



To: South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees
From: Julia-Ellen C. Davis, Interim Director
Date: October 20, 2017
RE: Interim Director's Report

Our exciting 2017 Chairmen's Summit on Early Childhood will be at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center on December 8, 2017 with two nationally recognized keynote speakers, Dr. Walter Gilliam from Yale University and Dr. Freeman Hrabowski from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Our keynote speakers will be addressing "Avoiding Preschool Expulsion: How Teachers' Implicit Biases Relate to Behavior Expectations" and "Holding Fast to Dreams: Empowering Children and Families." There will be concurrent sessions showcasing best practices in early childhood from across South Carolina with a focus on equity. We will look forward to seeing you in December!

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

- Reviewed the agency's Executive Budget Request for FY19 with representatives from Governor McMaster's office, the Office of Executive Budget and senior staff from SC First Steps on Tuesday, October 17, 2017. The Executive Budget will be released in early January and is used as an advisory document by the General Assembly, where the legislative budget begins with the House Ways and Means Committee in December and January.
- Participated in a discussion for ways to improve services to our most vulnerable children and their families held by Representative Rita Allison on September 19th. During the meeting, there were presentations of models being used to improve early childhood and family support services. Four innovative models in use across the state were presented. Three of the models included First Steps participation.

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Began the review process for the *County First Steps Annual Reports*, which are due each year on October 1st. Once the review is complete the annual reports are posted on the First Steps website.
- Received from each partnership the "*Numbers Served Matrix*" that are also due on October 1. In order to report statewide numbers for the First Steps State Annual Report, each partnership provides numbers served for children, families, child care centers, training hours, technical assistance hours, books distributed, home visits conducted, etc. These reports are verified with our data system numbers and then combined to calculate totals for the state for the 2017 fiscal year.
- Focused on the *First Steps Local Partnership Comprehensive Plan* template and planning process during the September First Steps Leadership Webinar. Each partnership must

prepare and post to the website their comprehensive plan as outlined in our reauthorization legislation, which is currently pending approval in the State Legislature. This three year plan is based on findings from their *Needs and Resources Assessment*, which is also required by legislation along with recommendations from self-assessments regarding their programs and services. The comprehensive planning process is designed to educate and engage local board members as well as align local partnership programs with:

- State Board Adopted Strategic Priorities
- First Steps Legislative Goals
- *Profile of the Ready Kindergartner* benchmarks (as adopted by the State First Steps Board and the Board of Education).

First Steps executive directors, staff and boards will be supported throughout the strategic planning process by state office TA staff. Comprehensive Plans, adopted by each local board, are due to the state office by February 2018.

- Planned the panels for the *2017 Chairmen's Summit* to highlight successes and promising new programs. There will be a "Board to Board" reception from 5:30pm-7:00pm after the Annual State Board meeting on December 7. First Steps Executive Directors and representatives from their local board leadership were invited to network and engage with each other and the First Steps State Board members at this event.

Diversity and Equity Workgroup

- Completed participating in a webinar series – *Advancing Race Equity and Inclusion* – sponsored by a collaboration of agencies including The Children's Trust, Sisters of Charity, Alliance for a Healthier South Carolina, Eat Smart-Move More, Palmetto Association for Children and Families, and First Steps.
- Attended one in a series of "Community Gatherings on Race, Equity and Inclusion," *Speaking Down Barriers*. Facilitators were trained in anti-racist framework and conflict mediation. The summer webinar series and community gatherings provided a rich base of knowledge and resources to support the workgroup as they move forward.
- Reconvened on October 4 the Diversity and Equity Workgroup to begin discussions regarding next steps. The Chairmen's Summit on Early Childhood and its theme of "Equity" aligns well with the workgroup's purpose. It was decided that the workgroup will host a resource area at the conference where materials and expertise regarding equity and inclusion will be available to interested participants. Workgroup members will bring books, articles, web links to videos, equity tools and other information to display and share.
- Planned the next step for the workgroup, beginning in January, which will be a planning retreat in order to prepare for a meaningful "Equity Organizational Self-Assessment" that would include all parts of First Steps – from local partnership boards, staff and programs to state level programs such as 4K and Early Head Start-CCP, along with state level staff and the state board.

BUILD Initiative

- Sent the First Steps Chief Partnership Officer to the national meeting of the BUILD Initiative in early October as part of a South Carolina team. The BUILD Initiative has helped state

leaders develop an early childhood system. The team consisted of a representative from the Department of Social Services, Department of Health and Environmental Control, Department of Education, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health and Human Services, USC Child Development Research Center and SC Thrive. The meeting focus was racial equity and inclusion that is related to early childhood systems building.

- Reviewed state and national data regarding disparities in education and health outcomes. Information and experiences from the six state teams attending was also shared.
- Made plans for the South Carolina team to share information across our programs and agencies in order to identify gaps and highlight where more services are needed.

DATA SHARING INITIATIVE

- Collaborated to develop and provide data for the following sites, including the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, SC Department of Education, Department of Health DHEC, DSS, DDSN, SC First Steps, Children's Trust, the Head Start Collaboration Office and other state partners.

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

Our current EHS-CCP enrollment is 256 students in 15 centers with a total of 32 classrooms. Program highlights in this quarter include:

Governance

- Held Policy Council Meetings on September 1 and October 6.
- Elected new Policy Council representatives in September at most centers.
- Conducted conference calls with EHS-CCP Directors on September 6 and October 11. Held a CCP Director's Training in Columbia on September 27.
- Estimated costs for renovations for six current partners for additional classrooms and eight new child care centers for expansion. We will add twenty more EHS classrooms to the partnership. Contracts are currently being reviewed by the SC First Steps attorney.
- Began revising policies and procedures to ensure appropriate reporting of incidents at centers.

Personnel

- Hired ten Family Advocates to serve the fourteen county service area.
- Began planning for a three day Pre-Service Training on January 10-12, 2018 for new child care partnership staff.

- Received technical assistance and training in curriculum fidelity and mentoring from Region IV Education Specialist Victoria Grimes on September 28 for Education Coordinators and Teacher Mentors.
- Removed two teachers in one EHS-CCP classroom because of concerns with the education quality and inappropriate interactions with children. This matter is under review and discussion with the Region IV office.

Family and Community Partnerships/ERSEA

- Maintained a waiting list of 253 children with a funded enrollment of 256 infants and toddlers. This represented 15% infants, 38% one year olds; and 47% two year olds.
- Have identified that a majority of EHS families are living below the Federal Poverty Guidelines (82%). The percentage of families who are eligible based on other factors such as public assistance, foster care or homeless status is 18%. No “over income” families are being served.
- Maintained a monthly Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of 90.54% in September 2017.
- Enrolled 26.3% of children with SC Vouchers. This exceeds the 25% grant requirement.
- Provided Parents As Teachers (PAT) training to the Family Services staff who attended the SC First Steps Parents AS Teachers conference in October and PAT training in September.

Health and Disability Services

- Served 29 children with IFSPs or IEPs this program year (11%).
- Identified the following chronic health conditions of the children in our program: Anemia (8) Asthma (17) Hearing Difficulties (2) Vision (7) Diabetes (1).
- Referred one child for Mental Health Services this year.
- Met 100% of the 45-day sensory and developmental screening requirements.
- Experienced no wind or water damage during severe hurricane weather in September 2017.
- Began the installation of new playgrounds at partner sites.

FIRST STEPS 4K

Our 4K program has a current enrollment of 2,302 students in 216 classrooms at 197 centers.

- Center choices of the 4 model options, enabled by the proviso for 2017-2018:
Option A: **30 classrooms** - Standard School Year, 6.5 hours x 180 days

Option B: **33 classrooms** - Extended School Day 8.5 hours x 180 days

Option C: **26 classrooms** - Extended School Year 6.5 hours x 220 days

Option D: **127 classrooms** - Standard School Year + 8 weeks of summer instruction for 8.5 hours daily

- Engaged in 4K Regional Coordinator team growth with training of the Coaching to Fidelity Tool for The Creative Curriculum for Preschool and Teaching Strategies Gold®. Coaching from a strength based perspective based on specific early childhood strategies will move knowledge into practice in our 4K classrooms.
- Rolled out *Building Learning and Outcomes for Opportunities and Models* (BLOOM) for our 4K Lead Teachers. BLOOM is a progress and development tool to challenge teachers of every skill and experience level to help change the growth trajectory for the teacher and his/her students. Teachers will complete self-assessments. Planning meetings will be held after Coordinators observe and document. Reflective tools for personal growth will help each teacher to map out an individual plan with their Coordinator. First semester goals are based on social-emotional skill building with curriculum objectives rounding out second semester goals. Joy Mazur is project lead for BLOOM.
- Participated on the SC Early Learning Standards Leadership Team and on the SC Pyramid Model State Leadership Team, which is coordinated by the SDE's Office of Special Education Services.
- Have ten directors who completed the AIM4X SC Cohort (AIM 4 Excellence) Online Director's Credential through National Louis University's McCormick Center via SC First Steps. Seven more are scheduled to complete this credential before November 30. This exciting project has been led by two 4K Regional Coordinators, Kristine Jenkins and Sharon Bruton.
- Moved two 4K Regional Coordinators, Cassandra Legette and Kristine Jenkins, into Lead Coordinator roles, with each supporting five Regional Coordinators. Shayla Pettigrew and Anna Henrickson have replaced vacancies left by LaDrica Christian and Marley Via. Their strong early childhood educational skills continue the progression of the team.

SC PARENTS AS TEACHERS (PAT)

South Carolina First Steps is the State Office for Parents as Teachers, a nationally recognized, evidence-based home visitation model, which is widely implemented by local partnerships. PAT had accomplished the following in the past few months:

- Held three PAT National Trainings for new affiliates in April, August, and September.
- Provided Foundational 2 Training (3-5) in Lexington on October 16-17. The September PAT Teen Curriculum was rescheduled (due to Hurricane Irma) for January.
- Completed all forty-four National Annual Performance Reports. Notifications of status was sent to all affiliates. Thirty-seven SC affiliates met all seventeen Essential Requirements which is a great improvement from the previous year. The other seven are working on success plans to ensure that they meet all seventeen in this current program year.

- Held the *5th Annual Strengthening Families Through Collaboration - A Carolina Connection Parenting Conference* on October 10-11 in Columbia. Approximately 300 people attended from North and South Carolina. Approximately 75 Home Visitors and/or Supervisors were recognized for ten or more years of service to families in both of the Carolinas. Attendees were given a special appreciation performance by Candice Glover, an American Idol winner from Beaufort, SC. The 2017 sponsors who made it possible to provide the professional development were Children’s Trust of SC, South Carolina First Steps, Head Start Collaboration Office, SAVE the Children, and the following First Steps Local Partnerships: Beaufort, Berkeley, Cherokee “Talk to Me”, Darlington, Florence, Laurens, Lexington, Newberry, Oconee, Richland and York.
- Notified that all twelve PAT Affiliates who completed and submitted their self-study for Quality Endorsement on April 3, 2017 received the Blue Ribbon status, a national stamp of quality. The self-study was a yearlong process and each were thoroughly reviewed by a team at Parents as Teachers National this summer. The twelve affiliates (Berkeley, Darlington, Lexington1, Lexington 2, Clarendon 2, Lexington 3 and 4, Jasper, Richland, Lexington/Richland 5, York 1, McCormick, and Pickens) are added to our current three Blue Ribbon awardees (Beaufort First Steps, Charleston First Steps and Beaufort School District) which means that SC now has 15 Blue Ribbon Affiliates.

HUMAN RESOURCES

- Scheduled supervisors to take the Supervisory Practices training course offered by the State Human Resources Division in September and November/December.
- Reminded staff that the Employee Performance Management System should be completed by November 30.

FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Baby Net

Continued to work on transition of BabyNet from SC First Steps to the SC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). SC First Steps has not received the initial written draft of a Memorandum of Agreement for the current fiscal year describing transition activities for this fiscal year. There are a number of expenses (including leases) that are still being billed to SC First Steps. Work continues to support DHHS’s efforts to move these expenses to their accounts and ensure reimbursement. DHHS has reimbursed most of the costs of their operations for this fiscal year.

8% Administrative Cap on Local Partnerships

Continued to work on plans to update the accounting system so that tracking methods will be in place to implement the changes approved by the Board.

Child Care Partner Tax Credits

Collaborated with The Children’s Trust, the Institute for Child Success, Save the Children, and the United Way Association of SC, for improving the quality of childcare in the state. A state budget proviso is being developed for a pilot project in five counties that would implement Tax Credits for Teachers, center directors and centers that are in the DSS Quality Rating system. The goal is to have it completed prior to the House Ways and Means hearings on next year’s state budget.

Early Head Start – Child Care Partners Contracts

Developed contracts for the next round of partners, which are expected to be completed by November 1.

First Steps Financial Audit

Received the auditors’ financial audit for SC First Steps. The organization received the highest possible opinion from the auditor for the 2016-17 fiscal year and had no findings.