board of Trustees were emailed within two business days as required.

Action items and discussion included:

- Approval of the 26-27 Budget for Florence County First Steps
- Updates on Local Partnership on Corrective Action Plans
- Mid-Year review required by the Agency Head Salary Commission for the Agency Director was discussed. The final review occurs in Summer 2027. The Board of Trustees will have an opportunity to provide input.

Meeting minutes are included in your board meeting packet.



September 24, 2026

To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees
From: Dr. Amy Williams, Chairman
RE: **Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Report**

The Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee met on September 10, 2026.

- First Steps is legislatively mandated to have one of their programs evaluated by an external evaluator.
- Last year, the SPE Committee approved an evaluation of the First Steps Child Care Coaching Program.
- During the September meeting, the external evaluator, Child Trends, presented their findings.
- Attendees provided feedback to Child Trends, who will incorporate suggestions into a final report.
- The final report is on track for a timely submission to the General Assembly by Feb 1, 2027.



September 24, 2026

To: First Steps Board of Trustees
From: Jessica Mackey, Committee Chair
RE: Finance and Administration Committee Report

The Finance and Administration Committee met on August 28th, 2026.

David O'Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, noted that First Steps had \$28 million in cash at June 30, 2026, compared to \$26.5 million last year-end. This included \$1.9 million in unspent General Funds carried forward to Fiscal 2026-27.

Mr. O'Kelly also reviewed preliminary Budget Vs. Actual Expenditures for the year ended June 30, 2026. Actual expenditures totaled \$72.7 million, or 93.5% of the \$77.9 million total budgeted. The unspent amount was attributed to increased focus on the value added by expenditures, changes in practices and approaches to eliminate expenditures without clear, measurable benefits, and adjustments in the timing of activities to better align with needs they fulfilled. These changes reduced or slowed spending and increased cash.

Mr. O'Kelly reviewed the FY2026-27 budget increases approved by the General Assembly. He also reviewed with the Committee the various budget, accountability, CERDEP, and financial statement/audit reports due in late-August to early-October.

Mr. O'Kelly reviewed the status of Finance Department staffing, noting that First Steps currently has a position posted for a vacant local partnership fiscal analyst position and will be working to fill a vacant senior accountant position.

Robin Ebert, Director of Finance, provided an update on the implementation of the new SAGE local partnership financial system. She noted that Local Partnerships began transacting business in SAGE on May 1st, and that the implementation team is working to complete the data conversion and load historical data from blackboard into SAGE. Ms. Ebert described some of the extensive work done by First Steps state office and UHY staff over the past year to complete the implementation. She also reported positive feedback on the system received from the Local Partnership staff, including that the system is user-friendly, easy-to-learn, very fast, and has improved reporting flexibility.

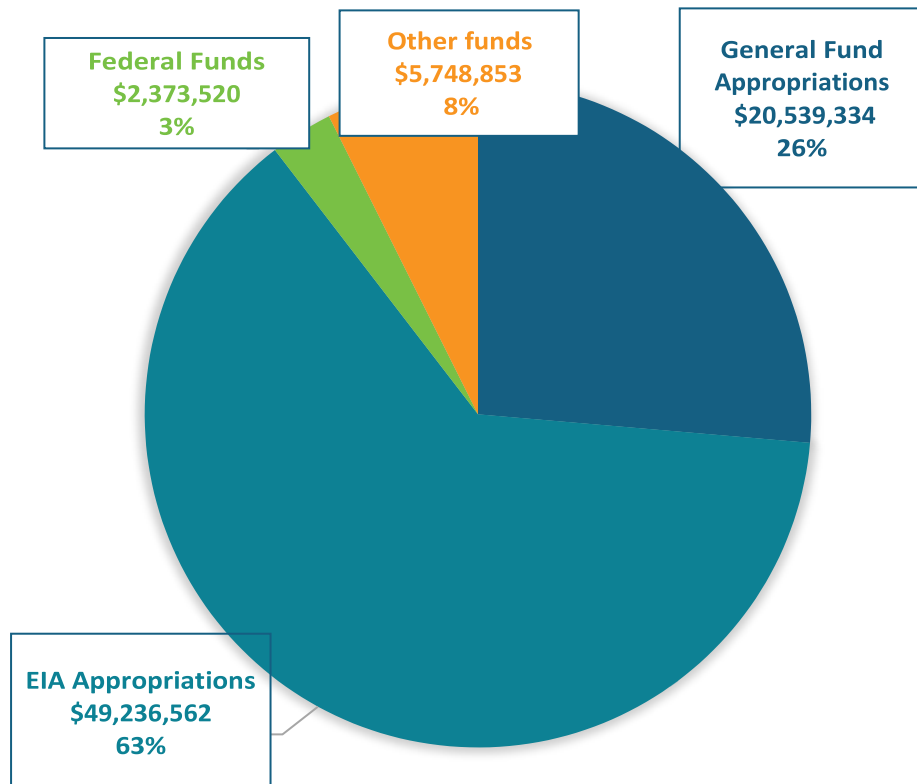
Ms. Ebert then provided the committee with an update on the status of efforts to attain compliance by Local Partnerships under corrective action plans.

Meeting minutes are included in the board meeting packet.

Budget Vs. Actual (July 1, 2025 — June 30, 2026)

Expense Category	25-26 Budget	Actual Year Ending June 30, 2026	Utilization Rate
Administration	\$ 3,506,301	\$ 2,398,502	68.4%
Local First Steps Partnerships	\$ 30,551,244	\$29,816,323	97.6%
First Steps 4K	\$ 40,686,113	\$ 38,983,989	95.8%
Early Childhood Advisory Council	\$ 3,124,611	\$ 1,546,393	49.5%
TOTAL	\$77,868,269	\$72,744,407	93.5%

25-26 Funding by Type





September 24, 2026

To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees

From: Ann Vandervliet

RE: **Agency Director Quarterly Report**

In alignment with the five-year strategic plan and the goal to ensure that at least 75% of SC's children will enter kindergarten able to achieve "demonstrated readiness" on the kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA), the following strategic progress has been made and supported by capacity building.

First Steps 4K	<i>Goal: Increase the number of children able to reach "demonstrated readiness" on the kindergarten readiness assessment as a result of the First Steps 4K program. Last fall, 28% of First Steps 4K achieved that level of school readiness.</i> SCFS has contracted with five external, certified CLASS observers to complete over 380 CLASS observations by mid October. The new Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), developed by consultants who have supported measurable quality change in other states, has replaced the generalized coaching checklist used in the past. Data from the fall CLASS observations will be merged into the Quality Improvement Plan to ensure data driven coaching that will meet the unique needs of each teacher. External CLASS observations will take place again next spring to measure progress at the classroom level. Success Monitors have been contracted to provide intermittent contract compliance monitoring on site and internal desk review. The Director of Compliance and Classroom Resources will lead these contractors, monitoring and follow up. Five Lead Coaches have been selected to ensure that the team of 4K coaches receives effective and consistent support and mentoring.
4K Capacity Building	SCFS 4K enrollment remains open, and marketing efforts

	continue statewide. Interest events for potential new 4K sites begin in October and site applications open for 27-28. The application process will close in early January, allowing more time for contracting and onboarding of new sites, which will ensure providers have adequate time to enroll students, attend summer training, and receive classroom materials. The application will be released with defined criteria for new and renewal sites to strengthen selection process. It is important that sites meet quality standards and our able to implement the First 4K program with fidelity.
4K Utilization	Following the eligibility expansion from 185% to 300%, we currently have 4,292 students enrolled in First Steps 4K. SCFS will continue to work on strategies to increase awareness of First Steps 4K and increase enrollment and site capacity. There are currently 305 4K providers supporting 378 classrooms. We continue to offer training to our network of roughly 580 teachers and assistants on a monthly basis. We are utilizing partner agencies, such as the Department of Social Services and Department of Education, to build awareness of the eligibility expansion.
Local Partnerships	<i>Goal: Increase access and utilization of evidence-based, high intensity programs through First Steps Local</i> Twenty-six (26) counties are now formally collaborating through Innovation Investments compared to 20 last year; and 0 the year before. <i>Resulting in increased capacity for evidence based and high intensity services that yield measurable impact on child level readiness:</i> Parents as Teachers, 28 to 30 counties HIPPY, 16 to 23 counties Triple P (level 4), 4 to 8 counties Healthy Steps, 4 to 6 healthcare systems LEAP for K, 2 to 4 counties The number of children served in <i>evidence-based, high-intensity programs</i> continues to grow. In FY24, SCFS served 5,214

	children, that number grew to 5,633 children in FY25, and then to 6,008 children in FY26. Statewide, across all funding types, the number of children projected to be served by evidence based and high intensity is 7,200. As local partnerships adjust to new funding and more intensive programs, there must be time allowed for recruiting, and training new staff.
	We have completed a 12-month training calendar for the Local Partnerships. In person and virtual training is now offered year-round to meet various training needs at beginner and advanced levels. The training for local partnership boards began in August and will be offered in every region.
Resource Development	\$5M for Innovation Investments (non-recurring) was approved in the 26-27 State budget
	\$9M to support expanded eligibility for First Steps 4K (185% FPL to 300% FPL); to pilot 4K refinement in partnership with the SC Dept of Education; and increase retention stipends was approved in the 26-27 State budget
	SCFS has submitted a grant application to a private foundation to expand <i>HealthySteps</i> statewide. Currently, SCFS funds <i>HealthySteps</i> within ten clinics. If approved, SCFS will support up to 30 clinics by 2028. <i>HealthySteps</i> provides intensive case management within pediatric offices for children up to age 4.
	SCFS received the remainder of the non-recurring funding for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (\$4,579.136) from the South Carolina Department of Education and is working with the Dolly Parton Foundation based in TN and the SC Department of Education to plan for enrollment expansion.
First Five Pee Dee Pilot in partnership with the Leon Levine Foundation	CareSouth is actively implementing <i>HealthySteps</i>. Darlington County First Steps in partnership with Chesterfield County First Steps and Marlboro County First Steps is preparing nine parent educators as part of the <i>Parents Teachers</i> expansion with the pilot footprint.
www.FirstFiveSC.org	The First Five SC portal has been refreshed making it easier for families to identify publicly funded programs for which they are eligible.

	Families no longer need to provide their name or email address to use the eligibility screener. Instead, they simply enter a ZIP code to view programs available in their community. After completing the screener, families see the programs that match their needs, along with a brief description, a Learn More link, and, when available, a link to begin an application. As indicated in June ECAC materials, Palmetto PreK was consolidated with First Five SC in June. Palmetto Pre-K has its own landing page on the First Five site. Parents and navigators are able to find Palmetto PreK through organic search and paid promotion about preschool. Features like information about preschool locations, quality ratings, and distance from an address found on the Palmetto PreK site are now located on the First Five site.
Research and Evaluation	The annual Accountability Report was submitted to the General Assembly on September 15, 2026. Once it is approved, it will be posted publicly and the link will be shared with the Board when it's available.
Human Resources – New Employees, Promotions and Transitions	New Staff Tracy Edmunds, Director of Communications. Porsche McCloud, Procurement Coordinator Stephen McCant, IT Support Intern Evan Lawton, Governance and Compliance Intern Abi Satti, Data Insights Intern Promotions Stacy Greenwalt to Lead Coach (Upstate West) Chelsea Adamson to Lead Coach (Upstate East) Charshina McMillan to Lead Coach (Midlands) Amy Engle to Lead Coach (Pee Dee) Kim Trudell to Lead Coach (Low Country) Transitions Joy Mazur to Director of 4K Compliance and Classroom Resources Shayla Pettigrew to Director of 4K Family Engagement Kristine Jenkins to Lead Coach Business Development
Vacancies	Chief of Early Learning (interviews in late Sept.30) Senior Director of Local Partnership Operations Local Partnership Fiscal Analyst 4K Coaches