



To: South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees  
From: Julia-Ellen C. Davis, Interim Director  
Date: March 17, 2016  
Re: Director's Report February 2016

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During February and early March, I held regional listening sessions in each of the SC First Steps regions. This was an outstanding opportunity to learn more about how the state office can be more supportive and each session was well attended by local Executive Directors. I found each area to be unique and appreciated the hospitality of the counties that hosted the meeting in their region.

Please find below updates of our programs since January 27, 2016.

### **Legislative Update**

First Steps presented its programs at the request of the House Legislative Oversight Committee's Public Education and Cultural Subcommittee on March 1, 2016. This committee, composed of Chairman James Smith, Representative Gary Clary, Representative Joe Jefferson, and Representative Tommy Stringer, is assigned the task of reviewing each agency of state government on a seven-year cycle. Public input was provided March 10 and final recommendations were heard on March 15. The subcommittee's report now goes to the full House Oversight Committee for adoption.

In addition, First Steps provided a presentation on BabyNet to the Healthcare Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee in early February.

The House Ways and Means Committee has finished its budget deliberations, adding \$6.1M in new resources for the local First Steps partnerships and BabyNet. The full House will take up the budget during the week of March 21.

### **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership**

Accomplishments in February-Early March include the following:

- **EHS Personnel:** Since the last Board meeting, we have interviewed candidates for five new EHS positions: Fiscal Manager, Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance (ERSEA) /Family Services Manager, Education Coordinators (2) based in Columbia and Berkeley County areas, and a Health Coordinator. Family Advocate job descriptions have been submitted for posting via the SC Department of Education (on the State Jobs website) and Head Start related websites. Teachers are being recruited and background checks conducted.
- **Child Care Partnership:** Bids for renovation projects have been solicited and received at most sites.
- **Family and Community Partnership/ERSEA:** The funded enrollment of 254 infants and toddlers are to begin being served in Spring 2016 with full enrollment by the federal deadline of July 2016 in 15 child care centers within Allendale, Anderson, Bamberg, Berkeley, Dillon, Georgetown, Laurens, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg, Saluda and York Counties. Policies and procedures including an enrollment application and selection criteria are being developed in preparation for enrolling children. Forms to document the non-federal match from parent involvement activities have also been prepared.
- **Education:** Classroom supplies and equipment are being ordered for the EHS classrooms.
- **Fiscal:** The end of the start-up period of the grant is July 31, 2016. A refunding application is due to the Office of Head Start on May 1, 2016 and must be approved by both the Policy Council and the Board of Trustees before submission on that date. An updated Notice of Award (NOA) was received with the funded enrollment of 254 infants and toddlers for the program.

- **Training and Technical Assistance:** I attended Region IV Head Start Association training on February 2 and at that time met our new federal Region IV Program Specialist. Five hours of Governance Training was provided on February 18 to members of the Governance Council and First Steps staff by Foundations for Families, an Early Head Start start-up organization. The Region IV Program Specialist provided input during the training to the council. Governance training is scheduled for the Governing Body on March 17 with additional training to be provided at subsequent Board of Trustees meetings. Center Directors received training on March 9 on teacher qualifications, allowable expenses, non-federal share requirements, and best practices with infants and toddlers. Two Early Childhood Specialists were identified to assist teachers obtain the necessary Child Development Associate (CDA) qualifications with 120 hours of training and technical assistance in preparing professional portfolios.

### **School Readiness Definition – Endorsements and Public Awareness Campaign for [ICAN]**

SC First Steps is legislatively mandated in Act 287 to inform and educate the public about the benchmarks of kindergarten readiness, which were developed and adopted by SC First Steps and the SC Board of Education with other partners in the overall process. These can be found on the First Steps and ICan.SC websites.

In the past month a total of eleven organizations have endorsed the “The Profile of the Ready Kindergartner,” the school readiness definition. These are: SC First Steps, the State Board of Education, the SC Chamber of Commerce, TransformSC, the SC Association for the Education of Young Children, the SC Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Palmetto State Teachers Association, the SC Education Association, the LARCUM Bishops’ Education Initiative, The Children’s Trust of SC and the SC Association of School Administrators. An additional presentation has been made to representatives of *Cradle to Career* at Trident United Way.

The status of the public awareness campaign, [I CAN], that was launched at the Summit in November 2015 to meet the legislative goal is as follows:

- Continue until mid-April with nine privately-funded billboards in prime locations across the state. A free electronic billboard is in the Myrtle Beach area.
- Change the [I CAN] statements and images from children to adults/community members in March 2016.
- Update the [I CAN] website, [www.ican.sc](http://www.ican.sc) .
- Continue regular posts to ICANSC Facebook page featuring community member messages.
- Prepare video and audio PSAs featuring [I CAN] statements from the Summit.

The local partnerships are continuing to share wonderful articles that are online and related to the domains of the school readiness definition, such as Pickens County First Steps’ *I CAN Be Ready for School Blog*: <http://www.pickenscountyfirststeps.org/blog/> .

### **First Steps 4K**

The students in SC First Steps 4K classrooms are assessed using GOLD by Teaching Strategies. The winter window for GOLD closed on February 12 and the spring window will continue until May 20. Although Language and Literacy are the only domains required through legislation this year, our teachers have begun assessing all domains. Putting more data into the tool enriches and individualizes lesson plans and instruction.

We have begun using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale- 3 (ECERS-3) as a program assessment tool. This revised instrument has a greater emphasis on math, language/literacy, and individualized teaching and learning proficiencies that happen daily in classrooms. We will use the data to develop plans to raise quality in each classroom. Post assessments will be ongoing through the 2016-2017 year. We will look for these assessments of actual experiences of students as predictors of child outcomes.

The final Professional Development Day for 2015-2016 was held at four regional sites on Friday, March 11 with 201 teachers and 96 teaching assistants in attendance. Our 4K Team facilitated sessions on differentiated instruction, aligning standards, and parent engagement strategies. Our partners from SCETV were in attendance at each site as well to issue cellular Wi-Fi devices to 168 of our teachers through a generous collaboration with Sprint Wireless. We are thrilled with the possibilities that will open as our classrooms have wireless access for their iPads. We are in conversation with Verizon to partner with us for the remaining centers that are outside of Sprint’s network.

We are planning our 4K Academy for August 8-12, 2016. This will be for Lead Teachers and Instructional Assistants. Our Directors will attend a separate Leadership Academy in late August or early September.

### **BabyNet**

BabyNet has filled 16 of the 18 positions for the local BabyNet intake offices around the state, and has posted the remainder of the positions for the BabyNet State Office. The BabyNet Policy and Procedure Manual has been revised, and posted with the FY 2016 grant application for public comment and seven public hearings are scheduled for later in the month.

### **County Partnerships**

Approximately thirty-one of the Executive Directors met on February 17 during a four-hour meeting to cover a variety of updates including FY17 Accountability Standards, FY17 Renewal Planning, e-Spotlight and the public awareness campaign for the school readiness description.

On March 9-10, roughly twenty First Steps Executive Directors attended the South Carolina Association of Non-Profits (SCANPO) Annual Summit in Spartanburg, along with five of the First Steps State Technical Assistance Team. The summit provided professional development in non-profit management, board development, fundraising and community collaboration. This partnership with SCANPO allowed the state office to offer expert training and networking for executive directors who wished to attend. Registration for the conference was underwritten by the state office.

Another effort underway for state office technical assistance is the development of local new board member and executive director orientation materials. Four modules have been developed to provide an overview of First Steps, its structure, board member responsibilities, and the local partnership operations. These modules are power point presentations with guided notes for use by a facilitator. In addition, a "Board Orientation Handbook" will accompany the modules containing the key documents referenced in the training. State office staff are currently reviewing the orientation materials and during the monthly ED webinar in March an over view will be provided to Executive Directors. We plan to have the orientation modules posted on our website and available for use by mid-April.

We are gearing up for "Countdown to Kindergarten" for the summer of 2016. Teachers to serve as home visitors and eligible families are being recruited. We anticipate serving over 1,000 rising kindergartners in approximately 24 counties.

Weekly "e-Spotlights" are available on our website under the tab, "Local Partnerships" to highlight the initiatives of our local partnerships. These spotlights cover a range of topics including,

- Chesterfield County First Steps' Blessings Resource Center, a collaborative partnership with faith and business communities to provide support services for families in need.
- Pickens County First Steps and their efforts to use the [I CAN] campaign to engage community members in building a foundation for school readiness.
- Anderson County First Steps partnership with their local districts.

The staff with the Program and Grants Committee updated the Partnership and Program Accountability Standards for FY17. The proposed local partnership grant allocations were also submitted by the Finance and Administration Committee. Both are part of the consent agenda for board approval on March 17.

### **Parents as Teachers (PAT)**

Compass Evaluation and Research is beginning work on the evaluation of SC's Parents and Teachers (PAT) Program, a national, evidence-based home visitation model. During a planning meeting, a representative of the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs (RFA) Office discussed what data Compass could get from the SC First Steps data system and what might be accessed from the SC Department of Education. The Compass evaluators were introduced by email to the Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS) authors, Phil Gordon and Marilee Comfort. First Steps local partners complete baseline and post assessments of the primary adult client using KIPS.

As of October 1, 2015, national PAT affiliates fall into one of three new affiliate categories:

Model Affiliate - meets the seventeen Essential Requirements (ER) of the model

Blue Ribbon Affiliates – participates in the Quality Endorsement and Improvement Process (QEIP) every five years. This in depth process looks comprehensively at the affiliates' fulfillment of both the seventeen Essential Requirements and the Parent as Teachers' 100 additional Quality Standards. Once Earned, the Quality Endorsement is valid for five years.

Provisional Affiliates—does not demonstrate that they are meeting the seventeen Essential Requirements. This interim and temporary designation is used to help guide technical assistance.

2014-2015 was the final year of field testing for this new designation (Blue Ribbon) of the Quality Endorsement Process.

Two First Steps programs received the Blue Ribbon Designation during the voluntary pilot period -- Beaufort County First Steps and Charleston County First Steps. We are proud to highlight the excellent quality of these two programs and look forward to seeing the ones participating in this program year, FY16 and beyond to achieve this status as well! Every Affiliate in SC will go through this cycle every 5 years. What they went through and how much they learned from this is a tough process and they exceeded expectations!

### **State Office and Other Facilities**

The state office continues to work on changes in the building in order to add the Early Head Start project management team, as well as the additional Columbia-based BabyNet staff, which are funded in the FY16 state budget. This includes five additional staff upstairs and at least six staff downstairs in the building. We are adding cubicles in both places and moved our large conference room upstairs. We plan to paint the inside of the building over the next several months as well as clean carpet and other activities.

Other facility activities include adding additional BabyNet space in Sumter, Myrtle Beach, Georgetown, Walterboro, Greenwood, Dillon and Rock Hill. This significantly increases BabyNet's presence in these communities and provides greater access for our clients across the state.