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Date: 6/24/2013 3:19:46 PM

Subject: Fwd: A Follow-Up Message from Lewis Smoak

Attachments: LAC Recommendations June 2013.pdf

ATT00001.htm

FYI

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Herrod, Jeanie" <VJHerrod@scfirststeps.org>

Cc: "Smoak, Lewis" <lewis.smoak@odnss.com>, "DeVenny, Susan" <SDevenny@scfirststeps.org>

Subject: A Follow-Up Message from Lewis Smoak

Dear Trustees,

Thank you for attending the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees Meeting held on Thursday, June 20, 2013. We appreciate your continued support and your endless work to provide a better future for the children of South Carolina. As we discussed in our meeting, there are two areas for your immediate attention below:

1. Please look at the attached recommendations from the Legislative Audit Council Report and let us know which of them you would like the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee to consider for the external evaluation scope of work. Please send your recommendations to Lisa Van Riper (Lisa.VanRiper@ngu.edu<<mailto:Lisa.VanRiper@ngu.edu>> by July 15, 2013.
2. The following work teams have been created to provide recommendations by September 1, 2013. We are seeking state and local staff and board representatives for each team. Please indicate in your response on which team you would like to serve by July 1, 2013.

1. First Steps' Programs

This team will work on program and evaluation recommendations to strengthen services for children and families.

2. First Steps' Funding Formula

This team will work with consultant(s) on the First Steps funding formula and related recommendations.

3. First Steps' Technical Assistance

This team will recommend technical assistance structures to support the continued program, governance, finance, and collaboration functions of First Steps.

4. First Steps' Relationships/Governance

This team will identify opportunities and strategies to strengthen governance and collaborative relationships to benefit children and families.

As we discussed at the board meeting last week, we were concerned that our significant successes in meeting our legislative mandate were not noted in the LAC report at all--- raising \$97M in private resources for children to add to the state's investment of \$213M; the fact that our local partnerships are successfully finding the most at-risk children and serving them by leveraging public and private resources in each county; the fact that over a half a million home visits are successfully helping parents get their kids ready for school. Also missing from the report:

Ø Nowhere is it noted that First Steps brought Nurse-Family Partnership to SC with our partners at the Duke Endowment, now serving low-income, first time moms and their children in 19 counties.

Ø Nowhere in the report is it noted that First Steps developed and now administers an expanded preK service for SC's 4 year olds with our partners in private and community-based settings, serving kids with the same outcomes as our public school partners at a 20% cost savings to SC through CDEPP.

Ø The report does not note how we have added accountability and precise eligibility screening plus added family supports to BabyNet, connecting families of developmentally-delayed children to other community services through our partnerships, while getting the system back into the black.

That is the STORY OF FIRST STEPS.

We were pleased to see that nearly half of the LAC recommendations have already been acted on, however, and that nearly a third of the LAC recommendations already appear in our draft First Steps Reauthorization bill. Some examples:

· We agree with the LAC that the need for early childhood services is strong. Our research uncovered the conditions of risk that impact low 3rd grade achievement in 2006, and we have

been targeting early childhood services statewide since that time.

· We appreciate the LAC acknowledgement of First Steps significant improvements in evaluation, a board priority since 2007. Programs serving at-risk children should continue to be evidence-based or promising practices and should be both promulgated and evaluated regularly.

· We agree with the LAC that the time has come for SC to adopt a uniform school readiness assessment (the previous readiness measures were deleted in 2001 and 2008, respectively). As they note, the state has only been able to trend improvement of children's early success in school by using retention trends in K and 1st grade. The retention news is great—since 2001, we have cut the retention rate in half, saving the state \$21M per year in lower first grade retention alone, but we need a better measure at school entry. We will be joining a consortia of states who are working on this together which is great news for SC. The LAC recommendation helped us shine a light on this critical need (already in the Reauthorization Bill).

· On the issue of funding, we agree it is time to re-evaluate and promulgate the funding formula. We look forward to a robust discussion of how best to support our local county partnerships, large and small.

As with each of our previous external evaluations, we appreciate the feedback and look forward to using the recommendations to strengthen the bill this summer and fall. Thank you for your continued leadership for our vulnerable children and families.

Please contact either Susan or myself with any questions or concerns.

Lewis Smoak

Vice-Chair, South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council

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