



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 to School Readiness

Date: March 15, 2019

RE: First Steps 4K Underserved Communities Pursuant to Proviso 1.83

Proviso 1.83 of the General Appropriations Act for FY19 specifies that:

1.83. (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 enrolling less than 80% 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, 2019.

Pursuant to the terms of the proviso, I am writing to provide an update on First Steps implementation of Proviso 1.83 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. SC First Steps used the SC Education Oversight Committee's FY2015 - 16 & 2016 - 17 State-Funded Full-Day 4K Evaluation (published January 18, 2017) to identify the counties including school districts with less than 80% of eligible 4-year-olds enrolled in public, private or Head Start settings (as per the proviso). 17 counties included school districts that fit the eligibility criteria articulated in the proviso. The final, board-approved, application was promoted to local partnerships and centers in these eligible counties.

First Steps received its first grant application in late spring of 2018. This request - linked to an emerging collaboration between Northeastern Technical College and Chesterfield County First Steps - supported the creation of Compass Point 4K on the campus of NETC in Cheraw, SC. The grant request of \$30,000 to bring facilities up to child-care licensing code was approved in May 2018. This grant created 20 new available 4K slots in Chesterfield County.

The eligibility list was updated in the most recent Education Oversight's Evaluation of State-Funded Full-Day 4K (published January 15, 2019). Appendix F named the now 24 eligible school districts that meet the proviso's definition of underserved communities. This information was shared and cultivated with our local partnerships, DSS, ABC, and local childcare centers in the 24 school districts.

At this time, three applications have been received and are being reviewed- two in Horry School District to add 23 new 4K slots and one in Richland One to add 17 new 4K slots. Several other sites of interest are promising. We will continue to advertise this prospect to generate slots in underserved communities.

We are grateful for the General Assembly's continued emphasis on creating opportunities for the state's at-risk pre-kindergartners.

cc: Chip Stanley, Chair, SC First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees
Mark Barnes, Chief Financial/Operating Officer, SC First Steps to School Readiness
Martha Strickland, 4K Director, SC First Steps to School Readiness
Kenzie Riddle, House Ways and Means
Grant Gibson, Senate Education