

Annual Report

2019-2020



THE NEED IN LANCASTER COUNTY:

5,353

children under age 5

41.3%

of young children live in poverty
or low-income households

63%

of kindergartners are considered "not
ready" for school



THREE MOST COMMON RISK FACTORS:

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
2. Single Parent Households
3. TANF Eligible Families (50% of federal poverty guidelines)

OUR MISSION

*All Lancaster County children will enter school
healthy and ready to learn.*

Collaborating with other entities, Lancaster County First Steps helps families and caregivers prepare children for success by maximizing public and private community resources to deliver, enhance and expand high quality early childhood services and programs.

OUR APPROACH



High quality programs and services
for children and families



Intensive training, resources and
support for childcare providers



Strategic partnerships and
community education

OUR IMPACT

5,472

number of children and adults served by
Lancaster County First Steps in 2019-
2020

JOIN US

We rely on a community of partners, donors, and volunteers –
people like you – who believe in a brighter future for children and
families in our community.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Lora Bryson
Executive Director
Lancaster County First Steps

For the last 21 years, Lancaster County First Steps has served as the community leader of Lancaster's comprehensive early childhood efforts in assuring that families have the necessary tools and programs for their children to enter school ready to succeed.

The work we do is critical but could not be accomplished without the collaboration, partnerships and support of many local organizations, agencies, parents, businesses and community volunteers.

School Readiness is everyone's job. We each have a role and we all have a stake. We are building the future.

Part of our effort is to educate the community on the importance of high quality early childhood education. A child's early years determine many outcomes in education, health and future income. Even more, we are building the best future for the individuals and our local community. We must give our youngest children the opportunities needed to reach these goals.

I invite you to read our annual report and get engaged in Lancaster County First Steps through the work we do. Please join us in celebrating the accomplishments a community with a clear vision can obtain. Thank you for helping us get Lancaster's children ready for school and beyond!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lora P. Bryson". The signature is written in a cursive style.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Dr. Paul N. McKenzie

Chair

Lancaster County First Steps Board of Trustees

Lancaster County is so very fortunate. Strong churches, talented leaders, committed parents, great schools, and countless non-profit organizations are just some of the many resources that make Lancaster such a great place to live, work, and play. First Steps serves as the connective tissue between the many public, private, civic, and faith-based stakeholders, all working together to improve the quality of life for children and families in our community. For over 20 years, First Steps has prioritized outreach to the most vulnerable children with an array of programming based on strong science and efficient management systems. The Board of Directors, Executive Director, and staff never settle for second place, and strive to outperform each and every year. This culture of excellence has guided First Steps in our mission, our methods, and our partnerships.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul N. McKenzie".

GETTING CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL

All children are ready to benefit from a quality kindergarten experience when they are five years old by September 1 of that school year. But kindergarten readiness—the critical stage at which children are prepared for learning and success—is more than a matter of age. For a strong start in school, children need positive relationships and supportive learning environments beginning at birth. At First Steps, we partner with families, caregivers, and communities to ensure that all children are prepared for success.

South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner

Developed by SC First Steps and the SC Department of Education, the state's description of school readiness includes 60 developmental milestones across 5 categories:



Approaches to learning & inquiry



Emotional & social development



Physical development, self-help & motor skills



Mathematical thinking



Language & literacy development

In support of the Profile of the Ready Kindergartner, our approach is focused on advancing Lancaster County toward the following strategic goals:

- Increase efforts of working with county wide partners to strengthen the early education initiatives in Lancaster County.
- Integrate school readiness information within all Lancaster County partners.
- Improve the capacity of the staff, board, and partners to carry out the mission, deliver and support evidence based programs.
- Increase revenue to build a sustainable and diversified funding stream.
- Increase community awareness and support of LCFS program services.



OUR GOALS

PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When the coronavirus pandemic forced South Carolina to shut down in March 2020, Lancaster County First Steps quickly pivoted to provide much-needed support to young children, their families and child care providers.

Our work has never been more critical. The crisis is having a profound impact on their wellbeing and development. For minorities and low-income communities, these impacts are expected to be even more damaging. That is why Lancaster County First Steps is enhancing our efforts to provide parents and caregivers with the services and resources they need to weather this storm.

IMPACT ON LANCASTER COUNTY

HEALTH

Through June 30, Lancaster County had a total of **482** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **17** COVID-19 deaths.

JOB LOSS

160.2%

increase in unemployment, 2019-2020

CHILD CARE

57.4%

children under 5 in Lancaster County lived in a child care desert* before COVID-19

76.7%

children under 5 in Lancaster County lived in a child care desert as of May 28, 2020



Services continued! Lancaster County First Steps provided high quality services through all of our programs during the pandemic.

We are proud of our providers, staff, community partners and families that all worked with us as we moved to implementing our Covid Preparedness Plan and providing safe services.

*The Center for American Progress defines a child care desert as a ZIP code with at least 30 children under the age of 5 and either no child care centers or so few centers that there are more than three times as many children under age 5 as there are spaces in centers.



EARLY IDENTIFICATION & REFERRAL



an evidence-based program

First Steps' Early Identification and Referral (EI&R) programs serve families with young children with suspected delays in development, acting as a local portal to connect families to community-based services they may need or desire to ensure the school readiness of their children. EI&R services include:



Screenings for children ages 0-5 with suspected delays in development



Referrals, based on screening results, to appropriate resources and support services



Patient information including strategies to monitor growth and development

EI&R BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

99

children served

483

materials distributed

32

referrals to BabyNet or other local services



Our initiative this year was to increase public awareness in the importance of early identification of developmental delays and assist parents in navigating the sometimes complex referral process. We matched the needs of **38** children with appropriate resources using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire as assessment tools. Fourteen (**14**) children were also screened for autism with the MCHAT tool.



IMAGINATION LIBRARY



an evidence-based program

As the local affiliate of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, we provide free, high-quality books to children from birth until age five, no matter their family's income.

Children enrolled in our Imagination Library program receive one book per month by mail. Each title is selected by a panel of early childhood literacy experts, who are responsible for choosing books that meet the age-specific developmental needs of young children.

IMAGINATION LIBRARY BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

1,662

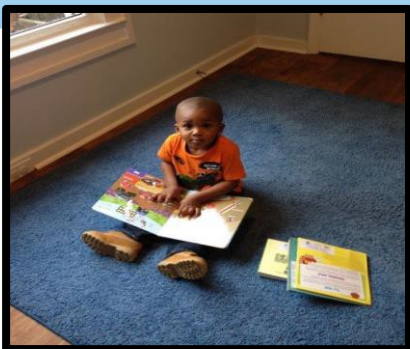
children served

15,012

books distributed

Books are 100% free to children in Lancaster County because Lancaster County First Steps secures the funds to cover the cost of books and shipping fees. Thank you to United Way of Lancaster County for their continued support.

Sponsor a child for just \$30 a year.





COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN



an evidence-informed program

Developed by South Carolina First Steps – and identified as a promising state practice by the National Governor’s Association in 2005 – Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a home visitation program pairing the families of rising kindergartners with their future teachers during the summer before school entry. Teachers complete six visits with each family, establishing strong connections during the summer that facilitate classroom learning throughout the year.

LCFS was showcased by SC First Steps for a CTK promotional video and for training!

Countdown to Kindergarten is funded by SC First Steps, The Springs Close Foundation and United Way of Lancaster County.

CTK BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

12

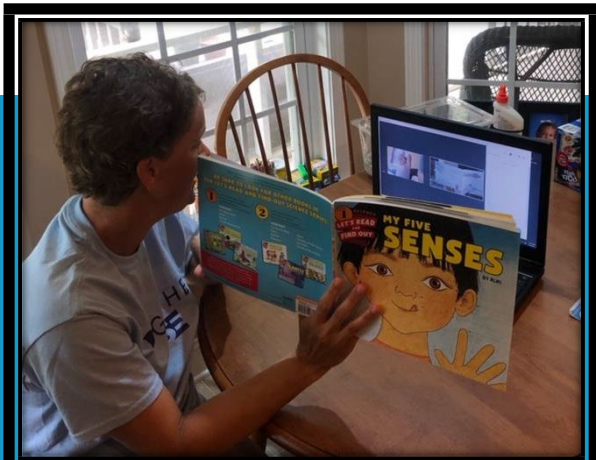
kindergarten teachers
trained as home visitors

104

children served

624

total home and school
visits



COVID did not stop CTK. Home visits took place outdoors in backyards and parks, as safety measures were followed with masks and social distancing. The children learned, relationships were formed and CTK was a HUGE success!



4K

FOUR-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN



an evidence-based program

South Carolina First Steps provides eligible children with free enrollment in full-day four-year-old kindergarten. In coordination with First Steps local partnerships and more than 230 private, community and faith-based preschool providers, First Steps 4K expands access to quality early education across the state.



ELIGIBILITY

To qualify for enrollment, a child must be:

- ✓ 4 years old on or before September 1
- ✓ Eligible for Medicaid, SNAP or TANF, experiencing homelessness or transiency, or in foster care

FIRST STEPS 4K IN LANCASTER COUNTY 2019-2020

SC First Steps awarded a grant to the Town of Kershaw during the program year to transform a historical downtown building into a state of the art child care and early learning center serving families across the county of Lancaster. The area of Kershaw in Lancaster is considered a “child care desert” without any licensed providers in the town or surrounding areas. The renovations have begun and there will be classroom space for 30 First Steps 4K children. Lancaster County First Steps in collaboration with the Town of Kershaw will operate the program when it opens in 2021.





EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM



an evidence-based program

Lancaster County First Steps is the recipient of a federally funded Early Head Start Child Care Child Care Partnership grant. This grant is unique in that we partner with local child care programs. We not only provide early head start services but we also improve services at local child care centers in a variety of areas including facilities, outdoor learning, curriculum, teacher education and much more. Currently, we partner with Buford Child Development Center and Greater New Hope Child Development Center to provide full day, year round services for our families. We serve children from birth through their third year. Our program provides comprehensive services to families and children that includes early education, disabilities, health, nutrition, dental, family services and community resources.

EARLY HEAD START BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

2

child care providers
served

77

number of children 0-5
enrolled in provider
classrooms



"Early Head Start has been more helpful than I could ever imagine. My child came into the program with developmental delays. The program has provided him with a safe environment to learn and explore. As a parent, I have been given the opportunity to learn and become a better parent and person for my child through Parent Committee meetings. The best experience during my time has been the Incredible Years program. I learned about what my child was thinking, why he does what he does, and how I can further his development. Because of this, I have learned to meet my child where he is. Our family's life has been changed for the better because of this program. Thank you Lancaster County First Steps- Early Head Start!"



PARENTING PROGRAM



an evidence-based program

In an effort to support positive social and behavioral development in young children, Lancaster County First Steps implemented the Incredible Years Program at the Lancaster Community Center offering morning and evening options for families including a meal and childcare while participating. Incredible Years is effective in reducing children's aggression and behavioral problems in early childhood classrooms and at home. The Incredible Years program provides 10 weeks of group training for parents, with an emphasis on positive parenting strategies that promote children's social skills.

The following has been proven:

- Increases in parent positive affect such as praise and reduced use of criticism and negative commands
- Increases in parental use of effective limit-setting by replacing spanking and harsh discipline with non-violent discipline techniques and increased monitoring of children
- Reductions in parental depression and increases in parental self-confidence
- Increases in positive family communication and problem solving
- Reduced conduct problems in children's interactions with parents and increases in their positive affect and compliance to parental commands.

INCREDIBLE YEARS PARENTING BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

16

Families served

23

Children served

15

Group Training Sessions





NUTRITION PROGRAM



an evidence-informed program

Through our collaboration with Clinton Elementary School and Brooklyn Springs Elementary, it has become apparent to Lancaster County First Steps that many of the children that participate in the free and reduced lunch program have no way for their nutritional needs to be met on the weekends. In response to this need, the Weekend Backpack Feeding Program has been implemented at both schools.

Each week during the school year, Lancaster County First Steps will ensure that at-risk elementary students will receive a Weekend Backpack designed to supplement meals for children, who depend on school breakfasts and lunches, during the week. The Second Harvest Food Bank delivers packs of nutritious, child-friendly, nonperishable, easily consumed and vitamin fortified food packed in backpacks each Thursday. Several volunteers tag and distribute these backpacks to each classroom on Thursday afternoons.

On Friday, both schools discreetly distribute these bags to children to carry home for the weekend. Lancaster County First Steps also includes newsletters, lists of helpful resources for parents, developmentally appropriate fact sheets, nutrition, health and fitness tips, fun and informational education materials with the backpacks each week. If interested in volunteering to assist with this program, please call the Lancaster County First Steps office at (803) 286-8000

WEEKEND BACKPACK FEEDING PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

425

children served

10,676

meals provided

288

volunteer hours

As schools closed in March, LCFS with the help of many volunteers continued to serve our children with food bags during this much needed time.





PUBLIC AWARENESS



an evidence-informed program

Community Education involves building awareness about the importance of early childhood education through a variety of advocacy and outreach projects. We focus on reaching families through participating in community events, rotary clubs, community partners, local schools and preschools and local businesses. Also, we reach families through our social media presence online and via Facebook. We often are told families enjoy seeing us at the local festivals and county celebration days.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

11,159

materials
distributed

12

events held

3,049

total event
attendance



"The Countdown to Kindergarten program is perfect! I cannot believe all of the books and supplies that my child received. He now has his own library and has learned to LOVE books and reading. Since Countdown to Kindergarten we read to Ian every day. He has picked up on so many new words and is learning to sound them out. Getting to know his teacher has eased our minds and we are all ready for him to begin school.
Josh Matthews and Raven Baucom, Parents



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Addressing the needs of young children is a shared endeavor. In addition to providing services to families and support for child care providers, Lancaster County First Steps mobilizes partners and community members to ensure all children in Lancaster County begin school ready to succeed. We

serve as a:

LOCAL PORTAL

connecting preschool children and
their families to services

CONVENER

of community stakeholders to develop an effective
and comprehensive early childhood system

CHAMPION

of the importance of school
readiness to our children's future

OUR PARTNERSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

6

Local, state and
federal grants

\$112,900

Local funds received
beyond state and federal
dollars

“Being in a partnership with Lancaster County First Steps has helped not only the children/families in our community, it has also helped our center grow into a respected facility. So thank you to LCFS for all the upgrades and for always being there when we need you.”

Becky Nicholson, Director of Buford Child Development Center



OUR SUPPORTERS

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

FUNDING SUPPORT

EHS-CCP Grant: \$1,599,839
(To provide EHS- Child Care Partnership Program to Children 0 - 3)

State of South Carolina: \$ 216 ,721
(Through South Carolina First Steps)

The Springs Close Foundation: \$ 88,400
(For Weekend Backpack Feeding Program)

The Springs Close Foundation: \$ 16,500
(For Countdown to Kindergarten Summer 2020)

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness: \$ 6 ,340 (Pre- School Development Grant)

United Way Grant: \$ 8 ,000
(Dolly Parton Imagination Library & Countdown to Kindergarten)

IN-KIND SUPPORT

Dollywood Foundation: \$ 166 ,398

Kaplan Early Learning Company: \$ 2 ,032

Lakeshore Learning Materials: \$ 2 ,640

Various EHS- CCP Consultants: \$ 2,000

JOIN US

Thank you to our Exceptional Community Partners and Collaborators!

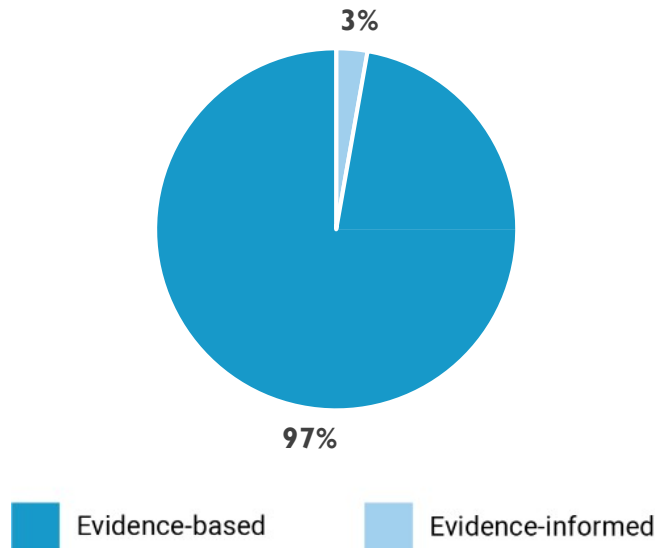
For more information on partnership opportunities, visit our website at
www.lancastercountyfirststeps.org/



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

OUR INVESTMENT IN QUALITY

Expenditures of Public Funds by Program Type



ESTIMATION OF COST SAVINGS

Since inception, Lancaster County First Steps has leveraged **\$13,849,123** from sources outside of state government.

That's **\$2.69** for every state dollar.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES BY STRATEGY

	State Funding	Federal Funding	Private Funding	In-Kind Contributions	Total
Administrative Support	\$26,614	\$0	\$535	\$0	\$27,149
Program Support (Core Functions)	\$20,226	\$3,000	\$694	\$0	\$23,920
Imagination Library	\$35,839	\$0	\$27,616	\$166,398	\$229,853
Incredible Years Parenting	\$51,907	\$0	\$4,200	\$0	\$56,107
EHS-Child Care Partnership Grant	\$15,691	\$1,570,882	\$0	\$4,640	\$1,591,213
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$24,698	\$102	\$26,479	\$2,032	\$53,311
Nutrition (Backpack Feeding Program)	\$24,498	\$0	\$58,972	\$0	\$83,470
Early Identification and Referral	\$51,319	\$0	\$892	\$0	\$52,211
Total Expenses	\$250,792	\$1,573,984	\$119,388	\$173,070	\$2,117,235



LEADERSHIP

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Leslie Sinclair, *Office Manager*

Kim West, *Program Manager*

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Denise Jowers, *Health, Safety & Nutrition Coordinator*

Haven Langley, *Family Services, ERSEA & Data Coordinator*

Sherry Bradshaw, *Education & Disabilities Coordinator*

Nicole Barrino, *Infant & Toddler Specialist*

Raquel Smith, *Family Services Specialist*

Veronica Reed, *Family Services Specialist*

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