



**SC First Steps Board of Trustees Meeting
February 21, 2019**

**Immediately following the meeting of the Early Childhood Advisory Council
IT-ology
1301 Gervais St #200, Columbia, SC 29201**

MINUTES

Members Present (15):

Chip Stanley, Chair
Julie Hussey, Vice Chair
Senator Greg Hembree
Senator Gerald Malloy
Representative Jerry Govan
Josh Baker (Phone)
Shelley Canright
Mary Lynne Diggs
Tim Holt
David Mathis
Jennifer McConnell
Mary Poole
Roger Pryor (Phone)
Amy Williams
Sue Williams

Members Absent (4):

Representative Rita Allison
Angel Johnson-Brebner
Walter Fleming Jr.
John Meacham
Alexia Newman

Others Present:

Georgia Mjartan	Mary Anne Mathews
Zack Catoe	Porlan Cunningham
Bridgett Shealey	Jonathan Artz
Martha Strickland	Dorothy Priester
Debbie Robertson	Jim Riddle
Mark Barnes	Lillian Peake
Betty Gardiner	
Cassie Barber	
Lavinia Tejada	



Call to Order/Quorum Call

Ms. Julie Hussey called the SC First Steps Board of Trustees meeting to order at 3:11 pm.

Dr. Shelley Canright introduced a motion to approve the meeting agenda as written. Ms. Jennifer McConnell provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.

Dr. David Mathis made a motion to approve the December 2018 meeting minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Ms. McConnell. Ms. Mary Lynne Diggs asked that an update be made to the minutes to correct "Mr. Arthur Bruton" to "Dr. Arthur Bruton". No other corrections or suggestions were made and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Ms. Hussey presented a brief executive report to highlight the addition of Mr. Chip Stanley as the appointed Chairman of the Board. Ms. Hussey also recognized the presence of other new members and thanked Mr. David Wilson for his service on the SC First Steps Board. Ms. Hussey continued to mention that the next order of business was to select a new board secretary who would also join the Executive Committee. Ms. Alexia Newman had previously served in this capacity; however, she wishes to step down due to time constraints. Ms. Hussey further elaborated on the roles and duties of the secretary, and she formally recommended Ms. Jennifer McConnell for this position.

Senator Gerald Malloy made the motion to nominate Ms. Jennifer McConnell as the Secretary of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees. The motion was seconded by Ms. Sue Williams and the motion to approve Ms. McConnell as board secretary was unanimously approved.

Ms. Hussey announced that in the coming months, there will be a new SC First Steps website that will include board member biographies and photos, which may bring a degree of personalization to the board's web presence.

Ms. Georgia Mjartan provided a brief update on the website timeline and stated that Ms. Porlan Cunningham will be reaching out to members to collect their biography and photo.

Ms. Hussey asked that members take the time to also complete the Member Information document and accompanying Diversity Survey. Ms. Hussey reiterated that completing the forms, will help show diversity and equity among the board membership. Ms. Hussey also took the time to ask the members to donate and/or pledge money to the board and expressed that with the new year and the new board chair, it would be a perfect time to show dedication to the mission. Mr. Stanley concurred with Ms. Hussey stating that board participation speaks volumes and sends a great message to grantees.

In the Legislative Committee update, Senator Malloy provided a brief overview of the strengthened status of SC First Steps lawmakers serving on the board, noting the



promotion of Senator Greg Hembree to Chairman of the Senate Education Committee. Senator Malloy further informed the board of budgetary matters related to carry-forward money. Sen. Malloy discussed the Education Reform Bill and noted that it had passed out of the House and is now being debated in the Senate. There was also discussion of the fact that some members of the House and Senate are discussing the creation of a consolidated early childhood agency that would be a cabinet-level agency and would include SC First Steps along with programs serving young children from multiple other agencies. Senator Malloy underscored the importance of the education bill and encouraged members to pay attention to bill as it unfolds and reinforced the notion that it is important for SC First Steps to stay ahead of legislation as this legislative year is focused on education.

Senator Malloy and Senator Greg Hembree reminded the group that SC First Steps has been involved in a senate oversight study for a year and a half, and that while that may feel like a long time, the oversight study was not triggered by any one thing. This is instead, a cyclical oversight study that must happen for all state agencies every six years within the House and the Senate.

Senator Hembree reflected on the message of Senator Malloy to be attentive to the new reforms in education and the idea of a single consolidated early childhood agency and ensured that there is no cause for anxiety as the process works throughout the two legislative bodies.

Representative Jerry Govan stated that as of this meeting, the education bill has been amended in the House and the subcommittee voted it out to the full committee where it will be taken up during the final week of February. Rep. Govan said the House Ways and Means committee should be finished with the budget and the bill should be ready for the Senate to look at it the same time the budget is approved. Rep. Govan said the reason for the expedited process with the education bill is to get it on the floor before the budget is debated. Representative Govan concluded his statement in saying there are many positive things that will be adopted as a result—the bill should help move South Carolina forward in education.

Ms. Hussey thanked the members of the Legislative Committee for their insightfulness and dedication to the mission of SC First Steps while providing an opportunity for questions from the board.

Ms. McConnell provided an update from the Program and Grants Committee. Ms. McConnell explained that the committee learned of two programs that they wish to endorse as part of the State Board's list of Evidence-Based Programs. Ms. McConnell also updated the board on conditional approvals for local partnerships and said the committee had reviewed all conditional approvals and that Corrective Action Plans were in place. Ms. McConnell noted that staff will monitor the local partnerships' compliance to their corrective action plan. The Program and Grants Committee recommends that the programs "Quality Counts" and "Motherread – Fatherread" be designated as Evidence Based and added



to the State Board list of Evidence Based Programs (attachment 3). Dr. Amy Williams seconded the recommendation by the committee.

Upon discussion from the board, Ms. Diggs posed the question to Dr. Mathis as to the use of these programs at the Department of Education. Dr. Mathis replied that he is not aware of the agency using these programs.

Mr. Tim Holt also asked how many counties in the state were using these programs. Ms. McConnell deferred to Ms. Debbie Robertson who replied that Darlington is using Motherread currently and that Quality Counts has four pilot programs in the Spartanburg area.

Ms. Diggs asked if there will be a bridge between Quality Counts and the DSS quality rating system and Ms. Robertson said there will be a bridge between the Quality Counts program and the state's system. The motion from the committee was unanimously approved.

Dr. Amy Williams presented on behalf of the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee. She explained that the Board of Trustees, First Steps staff, Local Partnerships, and other stakeholders would be involved in strategic planning exercises over the coming weeks. Ms. Williams reminded the group of the full-day strategic planning retreat on April 26th with the goal to have the agency's strategic plan approved at the meeting in October. The group was then asked to break into groups to participate in a "Values Exercise". In this exercise, board members were asked to summarize what values can help advance the mission of SC First Steps. The words/statements will be used to help re-write the mission and vision statement for the organization. Upon completion of the exercise, members from each small group shared their ideas.

Ms. Hussey and Ms. Mjartan acknowledged the presence of Local Partnership Executive Directors, Ms. Dorothy Priester, of Cherokee, and Mr. Jim Riddle, of Lexington, at the meeting.

Mr. Holt then presented on behalf of the Finance and Administration Committee. Mr. Holt reported that the committee has informally met twice since the February board meeting to work on a new allocation model for the local partnerships. Mr. Holt stated that the algorithm will be updated due to a legislative statute and will replace some of the risk factors that are no longer applicable. Five Executive Directors joined the group to make sure their input is included in the process. Mr. Holt said the group is working to simplify the model now and the goal is to implement this work within the next year. Mr. Holt said the following factors were considered in the assessment of the funding model: population, income level, and identified needs as the committee works with Dr. Learner, who is evaluating the model and facilitating discussions. Mr. Holt noted that accountability is also included in this model through a variety of avenues. Lastly, Mr. Holt acknowledged Mr. Jonathan Artz for his support in notating the committee's work. Mr. Holt then presented the most recent financial report.



Ms. Hussey and Ms. Mjartan highlighted the 2018 SC Summit on Early Childhood and the South Carolina Parenting Conference in the financial report while thanking all board members and organizations for their contributions to its success. Ms. Mjartan noted that over 600 individuals attended and the \$74,000 raised for the Summit was enough for the event to break even. Ms. Mjartan commended the togetherness of the event and noted the great work by Ms. Cassie Barber on the Summit, and Ms. Mary Anne Mathews on the success of the Parenting Conference.

Ms. Mjartan continued the meeting by recognizing the work of Acting Chair, Julie Hussey, and her eight years of service. Ms. Mjartan spoke to the goals of Ms. Hussey to create a board that communicates clearly and elevates young children within South Carolina. These statements transitioned into the Director's Report where Ms. Mjartan promoted a flyer for the 2019 "Read In" which celebrates the importance of reading in the state. Many of the children present for this event will be in SC First Steps 4K t-shirts. Ms. Mjartan reminded everyone that this is hosted by the SC State Library for students in the state and this year's event marks the one-year anniversary of Governor McMaster signing the reauthorization for our agency. Ms. Mjartan said that "The Week of the Young Child" is also upcoming and there will be many activities planned which will allow board members the opportunity to engage.

Ms. Mjartan then covered a report, published in January 15, 2019, that was prepared by the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), the University of South Carolina College of Education and the RAND Corporation that evaluates state-funded full-day 4K (CERDEP). Ms. Mjartan stated the RAND corporation looked at the true costs of providing early childhood education and the USC component looked the following questions: Does CERDEP affect young children's learning and their readiness for kindergarten? Ms. Mjartan stated that First Steps looked at Teaching Strategies Gold which is the assessment tool used and identified that the students are progressing because of the impact of 4K. What are the costs of CERDEP program components, and what is the estimated per pupil cost of CERDEP? Ms. Mjartan said the legislature sets the reimbursement rates and the EOC decided it wanted to know the true cost of 4K. Ms. Mjartan stated that according to the report, as it relates to Private Child Care Providers who provide one single full-day slot is \$7,000. Ms. Mjartan stated that by law SC First Steps reimburses provides \$4,510 per student. Ms. Mjartan further elaborated that every First Steps 4K provider takes a roughly \$2,500 cut with each child they serve due to the differences in reimbursement rates and the stricter policies on ratio. Ms. Mjartan expressed the importance of acknowledging that the true cost of public school has other public money covering the differential, so if it costs \$11,000 and the reimbursement rate is \$4,500, the difference is covered at the district level; however, in a private center it is a private business covering that cost. Ms. Mjartan reminded the board the private providers should be thanked and acknowledged for what they are giving to the communities and, as a board, try to figure out ways to get them to parity with their actual expenses.

Are formal early childhood education programs serving more four-year-olds living in poverty? Ms. Mjartan acknowledged that within the report a concerning gap does exist



between the number of students eligible for CERDEP and the number of students actually enrolled in CERDEP.

Ms. Mjartan notes that the report highlights a gap for children who are eligible and children who are enrolled in the program; however, the programs in which these numbers account for do not include all of the available Early Childhood support in an area. Specifically, Ms. Mjartan uses the Richland School District 1 early education data as an example to show that of all children who are CERDEP eligible only 44% are being reached. Ms. Mjartan referenced that DSS services (child care vouchers) increases this number to 52%; however, that data was not originally reported by the EOC, along with district funded and Title I funded slots. Ms. Mjartan states the data is not a complete picture of children enrolled in free 4K programs, and the board, collectively, should continue their actions to resolve the issues with the both the data and the eligible vs. enrolled gap.

Representative Govan asked for an estimate on how many children are not being served through one of the available funding sources.

Dr. David Mathis stated that it may appear that there are a great number of children who are not served, but this may not be the case because this study focused solely on CERDEP funding. Dr. Mathis and his team at the Department of Education are working with Richland 1 because there is not a waiting list, but they are currently serving less than 50% of the children according to the EOC report.

Ms. Mjartan confirmed that children may be receiving benefits from other programs, but they are not reflected in this report and was exemplified through the use of student numbers who took a state assessment. Ms. Mjartan also mentioned good data is a key step to filling in the gaps and helping more children receive services using all of the funds set aside for this purpose.

Ms. Mjartan continues the presentation to discuss the aggressive strategies being implemented to increase enrollment and stated last year alone, there was a 10% increase in the number of children served in the SC First Steps 4K program. Ms. Mjartan said the agency is hiring an Outreach Coordinator and there will also be parents “hitting the pavement” and promoting the program in their communities. Ms. Mjartan noted the post card drive has also ramped up with “mid-year” and “next year” waves along with billboards going up throughout the state. Ms. Mjartan concluded in informing the board that that this is the first year that 4K will spend into its carry forward due to growth and a planned spend down of CERDEP carry-forward funds.

Dr. Mathis asked Ms. Diggs about the Head Start enrollment numbers for Richland County. Ms. Diggs replied that Head Start served over 6,000 four-year olds statewide in the previous year and that a goal for the agency should be to administer programs where they best fit so that programs such as Head Start are serving children in the most need with comprehensive care directed to elevate families from poverty. Ms. Diggs concluded her statement in saying that all programs are different and Head Start is designed to serve the



lowest hanging fruit (100% poverty level) which is also the easiest group to find, henceforth many students qualifying for federal assistance are now being served by CERDEP and public schools.

Dr. Amy Williams interjected with the question of using DHHS data to determine what students are eligible for each program.

Ms. Mjartan explained the First Steps 4K tie to Medicaid and future plans for a portal to help determine eligibility. Ms. Mjartan also noted the prerogative of family choice and the wise use of resources. Dr. Mathis also elaborated on the need for choice in certain situations.

Ms. Diggs expressed a concern for educators and professionals not understanding the differences within each program, citing a recent meeting and the various educational requirements.

Ms. Mjartan further explained the future vision to unite 4K instructors across programs to train together and share experiences and knowledge regarding the instruction of South Carolina's youngest students.

Dr. Mathis reinforced Ms. Mjartan's thoughts by acknowledging that certain opportunities collectively and within each program are unexploited; however, all of these students will enter 5K eventually and the knowledge they gain is significant to success.

Mr. Govan strongly encouraged all service providers to work together in figuring out how to best serve the highest number of children possible while defining where the gaps are and how they can be closed. He stated that now is the time to act as the public eye is on education reform and holding all stakeholders accountable for the services provided to children.

Ms. Hussey remarked that it is important to consider the data, the relationship, and all the other available pieces going forward. Early childhood education is an investment, and if the data cannot provide guidance, then the children are not being served.

Dr. Mathis emphasized the importance of using funds for education. He stated that in many of the rural and underserved areas, district and local monies are being used for education that could be repurposed for other issues.

Ms. Mjartan concluded by stating that the SC First Steps board exists with the purpose of conquering problems like these. To know that there are so many children in our state that are not being served is negative, but positive side is that the issue has been uncovered and the work can begin to solve the problem.

Representative Govan reiterated the need to work together in an efficient way, and to be proactive in addressing the challenges that exist.



Ms. Mary Poole expressed the need to fully understand each of the programs and their role with integrating curriculum for children with a scope of disabilities. She also discussed the need for specialized assistance in navigating programs and partnering with parents to support the child in the most positive way possible.

Ms. Hussey thanked Ms. Poole for her perspective on this issue and concluded the meeting with an uplifting tone.

Dr. Amy Williams made a motion to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Dr. Mathis. The meeting was adjourned at 4:44 PM.