

**Wake County Smart Start  
Board of Directors Committee Meeting  
April 23, 2025**

A meeting of the Wake County Smart Start (WCSS) Board of Directors was held on Wednesday, April 23, 2025, with Vice Chair Nikia Coates presiding.

Board members present: André Anthony, Nikia Coates, Veronica Creech, Sherry Heuser, Ronetta Pearsall, Antonia Pedroza, Susan Evans, Ariel Ford, Stephanie Shell, Joe White, Nikki Leonard

Board members absent: Katherine Williams, Tonya Venable, Matthew Ellinwood, Matt Glova, Mickey Holt,

Staff members present: Alex Livas-Dlott, Carol Orji, Joan Crutchfield, Gary Carr, Gayle E. Headen, Sasha Gomez, Bryce McClamroch, Lynn Policastro, Taylor Young, Rob Linens, Jen McPherson, Ana Gallo

Guests Present: Anjanette Curtis

**Call to Order/Announcements**

At 9:02 AM, Vice Chair Nikia Coates recognized a quorum and called the meeting to order. She announced the meeting was being recorded and called attention to the presence of staff members and guests.

Vice Chair Nikia Coates requested a motion to adopt the agenda. Veronica Creech moved to adopt the agenda. Sherry Heuser seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (4-23-57)

**NC Pre-K Mission Moment**

Vice Chair Nikia Coates introduced Ana Gallo to discuss the NC Pre-K Mission Moment. Ms. Gallo presented a video highlighting NC Pre-K teacher contributions.

**Consent Agenda**

Vice Chair Nikia Coates requested a motion to adopt the consent agenda, including the Minutes of the February 25, 2025, Board of Directors Meeting and March 2025 Financial Reports. Nikki Leonard moved to adopt the consent agenda, including the Minutes of the February 25, 2025, Board of Directors Meeting and March 2025 Financial Reports. André Anthony seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (4-23-58)

**Committee Reports**

**Allocation Committee**

In Tonya Venable's absence, Gayle Headen presented the Allocation Committee recommendations. Ms. Headen reported that April is when the Allocation Committee asks the Board to consider the activities to be funded for the following fiscal year, 2025-2026. This is Year 2 of the funding cycle. All current funded partners, except Book Harvest, submitted a letter of intent to continue services and a budget. Sherry Heuser moved to accept as a total package the allocation of \$12,648,304 in funding for 11 organizations to implement 21 activities in FY25-26 based on needs within the community, alignment with Board-identified priorities as reflected in the WCSS strategic Framework and the availability of WCSS funding as follows:

AGENCY	PROGRAM ACTIVITY	ALLOCATION
Wake County Human Services	Child Care Health Consultant Program (CCHC)	\$564,517
Wake County Smart Start	NC Pre-K	\$2,702,505
Wake County Smart Start	NC Pre-K QE	\$195,664
Wake County Smart Start	Quality Enhancement (QE)	\$537,518
Child Care Services Association	Rebuilding Capacity for Quality	\$157,792

Wake County Health and Human Services	Subsidy	\$4,672,034
Book Harvest	Book Babies	\$0
Step Up Ministry	Baby Steps/Little Steps	\$100,000
Catholic Charities	School Readiness Services for Hispanic Children	\$174,439
Wake County Smart Start	Smart Start SIPE Family Navigation	\$92,815
Triangle Area Parenting Support	Breastfeeding Support and Education	\$33,255
Fiesta Cristiana Mission Congregation	Building Family Support	\$106,313
Triangle Area Parenting Support	Circle of Security	\$98,705
SAFEchild	Crianza con Cariño: The Nurturing Program for Spanish Speaking Families	\$119,360
Family Resource Center of Raleigh Inc.	Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)	\$404,290
Wake County Health and Human Services	Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)	\$126,698
Wake County Public School System Office of Early Learning	Parents as Teachers (PAT)	\$750,642
Lucy Daniels Center	Social Emotional Interventions for Young Children	\$633,694
Wake County Smart Start	Fundraising	\$108,986
Wake County Smart Start	Program Coordination and Evaluation	\$444,726
Wake County Smart Start	Systems Improvement and Public Engagement (SIPE)	\$624,351

Stephanie Shell seconded. Abstentions: Susan Evans, Tonya Venable, Ronetta Pearsall. With no opposition, the motion passed. (4-23-59)

Ms. Headen presented the second recommendation from the full Allocation Committee to discontinue the current WCSS Appeals Policy related to the competitive bidding process. After discussion, André Anthony moved to approve the recommendation to discontinue the current WCSS Appeals Policy related to the competitive bidding process and NC Pre-K and Wake ThreeSchool Site Selection processes. Joe White seconded. Abstentions: Susan Evans, Tonya Venable, Ronetta Pearsall. With no opposition, the motion passed. (4-23-60)

Ms. Headen presented the final recommendation from the Allocations Committee to approve the release of a Request for Application to implement the Raising a Reader program for Fiscal Year 2025-26. Following discussion and questions, Nikki Leonard moved to approve the recommendation to approve the release of a Request for Application to implement the Raising a Reader program for Fiscal Year 2025-26. No second was required. With no opposition, the motion passed. (4-23-61)

### **Board Governance Committee**

Board Governance Committee Chair, Sherry Heuser indicated there are two vacancies as of April 1<sup>st</sup> due to the resignations of Heather Drennan and Dr. Stacy Wilson-Norman. Ms. Heuser's term ends on June 30<sup>th</sup>, leaving three vacancies to fill. The Committee is in discussions with the County and WCPSS regarding successors. The Committee would like to pursue up to five candidates for the next round, based on the number of people currently on the Board, the current Board makeup, how full committees are, and knowing additional input and representation are desirable. More will be reported at the next meeting.

### **Finance Committee**

Joe White presented two recommendations for Finance Committee Chair, Matthew Glova. The first is to change the Inclement Weather Policy to align it with Wake County Public Schools' closure decisions. André Anthony moved to approve the recommendation to change the Inclement Weather Policy to align it with Wake County Public Schools' closure decisions. Nikki Leonard seconded. The motion passed with no opposition. (4-23-62)

The Finance Committee recommended an adjustment of 3% to WCSS salary ranges effective July 1, 2025. After discussion, Stephanie Shell moved to approve the recommended adjustment of 3% to WCSS salary ranges effective July 1, 2025. No second was required. The motion passed with no opposition. (4-23-63)

### **Chair's Report**

Vice Chair Nikia Coates presented. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Block Party is on May 17. Last year nearly 2,000 people attended. The same level of success is expected this year. Ms. Coates acknowledged Board Members Katherine Williams, Ronetta Pearsall, and Matt Glova for their attendance last year, as well as noting that Tonya Venable recruited 20 of her sorority sisters to volunteer. Board Members are asked to show their support by attending and volunteering. There are two months remaining to give for this fiscal year. Ms. Coates encouraged every Board Member to make sure they donate as another way to show support for Wake County Smart Start. Rob Linens can provide information regarding the last time someone donated.

### **Executive Director's Report**

Executive Director Gayle Headen presented. In the systems level role, staff is constantly monitoring the landscape, paying attention to and being concerned about impacts to WCSS and any of its partners in the Early Childhood Community. She stressed the importance of presenting factual information. Ms. Headen shared what Telamon Head Start partners are communicating to the community regarding funding related to Head Start. Approximately two weeks ago, the President's initial budget for 2026 recommended that Head Start be fully cut as a program, which is very concerning because Head Start is a critical part of the Early Childhood system. Head Start is encouraging their partners to let their legislators know the importance of Head Start and the impact it could have if a child's preschool experience is eliminated. Not only would it impact the child, but it would impact a parent's ability to work or complete training. A link will be shared after the meeting for those inclined to reach out to their representatives. If there are any questions, Ms. Headen will take them back to Head Start.

Ms. Headen also followed up on the February conversation about the uncertain times. Executive Director Headen reported on steps NCPC has taken and that their Board is aligned as well. As a follow up to the guidance received from the Board at the February meeting and NCPC's approach, staff has developed recommendations for the Board on the Updated Greatest Needs and Strategic Framework. The language reflects system-level impacts, but it remains aligned with the Board's strategic framework and priority.

Nikia Coates asked for a vote on the recommendation. Veronica Creech motioned to the updated language for the Greatest Needs and Strategic Framework. Sherry Heuser seconded. The motion passed with no opposition. (4-23-64)

Ms. Headen noted that WCSS is on track with Wake ThreeSchool applications as compared to last year. The Wake ThreeSchool team has been in conversation with Directors of Wake ThreeSchool and sought their input on solutions to support them as they support children with challenging behaviors. The team developed an RFP that is responsive to provider input and the RFP will be released later today. This is a continuation of the discussion that the Board had at the February meeting. Ms. Headen asked that Members share it with their networks.

Lastly, Ms. Headen reminded the Board that the Block Party is on May 17<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM. Staff looks for a strong turnout of Board Members because they believe the Members will enjoy it and find it personally rewarding. As of today, 873 individuals have registered. There are 30 community programs and services tabling in the Vendor/Resource Zone, so the event will be rich in resources. The Diaper Train will give away diapers, and there will be a pop-up food market from the Food Bank of Eastern North Carolina. Ms. Headen asked everyone to encourage family, friends, and organizations to volunteer. The volunteer registration link will be shared after the meeting. PNC is the premier sponsor.

With no further business to discuss, Susan Evans moved to adjourn the meeting. Veronica Creech seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned by Nikia Coates at 10:13 AM. (4-23-65)

Initial  
ME

Signed by:  
Matt Ellinwood  
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6/30/2025 | 12:16 PM EDT