



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SOUTH CAROLINA AWARDED \$3.3M GRANT FOR EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM**

**Columbia, S.C.** – South Carolina will receive a \$3.3 million federal grant to incorporate early childhood programs into the state’s existing system for capturing and tracking student progress through school.

The Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program awarded the funds competitively based on South Carolina’s plan to extend its existing K-12 data system to early childhood programs, and to make the information more accessible to the public. The four-year grant is part of a national effort to help states and educators better understand what works for students and facilitate research to increase student achievement and narrow achievement gaps.

South Carolina was one of 28 applicants selected for funding, which totals \$105 million nationwide.

Awarded to the South Carolina Department of Education, the grant will be coordinated in partnership with South Carolina First Steps, the Office of Revenue and Fiscal Affairs, the Department of Social Services, and the state’s Head Start programs.

“Better data means better outcomes,” says Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director of South Carolina First Steps. “Participating in our state’s longitudinal data system will help us connect public investments in early childhood with outcomes in college and career. There’s no better way of evaluating our long-term impact and tailoring our strategies to ensure all children are getting what they need to reach their highest potential.”

Goals for the funding in South Carolina include:

1. Expanding the state’s educational data infrastructure to include early childhood data,
2. Linking early childhood and K-12 data to improve understanding of early learning outcomes,
3. Increasing the availability of early childhood data
4. Creating a data portal accessible to educators, policy-makers, researchers and the public

The state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) will take a lead role in the development and oversight of data sharing across agencies. As the organizational home of the ECAC, South Carolina First Steps will staff a project coordinator for the length of the grant.

“By having this process reside within an interagency group like the Early Childhood Advisory Council, we can ensure that our state’s progress towards a more integrated data system extends beyond the grant period,” says Mjartan.

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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, 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.

## **ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL**

South Carolina's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is a collaborative body representing the state's early childhood system. Established in law, the ECAC includes the directors of eight state agencies and government entities that provide state- and federally-funded services to young children. South Carolina First Steps coordinates the activities of the council.

Learn more at **[SCFIRSTSTEPS.ORG](http://SCFIRSTSTEPS.ORG)** and **[EARLYCHILDHOODSC.ORG](http://EARLYCHILDHOODSC.ORG)**.