



To: South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees  
From: Julia-Ellen C. Davis, Interim Director  
Date: June 16, 2016  
Re: Director's Report June 2016

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As a result of lessons learned from the 2015 summer visits, regional meetings in early 2016, and visits to individual county Executive Directors (EDs) in the spring/summer 2016, ways to improve collaboration and communication between the state office and the local partnerships – as approved by the Board in March - are being developed with input from the EDs of the County Partnerships. Details were shaped during two state-local focus groups and during a June 13 ED meeting for the creation of an Executive Council and state-local teams to improve collaboration and communication.

Please find below updates since March.

### **Legislative Update**

The SC First Steps to School Readiness budget for FY17 includes the following increases in funding to ensure quality and accountability:

- \$1.7 million to increase base partnership annual funding from \$138,000 to \$200,000
- 4 New Partnership Technical Assistants
- \$3.1million in increased Baby Net Service Funds
- \$750,000 for Baby Net Eligibility and Assessment Team

SC First Steps was authorized for an additional year - until June 30, 2017 through a proviso.

The First Steps Reauthorization Bill, H. 4774, passed the House by a vote of 94-0, but was not debated by the Senate.

### **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP)**

Accomplishments since mid-March include the following:

- **Governance:**
  - Parent Committee meetings have taken place at the two centers with children enrolled (Little New Steps in Allendale and Little Treasures in Dillon).
  - The EHS Policy Council met for the first time on May 12 and received training.
  - The 2016-2017 refunding application was approved by the EHS Governance Council on May 5 and the Policy Council on May 12.
  - The Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) budget was approved by the Policy Council on June 7 and by the EHS Governance Council on June 8.
  - The Policy Council approved the hire of several new employees.
- **Personnel:**
  - The Policy Council approved the hire of two Education Coordinators, a Health Coordinator, an ERSEA/Family Services Manager, four Family Advocates, and an EHS Program Assistant.
  - We are interviewing for four additional Family Advocates and two Teacher Mentors.
- **Child Care Partnership:**
  - Five more children will start this week.
  - Renovations are completed at all sites except The Thornwell Children's Home in Laurens County.
  - Furniture has been delivered to most sites.

- We have conducted environmental health and safety evaluations at four of the partner sites that are ready for children to start.
- Family and Community Partnerships/ERSEA:
  - As of June 15, our enrollment is 11, which includes children in Allendale and Dillon.
  - Applications are being taken at sites throughout June and July in order to have the funded enrollment of 254 infants and toddlers by July 31 in 15 child care centers within Allendale, Anderson, Bamberg, Berkeley, Dillon, Georgetown, Laurens, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg, Saluda and York Counties.
- Education:
  - We have set up four regional cluster trainings on the Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers.
  - Five EHS Teachers have received their Infant Toddler Child Development Associate credential.
- Fiscal:
  - Four staff are scheduled to receive Fiscal Training at the Head Start Region IV's Leadership Summit in Atlanta on June 13-16.
  - The refunding application, a budget revision, and a COLA budget were submitted to Region IV.
- Training and Technical Assistance:
  - We provided pre-service training to 126 staff on various components of the Head Start Performance Standards and on the Department of Social Services (DSS) requirements.
  - Our Education Coordinators received Education training that was sponsored by Head Start in Myrtle Beach on June 7-9.

### **School Readiness Definition**

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.

The status of the public awareness campaign, [I CAN], to meet the legislative goal is as follows:

- Continuing to post on ICANSC Facebook page featuring community member messages.
- Updates to the [I CAN] website, [www.ican.sc](http://www.ican.sc) are in progress. The draft website is at to <http://ican.sc/demo>
- Continuing to have billboards in prime locations until the contract runs out and they are replaced by other vendors with new messages.
- Preparing 30 second video public service announcements (PSAs) and 10 second and 30 second audio PSAs featuring school readiness related statements. They will be completed in the near future.

On Monday, June 6 Dr. Dan Wuori travelled to Walhalla, SC at the invitation of the Oconee County School District to conduct a half-day training on the Board's Profile of the Ready Five-Year-Old for the district's prekindergarten teachers and assistants.

### **First Steps 4K**

We completed the 2015-2016 year with 176 centers and 202 classrooms providing high quality early education for our children and families. As of early June, we have approved 26 new centers for a total of 202 sites with 228 classrooms in the coming term for 2016-2017. As part of the recruitment process, we are collaborating with DSS for mailings to families of potential students, which continue to generate strong interest. As we continue to identify centers to implement 4K, we were thrilled to receive an application for a Department of Defense federally-licensed early childhood center and are working through their application with the help of DSS licensing. This looks to be a sensational partnership that we are both excited about.

Our teachers have finished the first year of assessing students with GOLD™ by Teaching Strategies®. The end of the spring checkpoint period reports 2,131 students in 202 classes with 100% completion rates in both Language and Literacy objectives. Below is a student snapshot from our Gold™ report:

Table 1: Language

Program Name	Below	Meeting	Exceeding
First Steps	13%	69%	18%

Table 2: Literacy

Program Name	Below	Meeting	Exceeding
First Steps	4%	68%	28%

Although Language and Literacy are the only domains currently required through legislation, many students were assessed in all domains. Our First Steps 4K program will require documentation and checkpoints completed for ALL domains for our students in the 2016-2017 school year.

Four members of our 4K Team, Martha Strickland, Joy Mazur, Kristine Jenkins and Marley Via; presented a session at the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) National Conference on “ECERS-3: A Compass to Guide Improvement and Redefine Quality Through Technical Assistance in SC 4K Classrooms”. Martha was also a member of a six states panel as South Carolina’s representative for the opening plenary and shared the work that we are doing in SC First Steps 4K with all attendees. As easy as it is to become entrenched in our own work, it is invigorating to see that SC First Steps 4K is a leader among states in working to raise quality.

We have just received notice of the procurement award of a data management system, Child Plus, by June 14. This child care management software will be used by SC First Steps 4K and the EHS-CCP Program.

Our 4K Lead Teacher and Paraprofessional Academy will be held on August 8-12, 2016 and the Leadership Academy for Directors will be August 30-September 1. Our themes for this high quality professional development will be based on the power of teacher-child interactions, intentionality, and the paths to quality for curriculum, assessment and family connections.

### **Baby Net**

Clarification of the Annual Performance Report, Phase II of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), and the federal grant application for FFY 2016 (July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017) were submitted to the US Department of Education in April, 2016. OSEP is in the process of reviewing each of these, and will be providing feedback regarding any required revisions by mid-June as well as the state determination of performance for FFY 2014.

Also submitted were revised policies and procedures, and the Baby Net contract with the SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (SCDDSN) for FFY 2015. By June 30, 2016, the state is required to submit the FFY 2016 contracts with SCDDSN and the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB), and an Memorandum of Agreement with the SC Department of Health and Human Services (SCHHS) regarding procedures for resolution of disputes regarding payor of first resort.

The Office of General Counsel at OSEP is reviewing our current MOA with Head Start (inclusive of all Head Start programs) to see if meets the regulations for the state’s system of payments. An addendum will be required to address procedures for resolution of disputes regarding payor of first resort. If additional revisions to the Head Start MOA are necessary, the state has the option of extending the deadline to June 30, 2017.

The Baby Net Program Managers’ workgroup is meeting bi-weekly to articulate the action plans for the SSIP, develop the calendar for monitoring, technical assistance, and enforcement activities for FFY 2016, and select national TA centers working with South Carolina so as to be a part of state-level planning calls.

Baby Net has been invited to become an intensive TA state for the Early Childhood Personnel Center to support building the infrastructure for a cross-sector comprehensive system of personnel development, and to receive national fiscal TA. An application notice for the latter will be posted this summer.

## **County Partnerships**

The Technical Assistance (TA) staff reviewed in May the 46 county renewal plan applications, which included program strategies, governance, collaborations and board operations for all 46 Local Partnerships. Staff prepared recommendations for the Program and Grants Committee to review and present at the State Board meeting in June. The programs outlined in the FY 17 Renewal Applications are to be implemented effective July 1 when approved. With the additional funds allocated by the legislature for next year, the partnerships plan to expand programs in the following major areas Parents As Teachers, Child Care Scholarships, Child Care Training/Professional Development and Child Care Quality Enhancement.

Two Executive Director focus groups were convened in recent weeks to discuss a concept for improving state-local collaboration and communication. This includes the convening of Local First Steps Program Teams and the creation of an Executive Directors Council with a committee structure that mirrors the committees of the State Board.

The Technical Assistance Team is now finalizing a new template to assist Local Partnerships in their community needs and resource assessment.

Dr. Cheri Shapiro, University of South Carolina, will be working on the development of the Evidence Based Programs Guidelines. She presented at the ED meeting on June 13 background information on the process. TA staff will be assisting to ensure that communication is maintained throughout this process with county executive directors and local stakeholders.

Weekly “e-Spotlights” continue on our website under the tab, “Local Partnerships” to highlight the initiatives of our local partnerships. Since the last board meeting, there were approximately 13 e-Spotlights that featured activities in several county partnerships, including the following:

[May 6, 2016: “...Their Child’s First Teacher”: Darlington County First Steps Works to Support & Empower Young Parents](#)

[April 21, 2016: “Talk to Me”: Cherokee County Comes Together for New Early Language & Literacy Initiative](#)

TA staff will be preparing and ensuring timely execution of the 46 county grant agreements. In addition, TA job applications were reviewed and interviews took place in May to hire another TA for state office.

## **County Partnerships: Parents As Teachers (Home Visitation Model) and State Office for PAT National**

SC First Steps funds Parents As Teachers (PAT) in 32 counties, as well as, other home visiting models including Early Steps to School Success (ESSS), which is in four counties and Parent Child Home Program (PCHP) is in three counties. In FY 16, the organization served 1,311 families, 1,395 adults/parents, and 1,505 children with 26,330 home visits from July 1, 2015 through May 31, 2016. Twenty-two counties plan to expand PAT in FY 17 through new local partnership funding.

Our SC First Steps Director of Parenting Programming who is the state leader for PAT national is working with Children’s Trust as they work towards expanding PAT with Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation (MIECHV) funding. The following is a highlight of some of the PAT activities at the state level:

- Another state office PAT Affiliate, Beaufort County School District PAT Affiliate, received Blue Ribbon Status in April, 2016.
- 14 SC PAT Affiliates will be going through Quality Endorsement in FY 17. Most received SC First Steps funding through the local partnerships.

## **State Office and Other Facilities**

Since the last report, painting dates have been set to paint the first floor of the State Office Building starting on June 20 and running through July 7. We will also use this time to move some staff around to make the office more efficient and effective. The new cubicles will be installed during the month of July as we finalize the additional Baby Net staff hiring. After the painting, the carpets will be cleaned.

Other facility activities have included a number of Baby Net office changes. A new Rock Hill location has been identified and a lease is being negotiated. The Sumter office has opened and staff is now located there. The new Myrtle Beach location was secured and staff are now located there. Walterboro and Greenwood were completed and are now open. We are working to secure the locations needed in Dillon and Georgetown. Additional space has been negotiated in Florence and the needed construction will be starting very soon. All of the changes that are being made will greatly expand the capacity of the Baby Net Program to meet clients and staff needs. This will assist in helping us build the accountability and performance necessary to meet the federal compliance issues.