

To: South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees

From: Julia-Ellen C. Davis, Interim Director

Date: March 17, 2017

Re: Director’s Report

The SC First Steps family has much to be thankful for during the first quarter of this calendar year. We are thrilled to announce that:

* H.3591, which would reauthorize SC First Steps, passed the House in February by a vote of 101-5. We are grateful to Rep. Govan and Rep. Allison for their leadership.
* SCFS has been awarded a second Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant, totaling $16.2 million over 54 months (including start-up funds). The grant will create an additional 162 EHS slots for low-income infants and toddlers in 11 SC counties;
* The Office of Head Start has approved the use of Round 1 carryover funds totaling $2,821,519 for playground equipment, vehicles, parent training, and other program needs; and
* We had a successful Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership monitoring visit by representatives of the Office of Head Start. The reviewer was very complimentary of the program and the staff, noting that she had to continually remind herself that this was a new program and not one that had been in operation for years.

We held a staff retreat on February 24 at EdVenture for all staff with a focus on communication. BabyNet staff members who will be transition to DHHS this summer met for a Q&A with our Chief Finance Officer/Chief Operating Officer and DHHS leaders in the morning, then joined everyone in the afternoon.

Please find below updates of our programs since the last SC First Steps Board of Trustees meeting on January 20, 2017.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

First Steps has participated in a number of state budget meetings in recent weeks, including the House Ways and Means Committee’s budget deliberations held February 21-23 and Senate Finance subcommittee hearings on February 22 and March 15. The subcommittee carried over most of First Steps proviso requests until a later meeting.

SC First Steps’ leaders were invited by Reps. Jerry Govan and Rita Allison to attend a February 23 press conference recognizing the passing of H.3591. A sizable number of the bill’s bipartisan sponsors participated along with local Executive Directors and Chairman Wingate.

The SC House passed its proposed budget earlier this week, proposing level funding for SC First Steps’ programs during FY18 and the transfer of state BabyNet funds to SC DHHS.

**LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS**

* SCFS has recently added 4 full-time and 1 part-time partnership technical assistants, bringing the partnership support team to 10 in total. We are pleased to welcome Carletta Isreal, Cassie Barber, Dr. Kim Archung, Jon Artz and Sharon Thomas to our team.
* SCFS hosted a meeting of the Executive Directors’ Leadership Council on February 16 at First Baptist Church. The agenda included an overview of statewide partnership data for FY16, a presentation by Greenville County First Steps regarding their Shared Services Network Project for child care providers and committee reports from the Executive Directors’ Finance and Administration and Program and Grants Committees.
* Local partnerships have received technical assistance regarding the status of their data entry as of the end of the second quarter. This review and support is designed to ensure compliance with program standards and data entry requirements in advance of the year-end review for grant renewals.
* First Steps was well-represented at the South Carolina Association of Non-Profits (SCANPO) Annual Summit in Columbia, March 6-8. Over thirty participating local Executive Directors and state office staff were in attendance and the directors of Lee and Dorchester County First Steps were featured in a local news story about the Summit:

<http://www.wltx.com/mb/news/local/hundreds-of-nonprofit-leaders-meet-in-columbia/420538366>

* SCFS hosted a reception for partnership Executive Directors on the first evening of the Summit and facilitated a professional development offering on communicating with those with differing beliefs, attitudes, and viewpoints.
* Staff are finalizing, for release to the partnerships on March 20, the FY 18 Grant Renewal Plan Template. Renewal Plan applications are due to the state office on May 5.
* SCFS holds monthly leadership webinars for Executive Directors and Board Chairs on the third Tuesday of each month to share information with local partnerships about all SC First Steps programs (Local Partnerships, the 4K Program, Early Head Start-CCP, BabyNet and Parents as Teachers) and key community events.

**SC PARENTS AS TEACHERS (PAT)**

South Carolina First Steps is the state sponsor agency for Parents as Teachers, a nationally recognized, evidence-based home visitation model, which is widely implemented by local partnerships. Since January, SCFS has:

* Provided support to thirteen PAT affiliates working on their self-study for the Quality Endorsement Improvement Process (QEIP), due to the PAT national office on April 3, 2017.
* Held a full-day meeting featuring a panel of SC’s current Blue Ribbon Affiliate Programs to support of the efforts of others pursuing “Blue Ribbon Status”. A final webinar for this cohort group was held on February 28.
* Provided a PAT National Foundational and Model Implementation Training in Charleston, during the week of February 20-24. There were approximately 30 participants from SC and surrounding states.
* Conducted two Parenting Data Webinars, on February 3 and March 10, to view the new Group Connections Reports and examine data in preparation for renewal and year-end data collection.
* Provided A *Life Skills Progression* (LSP) training in Greenwood SC on March 9 for PAT providers from eight SC counties.
* Prepared *Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition* (ASQ-3) and *Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Social-Emotional 2* (ASQ-SE) training for March 27and an *Adult Child Interactive Reading Inventory* (ACIRI) training for March 28 in Columbia.
* Collaborated with SC Children’s Trust to assist in the transition of five new MIECHV-funded sites from the Healthy Steps Model to Parents as Teachers. The application process to become PAT affiliates is in progress and training plans for these providers will begin in April.

**EARLY HEAD START - CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP (EHS-CCP)**

Our current EHS-CCP enrollment is 254 students in 15 centers with a total of 35 classrooms.

Program highlights in the first quarter include:

**Governance**

* Provided center staff with updated policy and procedure manuals.
* Held Policy Council meetings on February 3 and March 4.
* Received a successful federal monitoring review, February 7-8, 2017, with no compliance issues identified according to the exit briefing. The final report is expected in the coming weeks.
* Obtained the *Notice of Award* for the carryover request of $2,821,519 to complete playground renovations, purchase equipment, parent training, technical assistance to centers and other identified needs. These funds were remaining from the 18-month start-up period of the round 1 grant.

**Personnel**

* Interviewed and selected an Education Coordinator to serve centers in counties near the northern half of our service area.
* Conducted bi-weekly conference call meetings with EHS-CCP child care directors on February 1, February 15, and March 1. Executive Directors from the local county partnerships are invited to participate in these calls.
* Enrolled 74 children with vouchers, which is 29% of our funded enrollment. We have exceeded the 25% grant requirement.
* Provided individualized ChildPlus training to EHS-CCP staff on January 31.
* Hired a mental health consultant, Hope Garvin, to provide support to children, parents, and staff in addressing stress and challenging behavior issues.

**Family and Community Partnerships/ERSEA**

* Maintained a waiting list of at least 194 children with a funded enrollment of 254 infants and toddlers. This represents 28% infants; 37% one year olds; and 35%, two year olds.
* Launched a successful campaign to emphasize the importance of Average Daily Attendance (ADA). In February 2017, the monthly ADA was 91%. If a program’s monthly ADA rate falls below 85%, the program must analyze the causes of absenteeism to identify any systematic issues that contribute to the program’s absentee rate.
* Identified that the majority of our EHS families (74%) are employed. 25.7% are currently in school. The percentage of two parent families in the program is 9.5% with 93% of the single-parent families being headed by the mother.
* Documented our fathers’ participation rate, which is currently 36% based on family goal setting, home visits, parent conferences, Policy Council participation, and workshop attendance.

**Health and Disability Services**

* Identified that 96.5% of our currently enrolled Early Head Start children have health insurance:
* 94.5% - Medicaid
* 2% - Private Insurance
* Other families are in the process of being approved for Medicaid
* Completed all developmental screenings (ASQ-3 & ASQ-SE-2)
* Identified through the screening process children who may have a delay.
* Referred children to BabyNet to evaluate if they qualify for Early Intervention Services.
* Have twenty children (7.8%) with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Five additional IFSPs are in the process of being provided and eleven additional children who have been referred for evaluations are being tracked.

**First Steps 4K**

Our current 4K enrollment is 2,222 students in 187 centers with 206 classrooms. Recent highlights of the program include:

* Closed the winter checkpoint window on February 28 with all domains of learning assessed and finalized within Teaching Strategies GOLD, an observation-based assessment. The First Steps 4K teachers are now able to run GOLD’s Individual Child Report to track developmental and learning levels from the fall to winter checkpoints. This knowledge helps teachers plan individualized instruction. The Development and Learning Report will be shared with parents on March 22-23 during parent-teacher conferences. The report uses family friendly language to highlight a child’s strengths and shares specific activities to build areas of growth.
* Notified by AdvancED that SC First Steps 4K is a qualified accreditation applicant as an Early Childhood Educational Service Provider (ESA). The next step is approval by the SC First Steps Board of Trustees.
* Represented SC First Steps at the SC Association for Early Care and Education’s winter conference on Saturday, February 4 with presentations by the SC 4K State Director, Martha Strickland, and Regional Coordinator Kristine Jenkins.
* Developed a CCCC&D certified training for 4K teachers and paraprofessionals, *Ready for Kindergarten,* for March 17. This will be the last scheduled Professional Development Day for this school year. The training will be held regionally in eight sites concurrently and provided by the SC First Steps Regional Coordinators.
* 19 4K Center Directors are currently participating in a McCormick Center National Director’s Certification pilot program via SCFS. The project is led by two of our 4K Regional Coordinators, Kristine Jenkins and Sharon Bruton.
* Developed *Building Learning Opportunities, Outcomes, and Models (BLOOM),* a pilot to empower and incentivize our teachers in leadership roles. Joy Mazur, a 4K Regional Coordinator, is leading BLOOM, which will work with mentor level teachers. We will add induction and goals-based teachers in time for full implementation of this project.
* Represented by the State 4K Director, Martha Strickland, on the 4K Intervention Guidance Document Writing Team with the SC Department of Education. The team’s purpose is to create an Intervention Guidance Document for Prekindergarten to assist districts and schools with appropriate intervention for students as part of the Read to Succeed Act, Act 284.
* Planned for the SC Read-In on Tuesday, April 4 on our State House grounds to celebrate reading. Forty-two centers have registered to march as of mid-March.
* Advertised and recruited additional qualified providers to serve the 4K students of SC. Continue to receive applications for new providers in the 2017-2018 program year.
* Added to the 4K team two Regional Coordinators who bring strengths of early childhood instruction and systems support to our team, which now totals ten Regional Coordinators. Meada Fogle will serve Barnwell, Bamberg, Hampton and half of Aiken. Jeanne Voltz-Loomis will serve Georgetown, Williamsburg and half of Horry.

**BabyNet**

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and First Steps staff continue to work on a smooth transition of the lead agency function for BabyNet and to implement program requirements including:

* Submitted the state’s Annual Performance Report (APR) on February 1 for OSEP review and comments to which DHHS/SC First Steps will respond and revise as appropriate.
* Increased referrals significantly. At the current rate, referrals for FFY 2017 are likely to exceed 12,000 for this fiscal year. 8,586 referrals were received between July 1, 2016 and March13, 2017. The current enrollment is 4,554, which grew substantially over the last two years.
* Averaged at all of the System Point of Entry (SPOE) offices less than 45 days for children who were enrolled to receive an IFSP in January 2017.
* Held planning sessions with SC DHHS, which will complete the following,
  + Submit the FFY2017 grant application and post it on their website for a 60–day public review and comment period prior to submission.
  + Schedule public hearings for input on the current BabyNet policies and procedures. The schedule and locations will be announced through multiple media.
* Relocated seven BabyNet state office staff on March 1 to DHHS to make it easier to communicate with DHHS during the transition. System Point of Entry staff will be transitioned office by office through June 2017.

**State Office and Administration**

* Initiated a security plan for the state office that will improve access and control over the building.
* Began planning to meet the space needs of new Early Head Start Expansion Grant staff, as well as, working to improve the capacity of the agency to meet the needs of continued growth in the 4K program.
* Planned signage for the interior and exterior of the SC First Steps state office.