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January 19, 2021

Dear School Administrator,

South Carolina First Steps is pleased to announce the availability of funds for expanding our Countdown to Kindergarten program. These resources will enable more schools and teachers to support the transition of children entering kindergarten in August 2021 – *at no cost to schools*.

Administered by First Steps Local Partnerships with support from local schools, Countdown to Kindergarten is a home visitation and family engagement program pairing the families of rising kindergartners at risk for school challenges with their future teachers during the summer before school entry. Teachers complete six visits with each family, centered on classroom and content expectations.

Survey results have consistently shown that students, families, teachers and schools benefit from Countdown to Kindergarten:

- Parents of kindergarten students gain a better understanding of kindergarten expectations.
- Children and parents are more excited and confident about entering school.
- Parents are better able to provide meaningful learning experiences in the home.
- Parents are more likely to keep in touch with teachers, supporting them in their teaching and behavior management practices, throughout the school year.
- Children tend to show gains, especially in social-emotional development.

To receive funding for Countdown to Kindergarten, schools must demonstrate a commitment to:

- Identifying and recruiting kindergarten teachers. Home visits must be provided by kindergarten teachers who will have assigned children entering their classrooms in August.
- Working with the First Steps County Partnership to identify and recruit eligible families of rising kindergartners.
- Registering families and completing required paperwork (including signed parental consent and family eligibility determination forms)
- Coordinating with the First Steps County Partnership in promoting the program and its benefits, facilitating training, arranging final school orientation/celebration for families, etc.





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Commitments for the 2021 Countdown to Kindergarten Program must be in place by March. If there are more requests for funding than is available, applications will be evaluated based on demonstrated interest, commitment, and prior participation (schools that do not implement the program are strongly encouraged to apply).

For more information, please contact the Executive Director of your local First Steps County Partnership or Dr. Janice Kilburn, Countdown to Kindergarten at South Carolina First Steps.

Thank you,

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