



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**OFFICIALS LAUNCH NEW PALMETTO PRE-K WEB PORTAL
TO HELP PARENTS FIND FREE PRESCHOOL**

COLUMBIA, S.C. – State officials and agencies providing early childhood services held a press conference at Brookland Academy on Wednesday, February 5, to launch PalmettoPreK.org, a new, online portal designed to help families in South Carolina find publicly-funded, preschool options for their 3- and 4-year-old children. Officials speaking at the launch were: South Carolina’s Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette, Speaker Jay Lucas, South Carolina House of Representatives, David Morley, Chair of the SC Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and SC First Steps Board of Trustees and Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director of the ECAC and SC First Steps and Chair of the Palmetto Pre-K Committee.

For the first time ever, families can access data across multiple agencies in a single search to find preschool options for their 3- or 4-year old children. The portal empowers families to search for free or low-cost pre-k programs based on zip code, income level and other qualifying criteria. The mobile-friendly tool indicates the child’s eligibility for free or low-cost pre-k, populates a list of conveniently located preschool centers as well as provides descriptions, photos and testimonials of each program option. First Steps 4K, Head Start, public school 4K (CERDEP) and SC Vouchers are all available on the portal.

The state’s leadership supports efforts for improved access to publicly-funded preschool. “When we provide high-quality learning to our state’s youngest children, we not only give them the foundation they need to become productive citizens of our state, but also provide their parents the opportunity to find meaningful work. Improving educational outcomes benefits families and our state as a whole, which means a brighter future for all,” stated Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette.

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“It has been a great experience working with our agency partners to create this empowering new tool which will help hard-working families in South Carolina find quality, publicly-funded, educational options for their children,” said Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director of South Carolina First Steps and the SC Early Childhood Advisory Council.

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About Palmetto Pre-K

Palmetto Pre-K is a statewide initiative to increase access to quality early childhood programs and services for vulnerable children in South Carolina by helping families find free and subsidized Pre-K programs and supporting preschool teachers. The Palmetto Pre-K portal was created with funds from the 2018 Preschool Development Grant Birth-5, a one-year federal grant to the SC Department of Social Services. Palmetto Pre-K partners agencies offering statewide, publicly-funded, Pre-K programs serving 3- and 4-year-olds are: SC First Steps, SC Head Start Collaboration Office, SC Department of Education and SC Department of Social Services.

About ECAC

The South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) includes directors of state agencies and government entities that provide services to young children including: S.C. Department of Health and Human Services, S.C. Department of Social Services, S.C. Department of Education, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, S.C. Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, Children’s Trust of S.C., S.C. Head Start Collaboration Office and S.C. First Steps, which is the connector and convener of all early childhood serving agencies.

About the benefits of preschool

Data and studies show a need for the Palmetto Pre-K initiative. South Carolina’s poverty gap continues to increase while the number of children in preschool decreases, as reflected in the [2019 Kids Count Data Book](#).

The SC Council on Competitiveness Early Childhood Task Force’s report [Investing in South Carolina’s Future Talent](#) states, “Capable children are the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society. Through early childhood care and education, we can ensure that South Carolina’s youngest citizens grow into responsible, successful adults—and that our state’s talent pool of highly skilled workers continues to grow.” “Children living in low-income families are less likely to have met the developmental milestones essential for success in careers and higher education. Overall, 22 percent of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, a figure about three times greater than the rate for children with no family poverty experience.” “One in four S.C. children lives in poverty.” “To secure the economic prosperity of our citizens and our state, South Carolina’s future talent pool must have access to quality, evidence-based early care and education.”

According to the longest-running longitudinal study from [Highscope’s Perry Preschool Project](#) shows that at age 40, participants who experienced preschool had fewer teenage pregnancies; were more likely to have graduated from high school; were more likely to hold a job and have higher earnings; committed fewer crimes and owned their own home and car.

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