



**Meeting of the Board of Trustees**  
December 2, 2022, 2:00PM  
Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center  
1101 Lincoln St. Columbia, SC 29201

**AGENDA**

- I. **Roll Call** (Avian Jones)
- II. **Public Comment Period**  
The public is invited to provide comments relevant to the SC Early Childhood Advisory Council and/or South Carolina First Steps during this period. Members of the public wishing to speak must sign up before the meeting. Comments should be limited to no more than three minutes per speaker.
- III. **Call to Order and Approve Agenda** (Dave Morley)  
**Motion:** To adopt the agenda as submitted  
**Motion:** To adopt the October 20, 2022 minutes as submitted  
**Attachments:** SC First Steps Board of Trustees October 20, 2022 Minutes
- IV. **Executive Committee** (David Morley)  
**Motion:** To approve the 2023 SC First Steps Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council meeting dates  
**Attachments:** SC First Steps Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council 2023 Meeting Schedule
- V. **Consent Agenda: Motions Recommended by Committees** (Dave Morley)
  - a. **Motion:** To approve the updated program guidelines for the Evidenced-based Child Care Scholarship program for Grant Year 23. (Programs and Grants Committee recommends)
  - b. **Motion:** To approve the corrected Program and Operational Guidelines for implementation in Grant Year 23. (Programs and Grants Committee recommends)
  - c. **Motion:** To approve the waiver request from Greenwood County First Steps for match for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. (Finance and Administration Committee recommends)
  - d. **Motion:** To approve the resolution of the conflict-of-interest request from Edgefield County First Steps. (Finance and Administration Committee recommends)
- VI. **First Steps Is Here: 4K + Siblings** (Martha Strickland, 4K State Director)  
**Jacqueta Davis, Karmani Jones, Karmiah Jones, Sheila Jones, 4K + Siblings family**
- VII. **Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee** (Dr. Amy Williams)  
**Attachments:** Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Report, Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Meeting Minutes, IFS FY19-21 External Evaluation Report
- VIII. **Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee** (Jennifer McConnell)



**Attachments:** Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee Report, Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee Meeting Minutes, FY23 Program Operational Guidelines, Evidence Based Child Care Scholarships

IX. **Finance and Administration Committee** (Tim Holt)

**Attachments:** Finance and Administration Committee Report, Finance and Administration Committee Meeting Minutes, FY2023 Financial Status Report as of October 31, 2022, FY2023 Donations Report as of October 31, 2022

X. **Acknowledgements** (Dave Morley)

XI. **Executive Director's Report** (Georgia Mjartan)

**Attachments:** Executive Director's Report – Year In Review

XII. **Motion:** To adjourn the meeting of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees



**Board of Trustees Meeting**  
October 20, 2022 2:00PM  
SC First Steps  
636 Rosewood Drive Columbia, SC 29201  
Minutes

**Members Present (13):**

Rep. Paula Calhoon  
Mary Lynne Diggs  
Rep. Jerry Govan  
John Hayes  
Tim Holt  
Mike Leach  
Jessica Mackey  
Jennifer McConnell  
Janie Neeley

Roger Pryor  
Edward Simmer  
Sue Williams  
Dr. Amy Williams

Sen. Greg Hembree  
Robert Kerr  
Sen. Gerald Malloy  
Dr. David Mathis  
Dave Morley, Chairman  
Alexia Newman  
Nicole Wynkoop

**Members Absent (10):**

Dr. Shelley Canright, Vice Chair  
Jacque Curtin  
Dr. Michelle Fry

**Attendees (63)**

Georgia Mjartan  
Avian Jones  
Abby Duggins  
Alexis Pipkins  
Amanda Bailey  
Ashlea Hatcher  
Betty Washington  
Blaine Van Dyke  
Carletta Isreal  
Chelsea Richard  
Chastine Dickey-Jackson  
Cindy Ellis  
Cindy Galloway  
Crystal Campbell  
Delores Rock  
Dione Ashley  
Dorian Young  
Dwana Doctor  
Felicia Battle  
Felica Patrick  
Janice Kilburn  
Jennifer Williams  
Jon Artz  
Joy Mazur  
Justina Siuba  
Kate Roach  
Kathy Jenkins  
Kathy Sanders

Kenna Hoover  
Kim Trudell  
Kristine Jenkins  
LaMyra Sanders  
Lis Guimaraes  
Monique Branagan  
Nekim Clinton  
Patricia Hall  
Shakira Fulton  
Sharon Bruton  
Shayla Pettigrew  
Sheila Cornwell  
SheKiah Reese  
Sherry Gilliam  
Stacy Greenwalt  
Tiffany Outlaw  
Tricia Gordon  
Valencia Johnson  
Beth Moore  
Kaitlyn Richards  
Martha Strickland  
Derek Cromwell  
Mark Barnes  
Karen Oliver  
Tom Lacas  
Jessica Garrett  
Lexi Jones  
Rachal Hatton-Moore

Rhina Medina  
Betty Gardiner  
Kerry Cordan  
Kathy Fitzgerald  
Elizabeth Dudek  
Howard Morrison  
B. Van Dyne



Ms. Jones conducted a roll call.

Dr. Cordan shared information on First Steps is Here: Early Identification and Referral Program and its shared partnerships. Natoria Johnson, a parent participant in Allendale County's Early Identification and Referral Program shared the success of her experience.

Ms. McConnell called the meeting to order at 2:16 p.m. Ms. McConnell requested a motion to adopt the agenda. Mr. Holt provided the motion. Ms. Neeley provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. McConnell asked for a motion to approve the August 18, 2022 minutes. Rep. Govan provided the motion. Dr. Williams provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. McConnell asked for a motion to include items a, b, and c on the consent agenda. Mr. Holt provided the motion and Mr. Hayes seconded. The motion was approved unanimously. Ms. McConnell asked for a motion to approve the consent agenda. Ms. Williams provided the motion. Ms. Neeley provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.

Consent Agenda: **Motions Recommended by Committees** (David Morley)

- a. **Motion:** To approve the update to the Evidenced-Based Home Visiting Parenting Program guidelines listed above the FY23 grant year (Programs and Grants Committee recommends)
- b. **Motion:** To approve the updates to the Program and Operational guidelines for the FY23 grant year. (Programs and Grants Committee recommends)
- c. **Motion:** To approve the update to the Evidenced-Based Home Visiting Parenting Program guidelines listed above the FY23 grant year. (Programs and Grants Committee recommends)
- d. Whereas disability, foster care, and living in poverty or a low-income household are risk factors for early school failure already adopted by the Board.

Whereas disability, foster care, and living in poverty or a low-income household are eligibility criteria for South Carolina Medicaid's Partners for Healthy Children coverage.

Whereas the poverty threshold for Medicaid eligibility for children includes the poverty threshold for other public benefit programs, like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC);

Whereas Medicaid eligibility is an eligibility criterion for First Steps 4K and First Steps 4K students are sometimes a target population of local partnership programs, like for Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY);





Whereas identifying those eligible, but not enrolled and assisting them in the enrollment process can lead to improved health and health care access.

**Motion:** That Medicaid eligibility for children birth through age five is added to the list of First Steps approved risk factors. (Program and Grants Committee recommends)

- e. Whereas exposure to caregiver/parent mental health and substance use issues and living in poverty or a low-income household are risk factors for early school failure already adopted by the Board;

Whereas Medicaid coverage can lead to improved maternal health at birth and for one year postpartum and healthy moms have an increased likelihood of healthy babies.

Whereas identifying those eligible, but not enrolled and assisting them in the enrollment process can lead to improved health and health care access.

Whereas the poverty threshold for Medicaid eligibility and qualifying event of pregnancy and birth includes the eligibility criteria of other public benefit programs, like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

**Motion:** That Medicaid eligibility for pregnant and postpartum individuals is added to the list of First Steps approved risk factors. (Program and Grants Committee recommends)

- f. **Motion:** To authorize staff to reword, refine, and categorize the list of risk factors to be more family centered. (Program and Grants Committee recommends)
- g. **Motion:** To approve the corrective action determination as presented for the 3 local partnerships identified: Georgetown County, Horry County, and Sumter County. As a result of corrective action, the local partnerships effected are not eligible to apply for competitive or targeted grants until they have satisfactorily resolved the discrepancies noted on their corrective action plans as determined by SC First Steps. (Program and Grants Committee recommends)
- h. **Motion:** To approve the award of Resources for Early Acceleration and Development in Youth (READY) Infrastructure and Capacity Building round 1 grants to the following twenty (20) Local Partnerships as recommended by the SC First Steps staff review committee: Cherokee, Chesterfield, Colleton, Edgefield, Jasper, Kershaw, Pickens, Saluda, Sumter, York, Beaufort, Darlington, Dillon, Dorchester, Hampton, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, Orangeburg, and Williamsburg Local Partnerships to not exceed \$485,750 in total funding per year for three years. Before grant funding is awarded, for the following ten (10) local partnerships (Beaufort, Darlington, Dillon, Dorchester, Hampton, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, Orangeburg, and



Williamsburg), SC First Steps staff are authorized to enter into activity and budget revisions as identified through the grant review process. All funded local partnerships must remain in good standing and free from corrective action through the final approval of the State Board of Trustees at their October 2022 meeting. (Program and Grants Committee recommends)

- i. **Motion:** To receive the 2021-22 Fiscal Year Financial Audit. (Finance and Administration Committee recommends)

Dr. Williams reported on the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee and the work on ensuring the overarching measures of success align with the Birth Through Five Plan key measures of progress.

Ms. McConnell reported on the Local Partnerships Programs and Grants Committee. She announced that Aiken County and Sumter County will be removed from corrective action plans. She also provided an update on the twenty READY grant recipients. Mr. Cromwell shared that York County and Clarendon County were no longer on corrective action plans.

Mr. Holt reported on the Finance and Administration Committee. He shared that the agency had a perfect financial audit for the sixth year in a row.

Ms. Mjartan provided the Executive Director's report where she gave a legislative update on the agency's budget request. She shared an update on the agency's process on obtaining input and the process of permanent reauthorization. Ms. Dudek shared about the year end appeal. Ms. Mjartan announced the April 20, 2023 date for the A Night to Celebrate Community fundraiser. An update on 4K, staffing, and vacancies was provided.

Ms. McConnell asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Williams provided the motion. Rep. Govan seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 pm by Ms. McConnell.



## **2023**

### **Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council**

#### **Meeting Dates**

Meetings will be held at 2 p.m. at the SC First Steps Office 636 Rosewood Drive Columbia, SC 29201

<b>FEBRUARY 16, 2023</b>	<b>BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL</b>
<b>APRIL 20, 2023</b>	<b>BOARD OF TRUSTEES RETREAT EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL</b>
<b>JUNE 15, 2023</b>	<b>BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL</b>
<b>AUGUST 17, 2023</b>	<b>BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL</b>
<b>OCTOBER 19, 2023</b>	<b>BOARD OF TRUSTEES EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL</b>
<b>DECEMBER 7, 2023</b>	<b>2023 SC SUMMIT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD</b>
<b>DECEMBER 8, 2023</b>	<b>BOARD OF TRUSTEES ANNUAL MEETING EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL</b>



## Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee

**Staff Liaison: Dr. Chelsea Richard**

### REPORT

The committee met on November 21, 2022, via Zoom. Committee members present were: Alexia Newman; Janie Neeley; Dave Morley; committee members absent were: Dr. Amy Williams.

The meeting opened with an update regarding the annual Birth through Five plan progress report that the team hopes to launch at the February meeting, as well as an announcement of the Data Governance Coordinator role vacancy.

The bulk of the committee's meeting was spent discussing the First Steps' new data system (KITS) development and the complexity of First Steps' data that it will streamline. There are three types of First Steps data: (1) case-level data that First Steps collects and maintains for service provision of high-intensity and deep touch programs; (2) case-level data that is maintained in outside systems that are required by the model, like Head Start and Nurse Family Partnership; (3) aggregate count data that is input at regular intervals throughout the year for lighter touch programs. KITS will help staff at all levels navigate these three types of data that each come with their own complexities, as well as better gather data for annual reporting.

Next, the committee discussed a problem staff found with the overall annual number of those directly served reported to the General Assembly in the FY22 Agency Accountability Report, which was isolated to one program implemented in six counties. The details of the problem and solutions are outlined in the committee's meeting minutes and will be officially communicated with a variety of stakeholders (General Assembly, Governor's Office, Executive Budget Office, Board of Trustees, state and local partnership staff) before the Board meeting. The final FY22 number is 57,435 children directly served by First Steps, which is a 55% increase over last year – a tremendous accomplishment.

The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing the potential scope of the five-year agency-wide evaluation (due to the General Assembly on November 1, 2024). This committee will be involved in the planning of that evaluation.



## Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee

**Monday, November 21, 2022, 2-3PM via Zoom**

Committee Members Present: Alexia Newman; Janie Neeley; Dave Morley

Committee Members Absent: Dr. Amy Williams

First Steps Staff Present: Dr. Chelsea Richard; Georgia Mjartan

### MEETING MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 2:03PM. The meeting opened with an update about the annual Birth through Five plan progress report that the team hopes to release at the February meeting. Staff are working to gather data and accomplishments to highlight during the first year of the Birth through Five Plan. Despite the most recent data available being from 2020 (the first year of the covid-19 pandemic), there was incremental, positive progress, particularly for health care access related measures. Further, the Early Childhood Integrated Data System work is ongoing, despite a current vacancy in the Data Governance Coordinator role.

First Steps' new data system (KITS) development is ongoing and has finished the requirements gathering phase. User acceptance testing with a small group of state office staff has begun. The bulk of the committee's meeting was spent discussing the complexity of First Steps data and how KITS will support parents in better understanding their progress and child's development and help service providers better navigate service delivery, input data in a timelier fashion, and turn data into action. Further, KITS will allow for better case management, as 4K and local partnership programs will be in the same data system. Local staff will be able to see a family's history of programming with First Steps and have more seamless hand offs between local partnership and 4K programs. There are three types of First Steps data: (1) case-level data that First Steps collects and maintains for service provision of high-intensity and deep touch programs; (2) case-level data that is maintained in outside systems that are required by the model, like Head Start and Nurse Family Partnership; (3) aggregate count data that is input at regular intervals throughout the year for lighter touch programs. KITS will help staff at all levels navigate these three types of data that each come with their own complexities, as well as better gather data for annual reporting.

Next, the committee discussed a problem staff found with the overall annual number of those directly served reported to the General Assembly in the FY22 Agency Accountability Report, which was isolated to one program, Reach Out and Read, implemented in six counties. This program was implemented in three counties the previous year, and three additional counties were added in FY22. This program is implemented in pediatric clinics, where clinicians are distributing books to families and using the book in the exam room as a tool to complete a developmental screening. Data for this program are type 3 (see above), as they are reported from the clinic to the local partnership twice a year. Reach Out and Read counts well-child visits as their primary outcome, not the number of children served, which is First Steps' primary interest. Annually, Local Partnerships report these data to First Steps, and this year, well-child visits were misinterpreted as the number of children served at



either the clinic or local partnership level (differed by partnership). This is an overestimate because children attend several well-child visits a year; in the first year of life, for example, seven well-child visits are recommended. Further, local partnerships are one funding source for the total amount of money invested in this program in their county. Traditionally, First Steps local partnerships only count the number of children their investment reached, not the total pot of funding. Therefore, the number of children directly served by Reach Out and Read needed to be adjusted, as well as the total number of children directly served. The final FY22 number is 57,435 children directly served by First Steps, which is a 55% increase over last year – a tremendous accomplishment.

Staff are working diligently to ensure that the number is corrected in all places, and the General Assembly, the Board, and state and local staff will receive official communication about this correction. While the current systems and processes in place caught this error, staff will continue to improve them, so issues are caught earlier. Solutions to be implemented include flagging numbers reported annually that are higher than expected, adding narrative to the annual numbers served report, and refining the way the annual numbers served report is organized. Finally, state staff will work closely with the state office of Reach Out and Read for future reporting needs.

The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing the potential scope of the five-year agency-wide evaluation (due to the General Assembly on November 1, 2024). This committee will be involved in the planning of that evaluation. At the committee's next meeting, staff will present an analysis of data quality to inform the scope and scale of a potential longitudinal study. The committee's meeting adjourned at 2:51PM.





**INSTITUTE FOR FAMILIES IN SOCIETY**

## External Evaluation of South Carolina First Steps Child care Technical Assistance and Training Programs

FY19-FY21

**FINAL REPORT** | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

October 24, 2022



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## OVERVIEW

The mission of South Carolina First Steps (First Steps) is to work collaboratively to ensure that all children start school ready to reach their highest potential with engaged support from their parents, caregivers, and communities. Achieving this mission requires use of a wide range of programs and strategies to support children ages 0-5 and their families, and that reach early childhood stakeholders within communities and across the state. As a quasi-governmental organization, First Steps is well positioned to reach the early childhood stakeholders across the state, as it consists of a state office located in Columbia, SC, and a network of local partnership offices in each of the 46 counties within the state.

One important objective for First Steps is to ensure that children are ready for kindergarten. While kindergarten readiness is impacted by many factors operating at the individual, family, community, and system levels of the social ecology, high quality early care and education experiences can prepare children for kindergarten and can influence child outcomes over a lifetime. First Steps is an important part of the state network of agencies and organizations who provide support for early care and education programs and providers.

In recognition of the importance of early care and education programs to children's academic readiness and success, First Steps devotes a significant portion of funding provided to Local Partnerships to support child care technical assistance and training. Legislatively, First Steps is required to evaluate prevalent programs on a five-year schedule (SC State Code § 59-152-50). Prevalent programs are defined as >10% of total expenditure of Local Partnership formula funding; child care technical assistance and training are considered a prevalent program under this definition. Furthermore, the legislation dictates that First Steps shall: "...contract with an external evaluator to develop a schedule for an in-depth and independent performance audit designed to measure the success of each prevalent program regarding its success in supporting the goals of the State Board and those set forth in Section 59-152-20 and Section 59-152-30. Results of all external performance audits must be published in the First Steps annual report."

This external evaluation is designed to evaluate the reach and impacts of child care technical assistance (TA) and training programs operated by First Steps County Partnerships during a three-year time frame of FY18-19 through FY20-21. Of note, child care TA activities from FY14 to FY 18 were previously evaluated by the Institute for Families in Society in a report published in November 2019 as part of an overall evaluation of the impact of First Steps County Partnership programs. Outcomes assessed included the number of TA site visits made and changes over time in the quality of the child care environment (using data from standardized observational measures). Statistically significant positive changes in classroom environments (pre/post) were seen in 4 of 5 years on the Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale and in 3 of 5 years on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale. Over the evaluation period, the number of child care providers involved in TA services increased from 130 to 157. The number of hours of administrative TA provided was approximately 2000 in FY14 to FY16; in FY17 approximately 1,400 hours of administrative TA were provided. The current evaluation extends this prior work by extending the evaluation period's time frame, including a wider array of archival data on TA programs, including archival data on Training programs, and inclusion of primary data collection to augment the available archival data provided by First Steps.

## **EVALUATION FOCUS: TA AND TRAINING PROGRAMS**

First Steps County Partnerships provide child care TA through two different programs: Quality Enhancement (QE) and Quality Counts (QC). While program delivery specifics and program reach for QE and QC differ, both share the common goal of providing high-quality, individualized, supportive, collaborative child care technical assistance to child care providers (defined for this evaluation as child care programs, which can be either center-based or family-based). TA is provided by First Steps Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs), who work collaboratively with child care providers to assess areas of need and to create Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) that guide the TA services and supports provided. QIPs allow the tracking of progress toward identified goals for improvement.

More specifically, QE programs involve one year of coaching and support for child care providers at the classroom level through quality assessments, goal setting, twice/month onsite technical assistance, 8 hours of training, and funding for classroom materials/equipment.

Similarly, QC programs also involve coaching and support over the course of a year. QC programs utilize a continuous quality improvement framework; an initial assessment based on five quality standards results in a “star rating level” from 1-5. The TA provided is based on the initial rating level; services include site visits, 8 hours of training, monthly director network meetings, and funding for classroom materials/equipment.

First Steps County Partnerships also provide or support training for child care providers as a separate but related service. Training is provided in multiple ways, including training provided by TAPs (for counties who offer QE or QC) and other local or state agencies or organizations. First Steps child care training events are planned at the local (county) level; training content areas are derived from local needs assessments conducted in various ways in collaboration with a range of local early childhood stakeholders. This training for child care providers is designed to support high-quality service delivery and meet the annual professional development requirements for child care staff.

Relevant for understanding the First Steps child care TA and Training programs that are the focus of the current evaluation, it is important to acknowledge that multiple state-level entities support child care providers through TA, training, and related activities. Specifically, the SC Endeavors Registry (formerly known as The Center for Child care Career Development or CCCCCD), operated by the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS), is the formal system professional development system for child care professionals to track their educational attainments, certifications, training hours, and other professional development activities. The required topics and number of annual training hours are established by SC Endeavors and vary by type of child care provider (centers or family homes) and level of staff (i.e., Director or Teacher). Child care providers (sites) are certified or licensed by SCDSS and may choose to participate in the voluntary quality rating and improvement system operated by SCDSS known as ABC Quality. Involvement in the ABC Quality rating system is important for child care providers, as parents/caregivers use these ratings to select providers. Providers with higher ratings may obtain enhanced child care voucher payments as well as professional development supports and opportunities.

## EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Within the complex state context for child care providers, the current evaluation is focused on the training and TA programs provided by First Steps local partnerships. The evaluation is driven by research questions that seek to describe and understand the impact of these child care TA and training. Broadly speaking, these questions include the delivery and reach of these programs and impacts on child care providers and the child care environment. Given these goals, this evaluation adopts an evaluation and planning framework known as RE-AIM (<https://re-aim.org/>). This framework evaluates the reach, efficacy, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of child care technical assistance and training efforts.



**RE-AIM** elements as applied to the current evaluation and the associated research questions addressed in this evaluation are defined below.

### **R: REACH**

- o What is the reach of the TA and Training programs across local partnerships/counties?
- o How many child care providers participated in TA and training programs?

### **E: EFFICACY**

- o How has involvement in TA impacted ABC Quality participation and ratings?
- o How has involvement in TA impacted teacher retention?

### **A: ADOPTION**

- o To what degree have local partnerships adopted TA and/or Training programs as part of their service array?

### **I: IMPLEMENTATION**

- o What are the demographic characteristics of the First Steps Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) workforce who implement TA and/or Training?
- o What are the characteristics of the TA and Training programs provided over the evaluation period (number of TA visits, type and length of TA visits, number of Training events)?
- o What topic content areas were addressed by First Steps TA and Training programs?

- o For TA, what similarities and differences are noted across counties in Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs)? Are child care providers meeting goals established in the QIP's?
- o For Training, how many trainings and training hours were provided during the evaluation period? Across local partnerships, what areas of similarity and difference are seen across counties in Training Plans?
- o What perspectives do TAPs and County Executive Directors have of First Steps TA and Training programs?
- o What perspectives do child care providers have of First Steps TA and Training programs?

**M: MAINTENANCE**

- o Based on evaluation findings, what recommendations can be made to support and enhance maintenance of local First Steps TA and Training programs over time?

Existing archival, quantitative data as well as qualitative data collected specifically for this evaluation are used to address these research questions. Of note, special attention is paid to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred during this evaluation period.

**EVALUATION SUMMARY**

One important objective for First Steps is to ensure that children are ready for kindergarten. While kindergarten readiness is impacted by many factors operating at the individual, family, community, and system levels of the social ecology, high quality early care and education experiences can prepare children for kindergarten and can influence child outcomes over a lifetime. First Steps is an important part of the state network of agencies and organizations who provide technical assistance and training for early care and education programs and providers, devoting a significant portion of funding provided to Local Partnerships to support child care technical assistance and training.

This external evaluation examined the reach, efficacy, adoption, and implementation, of child care technical assistance (TA) and training programs operated by First Steps County Partnerships from FY18-19 through FY20-21. This evaluation built on a prior evaluation of child care TA activities from FY14 to FY 18 included in an overall evaluation of First Steps local partnership activities by the Institute for Families in Society at the University of South Carolina in 2019. The current evaluation expanded upon the prior evaluation by extending the time frame of the evaluation period, inclusion of a wider array of archival data on both TA and Training programs, and inclusion of primary data collected from TA providers, County Executive Directors, as well as child care providers.

First Steps County Partnerships provide child care TA through two different programs: Quality Enhancement (QE) and Quality Counts (QC). While program delivery specifics and program reach for QE and QC differ, both share the common goal of providing high-quality, individualized, supportive, collaborative child care technical assistance to child care providers (defined for this evaluation as child care programs, which can be either center-based or family-based). TA is provided by First Steps Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs), who work collaboratively with child care providers to assess areas of need and to create Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) that guide the TA services and supports provided. QIPs allow the tracking of progress toward identified goals for improvement.

As a separate but related service, First Steps County Partnerships also provide or support training for child care providers. Training is provided in multiple ways, and includes training provided by TAPs (for counties who offer TA programs), as well as by other local or state agencies or organizations. First Steps child care training events are planned collaboratively with early childhood stakeholders at the local (county) level and are based on local needs assessments.

The framework used for this evaluation, RE-AIM (<https://re-aim.org/>), guided questions regarding the reach, efficacy, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of child care TA and Training programs. Overall evaluation findings are reported below, using this framework.

## **R: REACH**

The TA and Training programs offered by select First Steps local partnerships are an important part of the child care system in South Carolina, impacting a significant portion of the child care provider workforce in the state during the three-year time frame of the current evaluation (FY19-FY21). This level of reach suggests that First Steps plays an important and significant role in provision of child care TA and Training programs within South Carolina.

TA: The total number of unique individual child care providers (directors/teachers) reached by TA programs over the course of the evaluation ranged from a high of 1490 in FY19 to a low of 1133 in FY21. This decrease in the number of providers reached over time is consistent with the reduction in the number of counties that provided TA programs over the evaluation period (likely due to COVID-19 impacts). Yet, despite a decrease over the time frame of the evaluation, First Steps TA programs are reaching a significant number of child care providers in the state. Based on 2020 data, there are an estimated 12,350 individuals in the early childhood teaching workforce (<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/south-carolina/>). TA programs thus reached approximately 9-12% of this workforce each year of the evaluation period. At the close of FY21, First Steps TA programs were present in 28% of South Carolina counties.

Training: At the close of FY21, First Steps Training programs were present in 80% of South Carolina counties. The number of unique providers reached by Training programs each year increased from 3750 in FY19 to 6265 in FY21, likely due to increases in online delivery of Training as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the 2020 estimate of 12,350 individuals in the early childhood workforce, it appears that the First Steps Training programs reached approximately 30-50% of the estimated early childhood workforce within each fiscal year of the evaluation period.

## **E: EFFICACY**

This evaluation focused primarily on the impact or efficacy of the intensive TA programs provided by local First Steps partnerships. This evaluation found that child care providers receiving TA, who were enrolled in the ABC Quality Program, did evidence an increase in their ABC rating level over time. However, as we do not have a comparison group of child care providers who did not receive TA support, caution is warranted in fully attributing these changes in quality to the TA support provided.

Due to the impacts of the pandemic, limited data was available to examine the impact of TA on the quality of early childhood environments using well-established assessment measures (ITERS and ECERS). Data provided by First Steps was for FY19 and the first half of FY20; within this time frame, no statistically significant changes were seen between initial and interim ratings on these measures.

Another possible area of impact of TA is on retention of child care teachers. High quality, dedicated support could encourage workforce retention. However, data limitations (e.g. missing data on exit dates) prevented the research team from fully exploring the impact of TA on child care teacher retention.

## **A: ADOPTION**

When TA and Training programs are considered, it must be understood that local First Steps County Partnerships have broad flexibility to determine which programs are implemented. Variations in county and stakeholder services and capacity, as well as financial resources, impact the service array. In addition, First Steps is mandated to be collaborative and non-duplicative in-service provision. Given these contextual factors, during the evaluation time frame, TA programs were adopted in just over 30% of counties in the state. Qualitative data from TAPs and Executive Directors note both a need and a desire to increase the number of counties providing TA programs, as well as a desire to increase the number of dedicated TA providers.

In contrast to TA programs, Training programs were supported in most counties (80%) by the end of the evaluation period in FY21. Over the evaluation period, the number of counties providing both TA and Training programs ranged from 13-14. This suggests that only a small portion of counties across the state are linking First Steps TA with Training programs. This is a focus area for growth, as stand-alone training programs are unlikely to have lasting impact if provided in the absence of intentional and focused support within the child care environment.

It is important to note that the evaluation time frame (FY19-FY21) included the onset of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020. Given this monumental event, it is noteworthy that the number of counties providing TA programs evidenced only a slight decrease. The growth in Training programs offered was likely positively impacted by the ability to provide training in online formats, with a concomitant increase in reach to the child care provider community.

## **I: IMPLEMENTATION**

A number of evaluation questions addressed aspects of implementation of TA and Training programs.

### Implementation of TA:

The implementation of TA programs is primarily accomplished by First Steps Technical Assistance Providers, or TAPs; thus, understanding this workforce is important. The number of TAPs dedicated providers grew over the course of the evaluation, from 25 to 29. This workforce appears to be primarily female, with the majority holding four-year college degrees or master's degrees in fields related to early childhood. That said, it is important to note that demographic information was incomplete (e.g., for sex and self-described race).

TAPs providers were extremely active during the evaluation period; indeed, a total of 8878.50 hours of TA were provided during the evaluation period. That said, the number of hours of TA provided decreased substantially over the evaluation period, from 4200.50 hours in FY19, to 3155.75 in FY20, and to 1522.25 hours in FY21. This decrease in the number of hours provided is most likely due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated closures of child care centers/homes in the later years of this evaluation period.

For QC programs, the number of TA site visits provided over the course of the evaluation time frame was 7299. Overall, the most common topics addressed in these site visits included Center Operations and Management (17.9%), Other (17.4%), Staff Management/Supervision (10.6%) and Goal Planning (10.2%). Overall, an average of 6.37 visits were provided to each unique child care provider per month; visits averaged 1.32 hours in length.

Another way to examine data related to TA program implementation is by assessing the overall number of classroom visits (used in the QE program); 6088 visits occurred during the evaluation period. A wide range of topics were covered in these visits; those commonly addressed included Health/Safety (10.8%), Staff-Child Interaction (10.4%), and Classroom materials (8.5%). These topic



areas took precedence over other important topics that each represented less than 2% of topics addressed, such as parent involvement, mental health consultation, developmental screening, social-emotional development, special needs, and cultural diversity.

TA efforts to support child care providers are guided by collaboratively derived Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs). The evaluation team reviewed QIPs from 9 counties, representing approximately half of the counties that participated in TA programs over the course of the evaluation period. The number of QIPs obtained from each of the 9 counties varied widely, from 2 to 30. It is noteworthy that the format of the QIPs varied from county to county with little consistency between counties. The variation in format included significant variation in whether goals were included and how/if action steps and measures to meet those goals were documented. While many action steps to meet the general goals noted on the QIPs had a time frame for completion, these were typically in 6-month increments and the action steps were not written/documented in a format to allow assessment of whether they had been met. Based on the sample of plans obtained and the variations in documentation, it is not possible to draw meaningful summary conclusions regarding the number or types of goals or action steps met/completed. The majority of QIPs did not document goal attainment or completion.



### Implementation of Training Programs:

First Steps local partnerships were active in offering Training programs during the course of the evaluation period. Over the three-year period, a total of 726 trainings were provided by local partnerships. Examination of training data obtained from First Steps revealed that the most common topic areas reported were for categories mandated for coverage by SC Endeavors (i.e. child growth and development, curriculum, health and safety, program administration, child guidance, nutrition, special needs, and professional development). During the evaluation time frame, significant variation was noted in the number of trainings provided by topic. The most common topic was curriculum, followed by child growth and development and child guidance. Training in the areas of special needs and program administration were less common.

The research team also examined Training Plans developed by local First Steps partnerships that guide training efforts each year. These training plans were created in collaboration with local early childhood stakeholders; while the number of collaborators varied, the most county partnerships reported working with 3-4 partners in this process. Most training plans were derived from needs noted in surveys of key early childhood stakeholders or from surveys given as part of training courses; county-level data on violations noted by SCDSS were also used to drive selection of training topics. Within the training plans, consistent with the quantitative data provided by First Steps, the most common topic areas reported were for the seven categories mandated for coverage by SC Endeavors as noted above. A wide range of other areas were addressed, albeit less commonly. Less common topics included Mandated Reporter training, behavior management, self-regulation, grief, mindfulness, and anti-bias or diversity, equity, and inclusion. Few training plans mentioned specific curriculum; Pyramid Model, Conscious Discipline, and Creative Curriculum were the only specific models noted in the plans reviewed. Within Training Plans, the most common method of follow-up from training events were training surveys and contact with child care providers through meetings, phone calls, or emails. Informal avenues of communication were also mentioned.

To ground the quantitative analyses of TA and Training program implementation, a total of four focus groups were held. Two focus groups were held with TAPs and two were held with local county First Steps Executive Directors. Across these important key stakeholder groups, rich information was obtained that highlights strengths of these programs, as well as areas for further development.

Focus group data highlights that First Steps plays a unique role in the early care and education (ECE) landscape because participation is voluntary, non-regulatory, strengths-based, long-term, individualized, and grounded in trusting and empowering relationships. That said, strong relationships between First Steps staff and child care providers are a necessary, but not sufficient condition, to support high quality program implementation. Furthermore, because services are voluntary, it is critical that services are experienced as value added, rather than as increasing demands or burdens on already over-worked service providers.

Focus group participants note the importance of the challenges facing the child care workforce. Even with high quality service provision, moving the needle of child care quality is challenging in the context of the devaluation of ECE work, including low wages, lack of respect for ECE providers, and related issues with teacher turnover, burnout, and an insufficient supply of child care. Focus group participants suggest that innovations to TA/training that explicitly address challenges of workforce turnover and the socio-economic realities of working in ECE could be helpful. This might include a shift from the center focus, to linking services to ECE providers in portable ways that both promote that provider's capacity to advance quality wherever they work, and that are experienced as investments in that provider's career trajectory over time. Such changes could also provide a foundation for more meaningful and accurate assessments of program effects (at the individual child care provider level). Additionally, providing stipends, incentives, and other ways to validate



participants' time, energy, and important work may help to improve participation and sustain effects of TA and training.

Focus group participants suggest a need to continue improving awareness both of the importance of ECE, and of the particular role and strengths of First Steps in supporting ECE. This involves expanding public awareness so that more stakeholders become invested in improving ECE quality, as well as continuing efforts to improve communication and coordination with other organizations providing support services to ECE centers and providers. Good communication and coordination with other early childhood serving organizations can help ensure that First Steps staff are fully and respectfully included in broader efforts to address ECE quality across the state.

Focus group participants identified potentially important differences in what is meant by child care "quality" – some organizations focus on meeting basic regulatory requirements, while First Steps tries to take a broader approach that incorporates a range of evidence-based strategies to promoting healthy early development. Clarifying these differences, building community buy-in to improve quality above and beyond regulatory requirements, and developing flexible resources to support quality improvement efforts are important for expanding the reach and effectiveness of First Steps TA and training.

Consistent with findings in this evaluation, focus group participants note the variation in local First Steps programs from county to county. This highlights important flexibility for county offices to respond to local needs and priorities. However, smaller counties experience some limitations in the opportunities and resources they can access to impact ECE quality. Innovations to facilitate collaboration and the sharing of resources and supports could provide more even access to First Steps ECE services.

## **M: MAINTENANCE**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING FIRST STEPS TA AND TRAINING PROGRAMS**

Given the evaluation data obtained, recommendations for enhancing and supporting the ongoing implementation of both TA and Training programs are offered below.

- While local flexibility is a strength of First Steps, it may be helpful to establish state-level goals for the reach and adoption of TA and Training programs. The data from this evaluation can be considered an initial benchmark for goal setting.
- Simultaneous adoption of both TA and Training programs is occurring in a minority of SC counties. It is recommended that First Steps consider methods to enhance the number of local partnerships that are offering TA and Training programs together. Indeed, combining training with intensive TA is considered a best practice to integrate new or novel approaches into existing, everyday practice.
- Should First Steps desire to expand the reach and adoption of TA and Training programs, consideration should be given on ways to expand the number of dedicated TAPs providers. Indeed, in some counties there is only a single TA provider or a part-time TA provider, while other (often larger) counties benefit from an established group of TA providers who are able to work in concert to meet local child care provider needs.
- Based on evaluation of the Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) and consistent with our qualitative findings, it is evident that TAPs would benefit from specific training in coaching

models for professional development. Specific support is needed to assist in the development of “SMART” goals as part of the collaborative process used to create QIPs. “SMART” goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. Enhancing the level of specificity of goals and steps to reach those goals would allow for a way to track and shape behaviors to the desired end.

- Consideration should be given to creating a standardized template for QIPs to support consistency across the state, and to enhance the quality and utility of the plans themselves.
- Regarding the content of TA and Training programs, it is recommended that these efforts are expanded to include focus on important and timely topics, such as child behavior management, infant mental health, consultation with parents/caregivers, inclusion, and reflective supervision. It is recognized that such topics may not reflect mandatory areas of training required by SC Endeavors for all child care providers. That said, intentional efforts to include training on key topics outside of those that are required is important.
- The reach of Training programs is significant and is driven by locally and collaboratively derived county-level training plans. Within the training plans, enhanced specificity in documentation of training needs and training follow-up is needed. At minimum, both pre-and post-training evaluations are recommended (as many plans noted only end-of-course evaluations) and methods to capture changes in daily practice are also needed.
- To assess the impact of TA and Training programs, it is necessary to continue use of valid and reliable observation tools to assess quality of care within child care centers and homes. This data can augment self-report data collected from child care providers regarding impact of training, as well as non-standardized observations of TAPs as they work in the child care settings. With COVID-19 pandemic restrictions lifting, it is understood that observational assessments of child care quality (ITERS and ECERS) are resuming.
- To fully understand the acceptability and impact of TA services, it is recommended that First Steps local partnerships adopt consistent and quantifiable methods for obtaining ongoing feedback from child care providers involved in TA programs. Examples include the routine use of consumer satisfaction measures after each TA visit, as well as at the close of each year of service. One method for examining impact of visits is through use of very brief measures (i.e. 1-4 questions) similar to those that are used in therapeutic contexts and that assess the working alliance, alignment regarding the goals and methods of the TA services provided, and an overall rating of the consultation session.
- Future evaluations would benefit from capture of meaningful data from child care providers directly, as they are the focus of TA and Training programs. Unfortunately, challenges with regard to survey distribution to child care directors, and therefore to their teachers, was a barrier to inclusion of this key stakeholder group in this evaluation. Based on the limited data obtained, online surveys, if widely distributed, are a valuable tool for obtaining feedback from child care directors. For child care teachers, it is recommended that other methods (e.g., interviews) be used to more fully capture their perspectives on TA programs.
- As noted in qualitative findings from this evaluation, ongoing efforts are needed to elevate the role of First Steps local partnership training and TA as an important and integral part of the state early childhood system. This is especially needed given the large number of entities involved in providing such supports for child care providers. The individualized, collaborative, and non-regulatory nature of the TA programs, in particular, is important to emphasize.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIRST STEPS DATA CAPTURE AND DATA SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

The following recommendations are provided for enhancing the quality of the archival data collected by First Steps for TA and Training programs.

- For child care providers receiving TA and training, including individual child care provider employment start and end dates in the data set can support evaluation of retention as an important outcome.
- To reach the recipients of TA programs more easily, it is recommended that a data base be created and maintained of child care directors at the local level that is accessible by the state First Steps office.
- To assess the impact of TA efforts more fully on child care quality, it is important that the First Steps data set capture dates of ABC Quality program application, formal enrollment, and exit from this program by child care providers.
- Several of the databases examined contained missing or incomplete data. Efforts to maximize the quality of data and to reduce missingness are needed.





To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees

From: Jennifer McConnell

Date: November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**RE: Local Partnerships Program and Grants Committee- Report**

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The Local Partnerships Program and Grants Committee met on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022; Minutes of the meetings are attached. The following motions were approved unanimously.

**A. Program Guidelines Updates**

**a. Update to Program Guidelines- Childcare Scholarships**

Motion: The Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee approves the updated program guidelines for the Evidenced-based Child Care Scholarship program for Grant Year 23.

**\*Motion was made by Shelley Canright, seconded by Roger Pryor. Passed unanimously.**

**b. Update to Program Guidelines- correction of identified errors in posted document.**

Motion: The Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee approves the corrected Program and Operational Guidelines for implementation in Grant Year 23.

**\*Motion was made by Shelley Canright, seconded by John Hayes. Passed unanimously.**

**B. Updates**

**a. Derek Cromwell, Chief Partnership Officer**

- i. Gave updates on issues affecting two Local Partnerships voted on by the Finance Committee:
  - 1. Greenwood County Match waiver.
  - 2. Edgefield County Conflict of Interest issue.

**b. Betty Gardiner, Director of Grant Making and Development**

- i. Gave an update on the status of READY grants and future schedule.

**C. Meeting Adjourned-**

- a. Jennifer McConnell 12:27pm.



## Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee Meeting

November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Virtual

11:30pm- 1:00pm

### Minutes

#### Attendance:

Board Presence: Chair Jennifer McConnell, Shelley Canright, John Hayes, Roger Pryor

State Staff Presence: Derek Cromwell, Kerry Cordan, Jon Artz, Lis Guimaraes, Kate Roach, Carletta Isreal, Janice Kilburn, Betty Gardiner, Kathy Fitzgerald.

#### 1. Meeting Called to order:

- a. Jennifer McConnell at 11:40.
- b. Jennifer McConnell and turned over to Derek Cromwell. Due to time and technical issues, we moved into the action items while we had a quorum.

#### 2. Action Item

##### a. Child Care Scholarships- Kate Roach

- i. In coordination with DSS, SCFS has changed the way it implements and distributes Child Care scholarships to Local Partnerships.
- ii. Kate explained the reasoning behind the change and the benefits to both SCFS and the Local Partnerships who offer this program.

#### Motion :

The Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee approves the updated program guidelines for the Evidenced-based Child Care Scholarship program for Grant Year 23.

Motion : Shelley Canright

Second: Roger Pryor

Vote: All said Yes

#### 3. Action Item

##### a. Program Guidelines- Kerry Cordan

- i. Over the course of the last few months, we have been made aware that the posted version of the Program and Operational Guidelines did not match what was approved in this committee.
- ii. SCFS staff also made other minor tweaks to language to make clearer.
- iii. Have done a thorough review and to error on the side of caution, bringing back to P&G for approval again.
- iv. Formal trainings were conducted by SCFS for the Operations guidelines and the Parenting Program Guidelines for all Partnerships. Childcare guideline training will be completed by end of year.

#### Motion :

The Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee approves the corrected Program and Operational Guidelines for implementation in Grant Year 23.

Motion: Shelley Canright



Second: John Hayes

Vote: All said Yes

**4. Updates**

**a. Chief Partnership Officer- Derek Cromwell**

- i. Finance Committee will be voting on tomorrow for a waiver for Greenwood County due to match requirement violation.
- ii. Finance Committee also voting on a conflict-of-interest issue in Edgefield County (ECFS). ED daughter obtained employment with a school district who contracts with ECFS.

**b. Ready Grants- Betty Gardner**

- i. Outcome statements will be added to the local partnership's Grant Amendment that will be released for signature ASAP.
- ii. Round 2, Infrastructure and Capacity , Sustaining and Expanding Child Care TA programs. New applications will be due by January 20<sup>th</sup> and will be brought before this committee.

**5. Meeting adjourned-** Jennifer McConnell at 12:27 pm

- a. Next Meeting TBD Jennifer McConnell and Derek Cromwell will work out the Schedule for 2023 as this was our last meeting for 2022.



## Child Care Scholarships (703)

Evidence-Based -OR- Evidence-Informed Strategy

Expenditures on child care scholarships shall be considered evidence-based when connected to one or more additional evidence-based programs. Note additional requirements for linking to a Child Care Training strategy in Section 3, B) in the Child Care Training guidelines.

Stand-alone scholarship expenditures, without connections to evidence-based companion strategies, shall be considered evidence-informed.

### SUMMARY

As of July 1, 2022, SC First Steps Local Partnerships no longer purchase child care vouchers through the SC DSS Voucher program. SC First Steps Evidence-Based Vouchers are a special voucher category designated by SC DSS exclusively for SC First Steps Local Partnerships. To qualify for a SC First Steps Evidence-Based Voucher, First Steps Local Partnership client parents or caregivers must be enrolled in an evidence-based program through the Local Partnership.

Unit of Delivery > Child

### Targeting

Targeting Clients At-Risk of Early School Failure

Each SC First Steps-funded scholarship client shall possess two or more Board-identified risk factors:

- A preschool-aged child has been abused
- A preschool-aged child has been neglected
- A preschool-aged child has been placed in foster care
- Eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, e.g. Food Stamps) or Free School Lunches (130% of federal poverty level or below – with first priority given to TANF-eligible clients whose annual family income levels fall at 50% of federal poverty level or below)
- Eligibility for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Parts B (Preschool Special Education, ages 3-5) or C (BabyNet, ages 0-3)
- A preschool aged child with a developmental delay as documented by a physician or standardized assessment (not screening tool)
- Teenage mother/primary caregiver at or under the age of 20 (at the time of the focus child's birth)
- Low maternal/primary caregiver education (less than high school graduation at the time of focus child's birth)
- A preschool-aged child has been exposed to the substance abuse of a caregiver
- A preschool-aged child has been exposed to parental/caregiver depression
- A preschool-aged child has been exposed to parental/caregiver mental illness
- A preschool-aged child has been exposed to parental/caregiver intellectual disability
- A preschool-aged child has been exposed to domestic violence within the home
- Low birth weight (under 5.5 lbs.) in association with serious medical complications.
- English is not the primary language spoken in the home
- Single parent household and has need of other services
- Transient/numerous family relocations and/or homeless
- Incarcerated Parent(s) (parent(s) is incarcerated in federal or state prison or local jail or was released from incarceration within the past year)
- Death in the Immediate Family (death of a parent/caregiver or sibling)
- Military Deployment (Parent/guardian is currently deployed or is within 2 years of returning from a deployment as an active duty member of the armed forces. Deployment is defined as any current or past event or activity that relates to duty in the armed forces that involves an operation, location, command or duty that is different from his/her normal duty assignment.)
- Recent Immigrant or Refugee Family - One or both parents are foreign-born and entered the country within the past 5 years



- Child was removed for behavioral reasons from one or more childcare, Head Start or preschool setting
- A young child who is eligible for Medicaid
- A pregnant or postpartum individual who is eligible for Medicaid

Clients participating in the Nurse Family Partnership strategy (in which participating mothers are selected during pregnancy) may be considered presumptively eligible for scholarship support with priority to clients with the lowest family incomes.

In the event that unique and/or emergency circumstances warrant, Partnerships may offer scholarships to children who do not meet the risk definition above, given prior written authorization from SC FirstSteps.

## Service Delivery

### **Administration and Use**

Child Care Scholarship clients must participate in a First Steps evidence-based program to receive First Steps-designed Evidence Based Voucher via SC DSS. Clients who qualify for a First Steps-designed SC Voucher will not have to meet any additional SC DSS qualifying criteria. Scholarships connected to DSS via the Local Partnership must limit use to providers who are enrolled in the ABC Quality program and accept SC Vouchers.

If a First Steps Local Partnership operates an in-house scholarship program, they must demonstrate non-supplantation of SC First Steps funds (see Section B) and receive approval from SC First Steps for operating “in-house” scholarships.

### **Non-Supplantation**

SC First Steps funds shall not be used to supplant – or in place of – other forms of public funding available to clients’ families for the provision of child care tuition. Current or transitional TANF clients must be referred to the SC Department of Social Services for enrollment in the SC Voucher Program. Age- and income-eligible clients shall be made aware of their service delivery options via Head Start, preschool programs available through the local school district, and the First Steps 4K program.

### **Developmental Screening**

SC First Steps partnerships funding child care scholarships shall ensure the completion of the age-appropriate developmental screening Ages and Stages Questionnaire – 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (ASQ-3) for each scholarship recipient – with results to be shared with parents. The ASQ-3 shall be administered within the first 90 days of receiving a child care scholarship for the current program year. If an ASQ-3 screening indicates one or more delays or potential delays, a follow-up screening shall be conducted within 90 days and referrals made (as appropriate) to either BabyNet or their local school district for additional evaluation. The ASQ-3 screening must be conducted on at least 80% of eligible clients. Scholarship recipients may be considered exempt from this developmental screening requirement if they are receiving services under IDEA or Head Start, or are enrolled in a developmental surveillance program such as Help Me Grow. Such exemptions shall be indicated in the First Steps Data Collection system.

Additional screenings, such as health screenings and the ASQ:SE2, are encouraged. Screenings may be conducted by the partnership, the child care provider, or another community partner as local needs and resources dictate.

## Monitoring

Partnerships connecting clients to SC First Steps Evidence-Based Vouchers through SC DSS must:

- Review scholarship reports from DSS to ensure all scholarship funds are being used and that qualified applicants are connected to a provider and receiving services in a timely manner (i.e., no “pending” scholarships);

Partnerships operating in-house scholarships must:

- Collect daily attendance data from each center receiving scholarships, at least monthly, to determine if scholarship funds are being used appropriately;
- Conduct unannounced monitoring visits to each center to verify child enrollment and family eligibility at least monthly; and
- Set scholarship reimbursement rates consistent with the local market, not to exceed the maximum reimbursement rates of the SC Voucher Program (unless authorization by SC First Steps is on file).

## Integration with Other Readiness Interventions



- Partnerships are strongly encouraged to integrate the provision of scholarships with additional First Steps (or partner organization) strategies and may require participation in these additional services as a condition of funding at the discretion of the Partnership Board.

#### Parent Training

- Child care scholarship parents/guardians who are new to the program in the current fiscal year shall receive at least one hour of training on the benefits of high quality child care.

#### Data Collection

- Regardless of whether partnerships operate child care scholarships through DSS or in-house, partnerships must enter client demographic data, scholarship and provider information, service dates, screenings, training attendance, and connections to other partnership or community services within the First Steps Data Collection system (FSDC). Additionally, partnerships may choose to enter monitoring visits to providers within the child care module of the FSDC.



To: SC First Steps Board of Trustees

From: Tim Holt, Chairman, Finance and Administration Committee

Date: November 16, 2022

**RE: Finance and Administration Report**

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The Finance and Administration Committee met via Zoom conference call on November 16, 2022, to receive updates from staff and to take up action items. Detailed meeting minutes are attached. The committee brings forward two action items through the Consent Agenda, and the following updates.

**ACTION: Match Waiver Request for FY 2021-22 for Greenwood County First Steps**

We reviewed a request from Greenwood County First Steps to waive the match requirements for FY 2021-22. The Executive Director retired in May and did not complete the documentation for the match for the last year prior to his leaving. The Greenwood County First Steps Board is making good progress and working closely with SC First Steps to meet all of their requirements. Greenwood County First Steps achieved a match of 11.3% instead of the required 15%.

There was general discussion by the Committee. David Morley motioned that the waiver be approved, and the Committee voted unanimously to accept. The motion will go to the Board of Trustees to approve the waiver for the match requirement for Greenwood County First Steps for the 2021-22 year.

The Committee makes the following Motion through the Consent Agenda:

**Motion: To approve the waiver request from Greenwood County First Steps for match for the 2021-22 fiscal year.**

**ACTION: Conflict of Interest Request for Edgefield County First Steps**

We reviewed a request from Edgefield County First Steps to support their resolution of a conflict of interest. The Board of the Local Partnership reviewed a situation with a vendor of theirs that wanted to hire an immediate family member of the Executive Director. All appropriate steps have been taken to both identify the possible conflict, appropriate recusal from decision making, and independence of the body that is involved in decision making. The Local Partnership is asking for First Steps Board to approve as is required in the Grant Agreement. This is a small county, and it is difficult to recruit and retain qualified candidates.

There was general discussion by the Committee. David Morley motioned that the request be approved, and the Committee voted unanimously to accept. The motion will go to the Board of Trustees to approve the conflict-of-interest request for Edgefield County First Steps.

The Committee makes the following Motion through the Consent Agenda:

Motion: To approve the resolution of the conflict-of-interest request from Edgefield County First Steps.

### **First Steps State Office**

#### **Financial Report**

2022-23: The YTD financial report was reviewed by Mr. Barnes. The organization continues to be in good financial condition. Expenditures to date are a little low but that should change as funds are distributed.

#### **Formula Funding Allocation Model Task Force**

Staff will be setting up at least one meeting of the Task Force during the second week of December. We hope to have any recommended changes to the full Board in February.

Other updates can be found in the meeting minutes.



## Minutes from Finance and Administration Committee Meeting

November 16, 2022

Members present: Tim Holt, Chairman, David Morley

Members not present: Jacque Curtin, CPA

Nonmembers present: Mark Barnes, Director of Administration; Lavinia Tejada, CPA, Director of Finance and Audits

With all public notices being provided, the Zoom meeting was called to order by Tim Holt at 9:00 am.

### **Required Action Item: Match Waiver Request for 2021-22 for Greenwood County First Steps**

Mr. Barnes presented a request from Greenwood County First Steps to waive the match requirements for FY 2021-22. He mentioned the fact that the Executive Director retired in May and did not complete the documentation for the match for the last year prior to his leaving. He also mentioned the Greenwood County First Steps Board was making good progress and working closely with SC First Steps to meet all of their requirements. Their actual rate was 11.3% instead of the required 15%. Staff recommendation was to support and approve the waiver request.

There was general discussion by the Committee. David Morley motioned that the waiver be approved, and the Committee voted unanimously to accept. The motion will go to the Board of Trustees to approve the waiver for the match requirement for Greenwood County First Steps for the 2021-22 year.

### **Required Action Item: Conflict of Interest Request for Edgefield County First Steps**

Mr. Barnes presented a request from Edgefield County First Steps to support their resolution of a conflict of interest. He mentioned that fact that the Board reviewed a situation where a vendor of the Local Partnership had implemented a committee to hire staff to fulfill their agreement for program services. The independent committee appropriately reviewed the candidates and selected two candidates to fill the two required slots. One of the two candidates is a member of the immediate family of the Executive Director for the Local Partnership. This candidate would not be an employee of the Local Partnership and would not be supervised by their family member. However, the agreement would be administered by the Executive Director. This individual would not be responsible for setting the salary level or disciplinary actions of the employee. Any actions by the Board that would affect the employee would be independent of the Executive Director and she would recuse herself of those actions. All appropriate conflict of interest disclosures were made, and the Local Partnership has handled the request per the requirements in the Grant Agreement. This is a small county, and it is difficult to retain and recruit qualified candidates. Staff recommendation is to approve the request.

There was general discussion by the Committee. David Morley motioned that the request be approved, and the Committee voted unanimously to accept. The motion will go to the Board of Trustees to approve the Conflict-of-Interest request for Edgefield County First Steps.

## **First Steps State Office**

### **Financial Report**

The YTD financial report for 2022-23 was reviewed by Mr. Barnes. SC First Steps is in good financial shape. He shared that the projected budget for FY 2022-23 is greater than \$66 Million. This is about the same amount as last year. Although expenditures to date are low, this will change as the payments are made to the Local Partnerships and other vendors, including the 4K providers. He mentioned that grants from the READY Funds were starting to go out as well and they would be awarding those funds between now and the end of the fiscal year. There was discussion about where we are in relation to full expansion of 4K for our students. Mr. Barnes mentioned that the previous fiscal impact study indicated that almost 4,400 students were estimated for full implementation of the private 4K providers. At the first of November we had almost 3,100 students enrolled, which is approximately 10% more than last year. We have also increased our reimbursement to \$5,100 from \$4,800 last year. The actual cost for the providers has also gone up significantly in the last couple of years. Estimates of the cost now range from \$7,000 to \$10,000 per year. We are working closely with DSS to assist with getting appropriate vouchers to child-care centers for the time after the 4K school day which will help with the financial concerns of the cost. Mr. Barnes also mentioned the donations report and the Summit coming up in December.

### **State Budget Update**

SC First Steps submitted a single state budget request to the Governor's Office for the upcoming 2023-24 state fiscal year. The total is almost \$9 million. Staff have met with the Governor's office and staff with the House Ways and Means Committee to share and discuss the request. They will be setting up meetings with the staff with the Senate Finance Committee as well.

### **Local Partnerships**

#### **Local Partnership Update**

Mr. Barnes provided an update on the Local Partnerships. He mentioned the progress that Abbeville and Greenwood County First Steps are making. He also mentioned at least two FOI requests that had been received. One to SC First Steps which was very large and would require significant cost to respond. There was general discussion about the Local Partnerships. Mr. Barnes will keep the Committee up to date on any changes or new information.

#### **Allocation Model Update**

State Office staff have been working with Dr. Max Learner to evaluate the allocation model and come up with suggestions, per the request of the Board of Trustees. We are ready to schedule the first meeting of the Allocation Task Force during the week of December 4 through the 10<sup>th</sup>. Notices will go

out soon to set this up and involve the state Board as well as the Executive Directors of the Local Partnerships. There was general discussion about the current Allocation Model and possible improvements. A meeting time for the Task Force Meeting was tentatively set up for Tuesday, December 6 at 10:00 am. This would be a zoom meeting to allow more people to attend. A second meeting would most likely be needed during early January so that recommendations can be made to the Finance and Administration Committee at that month's meeting. Then it can go to the full Board in February.

#### **4K Program**

Staff gave an update on the program's status during an earlier part of the meeting.

#### **Other**

Mr. Barnes gave an update on our partnership with the State Department of Education related to the status of the ESSER agreements.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 am.



October 4, 2022

South Carolina State Office of First Steps  
Attention: Mark Barnes  
636 Rosewood Drive  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Mr. Barnes;

The Greenwood County First Steps Full Partnership Board sincerely apologizes for not meeting the required match for the FY22 program year. However, a wide range of circumstances, such as the neglect of the previous Executive Director, caused the partnership to fall short of the required 15% match for FY22.

We are respectfully asking for a waiver to avoid being on corrective action for our in-kind match with consideration to the partnership's circumstances from the last fiscal year. This oversight was due to the neglect of an employee who is no longer with the organization. Since then, we have replaced the executive director and corrected management issues.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me, Loretta Parker, at 864-993-9059 or Santasha Highley, at 864-388-4102.

Respectfully Submitted,

Loretta Parker  
Greenwood County First Steps Board Chair

Santasha Highley  
Interim Executive Director, Greenwood County First Steps

cc: Greenwood County First Steps Full Partnership Board

## Edgefield County First Steps Conflict of Interest statement

A potential conflict of interest has been identified by the Edgefield County First Steps Partnership Board. It is anticipated that the Edgefield County School District will be the vendor for the Enhanced Early Education strategy that is a new strategy for Edgefield this fiscal year. One of the applicants who is potentially going to be recommended to be hired is a member of the immediate family of the ECFS Executive Director. The Edgefield County First Steps Board has been made aware of the conflict and it was discussed at both the September 22, 2022, and the October 10, 2022, board meetings. At the October 10, 2022, board meeting, the Board unanimously voted to approve the request for a waiver of the conflict of interest by the First Steps State Board of Trustees.





October 10, 2022

Members Present: Janice Cleveland, Christa Harris, Jenny Mims Herlong, Gail Jackson, Phyllis Lott, Betsy Painter, Stephanie Wallace, and Renee Williams

Members Absent: Carla Dorn, Blair Massey, Jennifer Satterwhite, Heather Trotter, and Amy Wilhelm

A meeting of the Edgefield County First Steps Partnership Board was held on October 10, 2022. The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m.

The first item on the agenda was approval of the Board minutes from the previous meetings. Candi called everyone's attention to the minutes from the August 8, 2022, and the September 22, 2022, meetings. Candi stated that the September minutes have been corrected to indicate that Phyllis Lott was in attendance. After a motion from Jenny and a second from Renee, the minutes for both meetings were approved.

The next item on the agenda was the Executive Director's report for September (see attached). Candi briefly highlighted a couple of items. Gail Jackson asked about the hearing and vision screenings that were done for the child care centers by Lander University students. This was our first year coordinating this effort and we are hopeful that this will continue yearly.

Candi then called everyone's attention to the FY23 Performance Report for the first quarter. Enrollment for most programs is very good. There were no child care trainings, but 3 will take place in October. Candi did express concern about the Nurse Family Partnership program. Enrollment for this program has been very minimal for the past 2-3 years and several of the current families will be graduating this program year. Candi had a conference with supervisory staff this past Spring about enrollment concerns and there has not been much improvement. No new families have been enrolled this fiscal year. If there is no improvement during the second quarter of this year, Candi will arrange another meeting with program staff in January and ask for a plan to increase enrollment.

Candi mentioned the FY 23 financial report. There is not a formal report for first quarter as we are still waiting for the first quarter invoices for the Nurse Family Partnership and Early Childhood Education programs. We also just had a reallocation completed this morning and several journal entries need to be done to correct charges that had to be made to other accounts

because our budget for this fiscal year was not loaded into the finance system in time to pay some bills. Candi will present a written financial report at the November meeting.

The next item on the agenda was the allocation of extra carryover funds, which includes both state funds and private (cash) funds. The carryover still needs to be finalized by our Regional Finance Manager (RFM) and the State Office finance department. Candi gave the Board members a handout with requests for allocations of the carryover funds (see attached). There is a total of \$18,385 of state funds carryover (with \$14,000 already allocated) and \$27,876 in private funds carryover (with \$20,000 already allocated). This leaves \$4,385 in state funds to be allocated, and \$7,876 in private funds to be allocated. Candi stated that we have been told by the state office that we could not use either our ESSER grant funds or our state funds for the gift cards for incentives for non-First Steps families who complete our nurturing parenting series so some of our private (cash) funds will need to be allocated for these. Candi also requested some funds be available for our in-house scholarships as there is one family that has been waiting for an opening at a center and has had some other issues that delayed her ABC voucher approval. At this point, all our ABC vouchers have been awarded but Candi would still like to be able to assist this family. Since this is the first year of the transition to the vouchers, we were told by the state office that we could retain minimal funding for in-house scholarships if necessary. Candi did mention that she was going to request more ABC vouchers as we now have 7 children on our waiting list, but she does not think we will get them. Jenny asked if we could allocate more money for in-house scholarships since our waiting list is growing. Candi is unsure but will ask if this is allowed. After a motion by Renee and a second from Janice, all the carryover requests presented to the Board were approved.

Candi then updated the Board about the Enhanced Early Education program strategy. The Board had been briefed at the September meeting on the potential conflict of interest because a candidate for employment in this program was an immediate relative of the First Steps Executive Director. There is a Request for Proposal for a competitive process to award the contract for the program strategy. If this school district is awarded the contract, it is their intent to hire the relative of the Executive Director. The Edgefield County First Steps Board has been made aware of the potential conflict of interest. There was a motion by Janice and a second from Gail to approve a request of a waiver of the conflict of interest from the State Office. There were no questions or comments, and the motion was approved. Candi will submit the statement of the potential conflict of interest, along with the Board minutes from this meeting, to the State office in the morning. The request will be forwarded to either the State Board Executive Committee or the State Board Finance and Administration Committee for consideration. Candi will notify the Board when a decision has been made.

Candi then brought up the Annual Meeting, which will be on November 14, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. at our office in Johnston. This will be a smaller meeting with no outside speakers and no food. Candi will give Board members a copy of our FY 22 Annual Report at this meeting. Candi did mention that we will hold Board member elections at the end of the meeting. We have 5 members who are rotating off and/or resigning so we need at least 5 new candidates to be Board

members. Candi will send a list of Board categories to the Board and asked for their help in recruiting new members for our Board.

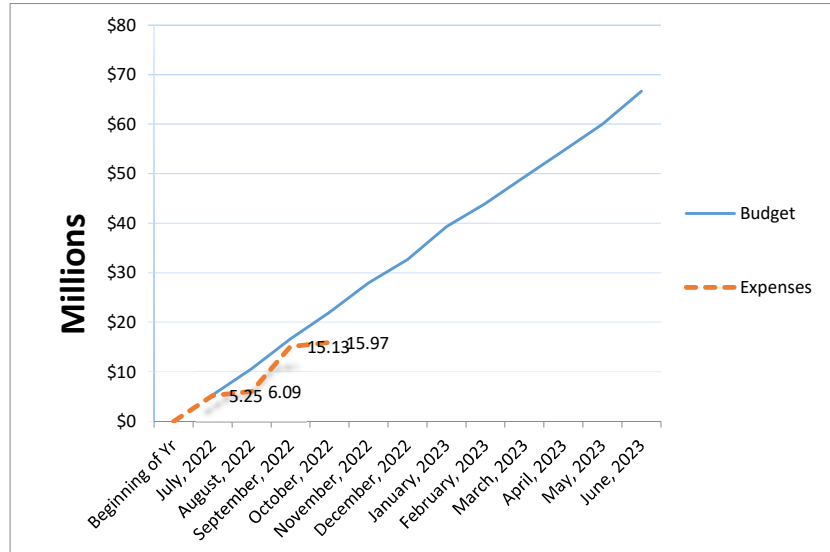
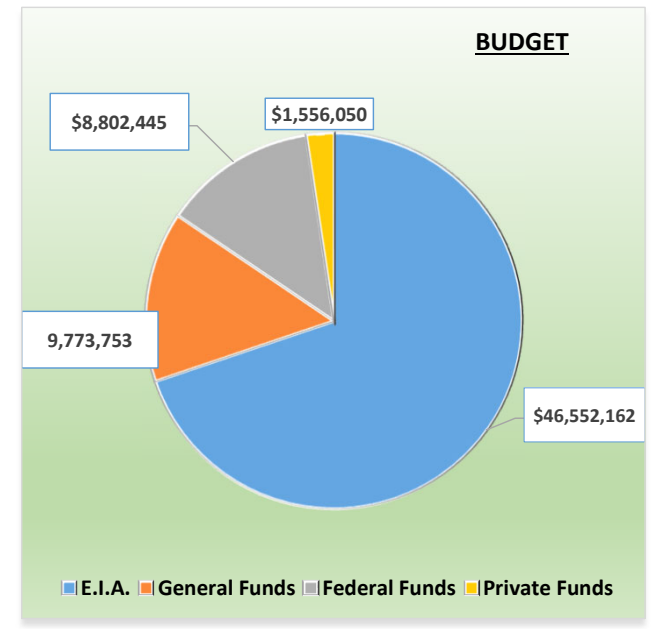
In other business, Candi mentioned our Fall fundraiser and talked about looking into the Nothing Bundt Cake products in place of the Krispy Kreme doughnut fundraiser. Candi said we typically do the fall fundraiser in October but asked if we could postpone the fundraiser slightly because everything and everyone is so busy right now. Candi will get information to the Board in the next couple of weeks and a decision will be made a little later.

Lastly, Candi brought up the Christmas parade and said she wanted First Steps to participate again this year. She said that if we want to give out books again, we will need more volunteers because we just couldn't keep up with the parade while giving out books at the same time. She will order Christmas books and we can discuss more about the parade at the November meeting.

There was no other business, so after a motion by Renee and a second from Phyllis, the meeting adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candi Lalonde, Executive Director



**As of  
October 31, 2022**

Spending Rates	
Projected	33%
Actual	24%

PROGRAMS / OPERATIONS Description	STATE APPROPRIATIONS			FEDERAL GRANTS			PRIVATE FUNDS			GRAND TOTAL		
	Budget	Expended	Balance	Budget	Expended	Balance	Budget	Expended	Balance	Budget	Expended	Balance
LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS	14,435,228	3,658,808	10,776,420	2,612,457	-	\$ 2,612,457	-	-	-	17,047,685	3,658,808	\$ 13,388,877
LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS SUPPORT & TECH ASST.	5,151,504	805,786	4,345,718	-	-	\$ -	1,495,624	-	1,495,624	6,647,128	805,786	\$ 5,841,342
PRIVATE 4-K	32,496,679	10,073,833	22,422,846	1,873,457	-	1,873,457	142,058	-	142,058	34,512,194	10,073,833	\$ 24,438,361
EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL	176,000	3,289	172,711	3,729,725	636,143	3,093,582	-	-	-	3,905,725	639,432	\$ 3,266,294
AMERICORPS	-	-	-	326,703	65,512	261,191	-	-	-	326,703	65,512	\$ 261,191
POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY	2,684,872	629,939	2,054,933	260,103	-	260,103	1,300,000	95,716	1,204,284	4,244,975	725,656	\$ 3,519,319
<b>GRAND TOTAL:</b>	<b>54,944,283</b>	<b>15,171,655</b>	<b>39,772,628</b>	<b>8,802,445</b>	<b>701,655</b>	<b>8,100,790</b>	<b>2,937,682</b>	<b>95,716</b>	<b>2,841,966</b>	<b>66,684,410</b>	<b>15,969,026</b>	<b>\$ 50,715,384</b>

**Notes:**

**1) Local Partnerships:**

- a. Funding Sources: Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funds
- b. Formula allocation cash advances are disbursed on a quarterly basis
- c. Expenditures reflect disbursements from SC First Steps (state-level)
- d. Does not include local-level actual expenses to staff and vendors

**2) Private budgets based on Projected Fund Raising and**

income & prior year cash.	46,552,162	E.I.A.
	9,773,753	General Funds
	8,802,445	Federal Funds
	1,556,050	Private Funds
	<b>66,684,410</b>	

**3) LP Support & Technical Assistance**

- a. Contracted accounting firm (Manley Garvin, LLC)
- b. Accounting Software network support & Data Housing
- c. Programmatic data housing & network support

**Federal Funds:**

AmeriCorps:	326,703
SLDS:	260,103
PDG:	3,729,725
ESSER Funds	4,485,914
	<b>8,802,445</b>

**3) LP Support & Technical Assistance (cont.)**

- d. Workers' compensation insurance coverage
- e. External programmatic evaluation
- f. Financial audits-annually each LP
- g. Does not include local-level actual expenses to staff and vendors
- h. OFS program & finance staff (payroll, rent, contractual, supplies, travel, etc)
- i. Includes LP Countdown to Kindergarten program

**4) State Appropriations Include EIA Funds and General Funds.**

## Donations

FY 2023

As of October 31, 2022



DATE RECEIVED	GENERAL	DONOR/PAYOR	FUNDS	PURPOSE / COMMENTS
Jul 12, 2022	\$ 120	Jennifer Humphries-NFG	Restricted	Cherokee County First Steps
Jul 12, 2022	\$ 10,000	DSS	Restricted	Summit Sponsorship-SC First Steps
Jul 14, 2022	\$ 10,000	Childrens Trust	Restricted	Summit Sponsorship-SC First Steps
Aug 2, 2022	\$ 500	Sisters of Charity	Restricted	Summit Sponsorship-SC First Steps
Aug 2, 2022	\$ 1,000	Head Start Collaboration-SCDSS	Restricted	Summit Sponsorship-SC First Steps
Aug 11, 2022	\$ 2,000	Enterprise Holdings Foundation	Restricted	SC First Steps
Aug 18, 2022	\$ 2,000	Enterprise Holdings Foundation	Restricted	SC First Steps
Sep 8, 2022	\$ 1,500	Dept. of Disabilities and Special Needs	Restricted	Summit Sponsorship-SC First Steps
Sep 8, 2022	\$ 2,500	Institute for Child Success	Restricted	Summit Sponsorship-SC First Steps
Sep 8, 2022	\$ 2,500	Kaplan Early Learning Co.	Restricted	Summit Sponsorship-SC First Steps
Oct 24, 2022	\$ 15,500	Enterprise holdings	Restricted	SC First Steps

\$ 47,620



## Fiscal Year 2022 Year in Review

### **South Carolina First Steps: Working Together So Every Child Reaches Their Highest Potential**

South Carolina First Steps is the state's only dedicated, comprehensive early childhood initiative focused on getting children ready for success in school and life. As both a state agency and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, First Steps works with families, early educators, and partners statewide to support children from birth through age five to close the gap on student's preparedness for success in school. Since the beginning, we have taken a holistic approach to accomplishing our mission, offering services that improve children's health, strengthen families, expand access to quality early care and education, and help transition rising kindergartners into school.

To have the greatest impact on young children requires collaboration across public agencies, community-based entities, and the private sector at both the local and state level. First Steps local partnership boards include a cross section of key early childhood stakeholders who assess local early childhood needs and provide services to young children and their families. First Steps 4K is a partnership between the South Carolina First Steps and private and faith-based child care centers, charter schools and private schools. At the state level, First Steps operates the Early Childhood Advisory Council, the statutorily authorized structure for coordinating all of South Carolina's public investments in early childhood services, ensuring efficient use of federal, state and local funds, and building a cohesive system that ensures young children are healthy and safe, ready for school, and supported by engaged families and communities. Our trustees serve concurrently as ECAC members and our staff coordinates their collaborative efforts.

In FY22, South Carolina First Steps directly served 57,435 children birth through age five with programs that improve children's health, strengthen families, expand access to quality child care, increase participation in four-year-old kindergarten, and help transition rising kindergartners into school. The agency's work with child care teachers, early educators, and child care providers impacted an additional 50,000+ children whose teachers and caregivers participated in First Steps teacher training and child care quality enhancement programs.

Like recent fiscal years, First Steps experienced another year of significant programmatic growth, serving 55% more children directly than last fiscal year. During FY22, First Steps...

- Served 57,435 children directly through our local partnerships and First Steps 4K (+55% over FY21)
- Enrolled 3,433 students in in-person, full-day 4K in 312 classrooms within private, non-profit, and faith-based First Steps 4K providers through the 180th day of school (+29% over FY21)
- Served 4,513 children in high-intensity programs through our local partnerships, which includes evidence-based home visiting and early care and education programs (+30% over FY21)



- Supported 1,415 rising kindergartners in their transition to school through the Countdown to Kindergarten program in summer 2021(+262% over FY21)
- Hosted over 4,461 hours of professional development for child care providers through on-site technical assistance via local partnerships (+116% over FY21)

**Established New Programs and Initiatives**

- Received \$14.7 million over three years from the SC Department of Education through the Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to...
  - Assist underserved students with school transition to kindergarten and Child Early Reading and Development Education Program (CERDEP) classes
  - Recruit and retain South Carolina First Steps CERDEP teachers
  - Provide summer and afterschool learning opportunities that leverage literacy with preschool-aged children throughout the state to accelerate learning
  - Support parents in actively engaging in their child’s education through evidence-based parenting programs, included but not limited to Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)
  - Screen and identify early childhood health and development concerns early, provide support to parents to ensure optimal maternal and child health, and make referrals through Healthy Steps and PASOs
- Secured \$3 million in recurring General Funds to expand First Steps programs, the single largest increase to the local partnerships in the history of First Steps with support from Governor McMaster and bi-partisan legislative support from the General Assembly.
- Awarded \$282,731 in competitive early childhood innovation grants to seven local First Steps partnerships
  - Anderson County First Steps (\$11,374): to implement the Ready Rosie Active Family Engagement System in partnership with four Anderson County school districts (Anderson School Districts One, Two, Three, and Four).
  - Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester County First Steps (\$198,000 over two years): to support the Tri-County Pyramid Play Collaborative, a multi-faceted initiative that integrates the principles of the evidence-based Pyramid Model for supporting children’s healthy development into programs and services for young children and their caregivers.
  - Cherokee County First Steps (\$19,00 over two years): to implement the Reach Out Project, a county-wide community education and outreach initiative to provide Cherokee County families with the information they need to access available programs and services that support their child’s development and family well-being.
  - Chesterfield County First Steps (\$39,357 over two years): to establish a three-year-old classroom at Compass Point, a child development center operated by Chesterfield County First Steps on the campus of Northeastern Technical College that currently serves as a First Steps 4K center.
  - Colleton County First Steps (\$15,000 over two years): to create Bags for Babes, an outreach program to provide every Colleton County family with a child under 3 with information about developmental milestones and local services, as well as an age-appropriate book for the child to keep.





- Launched Connected Families in seven counties (Berkeley, Charleston, Colleton, Lexington, Richland, Pickens, and York) through a collaborative philanthropic investment of \$3.8 million over three years from the Duke Endowment and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Through Connected Families, Department of Social Services case workers refer families to a local First Steps, where they can participate in Parents as Teachers, an evidence-based home visitation program. Families who need additional support may receive Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC) services. ABC is an in-home mental health intervention that is proven to increase parent sensitivity and promote positive parent-child interactions.
- Developed and launched Countdown to 4K. Modeled after the popular and successful Countdown to Kindergarten program, it pairs the child’s soon-to-be 4K teacher or teaching assistant with the child and parent for one-on-one sessions the summer before school starts. The Countdown teachers follow a curriculum and model activities to promote learning at home, provide high-quality learning materials, and – perhaps most importantly - create relationships for strong home-school connections.
- Developed and launched Catch-up to Kindergarten as a response to schools that told us that several students were entering kindergarten in turmoil due to the strains and isolation of the pandemic. Not only were they significantly lacking in learning skills, many were in emotional distress and needed additional support. The Countdown model was implemented in Fall 2021, after the start of school to bolster the children and parents during these difficult times.
- Conceptualized, developed, and implemented First Steps 4K + Siblings, an interagency, nationally-recognized innovation which braids state and federal funds and in this inaugural year resulted in 1,723 children being able to access this additional support for their and their siblings’ enrollment in a high-quality child care program.

**Expanded the Reach of our Existing Programs**

- Implemented the first year of statewide expansion of First Steps 4K successfully with 4,159 students served through day 220 (highest number ever) and expanded geographic accessibility and reach of the program.
- Expanded 4K in Underserved Communities through four grants totaling \$100,000
  - C.A.R.E. Academy, Charleston (\$20,000): to contribute towards remodeling construction of a building with a classroom to meet licensing requirements serving a class of ten four-year-olds.
  - New Generation Daycare and Learning Center, LLC, Greenville (\$30,000): to contribute towards construction of a building with a classroom to meet licensing requirements serving a class of twenty four-year-olds.
  - Plymouth Childcare Development Center, Charleston (\$20,000): to contribute towards construction of a bathroom to meet licensing requirements to serve a class of twenty four-year-olds.
  - This is My Child, Middle Tyger Community Center, Lyman (\$30,000): to contribute towards remodeling construction of a building with a classroom to meet licensing requirements serving a class of ten four-year-olds.
- Supported the opening of a 4K classroom at the Bethlehem Center in Spartanburg in November 2021. In 2020, First Steps awarded \$300,000 in state funds to The Bethlehem



Center based on the community's plans to renovate an underutilized, city-owned building and establish a First Steps 4K program serving 18 children from the Highland community and surrounding areas.

- Granted \$17,664,476 to our network of 46 local First Steps partnerships. A combination of state, federal and private dollars, the funds will directly impact more than 30,000 children and will expand parenting programs, increase the quality of child care, support positive transitions between early childhood and elementary school and improve the health of South Carolina's youngest citizens.
  - \$14,435,228 in state funding to all 46 local First Steps partnerships.
  - \$3,229,248 in federal, state, and private funds in targeted and competitive grant funding to help 44 counties expand and add new programs that successfully prepare children for school.
- Had a successful second year of the First Steps AmeriCorps national service program. Highlights include:
  - 35 AmeriCorps members recruited, of which 27 (77%) completed their term of service
  - 20 sites participated in First Steps AmeriCorps, of which 18 (90%) were First Steps Local Partnerships
  - 17,782 hours were served by AmeriCorps members, of which 16,839.5 (95%) were direct service hours.
  - \$76,242 in Segal Education Awards were provided to members after completing their service term, which are used to pay student loan debt or upcoming tuition costs.
  - 90 volunteers supported the statewide MLK Week of Service project, where 198 First Steps 4K centers received a reading of the same book, 'Different' by Michael Buxton, and 3,600 copies of the book were distributed to First Steps 4K students.
  - 110 families were recruited for participation in Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, of which 66 (60%) families completed the program of at least 26 lessons.
  - 337 families received a referral, screening, or attended a meeting facilitated by Family and Community Engagement members.
  - 3,196 promotional materials were provided to families to promote school readiness, like the South Carolina, Profile of a Ready Kindergartner.

#### **Increased Competence and Confidence of Early Care and Education Workforce**

- Taught over 1,000 teachers of four-year-olds across the state at the virtual, two-day Palmetto Pre-K Jamboree with the theme, "Rooted in Nature: Inspiring Curiosity"
- Trained and oriented 248 total First Steps 4K directors, of which 105 (42%) were new, and 411 total First Steps 4K teachers, of which 125 (30%) were new, in a series of one to two day trainings in our First Steps 4K Academies in preparation for the 2021-22 school year.

#### **Released the State's First Comprehensive Birth through Five Strategic Plan**

- Developed South Carolina's inaugural Birth through Five Plan (2022-2027) over almost three years gathering voices from thousands of families, service providers, and leaders from a variety of sectors.



- Released the plan at a February 2022 press conference at the State House with Governor McMaster, Lieutenant Governor Evette, and all agency directors who serve on the ECAC and whose agencies participate in the Interagency Collaboration Committee.
  - Included four goal areas
    - South Carolina’s youngest children are healthy and safe. - 6 objectives with 17 strategies
    - South Carolina’s youngest children are actively supported by their families and communities. - 4 objectives with 12 strategies
    - South Carolina’s children arrive at school ready to reach their highest potential. - 4 objectives with 17 strategies
    - South Carolina’s early childhood system is aligned, coordinated, and family-centered. - 5 objectives with 16 strategies
  - Included seven “key measures of progress”

**Increased Reach and Collaborative Relationships with State and National Partners**

- Spoke as panelists on national stages
  - Martha Strickland, State Director of First Steps 4K, spoke at a national webinar presented by the Hunt Institute titled, “Supporting Children and Families through a Mixed-Delivery Pre-K System”. Other speakers included: Dr. Barbara Cooper (Secretary, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education); Dr. W. Steven Barnett (Senior Co-Director, National Institute for Early Education Research); Dr. GG Weisenfeld (Senior Early Childhood Education Policy Specialist, National Institute for Early Education Research)
  - Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director of First Steps and the Early Childhood Advisory Council, spoke as a panelist for the Hunt Institute’s virtual “2021 Big Wins for Little Kids”. Other speakers included: Stephen Blanford (Director, Washington Children’s Alliance); Dr. Barbara Cooper (Secretary, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education); Bill Jaeger (Vice President of Early Childhood and Policy Initiatives, Colorado Children’s Campaign); Chris Jones (Director of North Dakota Department of Human Services); Ted Lempert (President, Children Now); Representative Tana Senn (Chair of Children, Youth, and Families Committee, Washington State Legislature); Stephanie Spencer (Executive Director, Urban Baby Beginnings)
  - Rachal Hatton-Moore, Two-Generation Coordinator of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, served on a four state panel at the Education Commission of the States Kindergarten Transition Policy Symposium in Denver, CO to highlight the development of the SC Pre-K to K Transition Plan: Family Engagement, which is aligned with the SC Birth-Five Plan.
  - Director Mjartan and Rachal Hatton-Moore highlighted the work of FirstFive SC on the nationally-distributed Preschool Development Grant Policy Matters Podcast
- Added to the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children as an ex-officio agency member.
- Supported the House Legislative Oversight process for the Department of Commerce by testifying before the Economic Development, Transportation, and National Resources and



the Education and Cultural Subcommittees as members of the education to workforce pipeline.

- Visited our counterpart agency that we were initially modeled after, the North Carolina Partnership for Children, and have started working on collaborative initiatives.
- Received continued support from the Alliance for Early Success to partially fund a government affairs liaison position and to connect us with technical assistance from national experts.
- Communicated to internal and external stakeholders about South Carolina First Steps' strategic plan including mission, values and priorities. A national group funded by the federal Administration for Children and Families (Office of Child Care) sought permission from First Steps to use South Carolina First Steps' strategic plan as an example in the "Systems Building Resource Guide" published by the national Child Care State Capacity Building Center, which provides support and technical assistance to state child care administrators.
- Secured support from the Education Commission of the States to develop a PalmettoPreK Transition Plan to engage families in successfully supporting their child's transition from early childhood to Kindergarten.

#### **Enhanced the Public's Awareness of and Ability to Access our Programs**

- Developed and launched First Five SC, the state's single portal into publicly-funded early childhood programs and services across 10 state agencies and more than 60 different programs and services for young children (local, state, and federally funded). In the four and a half months since launch (February 17 – June 30, 2022), the site had 26,626 unique visitors and 69,003 page views. 2,514 unique families completed the eligibility screener and of those who completed the screener, 83% were eligible for at least one program.
- Continued to lead the development, marketing, and interagency collaborative work driving the success of PalmettoPreK.org, South Carolina's single portal into all publicly-funded PreK programs for 3 and 4 year-olds. In FY2022, this included adding dozens of additional school districts (EIA and CERDEP funded) to the portal with targeted efforts to secure their participation. The site, which launched in February 2020, has now generated 114,923 unique visitors, 17,409 total leads, with 14,619 people children being eligible for at least one program, an 84% eligibility rate.
- Earned state and national media attention with at least 26 pieces of earned media, including television spots and newspaper articles.
- Deepened our partnership with SC ETV by collaborating on the *Countdown to Kindergarten* interstitial series, delivering messages to early learning families via Bright by Text, and producing an early learning focused episode of *Carolina Classrooms* called "First Five SC".
- Launched a tiered approach to this year's Countdown to Kindergarten, including:
  - Public Awareness. The #COUNTDOWNSC social media campaign directs families and communities to countdownsc.org, where they can find useful information to help prepare children for kindergarten. The new website includes tips and resources, a school directory, and calendar of local Countdown to Kindergarten events.
  - Community Events. Across the state, communities hosted celebrations and learning opportunities for rising kindergartners and their families. SC First Steps partnered



- with 19 organizations to offer free events at locations including children’s museums, libraries, parks, schools, and community centers.
- Family Engagement. SC First Steps coordinates with local First Steps nonprofits and schools to provide one-on-one support for children who may be at-risk for academic challenges. The program connects 4K and 5K teachers with their incoming students and families during the summer before school, with five sessions in the home and a final visit in the kindergarten classroom. Specialized support is available for dual-language learners and children with disabilities. In 2022, approximately 400 teachers are expected to participate, serving up to 2500 children.
  - Held the annual South Carolina Summit on Early Childhood with the theme, “From the Start: Prenatal to Three”. Highlights of the two-day, online event include:
    - 465 attendees
    - 22 presentation
    - 14 exhibitors
    - 1,890 chat messages
    - 1 Champion for Children, Debbie Robertson, who after over two decades of service to young children in South Carolina retired in July 2021 from First Steps
  - Developed and successfully executed our inaugural fundraising event, “A Night to Celebrate Community” in Spring 2022, which attracted individual and corporate donations to fund local early childhood community needs. The event exceeded its goal of raising \$70,000, generating a net sufficient to fund each county partnership with an additional unrestricted grant award of over \$1,000.

### **Centered Family and Client Voice**

- Measured the impact of First Steps 4K’s intervention on parents’ ability to return to work and / or school through direct participant surveying, results of which were so positive (70% can now work) that the Governor shared this data in his 2022 State of the State address.
- Continued establishing a culture of listening to and valuing "client voice" through the implementation of "Your Voice Matters," a surveying / continuous feedback loop process involving clients participating in First Steps local partnership programs and First Steps 4K programs. To date, 10 feedback loops have been completed on First Steps 4K, Parents as Teachers, Child Care Quality Enhancement, and Quality Counts with 2,368 individual survey responses from clients ranging from teachers and childcare directors to families. One-time grant funding from national funder Listen4Good ended on June 30, 2022, but the agency is committed to continuing these feedback loops and has developed a strong, ongoing partnership with Listen4Good that extends beyond the grant period.
- Put families at the center of our work, prioritizing their feedback and input in design, development, and continuous quality improvement. This included successfully completing 10 feedback loops of surveying with clients involved in First Steps programs (local partnership and 4K program) and conceptualizing, obtained funding for, and establishing South Carolina's inaugural Family Voice Council, a leadership body created to provide a formal avenue for engagement, input, and feedback from participants and beneficiaries of public programs to the leadership of agencies responsible for administering those programs for children birth through five and their families. During this first full year of existence, the



Family Voice Council consisted of 21 members from across the state and provided feedback and input on a variety of initiatives and state efforts including First5SC.org and South Carolina's first interagency plan to ensure optimal engagement of families during the pivotal transition from early childhood into Kindergarten.

### **Improved our Accountability and Transparency**

- Completed an all-team survey and meaning making focus groups with an external facilitator to understand the agency climate and culture. From the 56 respondents, we learned:
  - 53% highly recommended First Steps as a place to work to family and friends (20% increase from last year)
  - Over 90% of respondents agreed that First Steps is:
    - Family-friendly
    - A positive influence on professional growth
    - Encouraging the voices of families
    - Providing adequate feedback to employees
    - Providing fair and equitable compensation
  - About 50% of respondents agreed that First Steps:
    - Keeps them informed about important news and activities
    - Affirms diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Commissioned the Institute for Families in Society at the University of South Carolina to evaluate the reach and impact of our largest investment through local partnership state formula funding, Parents as Teachers (FY17-19). The study found:
  - 2,602 children from 2,150 families from 34 counties were served during the time period of interest
  - 85% of children were below the age of three at enrollment
  - 3.4 risk factors for early school failure were present per family on average
  - 61,969 total home visits were conducted for an average of 2.3 per family per month
  - Average parenting quality (+30%) and interactive reading (+9%) scores increased from the first assessment to the final assessment
  - Program participation was significantly related to school and well-child visit attendance rates
    - PAT program students were present for a significantly higher percentage of school days than their like-peers. On average, PAT students missed less than 6% of school days.
    - Children of PAT families who were enrolled in Medicaid attended the recommended number of well-child visits at a significantly higher rate than their like-peers. On average, PAT children met approximately half the recommended visits, while non-PAT children met only one-third.
- Secured the services of the Institute for Families in Society at the University of South Carolina to evaluate our local partnership's child care technical assistance programs, which includes intensive, on-site coaching and child care training from FY19-21. The results of this evaluation will be provided to the SC General Assembly by November 1, 2022.
- Continued and improved upon regional meetings between local partnership board members and state board members after a successful first year. These meetings have provided





helpful opportunities for connection, learning, and input. The 2022 sessions have also had an added component of soliciting feedback on reauthorization and the current legislation governing and defining First Steps.

- Concluded year one of development for the First Steps' Knowledge, Information, and Teaming System, a program and case management system for 4K and local partnerships, with AnLar.
- Proceeded on the development of the South Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System (SC ECIDS). As the governing body for SC ECIDS, in FY22, the ECAC:
  - Adopted key questions that focus on the state's early childhood landscape providing distinct, unduplicated counts of children that are eligible and enrolled in early childhood programs, and how existing programs support children's future success.
  - Adopted the Data Governance Charter to ensure that current and future early childhood integrated data initiatives follow a consistent framework, which outlines the scope of the SC ECIDS, roles and responsibilities of the ECAC, the Data Governance Work Groups, and individual members of the Work Groups, and the authority within the governing structure.

#### **Grew our Team**

- Increased our team from 52 to 68 full-time equivalents and leveraged other workforce and associated human capital contributions. Including all position types, there were 101 team members on June 30, 2022 out of 119 total positions, constituting a 15% vacancy rate. This included: 60 of 68 FTE's; 27 out of 37 AmeriCorps positions; 2 out of 2 full-time, temporary, grant-funded positions, 4 out of 4 full time, time-limited positions; 1 full-time, temporary employee; and 7 interns.
- Welcomed an inaugural Government Affairs Liaison, Kaitlyn Richards. Prior to joining First Steps, Kaitlyn was most recently working as a legal clerk in the Pennsylvania State Senate.
- Onboarded three new Board members
  - Michelle Gough Fry, J.D., Ph.D., LL.M, State Director of the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, by virtue of her position
  - Jacque Curtin, COO/CFO at the South Carolina Association of Certified Public Accountants, as a member of the business community
  - Representative Paula Calhoon, as a member of the House of Representatives
- Wished farewell to Representative Rita Allison as a Board member. After over a decade of service on the Board, Representative Allison delegated her seat to Representative Calhoon.