



To: The Honorable Hugh K. Leatherman, Sr., Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable G. Murrell Smith, Jr., Chairman of the House Ways and Means
Committee
From: Georgia Mjartan, Director, SC First Steps
Date: March 13, 2020

RE: First Steps 4K Underserved Communities Report Pursuant to Proviso 1.66

Proviso 1.76 of the General Appropriations Act for FY20 specifies that:

1.76. *(SDE: First Steps 4K Underserved Communities) Using funds appropriated for the Child Early Reading and Development Education Program, South Carolina First Steps shall develop a pilot program to expand four-year-old kindergarten enrollment within underserved communities eligible for participation during the most recent fiscal year. Newly created and/or newly approved private providers proposing to expand service to ten or more CERDEP eligible children in communities unable to enroll all of eligible students in a public, private, or Head Start setting during the prior fiscal year, may apply for up to \$30,000 in one-time supplemental, needs-based incentives designed to address building renovations, documented as necessary to bring proposed classrooms into compliance with licensing regulations, materials and staffing costs, and/or other obstacles currently preventing their participation in the First Steps 4K program. The First Steps Board of Trustees shall develop and approve an application process that incorporates formal review and fiscal safeguards designed to ensure grant funds are used solely to address documented barriers to program participation. Providers receiving this one-time supplement are expected to participate in the program and provide high-quality, center-based programs as defined herein for a minimum of three years. Failure to participate for three years will require the provider to return a portion of the supplemental allocation at a level determined by the Office of First Steps to School Readiness. First Steps shall submit a report detailing its process, expenditures and expanded enrollment to the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee by March 15, 2020.*

Pursuant to the terms of the proviso, I am writing to provide an update on First Steps 4K implementation of Proviso 1.76 to date. Following ratification of the General Appropriations Act for FY18, the First Steps Board of Trustees developed, reviewed, and approved the required center application at its meeting on June 16, 2017. The final, board-approved, application was promoted to local partnerships and centers in eligible underserved counties.

Since our last report on March 15, 2109, SC First Steps 4K has funded four grants;

- Horry County, Connect Kids in Conway, May 17, 2019- \$30,000 for a fire alarm system, flooring and walls to bring an existing structure into licensing requirements to create at least ten new 4K slots
- Horry County, Little Blessings CDC in Little River, May 17, 2019- \$30,000 for a coded access security system to ensure the ability to maintain classroom ratios, purchase of an approved bus to alleviate the transportation barrier, and to develop a gross motor outdoor space to create at least ten new 4K slots
- Richland County, Grace Academy CDC in Columbia, November 29, 2019- \$30,000 towards the purchase of an approved bus to alleviate transportation barriers to create at least ten new 4K slots
- Richland County, Education Express in Columbia, January 29, 2020- \$30,000 for construction costs to add two bathrooms and move walls to create at least ten new 4K slots

At this time, seven applications have been received and are being reviewed from these counties- Georgetown, Greenville, Lancaster, Marion, Newberry Richland, and Spartanburg. Several other sites of interest are promising. We will continue to advertise this prospect to generate slots in underserved communities across South Carolina.

We are grateful for the General Assembly's continued emphasis on creating opportunities for the state's at-risk pre-kindergartners. We are thankful for your bold leadership as you work for expansion of the First Steps 4K Program statewide to include student any and all deserving four-year olds in our great state of South Carolina.

cc: David Morley, Chair, SC First Steps Board of Trustees
Mark Barnes, Director of Administration, SC First Steps
Martha Strickland, 4K State Director, SC First Steps
Kenzie Riddle, House Ways and Means
Grant Gibson, Senate Education