

MEMO

To: South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees
From: Leslie Anderson, Consultant, Leslie Anderson Consulting, Inc.
Date: March 11, 2015
Subject: Draft Principles of Engagement

At the January 15, 2015 meeting, one topic the Board focused on was *Developing a High Performance Governance Culture*. Significant changes in the structure and responsibilities of the Board were included in the First Steps Reauthorization Act 287. Coming to a common understanding of current fundamental duties, implications for service and decision-making, and the new dynamics of Board culture is extremely important. In fact, it is essential for the future sustainability and success of First Steps.

Often a Board of Trustees has all the basics in place and yet is much less effective than their potential due to neglect of the culture - how well the group, including staff, work together.

During this presentation we considered the three *Duties* of Care, Loyalty and Obedience. We reviewed a list of *Basic Board Responsibilities* that are considered best practices. We spent most of the time examining the cultural dimensions of governance. We defined governance culture as:

A combination of learned and shared, formal and informal, rules, behaviors, agreements and traditions developed over time that determine decisions, performance, group satisfaction and impact of the organization.

From research about high performing Boards we know they have certain characteristics. A dozen traits and norms exercised by these very effective Boards were reviewed. We discussed the importance of “generative governance,” as described by the authors of the classic, *Governance as Leadership*. The authors underscore the necessity of intentionally creating the space, atmosphere, and opportunity to deal with issues of culture and to delve deeply together into complex, long-term problems and possibilities as well as ambiguous or fractious situations. Your new structure creates the perfect platform for this work.

There are tools to assist Boards in these important cultural dimensions of service. One is to discuss, create, and agree upon a set of standards for participation. This agreement explicitly informs all Board and staff members about expected behaviors; provides a way for participants to discuss and evaluate their individual and corporate performance against agreed-upon standards; and helps newcomers fit into the culture faster.

Prior to the January 2015 meeting, Mr. Wingate endorsed the development of this tool, *Principles of Engagement*. The Trustees spent time generating material for it by discussing the question: *What are the most important governance behaviors for South Carolina First Steps Board and staff to utilize, model, apply, and learn now and in the future?*

The attached *Principles of Engagement* draft for your consideration includes the responses to this question from board discussion on January 15, 2015. Concepts and words expressed by the Board are denoted by a check mark [✓] to the left. The additional statements are related to sources noted above and research in governance best practices. At the upcoming meeting, the Trustees will consider this statement for possible adoption, amendment, or other action. Once the final version is agreed upon, the Board should officially adopt it and each Trustee should sign it to affirm their individual intent.

This statement forms the foundation of an excellent governance culture. However, its passage should not supersede ongoing, open, and transparent dialogue and intentional work to develop and strengthen the high performing First Steps governance culture, as reconfigured by law in Act 287.

Principles of Engagement [DRAFT]

Purpose/Mission

As the South Carolina First Steps community of Trustees, staff, Local Partnership Board members and volunteers, we work to actualize this mission of First Steps as stated in legislation since its inception: develop, promote, and assist efforts of agencies, private providers, and public and private organizations and entities, at the state level and the community levels, to collaborate and cooperate in order to focus and intensify services, assure the most efficient use of all available resources, and eliminate duplication of efforts to serve the needs of young children and their families.

To this end we commit to a high standard of excellence in our behavior as described below and as grounded in the Duties of Care, Loyalty and Obedience (and are founded in trust, respect, integrity, teamwork, camaraderie, loyalty, interdependence, and mutuality).

Agreements

As a leader of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness, I understand...

- ♦ When making decisions, I/we always place the interest of South Carolina families and children *first*.
- ♦ ✓ I/we act in ways that are selfless and in the interest of the common higher good.
- ♦ ✓ I/we practice open-mindedness and transparency in dealings with Trustees, volunteers, and/or staff.
- ♦ I/we practice mutual respect, courtesy, and candor with fellow Trustees, volunteers, and/or staff.
- ♦ ✓ I/we appreciate one another's opinions, the right to freely express them and the opportunity for constructive debate and respectful disagreement.
- ♦ ✓ I/we work in a spirit of collaboration and in a cooperative problem-solving mode.
- ♦ ✓ Once decisions are made, we speak with one voice and I/we abide by and support the collective decision(s) of the Board.
- ♦ All Trustees have access to the same information.
- ♦ I/we prevent and avoid marginalizing any member.
- ♦ ✓ I/we are dependable and accountable in regard to attendance, preparation, and engagement.
- ♦ ✓ I/we invest the time and preparation necessary to be an effective Trustee, one who is prepared to listen, not only to speak.
- ♦ I/we are culturally responsive in all of our dealings.
- ♦ When deemed appropriate, and not a violation of South Carolina law, I/we maintain confidentiality in non-public matters.
- ♦ I/we commit to a Board/staff relationship which supports an interactive process for constructive decision-making.
- ♦ ✓ I/we are fearless in our vision, commitment, and support for South Carolina's young children and families.

Reviewed and accepted this ____ day of _____ by _____

Signature

Adopted _____, 2015