

**Wake County Smart Start
Executive Committee Meeting
January 22, 2025**

A meeting of the Wake County Smart Start (WCSS) Executive Committee was held on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, with Chair, Katherine Williams presiding. The meeting was held via Zoom conference call.

Committee members present: Nikia Coates, Matt Ellinwood, Sherry Heuser, Katherine Williams, and Tonya Venable

Committee members absent: Matt Glova

Staff members present: Gary Carr, Carol Orji, Alex Livas-Dlott, Gayle Headen, Rob Linens and Nancy Peck

Call to Order/Announcements

At 8:33 am, Chair Katherine Williams announced a quorum was present and officially called the meeting to order. She noted the meeting is being recorded and drew attention to the presence of staff.

Nikia Coates moved to adopt the agenda. Sherry Heuser seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the vote to adopt the agenda was unanimous. (01-25-40)

Committee members reviewed the consent agenda. Sherry Heuser moved to approve the consent agenda including minutes from the Executive Committee meeting on September 25, 2024 and December 2024 financial statements. Tonya Venable seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objection, the motion carried. (01-25-41)

Finance Committee

In the absence of Finance Committee Chair, Matt Glova, WCSS Director of Finance, Gary Carr presented a committee recommendation for including personnel expense increases in the planning budget for the next fiscal year based on based on Catapult's 2024 NC Wage & Salary Survey, the 2024 Consumer Price Index and historical information included on Attachment B.1. Nikia Coates moved to approve budgeting for a 4% increase in salaries for merit increases and salary range adjustments; and a 5% increase in employee health insurance cost for calendar year 2026. Sherry Heuser seconded the motion. Calling for a vote, and hearing no objections, the motion carried. (01-25-42)

Gary Carr presented a Finance Committee recommendation and supporting information for adding an additional full time staff position. Sherry Heuser moved to approve the addition of one full time staff position, Social Emotional Learning Specialist, to provide additional social emotional support to Wake ThreeSchool classrooms. Tonya Venable seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no opposition, the vote to approve was unanimous. (01-25-43)

Gary Carr presented a committee recommendation for a one-time longevity payment to eligible staff to support staff retention and mitigate the impact of inflation. He commented that the source of funding for the payments would come mainly from Smart Start reverted and carry-forward funds with the remainder from NC PreK and other grant funds. Following questions, Sherry Heuser moved to approve a one-time longevity payment to staff based on years of service as of December 31, 2024 as follows: greater than 1 but less than 5 years of service - \$750; 5 years but less than 10 years of service - \$1,250; 10 years but less than 15 years of service - \$1,750; 15 years but less than 20 years of service - \$2,250; 20 plus years of service - \$2,750. Nikia Coates seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with all in favor, the motion carried. (01-25-44)

Gary Carr presented a staff recommendation for insurance renewals in 2025. He provided an explanation for the recommendation coming from staff as a result of an unexpected, revised quote on Commercial Package and Umbrella Coverage from the insurer due to their review of the general liability rating after the initial quote was provided and reviewed by Finance Committee. He also remarked the insurer is charging a premium for professional liability and abuse and molestation, that has not been included in the past. Mr. Carr noted the total premium renewal cost for current coverage at \$37,436, represents roughly a 10% increase from the prior year. A motion to accept the insurance renewal package effective February 5, 2025, including Commercial Package and

Umbrella Coverage, Renewal of Directors' and Officers' Employment Practices and Fiduciary Liability with Selective Insurance, Directors' and Officers' Liability, Commercial Crime and ERISA Bond coverage, Workers Compensation, Cyber Liability, and Business Auto coverage as detailed on Attachment E.2 was made by Nikia Coates and seconded by Sherry Heuser. Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the vote for approval was unanimous. (01-25-45) Katherine Williams recognized the Finance Committee, including Board members: Matt Glova, Heather Drennan, Mickey Holt and Joe White for their thorough work on the insurance renewals.

Chair's Report

Katherine Williams gave a reminder of the upcoming extended Board meeting on February 26, 2025 at the NCSU University Club. She stated that one of the primary goals of the session will be capitalizing on the work of the Advancement Committee and Community Relations and Development staff team by helping Board members understand focal issues and build a stronger connection to the compelling purpose and need for raising additional funds.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director, Gayle E. Headen provided the following updates:

- Smart Start Legislative agenda: Ms. Headen reported the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) has developed legislative priorities for Smart Start with input from local partnerships across the network. Highlights of the priorities include:
 - Base funding increase - \$15 million increase in recurring funding for the Smart Start network
 - Restoration of the admin rate to 10% to support NC Pre-K
 - \$5 million in recurring funding for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) program
 - Investment in long-term solutions for early childhood teachers
 - Strengthening the overall early childhood system, including increasing behavioral support and reducing suspensions and expulsion in early childhood settings. Ms. Headen noted the tie to the recently released NC Preschool Exclusionary Discipline study and commented this is an issue currently being experienced in the Wake ThreeSchool (WTS) program.
- Ms. Headen reported the Exclusionary Discipline study report has been recently released and remains a timely topic as the practice is increasing. An email with a link to the study highlights some of the most important aspects of the study. Meetings are underway with the NC Coalition for Inclusion, Not Expulsions to see how the study findings and recommendations can be used to leverage the work of the coalition to affect policy and practice changes. Ms. Headen acknowledged each of the WCSS staff members who contributed their efforts during all phases of the study and the culminating report.
- DPIL: DPIL is at program capacity and must close new enrollments in state funded accounts to ensure there is sufficient funding to continue providing books to children already enrolled in the program. The enrollment freeze will begin Feb. 1 and will be in place until additional funding is allocated. NCPC is continuing to offer funding for program implementation and support which local partnerships must apply for.
- Wake County budget business case: WCSS will request nearly \$9 million from Wake County for FY25-26. The funding proposal includes \$5.5 million for Wake ThreeSchool for one additional full time Social Emotional Learning Specialist, two Intensive Intervention contractors and child screening, and a reimbursement rate increase to accommodate an increase in teacher pay. Many of the current children enrolled in Wake ThreeSchool have documented or noted concerns and require additional support. Ms. Headen commented that there is no plan for program expansion next year, requested funding will be used to maintain the integrity of the program. The remaining \$3.5 million in the request is to support the NC Pre-K program.
- Ms. Headen reported applications for Wake Pre-K SY25-26 were released in early January and applications for Wake ThreeSchool SY25-26 were released January 21.
- Human Resources project: WCSS has engaged with Gholston Consulting Group through May, 2025 to assess and improve the full life cycle of employment experience in the following areas:
 - Recruitment and staffing
 - New hire orientation and onboarding

A.1

- Performance management
- People strategies - succession planning
- Effective communication
- Leveling and updating job descriptions

With no additional business for discussion, Nikia Coates moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:57 AM. Sherry Heuser seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the motion carried. (01-25-46)

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6/9/2025 | 9:53 AM EDT

Signed by:
Matt Ellinwood
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