

CHEROKEE COUNTY



Getting children ready for school.



**Imagination Library**

**Countdown to Kindergarten**

**Child Care Training and  
Professional Development**

**Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative**

# Annual Report

2016-17

**THIRTY  
MILLION  
WORDS**

**BUILDING A  
CHILD'S BRAIN**

**TUNE  
IN**

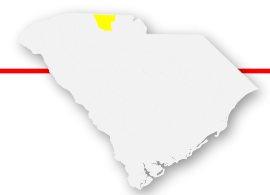
**TALK  
MORE**

**TAKE  
TURNS**

**DANA SUSKIND, MD**

**OUR VISION:**

**Every South Carolina child  
will arrive at kindergarten  
ready to succeed.**



Cherokee County First Steps  
**Dorothy M. Priester**  
Executive Director

## By The Numbers

Indicator	SC	Cherokee County
Children Under Five	293,134	3,394
Children In Poverty	24.4%	29.7%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Graders Scoring "Does Not Meet" Standard in Reading	22.2%	25.9%
Births to Mothers With Less Than a High School Diploma	15.0%	21.2%

KIDS COUNT data provided by



- Since inception, Cherokee County First Steps has leveraged **\$2,038,753** from sources outside state government. *That's \$.49 for every dollar received.*
- **2,155** children were enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.
- **24** children received home visits during Countdown to Kindergarten to help them prepare for school.
- **85** unduplicated child care professionals received **25** hours of high-quality training to meet licensing standards.
- **2** community learning events were hosted, and we participated in **12** education/health fairs for the Talk To Me Cherokee Initiative.
- **Total Children Served in FY17: 2,179**

### Cherokee County First Steps

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Gaffney, SC 29342

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**Board Chair**  
Dr. Ronald Cope

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Cherokee County First Steps continued to place "family first" by focusing on outreach within the community. Attendance at education/health fairs, community events, and home visits helped us to raise awareness of the organization as well as the importance of early education. During FY17, we highlighted Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, the Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative, and Countdown to Kindergarten.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is one of our primary programs. By providing books to children in their home environment, it allowed families access to books and increased parent-child interactions. It is noteworthy to mention that at the end of June 2017, we had more than 63% of the children within the county under age 5 enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

Another key component to promoting early education, was the Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative. Among the initiative's accomplishments this year was launching the second phase of home visiting using the LENA (Language ENvironment Analysis) system in partnership with Piedmont Community Action Early Head Start program. In January 2017, the First Steps state office provided \$5000 in additional funding to cover the cost of licensing for the LENA system to be used by Cherokee and other counties interested in following their model.

In maintaining the community approach, the Countdown to Kindergarten program was utilized. The summer home visitation model connected rising kindergartners and their families with their teachers. The home visits emphasized the classroom expectations for the 24 families involved.

The remaining program provided by Cherokee County First Steps during this year was Child Care Training. Keeping the child care providers and their staff updated on rules and regulations to maintain licensing was important, as the caregivers were an additional element in supporting early education practices. However, attendance numbers decreased this year due to training offered by the SC Department of Social Services.



Healthy Start



Family Strengthening



Early Intervention



Quality Child Care



Early Education



School Transition

## County Programs

Imagination Library  
Countdown to Kindergarten  
Child Care Training  
Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative

## State Programs

Early Head Start  
First Steps 4K

Like us on Facebook!  
[CherokeeCountyFirstSteps](https://www.facebook.com/CherokeeCountyFirstSteps)



Each of the six color blocks of the First Steps logo represents a core area of service, outlining our comprehensive strategy to prepare children for long-term school success.

**With measurable outcomes across each of its six school readiness strategy areas, First Steps is getting results.**



## Healthy Start

We begin with a focus on providing a healthy start to life. This includes prenatal and post-partum services for both mother and baby. In 2007, First Steps collaborated with key philanthropic and agency partners to bring Nurse-Family Partnership to SC having a significant impact on reducing premature births and Medicaid costs.



## Quality Childcare

Quality childcare starts with quality childcare providers. Our quality enhancement and training strategies lead to improved teacher-student interaction, which research shows has a significant impact on a child's development and success in school.



## Family Strengthening

Our home visitation strategies, such as Parents as Teachers, Parent-Child Home and Early Steps to School Success, are helping parents understand their responsibilities to care for and be positive models for their children. As a result of First Steps' intervention and parenting support, 66% of clients initially assessed at "low" levels of parenting have achieved moderate or high levels of parenting skill.



## Early Education

Private-public partnerships through First Steps 4K have led to significant cost efficiencies in the delivery of publicly funded 4K. One recent analysis suggests First Steps is achieving comparable results, without the need for costly capital construction, for 80 cents on the dollar. Early Head Start expands quality early learning and family support to infants and toddlers.



## Early Intervention

Children's school readiness depends on their healthy growth and development. First Steps helps identify potential delays early through developmental screenings and referring children to BabyNet and other early intervention resources.



## School Transition

Each of the corresponding blocks of services leads ultimately to the goal of transitioning children successfully to school. Programs like Countdown to Kindergarten are ultimately preparing children for school success.

**Based on the needs of our community, Cherokee County First Steps focuses its investments in Family Strengthening, Quality Childcare, and School Transition.**

**Children’s reading scores improve dramatically when parents are involved in helping them learn to read.**

## Program Description

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the peak period for brain development related to language is around **nine months of age**. **One of the easiest and most effective ways to build this capacity in young children’s brains is to read to them.**

Cherokee County First Steps is the local sponsor of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, which provides free, age-appropriate books to children age birth to 5 years. Operated by the Dollywood Foundation, Imagination Library is currently in more than 1,600 communities internationally and mails books to about 700,000 children each month.

Children who register with Cherokee County First Steps receive one book per month by mail through the month of their fifth birthday. Each book is carefully selected by a committee of educational specialists.



Author Matt Del A Pena signing his book titled, “Last Stop on Market Street” at the Dollywood Homecomin’ in June 2017.

## Imagination Library by the Numbers, 2016-17

Children Served	2,155
Books Given to Children 0-5	17,411



## This year, our Imagination Library program:

- ✓ Provided one book per month to 2,155 children who were referred from pediatricians, hospitals, 3K and 4K programs at local elementary schools, churches, child care centers, BabyNet, Head Start/Early Head Start, Cherokee County Public Library, Cherokee County School District’s Parents of Preschoolers and Special Services programs
- ✓ All children from the Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative were connected to this program and received books from the Imagination Library
- ✓ We had a part-time Outreach Professional who participated on average twice a month in community and educational outreach events such as: education/health fairs, 4K registrations, elementary open houses, church socials, hospital activities, and company presentations/picnics

## Thank you to our partners!

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Dollywood Foundation                                  | Encounter Church               |
| Broad River Electric Charities                        | Hope Broadcasting              |
| Carolina Pediatric Associates                         | Hopewell Presbyterian USA      |
| Cherokee County Coalition                             | Kiser Development Company      |
| Cherokee County Disabled American Veterans            | Limestone Presbyterian Church  |
| Cherokee County Public Library                        | NAACP Cherokee County Branch   |
| Cherokee County School District                       | Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative |
| Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start | United Way of the Piedmont     |
| Spartanburg Community College, Cherokee Campus        | Walmart of Gaffney             |
| Thickety Mountain Baptist Association                 |                                |

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# Child Care Training

Those who care for young children need high-quality, accessible, and affordable professional development.

## Program Description

High-quality child care hinges on high-quality professional development that meets the needs of the local child care workforce.

First Steps-sponsored training is certified through the SC Center for Child Care Career Development and includes topics in the areas of nutrition, health and safety, curriculum, child guidance, professional development and program administration. Best practices in training include not only the training itself, but follow-up in the classroom.

*"I will be incorporating more songs into our daily routine. We were able to move and have a great time!"*

Yakeeshia Ross  
 ZL Madden Head Start

**Child Care Training Sponsored by Cherokee County First Steps, 2016-17**

Topic:	Sessions:
Musical Games & More	Two Sessions
Early Childhood Building Blocks: Choosing An Assessment	One Session (Part 1)
Early Childhood Building Blocks: Tools for Learning & Authentic Assessments	One Session (Part 2)
Physical Activity: Born to Move & Grove/ Music Enhances Early Literacy Skills	Two Sessions
Keys to Communicating with Parents/ I am a Mandated Reporter	Two Sessions
The Incredible Preschool Years: Cognitive Development/Connecting the Dots: A Developmental Overview	Two Sessions
Blood Born Pathogens	One Session



Local child care staff uncovering new activities to help children learn.

## Training by the Numbers, 2016-17

Total Training Attendance	119
Child Care Teachers and Directors Served	85
Number of Training Sessions Offered	11

### This year, our Training program provided:

- ✓ 85 unduplicated early childhood staff with high quality training
- ✓ 22.5 hours of certified training and 2.5 hours of registered training for staff to meet annual re-certification requirements
- ✓ 4 Directors' Association meetings were held with local child care directors and surveys were conducted as follow-up to training

### Thank you to our partners!

- Cherokee County Child Care Directors' Association
- Kiser Development Company
- Midway Baptist Church
- Piedmont Community Action's Head Start/Early Head Start Program
- SC Center for Child Care Career Development
- SC Child Care Resource & Referral Network

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**Children involved in early learning are more likely to have better academic outcomes.**

## Program Description

Yearly assessments administered in SC determined 4K/5K students in Cherokee County lagged behind in vocabulary skills and other areas. The Talk To Me Cherokee Initiative was formed to address this problem based on the belief in parent talk being one of the world’s most valuable resources. The initiative’s mission is to support families from the earliest stages of a child’s development and prepare the children of Cherokee County for success through language and literacy skill development.

- 700 new neural connections are formed in the brain every second in the first few years of life; and later, connections not being used are reduced due to lack of use.
- 18 months is the age where disparities in vocabulary begin to appear.

Components/Activities include:

1. Group Activities
2. Home Visits with parents
3. Community Outreach Events
4. Information Sessions for Groups and Organizations

### Early Education by the Numbers, 2016-17

Community Learning Events	2
Education/Health Fairs	12

*“I love the program, because it has shown me just how important communication is with your child. I encourage my 5 year old to use as many words and details while explaining things, and asking questions. It has helped both of us. He has an amazing love for books at such a young age; and he gets really excited getting new books to read and learn new things.”*

Michelle Ramirez



One of the children that attended an event taking the time to read a book

### This year, our Early Education program:

- ✓ Community learning events included Chick-Fil-A Family Talk Night and Willis Plaza Fun Fest
- ✓ Educational outreach events included education/health fairs, 4K registrations, elementary open houses, church socials, hospital activities, and company presentations/picnics
- ✓ \$4-9 is the return on investment (ROI) for every dollar invested in early education

### Thank you to our partners!

- United Way of the Piedmont
- Cherokee County School District
- Know(2) Cherokee Initiative
- Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start
- Spartanburg Community College – Cherokee Campus
- Institute for Child Success
- Gaffney Visitor’s Center
- Cherokee County Public Library
- Limestone College
- SC Education Oversight Committee
- SC Department of Health & Environmental Control - Cherokee County Office

Like us on Facebook!  
Talk2MeCherokee

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**Bringing parents and teachers together as partners sets the foundation for success in school.**

## \*CTK by the Numbers, Summer 2016

Children Served	24
Families Served	24
Home/School Visits	144

*\*CTK program data is for June-August 2016, whereas CTK fiscal data includes expenditures from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017.*

## Program Description

Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a summer home visitation model connecting rising kindergartners and their families with their future teachers. The program is designed:

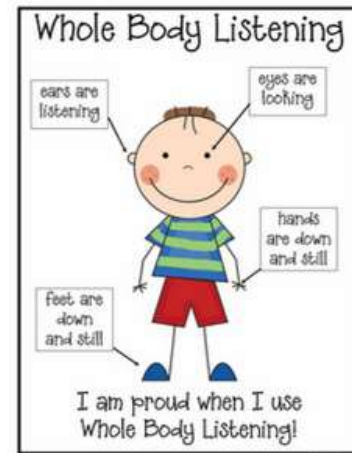
- ✓ to forge strong and lasting home-school relationships,
- ✓ to acquaint children and families with the state and classroom expectations to increase the likelihood of school success,
- ✓ to increase parent involvement in the early grades (particularly in hard-to-reach communities), when children's learning is foundational for life success; and
- ✓ to increase public awareness of the importance of school readiness and provide ways for parents and communities to impact children's early school success.

Countdown to Kindergarten integrates all of the following:

**Home Visitation.** Teachers make six visits over the summer to the homes of participating students and families. Children and families are introduced to actual materials used in kindergarten and are given a Kindergarten Transition Toolkit to keep.

**Learning Celebration.** The last visit is a "field trip" to the school where the child will attend class in the fall.

**Public Awareness.** Throughout the summer, First Steps releases tips to media to help parents and caregivers get children ready for kindergarten.



*The best part of the Countdown to Kindergarten experience was getting to know the teacher and helping our daughter feel comfortable!*

Parent of a Countdown to Kindergarten Child

## This year, our Countdown to Kindergarten program:

- ✓ According to the satisfaction results from parents, the number of parents spent reading daily to their children increased by 60%
- ✓ According to the satisfaction results from parents, 56.52% of CTK parents had a good understanding, an additional 43.48% had a very detailed understanding, of what was expected from them and their child during kindergarten after participating in the program
- ✓ According to the satisfaction results from parents, 69.57% of the CTK parents believed their child's kindergarten teacher was someone their child liked and trusted, with an additional 17.39% knowing their teacher a little bit
- ✓ According to the satisfaction results from parents, 47.83% of CTK parents will actively participate and an additional 13.04% will make it a priority to participate and support their child's education by acting as a volunteer or attending regular meetings (such as PTO, Parent Teacher Conferences, etc.)

## Thank you to our partners!

Cherokee County School District      Alma Elementary School  
Kaplan Early Learning Company      Blacksburg Primary School  
Kiser Development Company      Mary Bramlett Elementary School

Like us on Facebook!

Countdown to Kindergarten-South Carolina:



**Cherokee County First Steps**

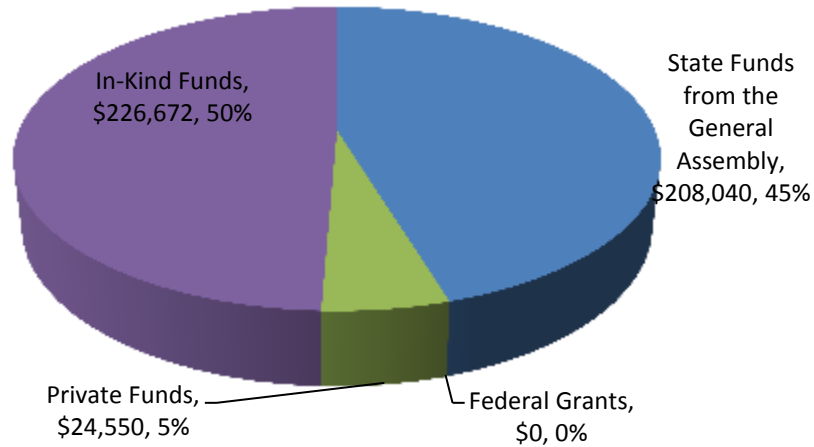
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## Cherokee County First Steps 2016-17 Expenditures by Funding Source



**Total 2016-17 Expenditures: \$459,262**

**State Funds Leveraged in 2016-17\*: 121%**

\*Percentage of state dollars matched by additional federal, private, and/or in-kind funds

## 2016-17 Expenditures by Strategy

	State \$	Federal \$	Private \$	In-Kind \$	Total \$	% of 2016-17 Expenditures
Imagination Library	\$18,469	\$0	\$18,326	\$224,172	\$260,968	57%
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$9,273	\$0	\$240	\$0	\$9,513	2%
Child Care Training	\$40,587	\$0	\$3,462	\$0	\$44,049	10%
Other Program	\$60,661	\$0	\$26	\$0	\$60,687	13%
Program Support	\$51,509	\$0	\$204	\$0	\$51,712	11%
Administrative Support	\$27,542	\$0	\$2,292	\$2,500	\$32,333	7%
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$208,040</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$24,550</b>	<b>\$226,672</b>	<b>\$459,262</b>	

*Unaudited numbers for the period July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017*

**Since inception, Cherokee County First Steps has leveraged \$2,038,753 from sources outside of state government. That's 50 cents for every state dollar.**



# Thank you supporters!

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

## Funding Support

State of South Carolina: \$208,040  
 (through South Carolina First Steps)

Fatz Fundraiser: \$868

SC Center for Child Care Career Development: \$2,000

United Way of the Piedmont: \$7,500

Walmart of Gaffney: \$2,500

## In-Kind Support

Allegra Print & Imaging

Dollywood Foundation

Fatz Café of Gaffney

Kiser Development Company

Midway Baptist Church

Spartanburg Community College, Cherokee Campus

SC Child Care Resource & Referral Network



Members of the Cherokee County  
 First Steps Board and Staff

## How your support helps children in Cherokee County:

- ✓ \$30 provides a young child a book per month for one year
- ✓ \$4-9 return on investment for every dollar spent in early childhood programs such as the Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative
- ✓ \$327 will fund one child for Countdown to Kindergarten during the summer

**HOW TO GIVE:** Cherokee County First Steps always welcomes donations from the public

Please call our office at 864.487.9466 or email us at [cc1ststeps@yahoo.com](mailto:cc1ststeps@yahoo.com) to donate

## Congratulations Recipients!

### *Cherokee County First Steps Board of Directors Annual Awards*

#### ❖ Oscar Fuller Education Achievement Award

✚ Education Partner Recipient – Dr. Walt Griffin

✚ Community Partner Recipient – Mae Frances Sarratt

✚ Faith-Based Partner Recipient – Barbara Cope, Limestone Presbyterian Church

#### ❖ Sandra Greene-Tucker Exemplary Board Member Award

✚ Recipient – Audrey McClary

**Support Cherokee County First Steps today through a tax-deductible donation, or volunteer!**

# Community Impact

## Building Better Futures

Kim Camp, Principal (Alma Elementary School)

Alma Elementary School has collaborated with Cherokee County First Steps to provide *Countdown to Kindergarten* to nearly 30 students over the past three years. The program is designed to help parents and students become more aware of five-year-old kindergarten expectations. The program format includes six home visits by the kindergarten teacher with a final summer celebration/field trip.

Filled bookbags with materials were donated, and teachers/assistants modeled their use. After the activity, they left the bags with families after their home visits. The parents and their children were always excited about new strategies. Topics of interest included math, science, language, literacy, writing and social studies. Parents received vital resources offering suggestions on how to effectively work with their children to prepare them for kindergarten.

Our teachers and assistants have enjoyed working with the families and *First Steps* staff. Assistant Renata Hamilton has worked in the program two of the three years and stated, "I think the program is simply amazing! In addition to the great learning tools and lessons provided, I love the bond between the parent, student, and myself. There was a different sense of trust and security among the ones that participated. This is very important to families and school staff as well, being able to have this one-on-one time with these families. Everyone learns something!!!"

*Countdown to Kindergarten* definitely has been an asset for the relationship between teachers and students as well as parent involvement. The parents involved in the program have stated repeatedly how much this past summer has meant to them. They will help us "recruit" more families for the following year.

We held our first kindergarten parenting workshop at Alma Elementary in late September. We had over 30 families to participate. I feel the response to these in-school activities is directly related to the home/school connection we build. *Countdown to Kindergarten* is one of those "bridge builders" for us.

To sum up, teacher Pam Morgan added, "I can attest to an increase in parent involvement at school, increased student confidence, stronger social skills, a higher student interest in learning new things and a sense of belonging among the school community for both the children and the adults.

Parents have stated the six summer sessions were well worth the time and effort, and they were pleased with all aspects of the program. The only complaint was that it did not continue longer!"



Families receiving information and supplies at the Willis Plaza Fun Fest



Families learning about the Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative and taking the cell phone challenge at Chick-Fil-A!



**Support Cherokee County First Steps today through a tax-deductible donation, or volunteer.**

## Bringing the Community Together

Dr. Arthur L. Brewton, Director (Head Start and Early Head Start)

Piedmont Community Action Head Start and Early Head Start partnered with Cherokee County First Steps to assist in the implementation of staff training and professional development designed to assist staff in acquiring or increasing the knowledge and skills needed to provide high-quality, comprehensive services within the scope of our staff's responsibilities. Cherokee County First Steps is a frequent provider of quality professional development workshops. Our staff are always eager to sign up when they see trainings offered through Cherokee County First Steps.

Over the years, our relationship with Cherokee County First Steps has allowed us to test research based practices to help us meet the goals of our Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five. We are currently partnering with Cherokee County First Steps, the Cherokee County School District, and the Talk To Me Initiative on a research project (LENA Start) designed to increase verbal interactions between children and significant adults in their families.

Cherokee County First Steps has been a valuable partner in helping our program increase partnerships with families to support dual language learners, address challenging behaviors in children, and collect and analyze data to improve learning experiences and outcomes for children we serve.

## Cherokee County First Steps Partnership Board, 2016-17

Name	Position	Board Category
Dr. Ron Cope, Chair	Retired Principal	Pre-K Primary Educator
Brian Lawson, Vice Chair	Director of Operations, American TransMed Inc.	Parent
Novella Kelly, Secretary	Retired Nurse	Healthcare
Melissa Green, Treasurer	Director, Iron City Ministries	Non-Profit
Cliffietta Cochran, Member-at-Large	Retired Army & Healthcare	Parent
Alisa Britt	Child Services Manager, PCA Head Start/Early Head Start	Head Start Representative
Kim Camp	Principal, Alma Elementary School	Pre-K Primary Educator
Alyssa D'Angelo	Youth Services Manager, Cherokee County Library	Library Representative
Denise Dyer	Human Resource Director, City of Gaffney	Local Government
Anitonette Gardner	Pastor, Hopewell Presbyterian Church/Hope Broadcasting	Faith-Based
Deborah Hamrick	Principal, Blacksburg Primary School	Pre-K Primary Educator
Karen Henderson	Asst. Principal, Limestone-Central Elementary School	Pre-K Primary Educator
Vanessa Jefferies	Director, Ann's Playland Day Care	Child Care
Dr. Joette Johnson	Retired School Administrator	Legislative Liaison
Audrey McClary	Principal, Mary Bramlett Elementary School	School District Representative
Dr. J. W. Sanders, Jr.	Senior Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church	Faith-Based
Iyonia Simmons	--	Parent
Kristen Smith	Cherokee County DHEC	Health Dept. Representative
Renee Smith	Branch Manager, Carolina Premier Bank	Philanthropic Community
Jeff Taylor	Manager of Engineering Maintenance Facility, Timken	Business
Amy Wyatt	Workforce Consultant, Department of Social Services	DSS Representative



# Getting children ready for school.

## The Goals of First Steps

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

-- Section 59-152-30



Interested parents with Medicaid-eligible children who live in eligible school districts can contact any participating provider to complete an application for free, full-day 4K. To view a list of participating First Steps 4K providers, visit:

<http://scfirststeps.org/4k>



### EARLY HEAD START – CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP

Low income families with children 0-36 months, and families with infants or toddlers with special needs, are invited to apply for this year-round, comprehensive program. Available in the following counties: Allendale, Anderson, Bamberg, Berkeley, Dillon, Georgetown, Laurens, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg, Saluda and York, and coming soon to Fairfield and McCormick counties. To apply, visit:

<http://scfirststeps.org/ehs/>



[I CAN] is First Steps' public awareness campaign for school readiness, in support of the state's Profile of the Ready Kindergartener. Includes resources for parents, providers and communities to learn what they can do to support school readiness.

Visit: [ican.sc](http://ican.sc)

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