

Chairman Wm. Weston J. Newton

*First Vice-Chair:
Laurie Slade Funderburk*

Legislative Oversight Committee



*Nathan Ballentine
Gary E. Clary
Kirkman Finlay III
Joseph H. Jefferson Jr.
Walton J. McLeod
Joshua Putnam
Samuel Rivers Jr.
Tommy M. Stringer
Bill Taylor*

*William K. (Bill) Bowers
Raye Felder
Phyllis J. Henderson
Mia S. McLeod
Ralph W. Norman
Robert L. Ridgeway III
James E. Smith, Jr.
Edward R. Tallon Sr.
Robert Q. Williams*

South Carolina House of Representatives

*Jennifer L. Dobson
Research Director*

*Cathy A. Greer
Administration Coordinator*

**Post Office Box 11867
Columbia, South Carolina 29211
Telephone: (803) 212-6810 • Fax: (803) 212-6811
Room 228 Blatt Building**

*Charles L. Appleby IV
Legal Counsel*

*Carmen J. McCutcheon
Research Analyst/Auditor*

Education and Cultural Subcommittee Meeting March 10, 2016 12:15 p.m. Room 110 - Blatt Building

Archived Video Available

- I. You may access archived video of this meeting by visiting the South Carolina General Assembly's website (<http://www.scstatehouse.gov>) and click on "Citizens' Interests," then click on "House Legislative Oversight Committee Postings and Reports." Lastly, click on "Video Archives" for a listing of archived videos for the Legislative Oversight Committee.

Minutes

- I. House Rule 4.5 requires the standing committees of the House to prepare and make available for public inspection, in compliance with Section 30-4-90, the minutes of full committee meetings. House Rule 4.5 further provides that such minutes need not be verbatim accounts of such meetings. It is the practice of the House Legislative Oversight Committee to provide minutes, which are not verbatim accounts of such meetings, for its Subcommittee meetings.

Attendance

- I. The Education and Cultural Subcommittee (Subcommittee) meeting was called to order by Chairman James E. Smith Jr. on Thursday, March 10, 2016, in Room 110 of the Blatt Building, Columbia, South Carolina. Representative Gary E. Clary and Representative Tommy M. Stringer were also in attendance. Representative Joseph H. Jefferson Jr. arrived later.

Approval of Minutes

- I. House Rule 4.5 requires the standing committees of the House to prepare and make available for public inspection, in compliance with Section 30-4-90, the minutes of full committee meetings. House Rule

4.5 further provides that such minutes need not be verbatim accounts of such meetings. It is the practice of the House Legislative Oversight Committee to provide minutes which are not verbatim accounts of such meetings, for its subcommittee meetings.

- II. Representative Clary moved to approve the minutes from March 1, 2016. A roll call vote was held, and all present voted in favor of approval.

Rep. Clary’s motion to approve the minutes from the March 1, 2016, meeting:	Yea	Nay	Not Voting
Rep. Gary E. Clary	✓		
Rep. Joseph H. Jefferson Jr.			✓
Rep. Tommy M. Stringer	✓		
Rep. James E. Smith Jr.	✓		

Public Testimony Related to First Steps

- I. This was the Subcommittee’s seventh meeting with South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness (First Steps). Chairman Smith provided a brief overview of the oversight process and stated that the purpose of the day’s meeting was for the Subcommittee to hear public testimony related to First Steps. He also explained that all testimony given before the Subcommittee was required to be given under oath.

The name and county of each person who provided testimony to the Subcommittee is given below, and the italicized notation represents the approximate start time for each person’s testimony on the archived video of the meeting. A brief summary of each person’s testimony is given below the person’s name.

Melanie Barton, Executive Director of the Education Oversight Committee 5:28

Ms. Barton testified about the great importance of early childhood education. Ms. Barton gave three lessons that she has learned from her years of experience and how those lessons relate to early childhood education: (1) what gets measured gets done; (2) if you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll probably end up somewhere else; and (3) it’s all about the adults in the system. Representative Clary asked if Ms. Barton had any information to report in a preliminary fashion about the best practices that are to be recommended to the state in 2017 based on the outcomes from various state education grants. Ms. Barton testified that her biggest concern was that the state has no way of measuring longitudinal outcomes statewide.

Brooke Robinette, Director of Thornwell Child Development Center in Clinton, SC 18:37

Ms. Robinette testified that First Steps has enabled the Thornwell Child Development Center to provide high-quality education to about 190 4K students who otherwise would not have had access to such education. She testified that her favorite thing about First Steps is that it is focused entirely on early childhood education. She testified that First Steps has continually challenged Thornwell to provide better educational experience and has offered hands-on support. Chairman Smith asked for the number of four-year-olds enrolled at Thornwell. Ms. Robinette testified that 80 four-year-olds were currently enrolled at Thornwell.

Paula Durham, Owner/Director of Care-A-Lot Daycare Center in Sumter County 25:11

Ms. Durham testified that she takes advantage of First Steps' resources to provide 4K education at her facility. She testified that the resources and training she and her teachers have access to as private early childhood education providers through First Steps that public facilities do not. Representative Jefferson asked for a mock schedule of a typical day for 4K students at Car-A-Lot Daycare.

Stephanie Bracey, Owner of Stephanie's Preschool Blessings 35:06

Ms. Bracey testified that the First Steps 4K program has been great for her students and teachers because it has allowed them to access resources that would have been too expensive for them to acquire without the agency's help.

Susan Adams, Mount Edna Baptist Church Child Enrichment Center in Union, SC 42:15

Ms. Adams testified that the Center had partnered with First Steps for three years, and that the agency had allowed it to expand its services to children. She testified that the First Steps program allows the Center to offer full-day 4K education, whereas public schools in the area only offered half-day 4K education. She expressed her concern that if the state's early childhood education program was moved from First Steps to some other state agency, the Center may not have access to those resources on account of its faith-based approach to education. Representative Jefferson asked how the Center advertises its services.

Michelle Perry, Owner Kid's Stuff Learning Center, West Columbia, SC 46:48

Ms. Perry testified that participating in the First Steps 4K program has benefitted the students in all levels at her early childhood education facility. She testified that First Steps provides diligent oversight to ensure that her facility is providing high-quality education. She testified that the employees at the First Steps state office are very willing to communicate with her at any time, and that she even has immediate access to the state director.

Jean Pearson, Pleasant Grove Academy in Marion County 52:30

Ms. Pearson testified that she was a retired principal of an elementary school, and that she has witnessed firsthand that the early childhood education the Academy has been able to provide due to the aid of First Steps has made positive differences in the lives of students. Chairman Smith asked how important it was to the Academy to have the assistance of First Steps' 4K program. Representative Clary asked if the Academy gets its supports from the state office of First Steps or from the Marion County or Florence County First Steps.

Jean Knowlton, Director of Trinity Learning Center in Columbia, SC 1:00:30

Ms. Knowlton testified that the Center has benefitted from the First Steps program. Representative Jefferson asked for the number of students enrolled in the Center's 4K program.

Amanda Swan, Parent 1:02:46

Ms. Swann read a letter that she had written to Jean Knowlton upon her child's graduation from the 4K program at Trinity Learning Center. Chairman Smith asked her if her child was more prepared for 5K because he had been a student at the Center.

Janet Simmons, Agape Land Community Services in Marion, SC 1:06:03

Ms. Simmons testified that the First Steps 4K program allowed Agape Land to access financial resources and training that enabled it to expand and provide better services to early childhood students. Representative Clary asked for the number of children the Agape Land serves and the number of early childhood education centers in Marion County partnering with First Steps.

Loretta McGill, Owner of McGill's Bundles of Joy in Marion, SC 1:13:50

Ms. McGill testified that she was raised in an environment rife with domestic violence and did not have access to education as a child. She testified that the resources to which she has access on account of First Steps' 4K program has enabled her to fulfill her dream of helping young children learn. Representative Jefferson asked how Ms. McGill was able to build or renovate her new facility.

Stephen Butterfield, Pastor at New Jerusalem Baptist Church Child Development Center in Barnwell County 1:21:00

Rev. Butterfield testified that the Center's partnership with First Steps' 4K program has allowed it to expand its services to children. He stressed that the Center's ability, even as a faith-based early childhood education center, to continue serving children depends on the availability of First Steps' assistance.

Lashondia Wright, Wrightway Child Development Center in Orangeburg County 1:25:43

Ms. Wright asked for the state's continued investment in First Steps. She testified that her community would be devastated if First Steps was not able to continue supporting her Center educationally, financially, and morally.

Alexia Newman, Trustee of First Steps of Spartanburg County 1:33:43

Ms. Newman testified that First Steps continues to improve with every evaluation, whether the evaluation is by the legislature or some other state entity. She testified in approval of the current First Steps structure. Ms. Newman testified that: (1) First Steps is the only governmental entity in SC dedicated solely to ensuring the school readiness of young children; (2) First Steps is able to harness the power of both the private and public sectors; (3) First Steps is focused on the role of parents as the first teachers children have; (4) First Steps is community-driven; and (5) First Steps provides comprehensive services by targeting the years of a child's development in which the child's brain undergoes the most significant changes.

Barbara Scott, Director of Myers Nursery and Daycare Center in Richland County 1:41:35

Ms. Hopkins testified that the Center's partnership with First Steps enabled it to expand its services to children so as to provide a foundation for children to be ready to attend school.

Althea Benson, Director at Children's Garden in Richland County 1:51:50

Ms. Benson relayed the positive experiences of a child and her father, and explained how the center's curriculum contributes to the learning outcomes of the children it serves. Representative Jefferson asked for the number of children the center serves.

Jackie Troy-Johnson, Troy Johnson Learning Corner in Marion County 2:00:32

Ms. Johnson testified that her center is a school solely because of the resources that First Steps has given to it. She testified that she is grateful that First Steps has partnered with her program because the

relationship has allowed her to give students a head start when they begin public school. Representative Jefferson asked for the number of children her center serves. Chairman Smith asked if Ms. Johnson would be able to provide the same educational opportunity to her students without the First Steps support.

Adrienne Waymer, Employee at Children’s Garden in Richland County 2:03:45

Ms. Waymer testified that the center was able to refer a child and parent to grief counseling when the child lost her father in the devastating flood in 2015 because of the support of First Steps.

Crystal Smith, Fairfield County First Steps 2:10:03

Ms. Smith testified that she felt very strongly about the services that First Steps provides to young children and that she has been very dedicated to Fairfield County First Steps.

Shannon Erickson, Member of General Assembly from Beaufort County 2:15:18

Representative Erickson testified that First Steps is a unique organization because it is divided into a state office and county offices. She testified that Beaufort County First Steps has provided her with excellent services over the years. She spoke favorably about the agency’s handling of the BabyNet program. She also testified about some of the agency’s shortcomings. She testified that the agency has been improving, but that First Steps had been the subject of studies and inquiries too frequently.

Virginia Newman, Calhoun County First Steps 2:20:59

Ms. Newman testified that Calhoun County First Steps focuses on empowering families to be better parents of young children. She described some of the services that the Calhoun County First Steps offers to children.

Ferlondo Tolluck, Deputy Superintendent of Calhoun County School District and Board Member of Calhoun County First Steps 2:23:58

Mr. Tolluck testified that the county’s schools had partnered with First Steps to share resources in order to ease the transfer from 4K to 5K in the county.

Connie Williams, Kids’ Corner Childcare Academy in Florence County 2:25:52

Ms. Williams testified that the resources offered by First Steps enabled her to provide vital resources to children to enable them to transition to public schools. She asked the members to think of the children as an investment rather than an expense. She testified that she had learned a great deal about childcare and education through the resources offered by First Steps.

Chairman Smith thanked everyone who testified for sharing with the Subcommittee. Representative Clary moved that the Subcommittee’s study include a statement that there was an opportunity for members of the public to provide input to the Subcommittee, and that the statement include a list of those who testified and any written comments from constituents. A roll call vote was held, and the motion was passed unanimously.

Rep. Clary's motion that the Subcommittee's study include a statement that there was an opportunity for members of the public to provide input to the Subcommittee, and that the statement include a list of those who testified and any written comments from constituents:	Yea	Nay	Not Voting
Rep. Gary E. Clary	✓		
Rep. Joseph H. Jefferson Jr.	✓		
Rep. Tommy M. Stringer	✓		
Rep. James E. Smith Jr.	✓		

II. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Those who were present on behalf of First Steps were: Dan Wuori (Deputy Director), Mark Barnes (Chief Operating Office and Chief Financial Officer), Debbie Robertson (Chief Partnership Officer), Julia-Ellen Davis (Interim Director), and Kristie Musick (BabyNet State Director).