



BUILD Initiative: Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children
Building Bridges: Connecting State and Community Early Childhood Efforts
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Panel: *The Public/Private Partnership Approach in Early Childhood Systems Building South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness*

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OVERVIEW

Created in 1999, South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness is the state's comprehensive, results-oriented statewide early childhood initiative to help prepare our children to reach kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private supports are combined through forty-six local, non-profit partnerships to enable communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families. This private-public partnership has increased accountability within South Carolina's early childhood system through the expansion of evidence-based programs, the development of nationally recognized standards and the adoption of common, statewide outcome measures.

The First Steps Board of Trustees serves a dual role as South Carolina's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), pursuant to the Head Start Reauthorization of 2007, which is tasked with maximizing state and federal resources for children. Based on a community survey and interagency focus groups, the ECAC has focused its recent work on two priorities: *data driven decision-making and professional development.*

PURPOSE

The purpose of the First Steps initiative is to develop, promote, and assist efforts of agencies, private providers, and public and private organizations and entities, at the state level and the community level, to collaborate and cooperate in order to focus and intensify services, assure the most efficient use of all available resources, and eliminate duplication of efforts to serve the needs of young children and their families.

LEGISLATIVE GOALS

- **Provide parents with access** to the support they might seek and want to strengthen their families and to promote the optimal development of their preschool children;
- **Increase comprehensive services** so children have reduced risk for major, physical, developmental, and learning problems;
- **Promote high quality preschool programs** that provide a healthy environment that will promote normal growth and development;
- **Provide services** so all children receive the protection, nutrition, and health care needed to thrive in the early years of life so they arrive at school ready to succeed; and
- **Mobilize communities** to focus efforts on providing enhanced services to support families and their young children so as to enable every child to reach school healthy and ready to succeed.

-Act 287 of 2014, Section 59-152-20



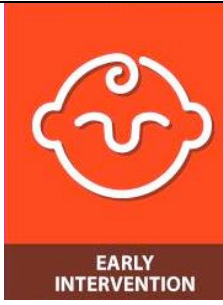
GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- The First Steps' model is designed to create collaborative early childhood systems focused on school readiness at both state and local levels. The governance structure allows for coordination and collaboration of public and private assets at both the community and state levels.
- First Steps program and fidelity standards are in place for programs, governance, fiscal, collaboration and accountability functions at state and local levels.
- In each of South Carolina's 46 counties, a local partnership board with legislated composition to represent all sectors is responsible for meeting the local needs of families and communities. Each board must identify gaps in service and other collaborative opportunities to support the school readiness of young children through an aligned 501(c)(3) local First Steps organization. The board is responsible for actualizing the mission at the local level, mobilizing resources and providing for long-term growth of the local First Steps organization.
- The state-level, 25-member SC First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees is responsible for actualizing the mission, setting direction and measuring outcomes, and providing long-term stability for the initiative. The 2014 reauthorization of First Steps included the addition of voting membership for state agency heads including the Department of Social Services, Department of Department of Health and Environmental Control, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, the South Carolina Head Start Collaboration Office and The Children's Trust of South Carolina;

PROGRAMS SERVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STATEWIDE

South Carolina First Steps is preparing the state's young children for school success with measurable outcomes across each of the following six school readiness strategy areas, funded at state and local levels:

**Healthy Start • Family Strengthening • Early Intervention
Quality Child Care • Early Education • School Transition**

	<p><i>Healthy Start (Highlighted program: Nurse-Family Partnership)</i></p> <p>First Steps is SC's sponsor agency for Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), an evidence-based home visitation program connecting first-time, low-income mothers with nurse home visitors beginning in pregnancy. The program operates through a wide collaboration with public and private entities in 19 of 46 SC counties.</p> <p>http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/locations/SouthCarolina</p>
	<p><i>Family Strengthening (Highlighted programs: Parents as Teachers, Parent-Child Home, Early Steps to School Success)</i></p> <p>First Steps operates parent education strategies at the local level in nearly all 46 counties. South Carolina First Steps' efforts to develop fidelity standards have been recognized by Parents as Teachers' CEO Scott Hippert, who noted, <i>"Under First Steps' leadership, Parents as Teachers in South Carolina has set the national example in fidelity and accountability. We hold South Carolina up to other states doing home visitation as an example of how it can be done right."</i></p>
	<p><i>Early Intervention (Highlighted program: Part C Idea or SC BabyNet)</i></p> <p>First Steps serves as the lead agency for BabyNet, the state's interagency early intervention program for infants and toddlers under Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Through BabyNet, children and families receive the targeted services designed to help them reach their full potential.</p>



Quality Child Care (Highlighted programs: Quality Enhancement, Staff Training and Development)

First Steps collaborates with parents, child care providers, and many agency and community partners to maximize child care quality available to preschoolers across South Carolina. Through training and support of providers through First Steps local partnerships, other agency partners, and the 4K program, SC's child care community has access to enhanced and ongoing professional development opportunities.



Early Education (Highlighted programs: 4K, Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships)

First Steps co-administers SC's public-private 4K program. First Steps leverages resources to increase the number of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs available to serve children in the private sector. During 2015, First Steps 4K programs are found in over 200 private, faith- and community-based preschool settings serving approximately 2500 students in 64 of 81 school districts.

The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships Initiative was created by Congress to expand Early Head Start services within community-based settings. This federally-funded, comprehensive early childhood program was designed to serve low-income infants and toddlers. Participating families will receive high-quality, full-day early care and education services (within contracted preschool settings) and comprehensive, wrap-around support. First Steps and other grantees are working together on this new initiative, begun in 2015.



School Transition (Highlighted program: Countdown to Kindergarten)

The Countdown to Kindergarten Program was created in 2003 to support the gap of school transition services for children, families, schools and communities. The program is designed to match high-risk rising kindergartners with their teacher for six home visits in the summer prior to school entry. This particular model was developed by South Carolina First Steps and identified as a promising state practice by the National Governor's Association in 2005.