BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Meeting Minutes

December 18, 2025

Location: Book Harvest, 2501 University Drive, Durham, NC 27707

Attending: Dr. Rod Jenkins, Collin McColskey-Leary, Ethel Vandergriff, Meytal Barak, Monnie Griggs, Ileana Vink, Liliana Lara, Tammy Sneed, Danielle Haynes

Absent: Commissioner Stephen Valentine, DeAnna Vincent, Terry David, Josh Hawn, Dr. Deborah Pitman

Staff: Kate Irish, Jameka Wells, Eduardo Schoen, Kristen Luft, Tamara Vanie

Quorum Met

I. Call to Order 3:00

Dr. Rod Jenkins called the meeting to order.

II. Introductions and Announcements 3:05-3:15

Dr. Jenkins invited board members and staff to introduce themselves. Tabitha Blackwell with Book Harvest provided an overview of Book Harvest and programs, such as Book Babies, funded through Smart Start. Dr. Jenkins thanked Ms. Blackwell and Book Harvest for hosting our Board meeting.

III. Public Comment

There were no public comments

IV. Consent Agenda 3:15-3:25

Consent Agenda items were approved. Motion was made by Collin McColskey-Leary and seconded by Tammy Sneed. Vote approved the following items:

A. Board Meeting minutes – October
B. Phone system contract renewal
C. Finance Committee: Family Leave Policy
D. Finance Committee: Support for Home-based Early Head Start
E. Finance Committee: Fundraising contract for anniversary event
F. Policy Council: Early Head Start Self-Assessment

V. Governance Committee 3:25-3:30

Monnie Griggs invited additional Board members to join the Governance Committee which meets every few months and identifies new Board members.

Ms. Griggs shared the Governance Committee nomination of a new member for the Board, Ethel Vandergriff. Ethel Vandergriff has worked in the education department with El Centro and is passionate about advocating for education. A motion made by Monnie Griggs and seconded by Meytal Barak. The Board voted to approve Ethel Vandergriff joining the Board of Directors.

VI. Finance Committee 3:30-3:45

Eduardo Schoen, Chief Financial Officer, provided an overview of the dashboard and monthly financial reports. The auditors are still working on the audit but we are ahead of last year's schedule and should receive our report earlier. The auditors will be charging us for additional hours and that is being monitored.

Eduardo noted that our Smart Start Administration spending is lower than expected at this point in the year but we are implementing a new cost allocation plan and some staff positions are being filled.

Kate Irish, Executive Director, highlighted that because of the federal shutdown, we haven't received our notice of award for the Early Head Start grant with the Jan 1 start date. Internal plans are underway to ensure operations continue if there is a delay in receiving funds. We have worked with Early Years and DSS to prepare for moving children to subsidies/scholarships to cover center-based care if needed. The Board approved in the consent agenda, the use of unrestricted funds to cover home-based services temporarily.

Monnie Griggs asked about the contracted professional services line that was overspent in the Early Head Start grant that just closed out and if there needed to be adjustments made. Eduardo indicated that this spending was during last fiscal year due to using contractors for fiscal staffing and that has been discontinued in this fiscal year.

There was discussion about the movement in unrestricted funds in July and Eduardo noted that the unrestricted funds were used temporarily due to a cash flow shortage. The federal Early Head start (EHS) drawdowns had not been made consistently resulting in limited available funds. As soon as EHS funds came in, the unrestricted funds were replaced.

Collin McColskey-Leary asked about how much unrestricted cash on hand the organization has in order to sustain operations if needed. The Partnership has $275k in unrestricted funds. Eduardo noted that our goal should be three months of operations in unrestricted funds. We do not currently have a line of credit because we were not approved when we applied recently with M&F Bank. That could be something that the Board needs to revisit. Cash flow has been much more stable over the last 6 months as drawdowns and payments are being made consistently.

Monthly Financial Reports were approved by vote of the Board. Meytal Barak made the motion to approve the reports and Monnie Griggs seconded. Vote passed.

VII. Program Updates 3:45-4:15

Short video was shown highlighting Partnership activities from the last quarter.

A. Smart Start carryforward funding recommendation

Jameka Wells, Director of Programs, presented a recommendation for allocating carryforward funds of $197,668. These were unspent service funds from last year. Partnership staff contacted direct service providers to assess their need and ability to spend these funds by the end of this fiscal year. The recommendation is to divide the carryforward funds evenly across all Smart Start activities, $14,820 per activity.

There was discussion about the strategy to divide the funds evenly across the activities. Due to the short turn around time and wanting to ensure the programs had the time to spend down the funds, the recommendation is to divide funds evenly. For next year, our Allocations Committee will be meeting soon to develop a methodology for allocating carryforward funds next year so there will be a strategy in place grounded in the committee's alignment of activities with community needs and priorities.

The Board voted on allocating carry forward funds for individual activities with members noting any conflicts of interest in order to abstain from votes on those activities.

Program	Motion By	Seconded By	Result	Abstentions
Child Care Ed & Referral	Collin	Meytal	Approved	Monnie
Smart Start Scholarship	Collin	Meytal	Approved	Monnie; Tammy
Building Family Child Care	Danielle	Ileana	Approved	Monnie
Rebuilding Capacity for Quality	Collin	Danielle	Approved	Monnie
WAGE$	Collin	Danielle	Approved	Monnie; Tammy
Shaping Healthy Lives	Danielle	Ileana	Approved	Monnie
Early Childhood Outreach	Collin	Ileana	Approved	Monnie
Healthy Families Durham	Tammy	Meytal	Approved	None
Welcome Baby	Monnie	Meytal	Approved	Ileana
Book Babies	Collin	Ileana	Approved	None
DPFC internal activities	Collin	Ileana	Approved	None

B. WAGE$ income cap recommendation

The Board reviewed a recommendation related to the WAGE$ salary supplement program to increase the program eligibility cap and provide a percentage increase to current participants if funds were available. These changes will not impact the total allocation but allow the program to serve more eligible teachers and ensure full expenditure of their budget.

There was discussion about whether these changes would apply in subsequent years and if this would have negative impacts if the changes are not sustained. These changes can be maintained as the program includes the income cap when they submit proposals to the Allocations Committee and staff will recommend to Allocations Committee to maintain the new income cap.

The Board approved the following changes to the Durham WAGE$ activity:

- Increase income cap to $25 per hour.
- Approve Tier Two with an additional percentage increase, implemented based on spending projections provided by WAGE$.

Motion made by Collin McColskey-Leary and second by Meytal Barak. Monnie Griggs and Tammy Sneed abstained from the vote. Vote passed.

C. Smart Start Evaluation Report FY 24/25

Tamara Vanie, Data Analyst Coordinator, introduced the FY 24/25 Smart Start Evaluation Report. This report compiles the outputs and outcomes for each Smart Start funded activity. At the state level, there have been substantial data reporting and system changes this fiscal year which will allow us to provide more in-depth performance data in future years.

There was discussion about how the Smart Start activities align with community needs. The upcoming strategic planning process will inform priorities and the next Smart Start RFP process to determine which programs meet current community needs.

D. Early Head Start monitoring visit was postponed due to shutdown. It will be rescheduled in 2026.

VIII. Organizational Change: Reflect, Reset and Re-engage 4:15-4:45

Valerie Merriweather, Fitwell Solutions, provided a presentation sharing the work she's been doing with the organization around transitions, trauma informed practice and conflict resolution. Ms. Merriweather noted that staff is ready to move forward and they appreciate Kate's leadership and transparency, which is critical during transition. Staff identified communication gaps in the past and the need for clarity. There is an undercurrent of anxiety around funding instability. Staff

show interest in skill building around communications, collaboration and conflict resolution. Ms. Merriweather recommends continuing to build psychological safety across teams, reinforce trauma informed practices, strengthen board-staff collaborations and reduce noise anxiety around funding.

IX. 30th Anniversary Event Updates 4:45-4:50

Kristen Luft, Community Awareness Manager, shared information about the upcoming 30th Anniversary event on April 16 at the Cotton Room. It will be an evening of dinner, drinks and celebration where we will celebrate our impact in the community and chart a path forward. Members were encouraged to share the save the date and opportunities for sponsorship.

X. Executive Director's Report 4:50-5:00

Kate Irish provided the Executive Director's Report and noted the following:

- Hopeful about the upcoming year particularly around the commitment that our community leaders and our community has about the importance of early childhood.
- With heavy and challenging times in our country and in Durham recently, we need to focus on how the Partnership can be a voice for young children and families.
- Continuing work on initial goals through 2026:
    - Staff engagement – continuing to focus on cultivating a thriving and safe staff and emphasizing strong onboarding practices with hiring for 4 new positions
    - Board engagement – Dr. Jenkins has been a great support; the Partnership will be reaching out in 2026 with more opportunities for engagement for Board members
    - Community engagement – This is an area of opportunity to convene partners and build and strengthen relationships.

Dr. Jenkins stated that annual Board giving is so important and grants opportunities look at whether the Board is giving to the organization or not. Dr. Jenkins encourages board members to give as they are able to.

XI. Meeting Adjourned at 5:00 PM

Board voted to adjourn the meeting

Next Board Meeting: February 19 from 3-5 pm