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SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS AWARDS 11 GRANTS TO ENGAGE PARENTS, EDUCATE MORE 4-YEAR-OLDS

Columbia, S.C. – South Carolina First Steps has awarded \$202,500 in grants that will promote literacy, strengthen parent-school connections, and increase enrollment in First Steps 4K.

The South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees today announced that First Steps local partnerships in 10 counties will receive a total of \$172,500 to enroll eligible families in Raising a Reader, an early literacy and parent education program, and ReadyRosie, a program for strengthening connections between parents and teachers. Both programs are nationally recognized and proven to have a positive impact on early learning and school readiness.

The grants are expected to serve 345 families with children in First Steps 4K, a program that provides eligible children with free enrollment in private, community and faith-based child care centers around the state.

The grant recipients are First Steps partnerships in Barnwell, Chester, Chesterfield, Colleton, Florence, Jasper, Kershaw, Lee, Marion, and Williamsburg counties.

The Board of Trustees also announced a \$30,000 grant to Grace Academy Child Development Center in Columbia. The funds will enable the center to expand its First Steps 4K program and provide free transportation to eligible children.

“We know that high-quality parenting and child care programs have long-term benefits for children in school,” said Georgia Mjartan, executive director of South Carolina First Steps. “We are excited to provide communities with the resources to serve more families, while at the same time enhancing the offerings of our 4K program.”

Earlier this year, South Carolina First Steps awarded \$14.3 million to First Steps local partnerships in 46 counties through an annual formula-funding grant process. This is the second year in a row that First Steps has also made additional, targeted grants. Last year, First Steps local partnerships in eight counties received \$100,000 to expand innovative programs promoting health, literacy, parent education, and STEAM learning in early childhood.

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ABOUT SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS

South Carolina First Steps is both a nonprofit and state agency and is the **only statewide, dedicated comprehensive early childhood agency** in South Carolina focused on getting children ages birth through five ready for school and life success. Last year, SC First Steps directly served 28,427 children across all 46 counties.

Established in 1999 by the South Carolina General Assembly to close the gap on students' preparedness for success in school, South Carolina First Steps takes a holistic approach to accomplishing its mission of preparing all children for success in school, work and life, offering services that improve children's health, strengthen families, expand access to quality child care, increase participation in four-year-old kindergarten programs and help transition rising kindergartners into school.

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