



**South Carolina Early Childhood
Education Study Committee**

**Preliminary Report on
Findings and Recommendations
December 1, 2019**

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Early Childhood Education Study Committee

Senator Scott Talley, *Co-Chair*
Senator Thomas McElveen
Senator Ross Turner
Representative Rita Allison, *Co-Chair*
Representative Jerry Govan
Representative Paula Calhoon
Representative Neal Collins

Honorable Pamela Evette
Ms. Melanie Barton
Mr. Floyd Creech
Ms. Sue Williams

J. Mason Thomas, *Director of Research*
H. Pierce McNair, Jr., *Director of Research*

December 1, 2019

To The Honorable Henry D. McMaster and Members of the South Carolina General Assembly:

On behalf of our fellow committee members, enclosed please find the preliminary report of the South Carolina Early Childhood Education Study Committee, established via Proviso 117.170 of the 2019-2020 General Appropriations Act. This report is the result of two meetings held during the fall of 2019, which included scheduled testimony from experts in the field of early childhood services.

Through our study, it is clear that the issues facing young children in our state are complex and deep-rooted. While the proviso states that a report is required of us by December 1, 2019, we feel that in order to do our due diligence and to make the most comprehensive and well-informed recommendations possible, it is vital that this study committee continue its work. We plan to schedule additional meetings, receive testimony, and work with stakeholders and experts to produce insightful findings and quality recommendations.

The Committee would like to thank the many stakeholders who have provided their time, expertise, and advice so that we may better understand the challenges and opportunities facing our state and communities. We look forward to continuing our work for the betterment of all of South Carolina's children.

Yours Sincerely,

Senator Scott Talley, *Co-Chair*

Representative Rita Allison, *Co-Chair*

Enabling Proviso

The Early Childhood Education Study Committee was established pursuant to Proviso 117.170 of the General Appropriations Act of 2019-2020.

There is established the Early Childhood Education Study Committee to make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding the best structure for coordinated early childhood services provided to children from birth to age 5 currently operating across multiple systems and funding streams for the purpose of improving the delivery of services, maximizing the number of children served, ensuring that all children are ready to enter school, and delivering cohesive high quality early childhood education, care and parental support to all children in South Carolina. The committee must solicit input from and consider the recommendations of affected constituencies, such as the report of the Office of First Steps Study Committee established pursuant to Act 287 of 2014, in the development of its report.

Programs to be included in the study must include, but are not limited to: Head Start Collaboration Office, Office of Early Learning, ABC Childcare Program, Childcare Licensing Office, Childcare Resource and Referral Network, Child Early Reading Development & Education Program, BabyNet, Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC), and the Postpartum Newborn Home Visitation Program.

The study committee shall be comprised of the following:

- 1) Chairman of the Senate Family & Veterans' Services Committee, or their designee, who shall serve as Co-Chair;
- 2) Chairman of the House of Representatives Education & Public Works Committee, or their designee, who shall serve as Co-Chair;
- 3) Two members of the Senate, appointed by the Chairman of the Family & Veterans' Services Committee;
- 4) Two members of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Education & Public Works Committee;
- 5) Four members appointed by the Governor who must be representative of the population of the State and have skills, knowledge and interest in early childhood care, education and improving the school readiness of young children for success; and
- 6) Chairman of the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children, or their designee.

Staff support shall be provided by the Senate Family & Veterans Services Committee and the House of Representatives Education & Public Works Committee. Findings and recommendations shall be submitted to the General Assembly and the Governor by December 1, 2019.

Committee Members & Staff

Appointed by the Chairman of the Senate Family & Veterans' Services Committee:

Co-Chair Senator Scott Talley, *Greenville & Spartanburg Counties*

Senator Thomas McElveen, *Kershaw, Lee, Richland, & Sumter Counties*

Senator Ross Turner, *Greenville County*

Appointed by the Chairman of the House of Representatives Education and Public Works Committee:

Co-Chair Representative Rita Allison, *Greenville & Spartanburg Counties*

Representative Jerry Govan, *Orangeburg County*

Representative Paula Calhoon, *Lexington County*

Appointed by the Governor:

Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette

Ms. Melanie Barton, *Senior Education Adviser - Office of the Governor*

Dr. Floyd Creech, Ph.D., *Director of School Readiness - Florence School District 1*

Ms. Sue Williams, *Executive Director - Children's Trust of South Carolina*

Appointed by Proviso:

Representative Neal Collins, *Chair of the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children*

Staff:

J. Mason Thomas, *Director of Research - Senate Family & Veterans' Services Committee*

H. Pierce McNair, Jr., *Director of Research - House of Representatives Education and Public Works Committee*

Meetings

September 17, 2019 - Bryan Boroughs, Vice President & General Counsel, Institute for Child Success

Senator Talley opened the meeting by having the members present introduce themselves followed by an explanation of the proviso, which established the Committee and giving an overview of past legislation that precipitated its creation. He noted that children face many challenges in South Carolina and that this Committee has the opportunity to address these many issues. Representative Allison then observed that there was a great deal of talent in the room, and that no one should be fearful, but comfortable with how the Committee approaches these challenges.

Mr. Boroughs was recognized by Senator Talley to give his presentation to the Committee. Mr. Boroughs introduced the Institute for Child Success's vision for a new statewide governance structure based upon research from other states and how they achieved more cooperative and coordinated services. He testified that 80% of brain development is complete by age 3, and 90% by age 5, so ensuring young children are given access to the best programs we have to offer is essential to future success. Mr. Boroughs reiterated that the language found in S.291 was a starting point, but that having a cabinet-level agency was the preferred structure for the delivery of programs and services.

The Committee requested that staff survey programs in South Carolina who provide early childhood services to report to the Committee how much state and federal funds they receive and how they deliver their products.

Senator Talley adjourned the meeting with the intent that the Committee would meet again in October to review the information requested and to hear from SC First Steps.

October 30, 2019 - Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director, SC First Steps

Senator Talley opened the meeting by introducing Ms. Mjartan to the Committee and asking her to come forward to begin her presentation.

Ms. Mjartan began by explaining the mission and activities of South Carolina First Steps and the Early Childhood Advisory Council. She detailed three models for statewide governance for early childhood services including 1. Creating a dedicated early childhood agency 2. Consolidating existing programs and divisions into an existing agency and 3. Collaboration and Coordination across different agencies. Ms. Mjartan noted that the first model is one that Mr. Boroughs presented to the Committee in September and that the third option is one she would recommend through the avenue of the Early Childhood Advisory Council.

Representative Govan noted that as a NCSL Early Childhood Advisory Committee member, he has seen the collaborative model to be the preferential choice. Representative Allison remarked that the original model for First Steps was borrowed from another state, but that they had later

developed issues and asked Ms. Barton if she had any insight into this topic. Ms. Barton indicated that we should look at accountability and focusing on brain development in ages 0-3.

Representative Govan further explained that, in his opinion, if we are to be serious about reforming early childhood education we have to look at more than just education, but rather a holistic approach including the consequences of poverty, unemployment, and under employment. We need a broader discussion in the state that may require seriously examining current programs and whether they are effective or not.

At the conclusion of Ms. Mjartan's presentation, Senator Talley asked staff to review their findings from a survey of child serving programs. The Committee determined that due to the complexity of this topic and the number of programs who responded to the request, it was prudent to continue the Committee's work beyond the original report deadline.

Findings

- While South Carolina invests significant sums in state and federal funds to implement early childhood programs to improve kindergarten readiness, data on the collective impact of these programs on the school readiness of children, especially our most at-risk children, does not exist. Even when the Committee reached out to agencies and programs for budget information and program outputs, the response was less than adequate to make recommendations at this time. Moreover, this lack of data makes setting state goals and strategies impossible.
- At the county level, while the objective of the First Steps to School Readiness Initiative was to coordinate efforts across the health, social and educational domains and to leverage private support to improve school readiness at the county level, currently less than 10 percent of the 350,000 most vulnerable children in our state between the ages of birth to five are being served. The lack of collective impact can be attributed to many factors, including but not limited to: (1) a governance structure that lacks strong accountability at the state level; (2) inability of many counties to generate private sector support for the Initiative; and (3) lack of human capacity in many communities to administer and implement the Initiative.
- Neuroscience has documented the importance of brain development in children during the first three years of their life. Scientists have determined that as much as 80 percent of the brain's wiring is determined by age 3. We know that the more children are comforted, nurtured and stimulated by play and language in the first three years of their life, the more their brains develop, preparing them for a lifetime of learning and resiliency. But we also know that poverty, stress and neglect can dramatically harm the brain's development during these critical years.
- There is need of a hub for linked services moving towards universal pre-k; a place for parents to have access to information on what is available. This will require further

breaking down silos and rewarding collaboration. This service must be free from conflicts of interest and favor quality programs that benefit children.

- An alarming number of children are growing up with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's). A wider array of services to treat physical, social, emotional, and mental health needs are necessary for children to grow into healthy, productive adults.
- Access for early intervention services for children with disabilities is a critical need in South Carolina. We must ensure that pre-k service providers are well versed in these issues and enable children to seamlessly transition to public schools.

Recommendations

- The Study Committee should continue to meet, receive testimony, and work with stakeholders and experts alike to develop a comprehensive system for addressing the many needs of children from ages 0-5.
- Committee members should begin considering what governance structure is best suited to meet South Carolina's needs.
- In its consideration, the Committee should identify parties who would be better served by a shared data governance structure to provide state leaders with adequate data on program effectiveness and children's needs.
- At the conclusion of the Committee's work, it should produce a final report to include comprehensive findings and recommendations for restructuring early childhood programs and service delivery in South Carolina.