



To: South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees
From: Julia-Ellen C. Davis, Interim Director
Date: January 27, 2016
Re: Director's Report January 2016

2015 was a great year for SC First Steps, with a new strategic plan, the receipt of federal Early Head Start funding, expansions of private sector 4K, and the delivery of high-quality partnership services in each of South Carolina's 46 counties. I want to thank Susan DeVenny and our staff for their tireless work to meet the mandates of the agency's 2014 reauthorization legislation. I began as Interim Director on December 16, 2015 and have been hard at work with state and local staff to ensure that our 2016 is just as successful.

Legislative Update

It's been a busy time at the State House, with First Steps participating in a number of scheduled hearings in December and January. First Steps leaders testified before the House Legislative Oversight Committee's Education and Cultural Affairs Subcommittee on both December 11, 2015 and January 14, 2016. As you may recall, the House Oversight Process is one in which each state agency will be involved on a seven year cycle. At this time we anticipate at least two additional meetings before the Subcommittee wraps its work on First Steps and makes recommendations to the full committee. We have been delighted with the opportunity to work with this committed group from the SC House of Representatives Subcommittee members (Chairman James Smith, Representative Gary Clary, Representative Joe Jefferson, and Representative Tommy Stringer).

First Steps presented its FY17 Budget request before the Ways and Means Committee's Public Education and Special Schools Subcommittee on Tuesday, January 12 and returned on Tuesday, January 26 to review education provisos. We will make a supplemental presentation on BabyNet to the Healthcare Subcommittee in early February.

As you know, 2016 is a reauthorization year for First Steps. On January 13, Governor Haley unveiled an education agenda that would include dividing the programs of SC First Steps across three other agencies. House and Senate lawmakers, meanwhile, are preparing to file reauthorization language to extend the reforms enacted in Act 287 of 2014. We are eager to discuss all of these proposals with policy makers, and are thrilled that early childhood education will be a major topic of discussion during the 2016 legislative session.

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Update

We have issued contracts to child care partners in each of our twelve Early Head Start counties and after center renovations will begin enrolling 254 infants and toddlers. These contracts cover 32 classrooms in 15 child care center within Allendale, Anderson, Bamberg, Berkeley, Dillon, Georgetown, Laurens, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg, Saluda and York Counties.

Rebecca Brown, our Early Head Start Director, has worked with a contractor to evaluate each partner site in order to establish the costs of needed renovations which will be addressed using start-up funds. All sites that require renovation were visited the week of January 19.

Applications are currently under review for the EHS Fiscal Manager, with interviews to take place in early February. On January 29, postings will close at <http://scfirststeps.com/employment-opportunities> for the grant's Health Coordinator, the ERSEA/Family Service Manager, two Education Coordinators and a Program Assistant.

Staff continue to participate in weekly conference calls with our EHS start up consultants and regular calls with the state's other First Steps EHS-CCP grantees to discuss progress and challenges.

Staff met with the new Region IV Manager Bob Bialas on December 17 to discuss progress to date and to review previous requests for an updated notice of award and to discuss the Board's proposed EHS Governance Council. A Head Start Enterprise System (HSES) email was received from Region IV to confirm the revised funded enrollment (254) and a revised Notice of Award is being processed by the regional office.

Other accomplishments in January include the following:

- Completed a recent revision of the decision-making and milestone timetable from Nov. 2015 – July 2016.
- Updated a Training and Technical Assistance Plan (T/TA) for EHS staff and Child Care Partnership (CCP) staff.
- Developed legal CCP contract language with agreement timeframes for Phase 1 (start-up) and Phase 2 (full enrollment).

The children will begin to be served in Spring 2016 with full enrollment by the federal deadline of July 2016.

[I CAN] Campaign

The [I CAN] campaign, which informs and educates the public about the benchmarks of kindergarten readiness is spreading around the state, with nine privately-funded billboards now positioned in prime locations across the state, including I-26, I-20 and US378 near Columbia, I26 near Clinton, I85 near Gaffney, I95 near Walterboro, and US52 near Darlington. For the next few weeks, these messages will feature [I CAN] statements from children, describing readiness across the major domains of readiness: language and literacy; approaches to learning and inquiry; physical development, self-help and motor skills; emotional and social development; and mathematical thinking. A written staff update, containing these billboard graphics is attached.

In addition to these billboards, [I CAN] messages are appearing online at www.ican.sc and on social media. These messages will be available to local partnerships in banner, Instagram, and newspaper ad formats. Local partnership Facebook pages are "liking and sharing" [I CAN] posts, with several partnerships launching their own [I CAN] campaigns locally. Some great examples include: Pickens County First Steps' *I CAN Be Ready for School Blog*: <http://www.pickenscountyfirststeps.org/blog/> and the Richland County First Steps *I CAN Slide Show*: <http://www.rcfirststeps.org/whats-the-deal-with-i-can>.

Since the campaign's launch, local partnerships have collected hundreds of [I CAN] statements from parents, educators, and civic, faith and business leaders in communities across the state. In the next few weeks, the statements from adults will be featured on the [I CAN] billboards, website, social media and local media outlets via county partnerships.

First Steps 4K

Part One of the Education Oversight Committee's 2016 4K Report was released on January 15. Private 4K students' early literacy results on Circle were superior in 4K and roughly equivalent in 5K (Circle). (A copy of the Executive Summary is contained in your Board packet today.) Private providers received a significant amount of training and technical assistance in supporting the early literacy initiative. They reported being better prepared to administer the Circle assessment, as they used the results to meaningfully inform instruction, administered the Circle more often (mid-year and year-end), and used the data to inform parents. Part II of the Education Oversight Committee 4K Report will focus on 2015-2016 assessment data.

January began with all 4K Coordinators participating in a week's training towards reliability on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), 3rd Edition. This tool will continually raise quality in our classrooms through reflection, assessment, monitoring, coaching, and mentoring. The strong emphasis in this new version of ECERS is on teacher/student interactions, which will support our program goals to raise quality.

Our 4K Coordinators provided training on January 14 for 36 teachers who did not attend the 4K Academy 2105. January 15 was a state wide professional development day for 238 Lead Teachers and Assistants. Our objectives were devoted to supporting curriculum, standards, assessment, and the social-emotional domain. Our next professional development day is March 11 and it will be held regionally with an emphasis on individualizing and connecting student assessment data with standards and growth.

More than 2,600 Student Unique Identifiers have been assigned to students in 201 classrooms at 178 centers. Recruitment is underway for new providers in 2016-2017. Current centers have received the 2016-2017 Student Application and new students are being registered.

BabyNet Update

After months of work by a diverse “BabyNet Think Tank” comprised by roughly 50 interagency and community partners, First Steps published a comprehensive report to the General Assembly on December 30. (A copy of the Executive Summary is contained in your Board packet today.) This report lays out a blueprint for bringing the interagency BabyNet system into federal compliance and contains an accompanying budget request, which First Steps has presented to the House Ways and Means Committee as the collective recommendation of the group. We are grateful to Governor Haley for including a \$3M expansion in BabyNet service funds and \$750K for establishing a statewide Eligibility and Evaluation Team contract in her Executive Budget.

18 new positions are in the interview process for the local BabyNet Intake Offices; this includes new locations for some offices based on analysis of location of children referred to the system in FFY 2014. 5 additional positions are in process of posting within the State Office.

The interagency BabyNet Program Managers is currently reviewing and revising current BabyNet Policies and Procedures in advance of the FFY 2016 federal grant application.

State Office Facility Updates

Discussions are in process with our landlord for to have First Steps’ offices on both floors painted. During this time, some offices will be moved to facilitate co-location of specific program staff, which have (in some cases) been placed in offices based on availability, rather than function.

Renovation is complete for the Early Head Start offices on the second floor. Cubicles will be added to large areas such as the large conference on the first floor and the Early Head Start space.