

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF



LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

FY 13-18



Key Findings

FIRST STEPS SERVICES HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS AND ABSENTEEISM IN KINDERGARTEN.

Children in general education who received First Steps services were...

- **74% more likely** to score *Demonstrating Readiness* on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment
- **66% less likely** to be *chronically absent* in kindergarten

...compared to their like-peers who did not receive First Steps services.

Similar results were seen with children in special education.

FIRST STEPS SERVICES INCREASE PARENT COMPETENCE AND CONFIDENCE.

Significant gains were seen over time on three measures of parent competence:

- Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale
- Life Skills Progression
- Adult-Child Interactive Reading Inventory

Parents said:

- "First Steps helped their *ability to parent and boosted their confidence*, especially for handling different situations with their child(ren)."
- "They would *highly recommend and encourage* anyone they knew to participate in First Steps services."

FIRST STEPS HAS POSITIVE EFFECTS ON CHILD CARE QUALITY.

Statistically significant gains were seen in the quality of the child care environment using two assessments:

- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale

One director said, "It is one of the *best benefits* we could receive. They are an *integral part* of our program... they work side by side with us and have *helped us build and sustain quality*."

FIRST STEPS STATE OFFICE AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS SERVE AS A HUB FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE.

The state office and local partnerships are:

- Led by **skilled leadership**
- Do not have sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time

Local partnerships vary in their role in their county's network with different levels of centrality and density.

“First Steps local partnership services are closing the gap for children in poverty.”

Recommendations

- Allocate family strengthening resources to highest poverty areas
- Allocate quality enhancement resources to rural and high poverty areas
- Further evaluate impact of specific programs, i.e. Countdown to Kindergarten
- Develop a core set of metrics to monitor routinely across the early childhood system
- Continue to identify additional funding opportunities
- Perform quantitative and qualitative evaluation more regularly than is legislatively mandated



Institute for Families
in Society

Evaluation completed by Institute for Families in Society (October 2019). Full report is available here: <https://scfirststeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Evaluation-of-South-Carolina-First-Steps-to-School-Readiness-Local-Partnerships-from-2013-2014-to-2017-2018.pdf>

