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**Education and Cultural Subcommittee Meeting
December 11, 2015
10:00 a.m.
Room 110 - Blatt Building**

ARCHIVED VIDEO AVAILABLE

- I. You may access an archived video of this meeting by visiting the South Carolina General Assembly's website (<http://www.scstatehouse.gov>) and clicking on "Citizens' Interests," then clicking 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

- II. The Education and Cultural Subcommittee (Subcommittee) meeting was called to order by Subcommittee Chair James E. Smith, Jr. on Friday, December 11, 2015, in Room 110 of the Blatt Building, Columbia, South Carolina. The following Subcommittee Members were present: Subcommittee Chair Smith, Representative Gary E. Clary, Representative Joseph H. Jefferson, Jr., and Representative Tommy M. Stringer.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting

- III. 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.
- IV. Subcommittee Chair Smith submitted proposed minutes from the Committee’s previous meeting, May 12, 2015. Representative Tommy Stringer moved to approve the minutes. A roll call vote was held, and all present voted in favor of approval.

Rep. Stringer’s Motion to Approve the Minutes from the May 12, 2015 Meeting	Yea	Nay	Not Voting
Rep. Gary E. Clary	Yea		
Rep. Joseph H. Jefferson Jr.	Yea		
Rep. Tommy M. Stringer	Yea		
Rep. James E. Smith Jr.	Yea		

Discussion of the Scope of Study of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness

- V. In attendance from South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness (First Steps) were the following: Ms. Susan DeVenny, State Director, First Steps; Dr. Dan Wuori, Deputy Director, First Steps; Mr. Mark Barnes, Chief Financial Officer/Chief Operating Officer, First Steps; Ms. Debbie Robertson, Chief Partnership Officer, First Steps; and Mr. Ken Wingate, Chair, First Steps Board of Trustees. Also present was Mrs. Emily Heatwole, Department of Education.
- VI. This meeting with First Steps was held to provide the agency and public an update on the status of the oversight study of the agency. It also allowed Subcommittee Members to receive a presentation of the Committee Staff Study and begin asking questions about the agency’s financial records and other topics, for which the Subcommittee had previously requested additional information.

Subcommittee Chair Smith swore under oath Mr. Barnes, Ms. Robertson, Ms. DeVenny, Mr. Wingate, Dr. Wuori, and Mrs. Heatwole; provided an update on the status of the oversight study, and then allowed Committee Staff to provide a brief PowerPoint presentation on the Staff Study.

After the presentation of the Staff Study, Chair Smith noted that Committee staff wished to revise a portion of the Study. Ms. DeVenny acknowledged that Committee staff communicated with the agency prior to the meeting and the agency had no problems with the revisions requested. Rep. Jefferson moved to allow staff to amend the staff study as indicated. A roll call vote was held, and all present voted in favor of approval.

Rep. Jefferson’s Motion to Allow Staff to Amend the Staff Study as Indicated	Yea	Nay	Not Voting
Rep. Gary E. Clary	Yea		
Rep. Joseph H. Jefferson Jr.	Yea		
Rep. Tommy M. Stringer	Yea		

Rep. James E. Smith Jr.	Yea		
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Chair Smith then recognized Ms. DeVenny to provide an overview on the agency’s Strategic Plan, which the First Steps Board recently approved. Ms. DeVenny provided a brief history of the agency and her involvement as well as explained the goals the Board recently adopted. Rep. Smith thanked Ms. DeVenny for all her work with the agency, as Ms. DeVenny, prior to becoming Director, was one of the initial members of the Board when the agency was first formed, and wished her the best in the new position she was taking with another entity in Lancaster, South Carolina.

VII. Numbers Served; Assistance for Struggling Local Partnerships

Chair Smith then asked if any Subcommittee members had questions at that time. Representative Jefferson, based on documents First Steps had provided prior to the meeting, asked questions about why there was such a disparity in the number of children and families served in each county, to which Dr. Wuori explained each local county partnership was responsible for serving the children and families in their areas.

Representative Clary then asked if the number of children and families served in 2014-15 was consistent with the numbers served in years past. Dr. Wuori responded that each county has the opportunity to change their strategies if they desire. Dr. Wuori also stated the number served is pulled each year and it is the state office’s responsibility to analyze those numbers. Representative Clary also asked if the State Office has helped any counties merge in an effort to improve services provided and numbers served. Dr. Wuori responded that they encourage and assist counties who wish to merge, but do not have the ability to direct counties to merge. Ms. Robertson from First Steps, who has been in a technical assistance role since 2000 and is now the Deputy of Partnerships, provided additional clarification testifying there is merging in terms of service provided to the counties such as multiple counties getting together to receive training and resources from the state office. While Florence and Marion counties are served by one executive director, Ms. Robertson confirmed there have been no county partnerships that have actually merged yet. Representative Clary went on to ask questions about whether there was a mechanism to provide assistance to local partnership directors who may be struggling. Ms. Robertson explained the state office has created “learning communities” for executive directors which allows the local partnership directors to share information among themselves. One of these communities is currently led by the Greenville local partnership.

Chair Smith explained that when the First Steps Initiative was brought to the General Assembly (Chair Smith was one of the members who initially sponsored the initiative), it was originally planned to have 6 pilot counties (3 rural and 3 urban) and organically grow from there. However, when the legislation finally passed it included a requirement that local partnerships exist in all 46 counties from the very start.

Representative Jefferson stated the Department of Social Services (DSS) has been working with children for years and asked if First Steps has had any resistance from DSS. Ms. Robertson testified that she believes First Steps and DSS are partnering well.

VIII. Financials

Representative Stringer then began asking questions about First Step's financial information, which had been provided to the members in excel charts prior to the meeting. Mr. Barnes from First Steps addressed the financial questions. Mr. Barnes, who just started with First Steps less than a year ago, testified there were challenges with bringing together the information from prior years because the First Steps money was handled by the Department of Education until 2010. He further testified the agency contacted the Department of Education and obtained paper copies of prior financial records to attempt to put together the information as best as possible. Representative Stringer asked what the agency is doing now to ensure accuracy of financial records. Mr. Barnes testified the agency has changed the way its expenses are coded so it can easily break out which ones belong to it and which ones belong to the Department of Education.

There were then additional questions about the financials including whether communication about what the subcommittee wanted was clear to the agency. After some discussion, the subcommittee and agency determined committee staff would get back together with the agency to determine the best way to obtain data everyone can clearly understand and agree on at the next meeting.

One of the big issues raised during the additional questioning about the financials was the amount of carry forward the agency had each year. More specifically, the Subcommittee members wanted to know why the agency was not spending all of the money it had available and the number of additional children the agency could have been serving with those funds. Dr. Wuori pointed out that in the most recent Appropriations Bill, there is a proviso which requires the agency to give all the carry forward it has in 4K programming back to the Department of Education and the agency supported this proviso.

IX. 4k Program

Representative Stringer asked how the agency could ramp up the 4k program and number of children served. Dr. Wuori testified the agency knew the population in the plaintiff districts and have been able to recruit as much as they want but some of the districts have a limited number of providers available. Chair Smith asked Dr. Wuori to provide the Subcommittee information on the following at the next meeting: number served by public 4K, number served by private 4K, number remaining that need to be served, number of eligible providers available, number of providers participating and number eligible that are not participating.

Dr. Wuori also stated part of the struggle in recruiting additional providers was the base amount paid to the providers per student. He testified the base amount of \$4,218 per student is too low for public school and too low to recruit private providers. He noted that in addition to this base amount providers also receive up to \$500 for transportation and, for new providers, up to \$10,000/classroom for materials. He also testified the agency only pays providers for the number of days service is actually performed (i.e. \$4,218 is for 180 days so if service is provided for fewer than 180 days, the amount is prorated).

Representative Clary asked how the base amount per student was derived. Dr. Wuori testified he was not sure other than it had been that amount for a number of years. Representative Clary then asked if the agency had informed the General Assembly that the base amount was too low. Dr. Wuori testified the agency has requested it a number of years through proviso. Representative Clary asked Dr. Wuori if the current amount is too low, what is the appropriate base amount needed. Dr. Wuori did not know the

answer to the question at the moment but stated he would be happy to provide it at the next meeting. Representative Clary emphasized to Dr. Wuori that the agency needed to ask for the amount they believed was appropriate and have information to support why the amount was appropriate. Representative Clary stated the agency is not doing their job properly if they are not advocating for the services needed for children in the right ways.

X. Local Partnerships

As for local partnerships, it was noted by Subcommittee members that some of the counties with the fewest number of children and families served are ones with lower populations. Dr. Wuori also noted that some of those county partnerships are focusing on intensive services for smaller numbers of children. According to Dr. Wuori, “large number of families served does not equate to the best service.”

XI. Statewide Readiness Exams

Chair Smith asked First Steps to provide information on how those who participated in First Steps programs performed on statewide readiness exams as opposed to others. Dr. Wuori testified there was no data for the statewide exam offered from 1977-2001 (CSAB) because the agency was just starting. As for the statewide exam offered from 2001-2008 (SCRA), Dr. Wuori testified the outside entity who performed an evaluation of the agency in 2010 (HighScopes) found that students who participated in private 4k settings performed comparable to students in public 4k settings. They further found that when private 4k was coupled with a First Steps Parenting program, the students participating in both scored higher than the students who only participated in the 4k program. Additionally, Dr. Wuori testified that last year in the Circle Test, First Steps 4k students scored slightly higher than students in 4k public settings.

Dr. Wuori testified a proviso states there are three tests among which the private and public 4k providers can choose between to test their students. Dr. Wuori testified all of the First Steps private 4k providers are going to use the same test (Teaching Strategies Gold) so scores among them can be easily compared. As for the public 4k providers, it is Dr. Wuori’s understanding that each district is choosing which of the 3 tests they want to utilize. Chair Smith stated that when tests continually change it makes it difficult to compare data between private and public settings, and between different public settings. Chair Smith would like to see the State commit to one test for a sufficient period of time so that data can actually be compared.

XII. Program Performance

Subcommittee members stated they wanted to know how effective the agency is, what is working and not working, and what the agency has developed to ensure they have valid and reliable methods to see if programs are working. Dr. Wuori testified each major program has an evaluation tool to track outcomes. He went on to say in 2007, the agency developed accountability standards for how partnerships would spend funding and use common outcomes. As an example, Dr. Wuori testified Parents as Teachers use 2 different metrics; Nurse Family Partnership has an assessment with the Department of Health and Environmental Control; and the 4k program is evaluated by the Education Oversight Committee.

Representative Jefferson stated that he believes one of the issues is that many children do not have parents at home who can reinforce what children are learning in 4k, etc. Dr. Wuori testified that he believes one of the biggest responsibilities of the agency is helping at home.

Chair Smith thanked the agency for their time and noted that at the next meeting the focus would be on ensuring the financials were in a format that everyone could agree on and understand; analysis of the 4k program in terms of the number of children served in each district, number of providers, etc.; and performance in other programs.

Adjournment

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

South Carolina
House of Representatives



Legislative Oversight Committee

EDUCATION AND CULTURAL SUBCOMMITTEE

Chairman James E. Smith Jr.

The Honorable Gary E. Clary

The Honorable Joseph H. Jefferson Jr.

The Honorable Tommy M. Stringer

Friday, December 11, 2015 at 10:00 a.m.

Room 110 -Blatt Building

Pursuant to Committee Rule 6.8, S.C. ETV shall be allowed access for internet streaming whenever technologically feasible.

AGENDA

- I. Approval of Minutes from May 12, 2015 meeting**
- II. Further Discussion of Study of First Steps, including but not limited to the staff study of the agency and the agency's response**
- III. Adjournment**