

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2024 – 2026



Acknowledgments

Through partnerships and collaborations, as well as financial support from grants and contributions, Marion County First Steps leverages state dollars to enhance and expand services to children and families.

FUNDING SUPPORT

State of South Carolina: \$200,000
(through South Carolina First Steps)

ESSER: \$97,776

AmeriCorps: \$45,918

IN-KIND SUPPORT

SC Department of Social Services

Pleasant Grove Academy

McGill's Bundles of Joy

Academy of Early Learning

Little Promises Learning Academy

Troy Johnson Learning Korner

Sugar Bears DC/CD Center

Florence County First Steps

Marion County First Steps Board of Directors

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Message from the Executive Director



Spencer R. Scott
Executive Director
Marion County First Steps

The mission of Marion County First Steps (MCFS) has remained the same since 1999, to serve the children of Marion County by assisting families acquire resources needed to ensure their child's success in school and in life. As we reflect on the past fiscal year, we celebrate the perseverance of our mission and the resilience of our educators who adapted to unprecedented changes as we emerged from a worldwide pandemic. We slowly saw our daycares reopening, and MCFS programs flourished, while ensuring proper protocol was being followed for continued safety of staff, daycare providers, families, and children.

Our Child Care Training continued its successful run, ending the year having provided 22 training hours attended by 11 teachers and directors. Our Child Care Scholarship program served 15 children attending 5 facilities across Marion County. Our 4K Program enrolled 88 children in 5 sites. MCFS's Literacy program distributed 1934 books to 26 sites serving 283 children who received 142 reading hours. Our Quality Enhancement (QE) provided assistance to 6 sites, serving 193 children, over 80 visits. Raising a Reader (RAR) and RAR enhanced served a total of 340 children in 5 child care facilities. The HIPPEY program has 4 providers serving 40 families and children. These numbers represent the highest in the state for this program. Nurturing Parenting served 15 families and conducted 6 group meetings. Countdown to 4K (CT4K) served 120 children across 6 elementary schools who received 720 total home and school visits. Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) trained 5 teachers as home visitors who provided 228 home and school visits to the 38 children enrolled.

The 2022 fiscal year demonstrated MCFS is an integral part of a resilient community whose continued support helps their youngest learners. Every dollar invested into MCFS goes back into the community, and your support continues to make a difference.

Spencer R. Scott

Message from the Board Chair



Judge Donald Fling
Board Chair
Marion County First Steps

As sitting Chairperson for the Marion County First Steps Board (MCFS), I recognize the needs and absence of programs within our community. MCFS works tirelessly to fill the need for quality education and programs, but it takes involvement from our entire community.

As we emerged from Covid and returned to life as usual, we have witnessed unprecedented changes, seen new experiences, and made adjustments we never thought we would have to make. Daycares that closed during the pandemic slowly reopened their doors, but most remained shut and unable to recover from the loss they suffered. Our children have been impacted the most from these closures. Currently we are experiencing an increase in daycare deserts and a huge loss of quality educators.

Marion County First Steps has played a crucial role in re-establishing the connection between child and educator. Their programs have worked diligently with the childcare facilities and providers to fill gaps in the community. I am especially proud of the HIPPY and Nurturing Parenting programs as they have started helping our community flourish. Over the last year, MCFS has served the neediest families in the county and provided education for teachers who served those families.

As Laila Gifty Akita so graciously put it "Meeting the needs of the needy is a noble thing to do." I am especially thankful to Executive Director, Mr. Spencer R. Scott, and his staff, who work tirelessly towards a common goal, feeding the minds of our youngest learners.

Donald Fling

Needs Assessment Process

CONVENE

Marion County held two community events to discuss the importance of data collection and completing surveys.

- ❖ Nurturing Parenting (NP) held a group meeting which was attended by 40 parents and their children. Attendees were informed of the upcoming needs assessment and the strategic plan.
- ❖ Raising A Reader (RAR) held its annual Reading Kick Off attended by 87 families. Information was shared and gathered regarding the needs of the community. Attendees received instruction on how to complete the surveys and the importance of listing their greatest needs was stressed.

October 2022 – January 2023

PRIORITIZE

Survey results, collected data and listed concerns were used to create future ideas and activities for implementation of MCFS programs.

The following needs were determined as the greatest concern to the community:

- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Preschool readiness
- ❖ Literacy in rural areas

January 2023 – March 2023



UNDERSTAND

Parent and community surveys were distributed throughout the county. Physical copies, QR codes, and a social media push were mediums used to gather responses. Data collected was organized and studied to determine the community's concerns. Analysis of the data clarified inconsistencies with program participation and community needs/concerns.

October 2022 – March 2023

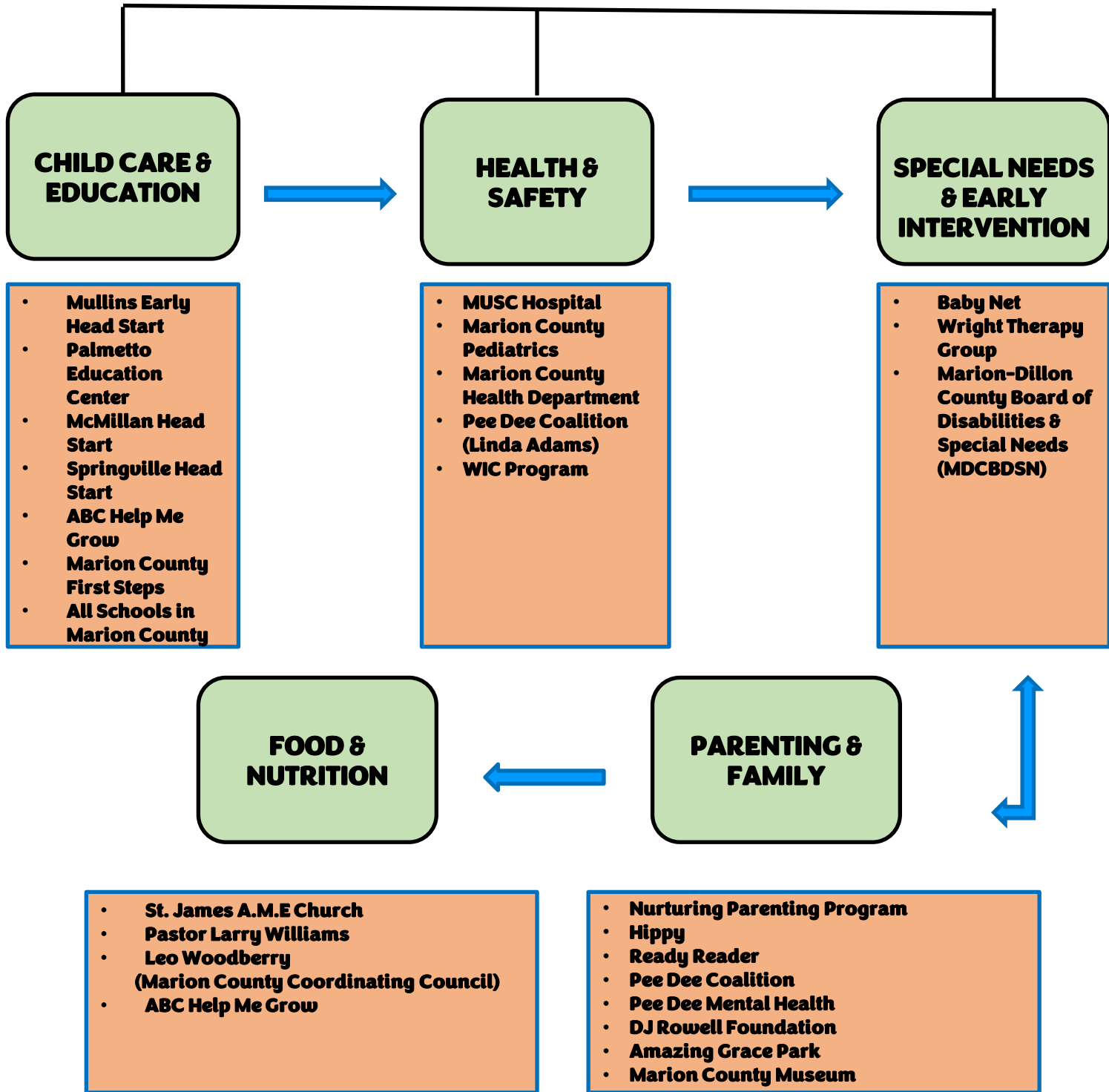
“Countdown to Kindergarten – 4K (CTK4K) has made quite an impact on both children and parents – the highlight for me is bonding over books...”

-Sonazera Hodge
Sugar Bear's Daycare

“With the Raising A Reader (RAR) program, our goal was and is, to use the powerful weapon of reading skills to ensure our kids are equipped to change the world.”

-Loretta McGill
McGill's Bundle of Joy

Asset & Resources



Priorities: Summary

1. TRANSPORTATION

Our goal is to ensure children ages three and up have the necessary means to attend quality child care facilities. Marion County is in need of transportation running in the rural areas, where accessibility to services are obsolete. MCFS along with Marion County Schools superintendent, Dr. Kandace Bethea, and Marion County School bus supervisor, Franklin Washington, look to ensure reliable transportation for children.

2. PRESCHOOL READINESS

Based on statistics and data, preschool readiness is a concern in the county, especially within the rural communities. Our goal is to educate parents and guardians on steps to take to ensure their children are prepared for school. Directors, principals, along with 4K and 5K staff from the public and private sectors will be included in bridging the gap between childcare and public schools.

3. LITERACY IN RURAL AREAS

Due to a lack of access to literacy materials, exposure to books at an early age is not the norm. Within the county, libraries are not always within close proximity to the homes in rural communities. In an effort to increase access to literacy in the rural areas, our plan is to create lending libraries making age-appropriate books more accessible. Lending libraries would be placed at sites across the communities.

Priority One: TRANSPORTATION

Data point

Needs & Assessment Surveys distributed to parents and community providers

- According to the Marion County First Steps surveys, most parents lack reliable transportation to get their children to and from childcare or public schools.
- Currently there is a county bus service that provides transportation to medical facilities, jobs, etc. However, the distance between the pickup locations are not within walking distance. These buses may also not have enough space to accommodate those needing the service. Without a designated child pickup service, they cannot ride the bus by themselves. This creates a hardship for parents & guardians.



“I really enjoyed being in the Nurturing Parenting program, getting insightful information and literacy books for my child. However due to transportation issues, trying to get a ride to Marion from Gresham was hard, so I had to make the decision to discontinue my participation.”

**-Najia Morris
Former parent participant**

Happy Hearts Learning Ladder
Transportation Buses

Priority Two: PRESCHOOL READINESS

Data point

Education Oversight Committee - <https://eoc.sc.gov/>

- According to the SC Education Oversight report, there is a preschool readiness gap in children.

<p>First Steps (CERDEP in Private Centers): 2,345 Emerging Readiness: 30% Approaching Readiness: 44% Demonstrating Readiness: 27%</p>	<p>Formal Private 4K (PIP only): 8,702 Emerging Readiness: 37% Approaching Readiness: 42% Demonstrating Readiness: 20%</p>
<p>Public CERDEP(PIP only): 8,744 Emerging Readiness: 35% Approaching Readiness: 45% Demonstrating Readiness: 20%</p>	<p>Informal 4K Setting (PIP only): 3,415 Emerging Readiness: 55% Approaching Readiness: 34% Demonstrating Readiness: 11%</p>
<p>All CERDEP PIP: 11,089 EM: 34%, AR: 45%, DR: 21%</p>	<p>All Non-CERDEP PIP: 12,117 EM: 42%, AR: 40%, DR: 18%</p>

- Principal Farrah Owens at Academy of Early Learning was contacted for her input, and was able to revisit and verify statistics collected between 2017-2022. Percentage results for children being ready for school showed:

2017: 20%, 2018: 23%, 2019: 25%, 2020: 16%, 2021: 22%, 2022: 24%

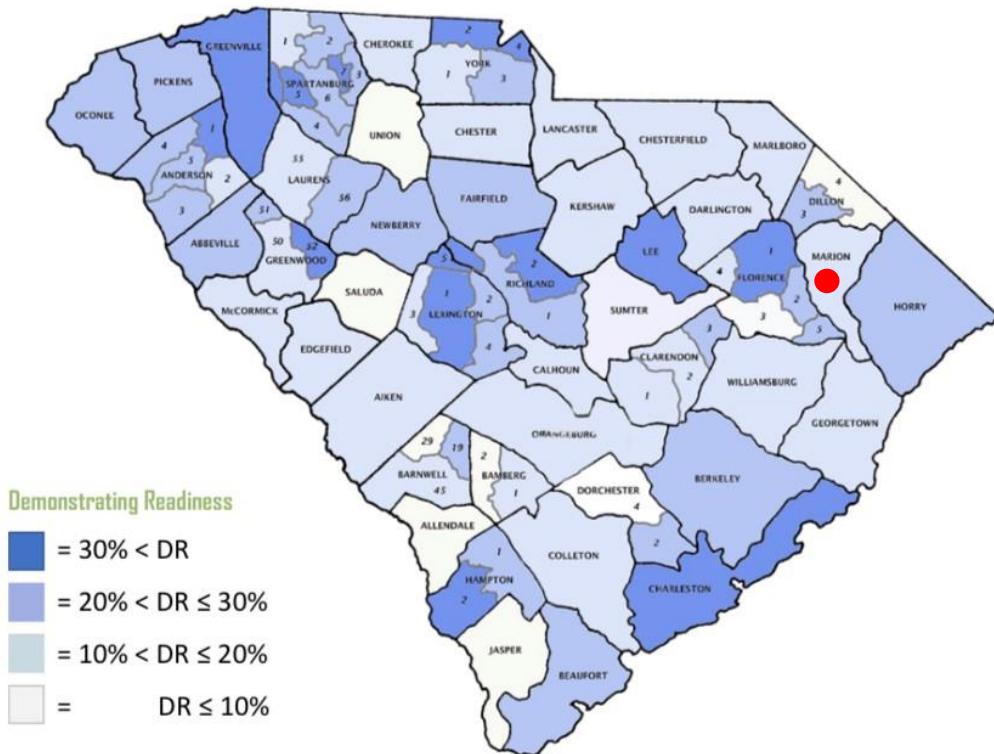
“It is so important for children 4yrs of age to have the opportunity to attend the 4K programs in childcare centers or in public schools. Socially it allows the children to learn how to interact with one another other, and with family members. Secondly, it gives them cognitive development early and helps them in necessary foundational information like reading, mathematics, and science skills. Lastly, the foundation of anything starts early. The Bible says to “Train a child in the way they should go”. Educators researched that vocabulary for a child is established before age 3, so 4K is needed.”

-Janet Simmons
 Former Daycare Owner & Director

Priority Two: PRESCHOOL READINESS CONT'D

Data collected from the Education Oversight Committee - <https://eoc.sc.gov/>
 These are the results of the Modified 2020-21 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)

Readiness Level by SC School District



KRA Performance Higher for Students served by State-funded 4K

An analysis of student performance using data from Pupils in Poverty (PIP) served by State-funded 4K (CERDEP) and Pupils in Poverty (PIP) NOT served by State-funded 4K (CER-DEP) shows that the State's investment in four-year-old kindergarten is beneficial for student readiness.

Poverty Status	Number	Emerging Readiness	Approaching Readiness	Demonstrating Readiness
First Steps (CERDEP in Private Centers)	2,345	30%	44%	27%
Public CERDEP (PIP only)	8,744	35%	45%	20%
All CERDEP PIP:	11,089	34%	45%	21%
Formal Private 4K (PIP only)	8,702	37%	42%	20%
Informal 4K Settings (PIP only)	3,415	55%	34%	11%
All Non-CERDEP PIP:	12,117	42%	40%	18%

Priority Three: LITERACY IN RURAL AREAS

Data point

Google Maps & Library Sites in Rural Areas – Marion County

- There are no libraries or childcare centers in most rural areas – creating a gap in availability of literacy resources.
- Google Maps show the nearest library is anywhere from 10 to 25 miles away
 - ❖ 10 miles away from Nichols, SC
 - ❖ 25 miles away from Britton's Neck/Gresham, SC
 - ❖ 12 miles away from Centenary, SC
- Due to inconsistency with the book mobile in the rural areas, accessibility is limited. As there is no set schedule for the mobile, parents are encouraged to contact the library to have books delivered to their homes.

“As a former teacher in the Britton’s Neck/Gresham area, my students were only exposed to literacy experiences at the school. There is not a library in the area. Many wonderful activities are held at the county library; however it is 25 miles away. Due to transportation constraints, most of my children couldn't participate in these activities.”

**-Beryl Collington
Former Teacher**



Marion County Book Mobile



Sellers Library & Resource Center

Priority Two: LITERACY IN RURAL AREAS CONT'D

Data collected from Marion County Library Service Website and google maps

<https://www.marioncountylibrary.org>

MCLS
Marion County Library System
Marion * Mullins * Nichols * Bookmobile

Marion Main Library

101 SE Court St, Marion, SC 29571, USA

843-423-8300



Map Satellite

Marion Main Library
[Directions](#)

Marion E Godbold St

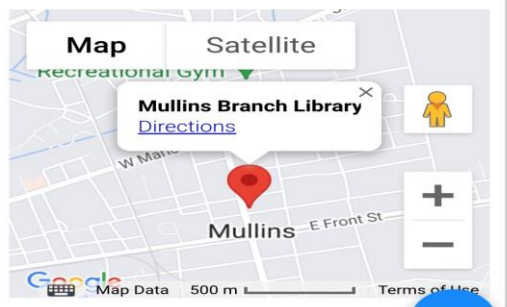
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MCLS
Marion County Library System
Marion * Mullins * Nichols * Bookmobile

Mullins Branch Library

210 N Main St, Mullins, SC 29574, USA

843-464-9621



Map Satellite

Mullins Branch Library
[Directions](#)

Mullins E Front St

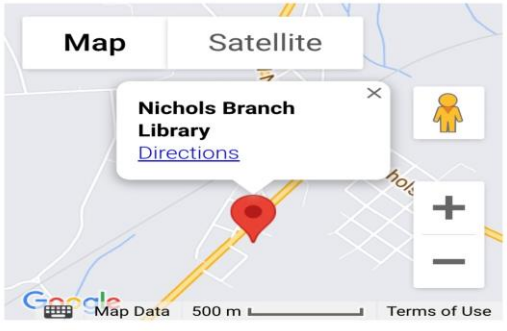
Map Data 500 m Terms of Use

MCLS
Marion County Library System
Marion * Mullins * Nichols * Bookmobile

Library

514 Mullins St, Nichols, SC 29581, USA

843-526-2641



Map Satellite

Nichols Branch Library
[Directions](#)

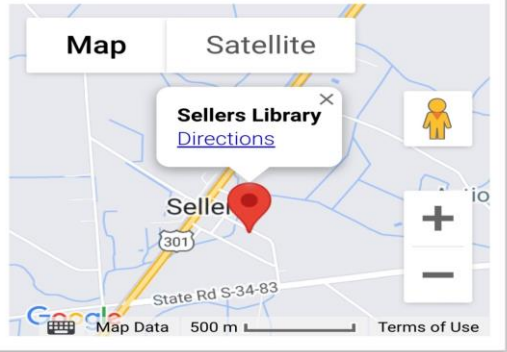
Nichols

Map Data 500 m Terms of Use

MCLS
Marion County Library System
Marion * Mullins * Nichols * Bookmobile

Sellers Library

2635 Main St, Sellers, SC 29592, USA



Map Satellite

Sellers Library
[Directions](#)

Sellers State Rd S-34-83

Map Data 500 m Terms of Use

Next Steps

