

**FIRST STEP ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**February 19, 2025 at 11:00 a.m.**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/6403942999>

Meeting ID: 640 394 2999

**Attendees:**

Dr. Angie Paccione, Executive Director, Department of Higher Education  
Angela Baier, CEO, CollegenInvest  
Mike Blake, CMO, CollegenInvest  
Mike Keglovits, ABLE & Special Programs Manager, CollegenInvest  
Austin Earp, Financial Education Program Coordinator, Department of Treasury  
Sarah Chapin, Media Director, Explore Communications  
David Kennedy, CEO, Corona Insights  
Joseph Homlar, OCYF Director of the Division of Child Welfare, Colorado Dept. of Human Services  
Dr. Lisa Roy, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Early Childhood  
Dr. Rhonda Haniford, Deputy Commissioner, Colorado Department of Education  
Dr. David Gross, Board Member, CollegenInvest  
Christine Heitz, Board Member, CollegenInvest

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Angela Baier at 11:05 a.m.

**Minutes:**

Angela Baier asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the November 19<sup>th</sup> meeting. Angie Paccione moved and Sarah Chapin seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**SMART Act Reporting (CollegenInvest):**

Baier shared the PowerPoint that she presented to the Joint Education Committee on January 23, 2025. At that hearing, she gave a brief overview of CollegenInvest to the Senators and Representatives. She reminded the legislators that we are an enterprise fund and that we don't receive any state taxpayer dollars. We have a 9-member Governor appointed Board and fall under the Department of Higher Education.

She reviewed the new legislation which made several changes to the program. It increased the age that an award can be claimed from the child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday to the child's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. This aligns with CollegenInvest's program because we find that our key market is really in the zero to

three years old, or possibly as high as eight years old. National research shows that if a parent hasn't started saving by age 9, very few do simply because they don't believe in higher education.

Going into some of our outreach, we work with over 200 nonprofit organizations and 821 employers throughout the entire state promoting the program. We have a 10-member team doing outreach including bilingual speakers. And of course, we continue to do an annual paid advertising campaign.

Corona Insights has recently completed a user experience research project now that the program has been around for four years. We wanted to know more about the experience that people are having when they sign up. Our Net Promoter Score (NPS) was 93, which they said was one of the highest they've ever seen. That question asked people how likely they would be to recommend the First Step program to a friend or colleague. We also asked how the application process was and 85% rated it as 9 or 10, which we're really happy with. We asked about the speed of the application. For the few that did have issues applying, we found when we drilled down a little deeper that the biggest problem they had was finding their child's birth certificate or adoption number. We also see that with opening a CollegeInvest account. The hardest thing is to find your kid's Social Security number.

The program continues to grow. We grew 29% year over year. We gave out a record of 6,161 awards in 2024. December 2024 was our biggest application month in the program's history with 1,835 awards. A large percentage of families continue to contribute to their accounts after receiving an award. It ranges from 90% - 98%, depending on the cohort year. The average account size is now \$4,650 which is up from \$3,292 in 2023.

David Gross asked about the uptake rate and how many children were eligible. Baier stated that there are 60,000 to 65,000 children born in Colorado each year. Blake said that the goal the CollegeInvest Board approved for FY24 was 6.0%. We are currently at 5.8% although that will increase over time, especially now that parents have until the child's 8th birthday to claim the award. He mentioned that the participation rate for children born in early 2020 is already up to 7.5%. Angie Paccione inquired about how that compared nationally. Blake stated that there are only 13 states that offer kickstarter accounts. Each program is very different and it's hard to compare apples to apples. Most states require the parent to claim the award before the child's first birthday, while our program gives them 8 years. Most states hold the award in a Treasury account until the child turns 18. Baier said our program puts the money directly into the child's CollegeInvest account and allows the parents to choose their own investments. She said First Step is also very unique in that it provides a match on future contributions. Mike Keglovits said that we will continue to monitor that savings activity through the 5 years of the match. We hope that they continue on their own long after the match has stopped.

Christine Heitz asked if we have any data on the applicants. Baier stated that the annual report to the legislature included some of this information and it's posted on our website. We do track zip codes since every account has an address listed. We also have questions on the application that

are related to income and ethnicity. However, these are self-reported and optional so not everyone reports.

Gross asked about the cost of acquisition. Sarah Chapin shared that it was about \$90 per acquisition. Heitz said that seemed great and mentioned that she used to be involved in higher education marketing. She would see acquisition costs for a student to enroll between 40% - 50% of tuition cost range. Those are different types of numbers of what people are spending. But just as a sense of efficiency, if it's investing a certain amount of year to get the return of thousands of dollars, that's pretty good. Baier said that First Step recipients have already saved about \$4,300 on average and hopefully they'll continue that for 18 years.

Gross asked if he could get a copy of the SMART Act presentation. Blake said he would email it out to the group after the call.

#### **Quarterly Enrollment Numbers (CollegeInvest):**

Baier stated that we are now at 18,679 total awards with approximately \$2,040,427 paid out in kickstarter contributions. The balance of the Master Account, which is the Assets Under Management, is \$30,813,983. We'll give this update every quarter.

#### **New Business/Action Items for Future Meetings**

May Meeting: Financial Literacy (Department of Treasury)

#### **Adjournment:**

Baier adjourned the meeting at 11:38 a.m.

The next meeting of the Advisory Board will be on Wednesday, May 14, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. and will be held via the web conference application, Zoom. Meeting details will be posted on the CollegeInvest website [www.collegeinvest.org](http://www.collegeinvest.org).