

2023-2024



FIRST STEPS
SOUTH CAROLINA
Guidelines

Child Early Reading
Development and
Education Program



Child Early Reading Development and
Education Program (CERDEP) Guidelines
SC First Steps 4K
2023 - 2024

Introduction: A Letter to South Carolina's Early Childhood Providers

Dear Early Childhood Partner,

On behalf of South Carolina First Steps, allow me to welcome you to a new year of the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program(4K) - a groundbreaking Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program within high- quality private, faith-based, federal, non-profit independent schools and other non-school district settings.

The *Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP) 4K Guidelines* outline the requirements that will guide the program's implementation during the upcoming school year. Key program components are listed in the Table of Contents for your easy reference.

Additional 4K resource materials will be made available throughout the year at <https://scfirststeps.org/what-we-do/first-steps-4k/>

We invite you to check this site regularly for materials and information that you may find helpful and encourage you to contact me if you have any additional questions.

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of South Carolina's youngest learners.

In admiration of your service,

Martha M. Strickland
4K State Director, SC First Steps



South Carolina First Steps 4K
Child Early Reading Development and Education Program Guidelines

Table of Contents

		<u>Page Number:</u>
	<u>Introduction: A Letter to the State’s Early Childhood Providers</u>	<u>1</u>
	<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>2 - 3</u>
	<u>Purpose of the First Steps 4K Program</u>	<u>4</u>
	<u>Purpose of the First Steps 4K Guidelines</u>	<u>4</u>
1.0	<u>Program Operation</u>	
1.1	<u>Days of Service</u>	<u>4</u>
1.2	<u>Hours of Service</u>	<u>4</u>
1.3	<u>Tuition and Fees</u>	<u>5</u>
1.4	<u>Transportation</u>	<u>5</u>
1.5	<u>Meals and Snacks</u>	<u>5</u>
1.6	<u>Wrap Around Services</u>	<u>6</u>
2.0	<u>Child/Family Eligibility</u>	
2.1	<u>Age Requirements</u>	<u>6</u>
2.2	<u>Family Income Requirements</u>	<u>6</u>
2.3	<u>Residency Requirements</u>	<u>7</u>
2.4	<u>Children with Special Needs and/or Speaking English as a Second Language</u>	<u>7</u>
3.0	<u>Enrollment/Disenrollment</u>	
3.1	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>7</u>
3.2	<u>Health Records and Screenings</u>	<u>7</u>
3.3	<u>Attendance</u>	<u>8</u>
3.4	<u>Chronic Absenteeism, Tardiness & Early Departure</u>	<u>8</u>
3.5	<u>Suspension or Disenrollment of a Child</u>	<u>8</u>
4.0	<u>Provider Eligibility</u>	
4.1	<u>Legal Operation, Capacity & Regulatory Violations</u>	<u>9</u>
4.2	<u>Anti-Discrimination Requirements</u>	<u>10</u>
4.3	<u>Criminal Background Checks</u>	<u>10</u>
4.4	<u>General Programmatic Requirements</u>	<u>10</u>
5.0	<u>Program Standards</u>	
5.1	<u>Class Size and Adult-to-Child Ratio</u>	<u>10</u>
5.2	<u>Classroom Environment</u>	<u>10</u>
5.3	<u>Outdoor Equipment</u>	<u>11</u>
6.0	<u>Curriculum</u>	
6.1	<u>Approved Curricula</u>	<u>11</u>

6.2	<u>Lesson Plans</u>	<u>11</u>
6.3	<u>Instructional Technology and Television</u>	<u>12</u>
6.4	<u>Rest Time</u>	<u>12</u>
6.5	<u>Discipline</u>	<u>12</u>
6.6	<u>SC's Early Learning Standards</u>	<u>12</u>
6.7	<u>Orientation</u>	<u>12</u>
6.8	<u>Parent Education and Involvement</u>	<u>13</u>
6.9	<u>4K to 5K School Transition Plan</u>	<u>13</u>
7.0	<u>Personnel and Training</u>	
7.1	<u>Classroom Staffing</u>	<u>13</u>
7.2	<u>Lead Teacher Qualifications</u>	<u>14</u>
7.3	<u>Instructional Assistant Qualifications</u>	<u>14</u>
7.4	<u>Days of Service</u>	<u>14</u>
7.5	<u>Substitute Teachers</u>	<u>14</u>
7.6	<u>Professional Development</u>	<u>15</u>
8.0	<u>Assessment</u>	
8.1	<u>Instructional Assessment</u>	<u>15</u>
8.2	<u>Developmental Screening</u>	<u>15</u>
9.0	<u>Program Monitoring</u>	
9.1	<u>Monitoring and Technical Assistance Visits</u>	<u>15</u>
10.0	<u>Funding and Financial Requirements</u>	<u>16</u>
10.1	<u>Per Student Funding</u>	<u>16</u>
10.2	<u>Equipment and Materials Grants</u>	<u>16</u>
10.3	<u>Transportation Funds</u>	<u>16</u>
10.4	<u>Fiscal Procedures</u>	<u>16</u>
APPENDIX A:		
<u>Section 59-156-110</u>		
	<u>SC Child Early Reading Development and Education Program</u>	<u>17-26</u>
APPENDIX B:		
	<u>Lead Teacher Qualifications</u>	<u>27</u>
APPENDIX C:		
	<u>Approved Curricula</u>	<u>28</u>
APPENDIX D:		
	<u>Approved Readiness Assessments</u>	<u>29</u>
APPENDIX E:		
	<u>Classroom Grants Criteria</u>	<u>30</u>
APPENDIX F:		
	<u>Jacob's Law (Section 56-5-195: School Bus Safety Standards)</u>	<u>31</u>
	<u>APPENDIX G: 2023-2024 Family Income Eligibility Table</u>	<u>32</u>
	<u>APPENDIX H: SC First Steps 4K Calendar 2023-2024</u>	<u>33</u>



SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS 4K is a comprehensive, results-oriented initiative for improving early childhood development. First Steps 4K exists to develop, promote, and assist the efforts of agencies, private providers, and public and private organizations and entities, at the state level and the community level, to collaborate and cooperate to focus and intensify services, assure the most efficient use of all available resources, and eliminate duplication of efforts to serve the needs of South Carolina's young children and their families.

PURPOSE OF THE FIRST STEPS 4K PROGRAM

South Carolina First Steps 4K is partnering with high-quality private for-profit, private non-profit, faith-based, non-profit independent schools, and other eligible providers to expand four-year-old kindergarten programs during the 2023 - 2024 school year. Programs shall focus on the developmental and learning supports that children must have to be ready for school and will incorporate research-based practices, ongoing assessment, and parenting education.

PURPOSE OF THE FIRST STEPS 4K GUIDELINES

The *First Steps 4K Guidelines* provide the standards and expectations for all 4K classrooms participating in the 4K Program.

1.0 PROGRAM OPERATION

Approved programs shall provide high-quality; developmentally appropriate educational services to age-, income-, and geographically eligible four-year-old children. Educational services are defined to include all domains of development: cognitive, physical, emotional, social, cultural, and non-cognitive.

1.1 Days of Service

First Steps 4K programs shall operate no less than five (5) days a week, for 180 or 220 instructional days annually on our 4K calendar as established in the provider contract. A 6.5 or 8 hour day may be selected. Each approved 4K program may honor the Thanksgiving, Winter, and Spring holiday (closure) schedule of the school district in which it is located and swap days with the consent of the 4K State Director/4K Managers (Calendar Change Request online link provided). Centers wishing to provide service on these days may do so on an optional basis, with tuition assessed to families. (Note that these days will not be considered a part of the 4K program year and no 4K tuition will be provided by SC First Steps.) **SC First Steps 4K classrooms follow the inclement weather closures of the district they are located in.** E-Learning days are not supported by First Steps 4K classrooms- those dates will be considered closed for the 4K classrooms. By submitting the Calendar Change Request form, days may be made up to cover those inclement weather days missed.

1.2 Hours of Service

The educational program shall operate for a minimum of six and one-half (6.5) hours daily, including breakfast, lunch, snack, outdoor play, and rest. The 4K instructional day may be extended to an eight hour day.

1.25 Service Delivery Options for 2023 - 2024

Pursuant to Proviso 1.48 of the General Appropriations Act for FY24, providers may elect – with the approval of SC First Steps 4K – to deliver an expanded program model.

Traditional Day and Year (180 school days, 6.5 hours daily)

Extended Day and Traditional Year (180 school days, 8.0 or max of 8.5 hours daily)

Traditional Day and Summer School (220 days, 6.5 hours daily)

Extended Day and Summer School (220 days, 8.0 or max of 8.5 hours)

Providers may select only one of the options above. Tuition and transportation payments will be adjusted on a pro rata basis for providers electing Extended Day and Summer school options. Providers should note that Extended Days and Summer School are designed to extend the instructional program and are not intended as “wrap around” care or summer camp.

1.3 Tuition and Fees

Regardless of program option, providers may not charge tuition or receive any other form of compensation (i.e. Child Care Scholarships) for any portion of the instructional day already reimbursed by SC First Steps 4K, nor may enrollment fees be required. Tuition and fees may be charged for extended programming and/or wrap around care above and beyond the 6.5 hour or 8.0 hour instructional day, though participation in the state-funded 4K program may not be contingent upon enrollment in tuition-based services. Once enrolled, providers may not remove state-funded students to create additional capacity for tuition-based students.

1.4 Transportation

Licensed providers may offer (and will receive reimbursement for) transportation for eligible students. Providers may not charge fees for transportation to eligible students. Centers receiving reimbursement for transportation must have their current DSS transportation file available for review by their 4K Coach. The file at a minimum must contain the following:

- 🕒 Current auto and liability insurance documentation;
- 🕒 Driver’s license of staff designated to provide transport children;
- 🕒 Driving record of person(s) designated to transport children;
- 🕒 Initial Attendance Checklist of 4K Children receiving transportation and a route map;
- 🕒 SLED check of each eligible driver;
- 🕒 Current First Aid & CPR documentation of drivers;
- 🕒 First aid kit and fire extinguisher on the bus;
- 🕒 Tracking sheets depicting when children are transported; and,
- 🕒 Operable seat restraint for every child and driver on the bus.

All transportation services provided must adhere with the requirements detailed in South Carolina Section 56-5-195 (See Appendix F: Jacob’s Law).

Providers offering transportation may specify their own transportation routes and must make parents aware of these routes upon enrollment. Routes may cross school district attendance zones and/or county lines at the discretion of the provider. If transportation is offered, eligible students living within established provider routes must be afforded an equal opportunity to receive this service. Providers shall not be responsible for the transportation of any student living outside of these established boundaries. **Transportation forms signed by the student’s parent/guardian must be on file in our SC First Steps 4K office before reimbursement may be invoiced.**

Non-profit independent schools must furnish all applicable transportation requirements, as well as meeting Jacob's Law, to be considered for approval of transportation reimbursement. All required documentation is to be submitted to the 4K Administrator for approval before any transportation is offered.

1.5 Meals and Snacks

All First Steps-funded students shall be offered breakfast, lunch, and a snack that meet USDA requirements. 4K Centers not participating in the USDA Food Program must create daily meal plans that align with the requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and ABC Grow Healthy Standards (if centers participate in the ABC-Q Program). Weekly menus must be dated and posted prominently. Changes to the posted menu must be documented on the menu. All health and sanitation procedures outlined by DSS and CACFP will be adhered to before, during and after meal service and/or preparation.

1.6 Wrap Around Services

Providers are encouraged to provide before- and after-school care to accommodate the needs of working families. If a student requires childcare beyond the contracted 6.5 or 8 hour 4K day, all First Steps 4K enrolled students are eligible for a Half-Time scholarships through our partnership with SC Childcare Scholarships for 4K PLUS Siblings. These scholarships are honored at any ABC-Quality provider. Tuition may be charged for any wrap-around care that exceeds the required 6.5-hour or 8.0 hour school day if the student does not attend an ABC-Quality rated program. Tuition may also be charged for the provision of service on holidays (not included as part of the instructional calendar detailed in your contract), and/or for extended year programming.

A child's enrollment in the state-funded 4K program may not be contingent upon his/her participation in tuition-based services.

2.0 CHILD/FAMILY ELIGIBILITY

2.1 Age Requirements

Children must be four years of age on or before September 1, based on acceptable documentation to be kept on file by the provider (birth certificates, passports, or official documents from other countries).

Children are eligible to attend the First Steps 4K Program for one year only. A waiver of this requirement may be sought from the SC First Steps 4K Administrator in the rare event that a child is deemed unable to advance to kindergarten for developmental or other reasons. Waiver requests should be accompanied by documentation from the child's physician, parent(s)/guardian(s), and/or teacher. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) issued by the local school district and stating that, "an additional year of pre-kindergarten is necessary" shall also be deemed an acceptable form of evidence to support the waiver request.

2.2 Family Income Requirements

Eligible providers shall receive reimbursement from SC First Steps 4K for service to students whose documented family incomes qualify them for either the free- and reduced-price lunch program (185% of federal poverty, see Appendix H) or are Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF eligible, or are experiencing homelessness, transiency, or are in foster care. An income eligibility statement or verification of Medicaid eligibility (for all Medicaid participants) shall be retained in the file of each student. Proof of income-eligibility must be on file before the child begins attending the 4K program (e.g. acceptable forms of verification include, pay stubs, tax returns and/or documentation of eligibility for SNAP, TANF and SSI). Providers may continue to enroll – and charge tuition for - students whose family incomes exceed this eligibility threshold, provided that total class size does not exceed 20 students and the instructional program offered *all children* meets the requirements outlined herein. *State funding will ONLY be provided for approved, income-eligible students.*

2.3 Residency Requirements

Beginning with the current fiscal year, 2023 - 2024, **eligible students residing in any school district** may participate in the South Carolina Early Reading Development and Education program (CERDEP) pending the availability of space and funding.

Providers should note that the First Steps 4K program is designed to expand services to eligible *children residing* in SC. Providers documenting their service to such children may be eligible for participation in any district of SC.

Age and income-eligible children must provide documentation of their legal residency in SC. State issued identification or one of the following- current tax bills, utility bills, rental agreements, etc.- shall be retained on-site for each child receiving state funds. Proof of geographic eligibility must be on file before the approved program will receive tuition for the child.

2.4 Children with Special Needs and/or Speaking English as a Second Language

Children identified as needing early intervention services and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shall not be denied access to the First Steps 4K program. Providers shall collaborate with the First Steps 4K Coach and the child's school district of residence in determining whether a child may have special needs that would qualify him/her for special education services. The child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and recommendations from the school district shall determine any appropriate special education placements and/or related services. With the permission of parents, providers shall allow service providers/therapists to provide approved services on site. Providers serving children with special needs are required by DSS to receive at least 1 hour of training in serving children with special needs. Training may be provided by the SC Child Care Inclusion Collaborative, at no cost. When 4K providers refer a child suspected of having disabilities to his/her school district of residence, the referral request must be submitted in writing to the district's special education coordinator. School districts are requested to give priority for testing children in these non-district 4K programs and providing needed services, preferably in the location where the children are receiving 4K services so that disruptions in their 4K program activities are minimized. If English is not the primary language spoken in the home of an eligible child, the provider, with the assistance of the First Steps 4K Coach, shall collaborate with the child's school district of residence to determine what, if any, additional services he/she may be eligible to receive. Eligible students may not be denied enrollment based on linguistic status.

3.0 ENROLLMENT/DISENROLLMENT

3.1 Enrollment

Enrollment for the First Steps 4K program must be open and non-discriminatory. Should the number of age-, income- and geographically eligible students seeking enrollment exceed the number of spaces available, acceptances must be prioritized in accordance with developmental risks measured by the Ages & Stages Developmental Screening (ASQ-3) (Appendix D). Providers shall not be required to expand their programs to accommodate all children desiring enrollment.

Prior to billing, each student must be officially approved for enrollment by South Carolina First Steps 4K.

No invoice will be considered for services to students not yet officially approved by SCFS 4K.

3.2 Health Records and Screenings

All licensed providers shall comply with the South Carolina Department of Social Services Licensing Regulations for Private and Public Child Day Care Health, Safety and Sanitation requirements. All providers, including non-profit independent schools, shall maintain a health record for each child on site. Each record shall include the following information:

- ⌚ A statement signed by the parent or guardian regarding the child's health prior to admission to the 4K class;

- ⌚ A current copy of the child’s immunization record signed by a physician or other health official. This record should indicate that all required immunizations are complete as recommended and routinely provided by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, or that the appropriate official has provided written proof that the child meets either medical or religious exemption requirements; and
- ⌚ Other health information deemed necessary by the program director and/or by the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Providers should coordinate with their local First Steps Partnership, school district, health department and/or a local health care provider to arrange for basic health screenings (vision, hearing and dental) within 90 days of the program’s start date. Children should be referred to an appropriate health care provider or the local health department when a health problem is suspected or detected. All health-related referrals shall be noted in the child’s health file on site and the results of all screenings should be shared with parent(s)/guardian(s).

3.3 Attendance

The First Steps 4K program is educational in nature, providing at least 6.5 hours of instructional time, five days a week, and at least 180 days per year. These minimums may be exceeded depending on the Service Option chosen for 2023 - 2024. (See Section 1.25). All participants are expected to attend regularly and for the full instructional day as determined by the program option selected. Attendance requirements must be explained to parent(s)/guardian(s) during the enrollment process.

Classroom attendance shall be recorded daily, maintained on site (within the 4K classroom), and submitted daily on ChildPlus. Written absence excuses should be submitted following each absence and maintained on site. Children are allowed a maximum of ten unexcused (10) absences per 180-day school year.

3.4 Chronic Absenteeism, Tardiness or Early Departure

Students with more than 10 unexcused absences must be reported to SC First Steps 4K and will be dropped from enrollment. No child may be disenrolled without the express written permission of the SC First Steps 4K Administrator (see Section 3.6). A student may be re-enrolled with the permission of SC First Steps 4K.

Issues regarding children who do not attend on a regular basis, are routinely late, or routinely leave early should first be addressed by the Center Director or School Administrator. The child’s parent(s)/guardian(s) should be contacted to determine the reasons for the chronic absenteeism, tardiness, or early departure and to identify ways of resolving any underlying factors that might be preventing the child’s consistent, routine attendance.

If there are legitimate reasons for the child’s absence, tardiness, or persistent early departure (illness, death, extreme family hardship, etc.), the child’s parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or the 4K provider may seek a waiver of excessive absences from South Carolina First Steps. If no waiver is granted and the child is absent, tardy or leaves early for ten (10) consecutive class days, the provider will notify SC First Steps 4K.

3.5 Suspension or Disenrollment of a Child

Developmentally appropriate behavior management techniques should be always utilized. Suspension should be used sparingly and as a last resort. Disenrollment will be considered under extraordinary circumstances and only with thorough documentation of both the circumstances surrounding the request and the provider’s sustained and active efforts to resolve these issues in partnership with the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s).

The following procedures, in consultation with the 4K Coach, shall be followed for disenrollment of a child from the 4K class:

- ⌚ List the reason(s) why disenrollment is being requested;
- ⌚ List the interventions used to help the child benefit from the class;
- ⌚ Attach all written correspondence and meeting notes showing the ongoing involvement with the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s);

- ⌚ Attach behavioral and learning environment observations of the child that support the reasons for the requested disenrollment;
- ⌚ If the child has special needs, attach documentation of consultation with the child’s zoned school district’s special education personnel, results of applied interventions, and indicate the status of the special education referral (if applicable); and
- ⌚ Submit all documentation to the Administrator of SC First Steps 4K. **No state-funded students may be disenrolled without the express written permission of the 4K State Director of SC First Steps.**

The program administrator/director may elect to suspend a child for up to two (2) days at any time the child is causing harm to himself/herself or others. No prior approval from First Steps 4K is needed. First Steps 4K State Director must be notified in writing that such action has been taken immediately upon suspension. Extended suspension (more than two (2) days and/or more than three (3) incidents of immediate suspension) requires prior permission from the First Steps 4K State Director. Providers must submit the same information as they would for disenrollment.

4.0 PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY

4.1 Legal Operation, Capacity and Regulatory Violations

Eligible providers must, at minimum:

1. Be fully approved, licensed or registered by the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS). Programs holding “provisional” licensure will not be approved for initial participation or renewal. If a provider’s license lapses to “provisional” status during the contract year, its continuing eligibility/participation shall be determined at the sole and absolute discretion of South Carolina First Steps 4K
2. OR be a non-profit independent school approved by SC First Steps 4K:

- ⌚ Have the facility capacity to serve students in a class of at least ten, but not more than 20 four-year-old students
- ⌚ Comply with all state and local health and safety laws and codes
- ⌚ Have been in legal operation for a period of one year or more (or be granted a waiver of this requirement by South Carolina First Steps 4K)
- ⌚ Have no pending/unresolved regulatory violations relating to child supervision, compliance with ratios, or serious health and safety issues upon approval to participate in the program.

Approved providers must inform the SC First Steps 4K Administrator within one (1) business day of any founded regulatory violations, contacts with law enforcement, the issuance of a provisional license, and/or reports of Out of Home Abuse and Neglect (OHAN) occurring during the contract period. Approved providers must resolve all regulatory violation(s) with SCDSS/Child Care Regulatory to the satisfaction of South Carolina First Steps. Copies of the written Corrective Action Plan (CAP) required by DSS shall be provided to the First Steps 4K Coach. Providers shall make a copy of the DHEC and Fire Marshall’s report available to the First Steps 4K Coach upon DSS license renewal process. Providers shall submit a copy of the renewed license (front and back) to SC First Steps. SC First Steps 4K will review both regulatory violations and 4K Monitoring Reports monthly. Providers displaying a pattern of regulatory infractions or who are cited for endangering the safety and/or well being of students may have their eligibility suspended or terminated at the sole and absolute discretion of SC First Steps 4K.

4.2 Anti-Discrimination Requirements

Approved providers must comply with constitutional provisions and all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability or need for special education services (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997), race, color, creed or national origin (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964), gender (Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Title II of the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976), and religion.

4.3 Criminal Background Checks

Providers must comply with all applicable state laws regarding criminal background checks for employees and exclude from employment any individual not permitted by state law to work with children.

4.4 General Programmatic Requirements

Approved providers must comply with all programmatic, reporting, and assessment criteria established by South Carolina First Steps4K, to include:

- ⌚ Adherence to an approved, research-based preschool curriculum aligned with the South Carolina Early Learning Standards for four-year-olds (see Section 6.6 and Appendix C)
- ⌚ Employment of qualified staff and the provision of substitute teachers as necessary
- ⌚ Maintenance (and data entry as required) of individual student records including (but not limited to)
- ⌚ Eligibility verifications (proof of SC residence; proof of income to include W2s or check stubs or letter of eligibility for Food Stamps; Medicaid Card; copy of birth certificate)
- ⌚ Health data
- ⌚ Attendance records
- ⌚ ASQ-3 or other approved developmental screening scores
- ⌚ Teacher observations, documentation, and rating of skills with Gold© by Teaching Strategies
- ⌚ Records of parent/teacher contact and conferences
- ⌚ Assume accountability for meeting the educational needs of each eligible children and report regularly to parents on his/her progress.

Providers shall maintain all program records on site for a period of at least two years.

5.0 PROGRAM STANDARDS

5.1 Class Size and Adult-to-Child Ratio

Eligible providers must maintain a classroom of at least ten (10) four-year-old children, but not more than 20 four-year-old children with an adult to child ratio not to exceed 1:10. In classrooms of ten children, the 1:10 ratio must be a lead teacher to child ratio. The adult-child ratio must be always maintained during the 6.5-hour (or 8, 8.5 hour) instructional day. Waivers of the minimum – but not the maximum – class size may be sought from SC First Steps.

Providers should note that not all enrolled students must meet the First Steps 4K income eligibility criteria. *Providers will be reimbursed only for eligible students* but may charge tuition to otherwise ineligible children served in the same classroom, providing the instructional program provided *all children* meets the requirements outlined herein. Once enrolled, First Steps 4K funded students may not be disenrolled to create additional space for tuition-based students.

5.2 Classroom Environment

The provider shall maintain appropriate classroom space, equipment, materials, and supplies. All classrooms will be fully equipped to serve the designated number of children per class. All classrooms will be learning center

based and equipped with materials that promote language and literacy, mathematical thinking, reading, writing, listening, fine and gross motor development, scientific inquiry, block play, dramatic play, sand/water play and art. Other centers may be added or taken away based on selected curriculum and topics of study. Each learning center will be made available to children daily.

5.3 Outdoor Equipment

All outdoor playground equipment must be age appropriate and meet licensing requirements. The playground and equipment must be accessible to any enrolled children with special needs.

Outdoor play areas and play equipment must adhere – at minimum – to the following SC DSS requirements as stated in the Child Care Licensing Policy Manual, Chapter 8; 114-507 (C) revised:

Stationary outdoor equipment shall be firmly anchored and shall not be placed on a concrete or asphalt surface. Cushioning material such as mats, wood chips or sand shall be used under climbers, slides, swings, and large pieces of equipment. Cushioning material shall extend at least six (6) feet beyond the equipment and swings. Outdoor equipment shall be arranged so that children are able to be always seen. The height of play equipment shall be developmentally and size appropriate.

6.0 CURRICULUM

6.1 Approved Curricula

Each approved 4K provider shall offer an age-appropriate educational program, *operating with fidelity to an approved, research-based preschool curriculum aligned with the South Carolina Early Learning Standards* for four-year-olds (see Section 6.6). The program must focus on the developmental and learning supports children need to be ready for school. Providers must offer a uniform instructional program to all enrolled students in the 4K classroom(s).

The approved research-based curricula for the current school year are:

- ⌚ High/Scope Cognitively Oriented Curriculum
- ⌚ Creative Curriculum by Teaching Strategies
- ⌚ Montessori Method
 - The Montessori Method groups children into classrooms based on planes of development with Montessori Primary (ECE) including 3-6 year-olds. This method is an approved curriculum with one of the principles being mixed age group classrooms, however only 4-year-old students are eligible for our tuition funding.

Providers wishing to use a supplementary research-based curriculum shall seek prior approval from SC First Steps 4K. (See Appendix C for details.) Providers seeking to change their curriculum choice during the contract period must seek prior approval from SC First Steps 4K.

Programmatic coaching visits shall include appropriate measures of curricular fidelity. Visits may be in person or virtual and will be a minimum of twice monthly.

6.2 Lesson Plans

Written lesson plans containing specific educational activities are required for a minimum of 5.0 hours per 6.5 hour instructional day (or 7 hours for an 8.5 hour instructional day) and should include educational experiences in the areas of language/literacy, math, science, social studies, fine arts (music, art and drama), social and emotional and physical development. The remaining 1.5 hours of the instructional day, consisting of meals, rest time and/or outside play, etc. may be included in the written plans at the teacher's discretion and/or as they relate to instructional objectives.

Lesson plans will be reviewed by First Steps 4K Coach during monitoring visits (both announced and unannounced). These plans must be maintained on-line and on site (within the 4K classroom) and will be

reviewed for completeness, alignment with the South Carolina Content Standards and fidelity to the program's selected curriculum model. Lesson plans will be completed on-line using MyTeachingStrategies®. Lesson plans should evidence the lead teacher's deliberate and thorough efforts to prepare for the week's instructional activities. Providers with missing or insufficient lesson plans may be required to submit plans directly to SC First Steps 4K for a period to be determined by First Steps staff.

6.3 Instructional Technology and Television

The use of *active/participatory* instructional technology, such as age-appropriate computer software, *shall be limited to no more than 30 minutes a day. Television viewing may only be 30 minutes a week and used in support of specific instructional objectives to be detailed in the teacher's weekly lesson plans. The regular viewing of television programming or video materials is prohibited.* Teachers must preview all video materials to ensure their appropriate use and discuss what is viewed with the children. Providers shall ensure equal access to active instructional technology for all children.

6.4 Rest Time

Opportunity for a brief rest time shall be incorporated into each instructional day. Rest time may not exceed forty minutes per day, although thirty minutes is the suggested length, except as necessary to address the specific individual needs of children. During rest time, the staff/child ratio shall remain at least 1:10. Children who do not sleep after a brief rest period shall be allowed to have a quiet activity on their mats or go to a supervised area for quiet activities.

6.5 Discipline

Program providers shall use developmentally appropriate guidance techniques and may not allow the use of corporal punishment or severe discipline. Corporal punishment is the use of physical force to the body as a discipline measure. Physical force to the body includes, but is not limited to, spanking, slapping, biting, threats and shaking. Severe discipline includes shouting, withholding food, and/or isolation or confinement for long periods of time. All staff members and parent(s)/guardian(s) shall be furnished a copy of the disciplinary policy prohibiting corporal punishment and this policy shall be reviewed with each family upon enrollment. Both staff members and parent(s)/guardian(s) shall sign and date the disciplinary policy statement in recognition of receipt and understanding of the policy. The signed disciplinary policies shall be maintained on file.

6.6 SC Early Learning Standards

All instructional programming must be designed to support South Carolina's approved curriculum standards for four-year-olds. These statewide expectations ensure that:

- ⌚ Teachers know what is to be taught;
- ⌚ Children know what is to be learned; and
- ⌚ Parents know both what is to be learned and how well these concepts are being learned by their child.

6.7 Orientation

An on-site orientation for families must be offered and conducted prior to the first day of instruction. This orientation should be conducted jointly by the classroom teaching staff (4K teacher and instructional assistant) and director/program administrator as possible and may be held in conjunction with other orientation programs being offered. During the family orientation, parents shall receive written information concerning meal and extended day opportunities, a school calendar noting holidays and closures during the school year, discipline policies and the philosophy of the program. A 4K Orientation Checklist will be completed on all families and shall be maintained onsite.

6.8 Parent Education and Involvement

Parents are a child's first and most important teachers. Their involvement is critical to the success of their children. To strengthen parental involvement in the learning process, each provider shall be required to submit to SC First Steps 4K a *Parent Education and Involvement Plan*.

This plan must include provisions for:

- ⌚ A family orientation at the beginning of the school year.
- ⌚ At least two parent/teacher conferences during which assessment data on the child's progress must be shared.
- ⌚ Documentation of the parent(s)/guardian(s) efforts to participate in the parenting programming offered by the Center.
- ⌚ The provision of parent resources (a parent education resource library, regular newsletters, etc.); and
- ⌚ Opportunities and written operating policies for ongoing parent involvement (volunteerism, classroom visits, etc.).

In addition to two parent/teacher conferences, the provider shall offer at least two parent education workshops during the school year. The first of these workshops may be an initial orientation/open house. At least one of the two workshops shall focus upon interactive literacy. Documentation of these parent workshops, to include agendas and attendance records shall be maintained on-site, as shall documentation of all parent-teacher conferences.

6.9 4K to 5K School Transition Plan

Providers shall be responsible for developing and implementing a 5K transition plan for each eligible 4K student and his/her parent(s) or guardian(s). The transition plan shall include:

Parent Information

- ⌚ The name, address and phone number of the school the child is zoned to attend
- ⌚ Pertinent school information (registration dates, enrollment requirements, materials, etc.)

Child Information

- ⌚ Plans to provide the school with a portfolio of student work and assessment data (with parent/guardian permission)
- ⌚ Provision of any child-specific information that will enable the 5K teacher or other school personnel to best support the child's continued developmental and academic progress (with parent/guardian permission)

Visitation and Transition Planning

- ⌚ Coordination of visits to new school and/or 5K classroom
- ⌚ Exploration of Countdown to Kindergarten participation through the local First Steps County Partnership

7.0 PERSONNEL AND TRAINING

7.1 Classroom Staffing

Each First Steps 4K classroom (of 11 or more students) shall **at all times** be staffed by a lead teacher and an instructional assistant. Classrooms enrolling ten students (the program's minimum class size) may elect to employ a single adult provided this is a lead teacher. Lead teachers and instructional assistants may not serve dual work roles within the center.

7.2 Lead Teacher Qualifications

Providers shall employ qualified lead teachers in each First Steps 4K classroom. Teachers holding a four-year-degree or higher in Early Childhood Education are preferred.

Each lead teacher employed in the First Steps 4K program shall possess, at minimum, a two-year degree in early childhood education or a related field. Teachers possessing a two-year degree must be enrolled and demonstrating progress toward the completion of a teacher education program within four years.

A list of acceptable related fields is attached to this Guidelines document. (Appendix B)

Providers unable to locate lead teacher candidates meeting these qualifications may petition for a waiver from South Carolina First Steps 4K State Director. Waiver requests will rarely be considered on an individual basis and will reflect both the provider's documented efforts to employ a lead teacher meeting the qualifications detailed herein and the qualifications of the proposed lead teacher.

Programs electing to use Montessori as their curriculum model must have a Montessori credentialed lead teacher. This credential should come from a MACTE recognized organization.

Should an approved lead teacher leave the program's employment during the contract period, providers must notify their 4K Coach within 3 business days. Providers shall be allowed up to four weeks (20 school days) to find a qualified replacement. Providers unable to locate a qualified replacement during this period may be subject to the suspension of their provider eligibility at the discretion of the Administrator of SC First Steps 4K.

7.3 Instructional Assistant Qualifications

Providers shall employ a full-time instructional assistant for each classroom enrolling 11 students or more. Candidates possessing at least a two-year degree with experience and pre-service training in early childhood education are preferred. *Each instructional assistant employed by the First Steps 4K program must, at minimum, have a high school diploma or its equivalent and two years of documented experience working with children under five years of age. Instructional assistants must have completed the Early Childhood Development Credential (ECD) 101 or enroll and complete this course within twelve months of the 4K contract award.*

7.4 Days of Service

Teachers and instructional assistants shall be employed for a minimum of one hundred eighty days (180 instructional days), seven and one-half (7 ½) hour days. The times of employment will directly correspond to the Service Option chosen in Section 1.25.

Each lead teacher shall be compensated for at least one hour of unencumbered, instructional planning time daily (7.5 hour requirement = 6.5 hour instructional day + 1 hour daily for planning and preparation). During this portion of the day, he or she may not be responsible for any other task, including (but not limited to) the supervision of children. To ensure quality, teachers should be in attendance each day of the 4K program. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the Center Director. Vacations should be taken outside of the employment days of the 4K program.

7.5 Substitute Teachers

A substitute teacher and/or substitute teaching assistant shall be present and working in the 4K classroom for each day that a teacher and/or instructional assistant is absent, whether due to illness, required training or personal leave. The provider should attempt to secure a substitute teacher with similar credentials to the regular teacher or assistant. Long term substitutes acting as lead teachers for a period of four weeks (20 school days) or more must meet lead teacher qualifications.

7.6 Professional Development

All personnel (*both* teachers and instructional assistants) providing instruction and classroom support to students participating in the First Steps 4K program shall participate in at least 15 hours of professional development to include training in:

- ⌚ Teaching children from poverty
- ⌚ Curriculum embedded assessment
- ⌚ Emergent literacy (oral communication, knowledge of print and letters, phonemic and phonological awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension development)

Training hours must be approved through SC Endeavors. Documentation of each staff member's professional development hours shall also be maintained on-site and is subject to monitoring by First Steps 4K. Trainings approved by SC Department of Education for CEU credit will also be offered.

8.0 ASSESSMENT

8.1 Instructional Assessment

Providers participating in the First Steps 4K program shall use GOLD® by Teaching Strategies as their primary method of student assessment. GOLD® is a performance-based assessment requiring the ongoing documentation of student performance and progress. Summary reporting shall be monitored by SC Steps 4K and required at least three times annually (at the end of fall, winter, and spring checkpoints). Programs electing to provide a summer school option will also complete the summer checkpoint. All summary ratings shall be based upon the student's *documented performance and progress*. Student portfolios and the teacher's observation records shall be maintained, shared with parents during conferences, and monitored by First Steps 4K staff.

8.2 Developmental Screening

Providers are *required* to complete a developmental screening on each First Steps-funded student as part of the enrollment process. Screenings shall be conducted with the ASQ-3 (Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition) or another approved developmental screening tool, with the results maintained in the child's assessment folder and reported to SC First Steps 4K. SC First Steps 4K shall provide access to training and testing materials for eligible providers. Students whose developmental screening scores fall at the 10th percentile or below *must be referred to the Special Education Coordinator within the child's school district of residence for additional diagnostic evaluation*. Children experiencing discomfort, disinterest or refusing to participate shall be re-screened prior to making such a referral. Additionally, students with significant articulation difficulties should be referred for speech/language evaluations within their school district of residence.

9.0 PROGRAM MONITORING

9.1 Monitoring and Technical Assistance Visits

Approved providers enrolling eligible students shall each be assigned a First Steps 4K Coach. Our Coaches shall make both announced and unannounced monitoring and technical assistance visits to the funded 4K classroom throughout the school year, to include virtual visits as possible. These technical assistance visits may include unannounced evaluative monitoring using an ECERS-3 Assessment, Creative Curriculum Fidelity Tool, or others appropriate to measure the curricular fidelity. Deficiencies noted during monitoring visits will be reviewed with the 4K Program Administrator and shall form the basis of a Programmatic Improvement and Technical Assistance Plan.

Monitoring visits documenting significant levels of non-compliance with the program's contractual obligations and/or those documenting the endangerment of enrolled children will result in a corrective action plan up to and including the termination of provider eligibility. Note that First Steps 4K Coaches are considered "mandated reporters." Regulatory deficiencies noted on site will be reported to the SC Department of Social Services as a matter of policy. Failure to permit timely facility access to First Steps 4K staff during normal business/operating hours may be cause for corrective action, up to and including the termination of provider eligibility.

10.0 FUNDING AND FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

10.1 Per Student Funding

South Carolina First Steps shall provide funding in the amount of \$5,100 (Option TR) per eligible student served during the school year. Students enrolled for less than 180 school days shall be funded on a pro-rated basis commensurate with the length of their enrollment. Tuition reimbursement is the responsibility of the SC First Steps and is based on the provider's reports and verification of eligible students by the 4K Coach.

With approval by SC First Steps 4K, providers may select one of four program options detailed in Section 1.25. Tuition and transportation payments will be adjusted on a pro rata basis for providers electing beyond 180 days at 6.5 hrs. daily.

10.2 Equipment and Materials Grants

Approved providers must maintain material, supplies, and furnishings to accommodate the number of children enrolled in the 4K classroom(s). Based upon the availability of funds, SC First Steps 4K reserves the right to offer material/equipment grants to 4K providers. Approved providers enrolling between one and six eligible children may receive a materials/equipment grant of up to \$2,000 per child. Approved providers enrolling seven or more eligible children may receive a material/equipment grant not to exceed \$20,000. This grant funding shall be used to purchase items identified in consultation with a First Steps 4K Coach as necessary to support a high-quality learning environment. This grant funding may be used for approved purchases only, with compensation made directly to the vendor from which the order is to be obtained (see Appendix E). *All materials purchased with grant funds shall be maintained in the First Steps 4K classroom.*

10.3 Transportation Funds

Programs providing transportation to eligible students shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred per child up to \$620 for 180 day options. Transportation payments will be adjusted on a pro rata basis for providers electing a 220 day option.

10.4 Fiscal Procedures

Pending provider approval from SC First Steps 4K and enrollment of eligible children, a Grant Agreement shall be established with the 4K Providers. Contracts will be issued through a Cognito online form, completed, and submitted. Executed contracts with the signatures of the SC First Steps 4K Administrator and the SC First Steps Executive Director will be emailed in return to each Provider.



Appendix A
Child Early Reading Development and Education Program

SECTION 2. Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:
CHAPTER 156- Child Early Reading Development and Education Program

Section 59-156-110. There is created the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program which is a full day, four-year-old kindergarten program for at-risk children which must be made available to qualified children in all public school districts within the State. The program must focus on:

- (1) a comprehensive, systemic approach to reading that follows the State Reading Proficiency Plan and the district's comprehensive annual reading proficiency plan, both adopted pursuant to Chapter 155, Title 59;
- (2) successfully completing the readiness assessment administered pursuant to Section 59-155-150;
- (3) the developmental and learning support that children must have in order to be ready for school;
- (4) incorporating parenting education, including educating the parents as to methods that may assist the child pursuant to Section 59-155-110, 59-155-130, and 59-155-140; and
- (5) identifying community and civic organizations that can support early literacy efforts.

Section 59-156-120. (A)(1) The South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program first must be made available to eligible children from the following eight trial districts in Abbeville County School District et al. vs. South Carolina: Allendale, Dillon 2, Florence 4, Hampton 2, Jasper, Lee, Marion 7, and Orangeburg 3.

(2) With any funds remaining after funding the eight trial districts, the program must be expanded to the remaining plaintiff school districts in Abbeville County School District et al. vs. South Carolina and then expanded to eligible children residing in school districts with a poverty index of ninety percent or greater. Priority must be given to implementing the program first in those of the plaintiff districts which participated in the program during the 2006-2007 school year, then in the plaintiff districts having proportionally the largest population of underserved at-risk four-year-old children.

(3) With any funds remaining after funding the school districts delineated in items (1) and (2), the program must be expanded statewide. The General Assembly, in the annual general appropriations bill, shall set forth the priority schedule, the funding, and the manner in which the program is expanded.

(B) Unexpended funds from the prior fiscal year for this program shall be carried forward and shall remain in the program. In rare instances, students with documented kindergarten readiness barriers, especially reading barriers, may be permitted to enroll for a second year, or at age five, at the discretion of the Department of Education for students being served by a public provider or at the discretion of the Office of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness for students being served by a private provider.

Section 59-156-130. (A) Each child residing in the program's district, who has attained the age of four years on or before September first of the school year and meets the at-risk criteria, is eligible for enrollment in the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program for one year.

(B)(1) The parent of each eligible child may enroll the child in one of the following programs:

- (a) a school-year four-year-old kindergarten program delivered by an approved public provider; or
- (b) a school-year four-year-old kindergarten program delivered by an approved private provider.

(2) The parent enrolling a child must complete and submit an application to the approved provider of choice. The application must be submitted on forms and must be accompanied by a copy of the child's birth

certificate, immunization documentation, and documentation of the student's eligibility as evidenced by family income documentation showing an annual family income of one hundred eighty-five percent or less of the federal poverty guidelines as promulgated annually by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or a statement of Medicaid eligibility.

(3) In submitting an application for enrollment, the parent agrees to comply with provider attendance policies during the school year. The attendance policy must state that the program consists of six and one-half hours of instructional time daily and operates for a period of not less than one hundred eighty days a year. Pursuant to program guidelines, noncompliance with attendance policies may result in removal from the program.

(C)(1) No parent is required to pay tuition or fees solely for the purpose of enrolling in or attending the program established under this chapter. Nothing in this chapter prohibits charging fees for childcare that may be provided outside the times of the instructional day provided in these programs.

(2) If by October first of the school year at least seventy-five percent of the total number of children eligible for the Child Early Reading Development and Education Program in a district or county are projected to be enrolled in that program, Head Start, or ABC Child Care Program as determined by the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps, Child Early Reading Development and Education Program providers may then enroll pay-lunch children who score at or below the twenty-fifth national percentile on two of the three DIAL-3 subscales and may receive reimbursement for these children if funds are available.

Section 59-156-140. (A) Public school providers participating in the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program must submit an application to the Department of Education. Private providers participating in the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program must submit an application to the Office of First Steps. The application must be submitted on the forms prescribed, contain assurances that the provider meets all program criteria set forth in this section, and will comply with all reporting and assessment requirements.

(B) Providers shall:

(1) comply with all federal and state laws and constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services;

(2) comply with all state and local health and safety laws and codes;

(3) comply with all state laws that apply regarding criminal background checks for employees and exclude from employment any individual not permitted by state law to work with children;

(4) be accountable for meeting the educational needs of the child and report at least quarterly to the parent or guardian on his progress;

(5) comply with all program, reporting, and assessment criteria required of providers;

(6) maintain individual student records for each child enrolled in the program, including, but not limited to, assessment data, health data, records of teacher observations, and records of parent or guardian and teacher conferences;

(7) designate whether extended day services will be offered to the parents and guardians of children participating in the program;

(8) be approved, registered, or licensed by the Department of Social Services; and

(9) comply with all state and federal laws and requirements specific to program providers.

(C) Providers may limit student enrollment based upon space available, but, if enrollment exceeds available space, providers shall enroll children with first priority given to children with the lowest scores on an approved prekindergarten readiness assessment. Private providers must not be required to expand their programs to accommodate all children desiring enrollment, but are encouraged to keep a waiting list for students they are unable to serve because of space limitations.

Section 59-156-150. The Department of Education, the Read to Succeed Office, and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness shall:

- (1) develop the provider application form;
- (2) develop the child enrollment application form;
- (3) develop a list of approved research-based preschool curricula for use in the program based upon the South Carolina Content Standards, and provide training and technical assistance to support its effective use in approved classrooms serving children;
- (4) develop a list of approved prekindergarten readiness assessments to be used in conjunction with the program, and provide assessments and technical assistance to support assessment administration in approved classrooms serving children;
- (5) establish criteria for awarding new classroom equipping grants;
- (6) establish criteria for the parenting education program providers must offer;
- (7) establish a list of early childhood related fields that may be used in meeting the lead teacher qualifications;
- (8) develop a list of data-collection needs to be used in implementation and evaluation of the program;
- (9) identify teacher preparation program options and assist lead teachers in meeting teacher program requirements;
- (10) establish criteria for granting student retention waivers; and
- (11) establish criteria for granting classroom-size requirements waivers.

Section 59-156-160. (A) Providers of the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program shall offer a complete educational program in accordance with age-appropriate instructional practice and a research-based preschool curriculum aligned with school success. The program must focus on:

- (1) a comprehensive, systemic approach to reading that follows the State Reading Proficiency Plan and the district's comprehensive annual reading proficiency plan, both adopted pursuant to Chapter 155, Title 59;
- (2) successfully completing the readiness assessment administered pursuant to Section 59-155-150;
- (3) the developmental and learning support that children must have in order to be ready for school;
- (4) incorporating parenting education, including educating the parents as to methods that may assist the child pursuant to Section 59-155-110, 59-155-130, and 59-55-140, including strengthening parent involvement in the learning process with an emphasis on interactive literacy; and
- (5) identifying community and civic organizations that can support early literacy efforts.

(B) Providers shall offer high-quality, center-based programs, including, but not limited to, the following:

- (1) employ a lead teacher with a two-year degree in early childhood education or related field or be granted a waiver of this requirement from the Department of Education for public schools or from the Office of First Steps to School Readiness for private centers;
- (2) employ an education assistant with pre-service or in-service training in early childhood education;
- (3) maintain classrooms with at least ten four-year-old children, but no more than twenty four-year-old children, with an adult to child ratio of 1:10. With classrooms having a minimum of ten children, the 1:10 ratio must be a lead teacher to child ratio. Waivers of the minimum class size requirement may be granted by the South Carolina Department of Education for public providers or by the Office of First Steps to School Readiness for private providers on a case-by-case basis;
- (4) offer a full day, center-based program with six and one-half hours of instruction daily for one hundred eighty school days;
- (5) provide an approved research-based preschool curriculum that focuses on critical child development skills, especially early literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development;
- (6) engage parents' participation in their child's educational experience that shall include a minimum of two documented conferences for each year; and
- (7) adhere to professional development requirements outlined in this chapter.

Section 59-156-170. (A) Every classroom providing services to four-year-old children established pursuant to this chapter must have a qualified lead teacher and an education assistant as needed to maintain an adult to child ratio of 1:10.

(B)(1) In classrooms in private centers, the lead teacher must have at least a two-year degree in early childhood education or a related field and who is enrolled and is demonstrating progress toward the completion of a teacher education program within four years.

(2) In classrooms in public schools, the lead teacher must meet state requirements pertaining to certification.

(C) All education assistants in private centers and public schools must have the minimum of a high school diploma or the equivalent, and at least two years of experience working with children under five years old. The assistant must have completed the Early Childhood Development Credential (ECD) 101 or enroll and complete this course within twelve months of hire. Providers may request waivers to the ECD 101 requirement for those assistants who have demonstrated sufficient experience in teaching children five years old and younger. The providers must request this waiver in writing to First Steps or the Department of Education, as applicable, and provide appropriate documentation as to the qualifications of the teaching assistant.

Section 59-156-180. The General Assembly recognizes there is a strong relationship between the skills and preparation of prekindergarten instructors and the educational outcomes of students. To improve these educational outcomes, participating providers shall require all personnel providing instruction and classroom support to students participating in the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program to participate annually in a minimum of fifteen hours of professional development, including, teaching children from poverty. Professional development should provide instruction in strategies and techniques to address the age-appropriate progress of prekindergarten students in developing emergent literacy skills, including, but not limited to, oral communication, knowledge of print and letters, phonemic and phonological awareness, and vocabulary and comprehension development.

Section 59-156-190. Both public and private providers are eligible for transportation funds for the transportation of children to and from school. Nothing in this section prohibits providers from contracting with another entity to provide transportation services provided the entities adhere to the requirements of Section 56-5-195. Providers must not be responsible for transporting students attending programs outside the district lines. Parents choosing program providers located outside of their resident district shall be responsible for transportation. When transporting four-year-old child development students, providers shall make every effort to transport them with students of similar ages attending the same school. Of the amount appropriated for the program, not more than one hundred eighty-five dollars for each student may be retained by the Department of Education for the purposes of transporting four-year-old students. This amount annually must be increased by the same projected rate of inflation as determined by the Office of Research and Statistics of the State Budget and Control Board for the Education Finance Act.

Section 59-156-200. For all private providers approved to offer services pursuant to this chapter, the Office of First Steps to School Readiness shall:

- (1) serve as the fiscal agent;
- (2) verify student enrollment eligibility;
- (3) recruit, review, and approve eligible providers. In considering approval of providers, consideration must be given to the provider's availability of permanent space for program service and whether temporary classroom space is necessary to provide services to any children;
- (4) coordinate oversight, monitoring, technical assistance, coordination, and training for classroom providers;
- (5) serve as a clearing house for information and best practices related to four-year-old kindergarten programs;
- (6) receive, review, and approve new classroom grant applications and make recommendations for approval based on approved criteria;

- (7) coordinate activities and promote collaboration with other private and public providers in developing and supporting four-year-old kindergarten programs;
- (8) maintain a database of the children enrolled in the program; and
- (9) promulgate guidelines as necessary for the implementation of the program.

Section 59-156-210. For all public school providers approved to offer services pursuant to this chapter, the Department of Education shall:

- (1) serve as the fiscal agent;
- (2) verify student enrollment eligibility;
- (3) recruit, review, and approve eligible providers. In considering approval of providers, consideration must be given to the provider's availability of permanent space for program service and whether temporary classroom space is necessary to provide services to any children;
- (4) coordinate oversight, monitoring, technical assistance, coordination, and training for classroom providers;
- (5) serve as a clearing house for information and best practices related to four-year-old kindergarten programs;
- (6) receive, review, and approve new classroom grant applications and make recommendations for approval based on approved criteria;
- (7) coordinate activities and promote collaboration with other private and public providers in developing and supporting four-year-old kindergarten programs;
- (8) maintain a database of the children enrolled in the program; and
- (9) promulgate guidelines as necessary for the implementation of the program.

Section 59-156-220. (A) Eligible students enrolling with private providers during the school year must be funded on a pro rata basis determined by the length of their enrollment.

(B) Private providers transporting eligible children to and from school must be eligible for a reimbursement of up to five hundred fifty dollars for each eligible child transported, funded on a pro rata basis determined by the length of the child's enrollment. Providers who are reimbursed are required to retain records as required by their fiscal agent.

(C) Providers enrolling between one and six eligible children must be eligible to receive up to one thousand dollars for each child in materials and equipment grant funding, with providers enrolling seven or more such children eligible for grants not to exceed ten thousand dollars.

(D) Providers receiving equipment grants are expected to participate in the program and provide high-quality, center-based programs for a minimum of three years. A provider who fails to participate for three years shall return a portion of the equipment allocation at a level determined by the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness. Funding to providers is contingent upon receipt of data as requested by the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps.

Section 59-156-230. The Department of Social Services shall:

- (1) maintain a list of all approved public and private providers; and
- (2) provide the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps information necessary to carry out the requirements of this chapter.

Section 59-156-240. The Office of First Steps to School Readiness is responsible for the collection and maintenance of data on the state-funded programs provided through private providers.

Section 59-155-150. (A) With the enactment of this chapter, the State Superintendent of Education shall ensure that every student entering publically funded prekindergarten and kindergarten beginning in Fiscal Year 2014-2015 will be administered a readiness assessment by the forty-fifth day of the school year. Initially the assessment shall focus on early language and literacy development. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2018 - 2019, the assessment must assess each child's early language and literacy development, mathematical thinking, physical well-being, and social-emotional development. The assessment may include multiple assessments, all of which must be approved by the board. The approved assessments of academic readiness must be aligned with first and second grade standards for English/language arts and mathematics. The purpose of the assessment is to provide teachers

and parents or guardians with information to address the readiness needs of each student, especially by identifying language, cognitive, social, emotional, health problems, and concerning appropriate instruction for each child. The results of the assessment and the developmental intervention strategies recommended to address the child's identified needs must be provided, in writing, to the parent or guardian. Reading instructional strategies and developmental activities for children whose oral language skills are assessed to be below the norm of their peers in the State must be aligned with the district's reading proficiency plan for addressing the readiness needs of each student. The results of each assessment also must be reported to the Read to Succeed Office.

(B) Any student enrolled in prekindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third grade who is substantially not demonstrating proficiency in reading, based upon formal diagnostic assessments or through teacher observations, must be provided intensive in-class and supplemental reading intervention immediately upon determination. The intensive interventions must be provided as individualized and small group assistance based on the analysis of assessment data. All sustained interventions must be aligned with the district's reading proficiency plan. These interventions must be at least thirty minutes in duration and be in addition to ninety minutes of daily reading and writing instruction provided to all students in kindergarten through grade three. The district must continue to provide intensive in-class intervention and at least thirty minutes of supplemental intervention until the student can comprehend and write text at grade-level independently. In addition, the parent or guardian of the student must be notified, in writing, of the child's inability to read grade-level texts, the interventions to be provided, and the child's reading abilities at the end of the planned interventions. The results of the initial assessments and progress monitoring also must be provided to the Read to Succeed Office.

(C) Programs that focus on early childhood literacy development in the State are required to promote:

- (1) parent training and support for parent involvement in developing children's literacy; and
- (2) development of oral language, print awareness, and emergent writing; and are encouraged to promote community literacy including, but not limited to, primary health care providers, faith-based organizations, county libraries, and service organizations.

South Carolina General Assembly
125th Session, 2023-2024

H. 4300

General Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2023-2024
Ratified Version

PART IB

OPERATION OF STATE GOVERNMENT

SECTION 1 - H630 - DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1.48. (SDE: Full-Day 4K) Eligible students residing in any school district or attending any charter school authorized by the South Carolina Public Charter School District or an approved institution of higher education may participate in the South Carolina Early Reading Development and Education program (CERDEP) pending the availability of space and funding. Student eligibility as defined by Section 59-156-130 of the 1976 Code is an annual family income of one hundred eighty-five percent or less of the federal poverty guidelines as promulgated annually by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or a statement of Medicaid eligibility.

A parent or guardian may choose to enroll their child in a public school participating in the program and approved by the Department of Education pursuant to Section 59-156-210 or in a private provider participating in the program and approved by the Office of First Steps pursuant to Section 59-156-200. A private provider includes, but is not limited to, a child care center, a military child care facility regulated by the United States Department of Defense, or a

non-profit independent school. State funds appropriated for the provision of CERDEP services in military child care facilities may not be used to supplant existing federal child care funds. No school district can be denied participation in CERDEP or be denied CERDEP funding pursuant to the terms of this provision.

4K programs in public schools and non-profit independent schools participating in CERDEP are not required to be approved, registered, or licensed by the Department of Social Services in order to participate in CERDEP. Instead, the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps are responsible for ensuring that providers deliver high-quality educational programs pursuant to Section 59-156-160.

Public and private providers shall be funded for instructional costs at a minimum rate of \$5,100 per student enrolled. Eligible students enrolling during the school year or withdrawing during the school year shall be funded on a pro rata basis determined by the length of their enrollment. Private providers transporting eligible children to and from school shall also be eligible for reimbursement at a minimum of \$620 per eligible child transported. First Steps and the Department of Education must provide an equitable distribution above the minimum between public and private providers. First Steps and the Department of Education must provide a quarterly report beginning October 1 detailing funding above the minimum made to any provider to the Governor, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. All providers who are reimbursed are required to retain records as required by their fiscal agent. New providers participating for the first time in the current fiscal year and enrolling between one and six eligible children shall be eligible to receive at a minimum of \$1,000 per child in materials and equipment funding, with providers enrolling seven or more such children eligible for funding at a minimum of \$10,000. The Department of Education and the Office of First Steps Readiness are authorized to utilize carry forward funds and federal funds to supplement the amount expended for materials and equipment.

Providers receiving equipment funding are expected to participate in the program and provide high-quality, center-based programs as defined herein for a minimum of three years. Failure to participate for three years will require the provider to return a portion of the equipment allocation at a level determined by the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness. Funding to providers is contingent upon receipt of data as requested by the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps. The Department of Education shall only provide funding for public school students whose complete records have been entered into PowerSchool based on the one hundred and thirty-five day student average daily membership. For the current fiscal year, providers may enroll pay-lunch children who score at or below the twenty-fifth national percentile on two of the three DIAL-3 subscales by July 1 if at least seventy-five percent of the total number of children eligible for the Child Early Reading Development and Education Program in a district or county are projected to be enrolled in that program, Head Start, or ABC Child Care Program as determined by the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps, Child Early Reading Development and Education Program. Providers may receive reimbursement for these children if funds are available. The Department of Education is required to offer waivers allowing students with disabilities to be served in multi-categorical classroom settings based on similar cognition and abilities. Funding appropriated for CERDEP may be carried forward and expended for the same purpose.

Annually, the Department of Education is directed to audit the annual allocations to public providers to ensure that allocations are accurate and aligned to the appropriate pro rata per student allocation, materials, and equipment funding. In the event the department, during the audit process determines that the annual allocations of the prior fiscal year are not accurate, the department must adjust the allocations for the current fiscal year to account for the audit findings. The department must provide the results of the annual audit findings to the General Assembly no later than December first. Likewise, in the event the Office of First Steps determines that the annual allocations of the prior fiscal year to private providers are not accurate, the Office of First Steps must adjust the allocations for the current fiscal year to account for the findings.

Of the funds appropriated, \$300,000 shall be allocated to the Education Oversight Committee to conduct an annual evaluation of the South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program and to issue findings in a report to the General Assembly by March first of each year. To aid in this evaluation, the Education Oversight Committee shall determine the data necessary and both public and private providers are required to submit the necessary data as a condition of continued participation in and funding of the program. This data shall include developmentally appropriate measures of student progress. Additionally, the Department of Education shall issue a unique student

identifier for each child receiving services from a private provider. The Department of Education shall be responsible for the collection and maintenance of data on the public state funded full day and half-day four-year-old kindergarten programs. The Office of First Steps to School Readiness shall be responsible for the collection and maintenance of data on the state funded programs provided through private providers. The Education Oversight Committee shall use this data and all other collected and maintained data necessary to conduct a research based review of the program's implementation and assessment of student success in the early elementary grades along with information, recommendations, and a timeline for how the state can increase the number of students served in high-quality programs.

For eligible children residing in school districts that do not participate in CERDEP, the Department of Education is required to develop and implement inter-district transfer policies that give parents or guardians the option of their eligible child attending an out-of-district school that participates in CERDEP.

For the current fiscal year, the Office of First Steps may expend: (1) up to \$2,000,000 to pilot a program to provide higher reimbursement rates to high-quality providers. The reimbursement rate for students enrolled by child care providers rated B or higher in the ABC Quality System operated by the Department of Social Services may be increased by up to 10% of the per-student base following guidelines developed by the Office of First Steps; and (2) up to \$250,000 to provide one-time supplemental, needs-based incentive grants in an amount not to exceed \$30,000 for newly created and/or newly approved private providers proposing to expand service to ten or more CERDEP eligible children in communities unable to enroll all eligible students in a public, private, or Head Start setting during the prior fiscal year. These grants are designed to address building renovations, documented as necessary to bring proposed classrooms into compliance with licensing regulations, materials and staffing costs, and/or other obstacles currently preventing their participation in the program. The First Steps Board of Trustees shall develop and approve an application process that incorporates formal review and fiscal safeguards designed to ensure grant funds are used solely to address documented barriers to program participation. Providers receiving this one-time supplement shall be expected to participate in the program and provide high-quality, center-based programs as defined herein for a minimum of three years. Failure to participate for three years shall require the provider to return a portion of the supplemental allocation at a level determined by the Office of First Steps to School Readiness. First Steps shall submit a report detailing its process, expenditures and expanded enrollment to the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee by March 15.

If by August first, the Department of Education or the Office of First Steps determines that appropriations will exceed expenditures, available funds may be used to fund an extended program and to increase the length of the program to a maximum of eight and a half hours per day or two hundred and twenty days per year or to fund summer programs. If a district chooses to fund summer enrollment, the program funding shall conform to the funding in this act for full year programs; however, it shall be reduced on a pro rata basis to conform with the length of the program.

A summer program shall be no more than eight and a half hours per day and shall be not more than ten weeks in length. The per pupil allocation and classroom grant must conform with the appropriated amount contained in this act and end of year adjustments shall be based on the one hundred and thirty-five-day student average daily membership or later student average daily membership for districts choosing to extend the program past one hundred and eighty days. Funds may also be used to provide parent engagement, professional development, and quality evaluations of programs. No later than April first, the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps shall report to the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee on the expenditure of these funds to include the following information: the amount of money used and specific steps and measures taken to enhance the quality of the 4K program and the amount of money used for professional development as well as the types of professional development offered and the number of participants. The Office of First Steps is directed to determine if the provision of extended programs in private centers improves the ability of parents to enter the workforce or to pursue postsecondary training or industry credentials.

On or before November 15, the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps shall share data that identifies the total number of children enrolled in CERDEP in both public and private providers. If available appropriations exceed the instructional costs of serving children enrolled in the program and if a waiting list of eligible children can be documented by the Department of Education and by the Office of First Steps, then the Executive Budget Office may

authorize the transfer of funds between the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps.

The Office of First Steps and the Department of Education shall collaborate with the South Carolina Head Start State Collaboration Office to inform parents of all publicly funded full-day 4K programs including Head Start by participating in PalmettoPreK and First5SC.

1A.9. (SDE-EIA: Teacher Supplies) All certified and non-certified public school teachers identified in PCS, certified special school classroom teachers, certified media specialists, certified guidance counselors, and career specialists who are employed by a school district, a charter school, or lead teachers employed in a publicly funded full day 4K classroom approved by the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness, as of November thirtieth of the current fiscal year, based on the public decision of the school board may receive reimbursement of \$350 each school year to offset expenses incurred by them for teaching supplies and materials. Funds shall be disbursed by the department to School districts by July fifteenth based on the last reconciled Professional Certified Staff (PCS) listing from the previous year. With remaining funds for this program, any deviation in the PCS and actual teacher count will be reconciled by December thirty-first or as soon as practicable thereafter. Based on the public decision of the school district and no later than May fifteenth annually, the district shall notify all individuals entitled to receive these funds the manner in which the funds will be disbursed. Funds may be disbursed to each teacher via check in a manner separate and distinct from their payroll check on the first day teachers, by contract, are required to be in attendance at school for the current contract year, or the funds may be disbursed to each teacher via direct deposit as long as the funds are handled in a manner to be separate and distinct from their payroll check. This reimbursement shall not be considered by the state as taxable income. Special schools include the Governor's School for Science and Math, the Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School, Governor's School for Agriculture at John de la Howe, School for the Deaf and the Blind, Felton Lab, Department of Juvenile Justice, and Palmetto Unified School District. Funds distributed to school districts or allocated to schools must not supplant existing supply money paid to teachers from other sources. If a school district requires receipts for tax purposes the receipts may not be required before December thirty-first. Districts that do not wish to require receipts may have teachers retain the receipts and certify for the district they have received the allocation for purchase of teaching supplies and/or materials and that they have purchased or will purchase supplies and/or materials during the fiscal year for the amount of the allocation. Districts shall not have an audit exception related to non-retention of receipts in any instances where a similar instrument is utilized. Any district requiring receipts must notify any teacher from whom receipts have not been submitted between November twenty-fifth and December sixth that receipts must be submitted to the district. Districts may not add any additional requirement not listed herein related to this reimbursement.

Any classroom teacher, including a classroom teacher at a South Carolina private school, that is not eligible for the reimbursement allowed by this provision, may claim a refundable income tax credit on the teacher's 2023 tax return, provided that the return or any amended return claiming the credit is filed prior to the end of the fiscal year. The credit is equal to \$350, or the amount the teacher expends on teacher supplies and materials, whichever is less. If any expenditures eligible for a credit are made after December thirty-first, the teacher may include the expenditures on his initial return or may file an amended 2023 return claiming the credit, so long as the return or amended return is filed in this fiscal year. The Department of Revenue may require whatever proof it deems necessary to implement the credit provided by this part of this provision. Any person receiving the reimbursement provided by this proviso is ineligible to take the income tax credit allowed by this proviso.

1A.44. (SDE-EIA: CDEPP Student Information and Reporting) For the current fiscal year, the Department of Education and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness must acquire unique student identifiers or SUNS numbers for each student enrolled in the CDEPP program no later than the 45th day and must provide a report of such to the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Education Committee, the Senate Finance Committee, the Senate Education Committee and the Education Oversight Committee by November thirtieth. The Department of Education and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness must provide any information required by the Education Oversight Committee for the annual CDEPP report no later than November thirtieth.

1A.49. (SDE-EIA: 4K Early Literacy Competencies Assessments) Of the funds carried forward from the full-day 4K program from the previous fiscal year, the Department of Education is authorized to expend up to \$800,000 on assessments and professional development to analyze the early literacy competencies of children in publicly funded prekindergarten. If these funds are not available, funds appropriated and/or authorized for assessment shall be used to administer the prekindergarten assessments. The department shall manage the administration of assessments that analyze the early literacy and language development of children in publicly funded prekindergarten as done in the prior fiscal year. Each school district and private provider participating in a publicly funded prekindergarten program will administer one of the formative assessments selected by the department to each child eligible for and enrolled in a publicly funded prekindergarten program during the first forty-five days of the school year and during the last forty-five days of the school year. Accommodations that do not invalidate the results of these assessments must be provided in the manner set forth by the student's Individualized Education Program or 504 Accommodations Plan and for students who are Limited English Proficient according to their LEP Plan. The department will provide the assessment data to the Education Oversight Committee. The results of the assessment and the developmental intervention strategies recommended or services needed to address the child's identified needs must also be provided, in writing, to the parent or guardian. The assessment may not be used to deny a student to admission to prekindergarten.

Furthermore, up to \$2,000,000 of the funds appropriated for half-day programs for four-year-olds and funds carried forward from assessment must be expended by the Department of Education to administer the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) to each child entering kindergarten in the public schools. The assessment of kindergarten students must be administered at a minimum of once during the first forty-five days of the school year with the results collected by the department. The results of the assessments and the developmental intervention strategies recommended or services needed to address each child's identified needs must also be provided, in writing, to the parent or guardian. The assessment may not be used to deny a student admission to kindergarten.

Accommodations that do not invalidate the results of these assessments must be provided in the manner set forth by the student's Individualized Education Program, 504 Accommodations Plan, or LEP Plan. Districts are given the option of designating up to two days of the one hundred eighty day school calendar to administer the assessment to kindergarten students. The department will also provide the results of the assessment of kindergarten students to the Education Oversight Committee. With available funds, the department will also provide or secure training for appropriate educators in how to administer the assessment.

For all students assessed with the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), the Department of Education is required to collect data from schools and school districts on the prior early learning experience of each student. The data would include whether the kindergartener had attended in the prior school year a Head Start program, a South Carolina Early Reading Development and Education Program in a public school or a private center, a half-day 4K program in a public school, a full-day 4K program in a public school, a child care center (registered faith-based, registered family home, group home, or exempt provider) or informal child care.



Appendix B First Steps 4K Lead Teacher Qualifications

Providers shall employ qualified lead teachers in each First Steps 4K classroom. Teachers holding a four-year-degree or higher in Early Childhood Education are preferred.

The Proviso requires that each lead teacher possess, *at minimum*, a two-year degree in early childhood education or a related field. *All lead teachers must have completed or be enrolled and demonstrating progress toward the completion of a teacher education program within four-years.*

The following credentials shall be deemed acceptable for lead teachers during the school year:

1. A four-year or graduate teacher education degree with an emphasis in early childhood education.
2. A four-year or graduate teacher education degree (in a field other than early childhood) with at least six documented credit hours in early childhood education and/or child development.
3. A four-year college degree (in any field) with at least six documented credit hours in early childhood education and/or child development *and* evidence of the teacher's current enrollment in a four-year or graduate teacher education program with an emphasis on early childhood education.
4. A two-year Associate of Public Service (APS) Degree in Early Care and Education (or its out of state equivalent) *and* evidence of the teacher's current enrollment in a four-year teacher education program with an emphasis on early childhood education.
5. A two-year degree in a field other than early childhood education, *plus* a Child Development Associate's (CDA), 27 credit hour Early Childhood Development Certificate, or Montessori diploma *and* evidence of the teacher's current enrollment in a four-year teacher education program with an emphasis on early childhood education.
6. A fourth-year student in a teacher education degree with an emphasis in early childhood education in a final year of academic preparation or is co-enrolled in student teaching or an internship with the childcare provider.



Appendix C First Steps 4K Approved Curricula

Three research-based preschool curriculum models are approved for use within 4K.

These are:

HIGH/SCOPE
CREATIVE CURRICULUM
MONTESSORI METHOD

Providers seeking to use another *research-based* preschool curriculum must seek prior approval from South Carolina First Steps. Request submissions shall include:

- ⌚ A copy of the published curriculum and all supporting resource materials.
- ⌚ *Published, peer-reviewed research* supporting the efficacy of the curriculum in promoting school success.
- ⌚ Evidence that the curriculum is child-centered and supports the active learning of young children.
- ⌚ Goals for the knowledge and skills to be acquired by the children that are consistent with the SC Pre-Kindergarten Content Standards, and focus upon critical developmental and learning supports including, but not limited to:
 - Early literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Social/Emotional Development
 - Physical Development
- ⌚ A summary of training opportunities available for providers seeking to use this curriculum model.

Requests for curriculum review shall be addressed to:

Martha M. Strickland
State Director, 4K
South Carolina First Steps
636 Rosewood Drive
Columbia, SC 29201



Appendix D
First Steps 4K
Approved Readiness Assessments

Developmental Screenings: 1. Ages & Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition (ASQ-3)
Jane Squires, Ph.D., & Duane Bricker, Ph.D.
Copyright 2009, by Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co.

2. Ages & Stages, Social/Emotional Edition

Student Classroom Assessment: GOLD by Teaching Strategies, LLC



Appendix E First Steps 4K Classroom Grants Criteria

Approved providers must maintain material, supplies, and furnishings to accommodate the number of children enrolled in the 4K classroom(s). Based upon the availability of funds, SC First Steps 4K reserves the right to offer material/equipment grants to 4K providers. Approved providers enrolling between one and six eligible children may receive a materials/equipment grant of up to \$2,000 per child. Approved providers enrolling seven or more eligible children may receive a material/equipment grant not to exceed \$20,000. This grant funding shall be used to purchase items identified in consultation with a First Steps 4K Coach as necessary to support a high-quality learning environment.

In addition to validating the accuracy of the program's written application, a First Steps 4K Coach will complete a baseline *Materials and Equipment Inventory/Needs Assessment* (adapted from the ECERS-3) as part of each program's initial eligibility visit. The equipment and materials needs identified in collaboration with the Center Director/Principal shall form the basis of the program's grant funding request.

Providers should note that while the *Materials and Equipment Inventory/Needs Assessment* will be completed as part of the initial eligibility visit, providers must first become approved and then enroll one or more eligible students to trigger *any form* of First Steps funding.

Step 1: In collaboration with the 4K Coach, the Center Director/Principal will utilize the completed *Materials and Equipment Inventory/Needs Assessment* to identify and prioritize a list of needed materials and equipment. All requested expenditures must promote the research-based practice and contribute to the program's improved environmental quality as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-3).

Step 2: The 4K Coach shall assist the center with obtaining the necessary vendor online shopping cart.

Step 3: The 4K Coach shall assist the Center Director/Principal in the completion of the order and grant his/her approval and submission. (Note: All requested expenditures must reflect needs collaboratively identified on the *Materials and Equipment Inventory/Needs Assessment*.) The Director/Principal of the 4K Provider will sign off on the final order for submission.

Step 4: The 4K Coach shall submit approved order forms to the appropriate vendor(s).

Step 5: Materials will be shipped directly to center. Upon receipt, the Center Director/Principal will notify Regional 4K Coach. Oftentimes if the order will be delivered on one specific day, the 4K Coach will be onsite to use room arrangement as a teaching tool.

Step 6: Coach will contact SC First Steps 4K Fiscal Office to approve payment to vendors when all materials have been received.

Step 7: Follow-up visits by the First Steps 4K Coaches shall document the presence and use of grant-funded materials within the classroom. Equipment/materials shall remain in the designated 4K classroom for the duration of the 4K (4K) Program grant and may not be rearranged without consent and consultation with the 4K Coach.



Appendix F

Jacob's Law SC SECTION 56-5-195 School Bus Safety Standards

- (A) Effective July 1, 2000, any entity transporting preprimary, primary, or secondary school students to or from school, school-related activities, or child care, and utilizing a vehicle defined as a "school bus" under 49 U.S.C. Section 30125, as defined on April 5, 2000, must transport these students in a vehicle meeting federal school bus safety standards, as contained in 49 U.S.C. Section 30101, et seq., or any successor statutes, and all applicable federal regulations. Nothing in this section prohibits the transportation of children to or from child care in nonconforming vehicles by a State of South Carolina human service provider or public transportation authority as long as each child is accompanied by a parent or legal guardian whose transportation is in connection with his work, education, or training.
- (B) Notwithstanding subsection (A) of this section, any vehicle that is purchased before July 1, 2000, and is utilized to transport preprimary, primary, or secondary students to or from school, school-related activities, or child care is not subject to the requirements contained in subsection (A) of this section until July 1, 2006. A vehicle that is purchased on or after July 1, 2000, and is utilized to transport preprimary, primary, or secondary students to or from school, school-related activities, or child care is subject to the requirements contained in subsection (A) of this section once the vehicle is utilized for those purposes.
- (C) Before July 1, 2006, nothing in this section may be construed to create a duty or other obligation to cease utilizing nonconforming vehicles purchased before the effective date of this act.
- (D) To facilitate compliance with the provisions contained in this section, any entity contained in this section may purchase conforming vehicles under the State of South Carolina contracts for purchase of these vehicles.
- (E) Nothing in the section prohibits the transportation of students by common carriers that are not exclusively engaged in the transportation of school students or by the entities subject to this section which own or operate these vehicles. However, the motor carriage used by the common carrier or entity to transport students must be designed to carry thirty or more passengers.



2023-2024 Family Income Eligibility Table

Students eligible for 4K must provide evidence of either Medicaid, SNAP or TANF eligibility
OR a documented family income at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty definition
 circulated annually by the US Department of Health and Human Services
OR are experiencing homelessness, transiency or in foster care.

Persons in Family or Household	2023-2024 100% of Federal Poverty	4K Eligibility 2023-2024 185% of Federal Poverty (Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility)
2	\$19,720	\$36,482
3	\$24,860	\$45,991
4	\$30,000	\$55,500
5	\$35,140	\$65,009
6	\$40,280	\$74,518
7	\$45,420	\$84,027
8	\$50,560	\$93,536

For each additional household member add: + 5,140

+ 9,509

Adapted from the 2023 US Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines, Effective July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

(Federal Register/Vol. 88, No. 12/Thursday, January 219, 2023/Notices, pp. 3424-3425)

2023-2024 First Steps 4K School Calendar

August 2023						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

September 2023						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

October 2023						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

November 2023						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

December 2023						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

January 2024						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

February 2024						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		

March 2024						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

April 2024						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

May 2024						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

June 2024						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

July 2024						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Professional Development Days/Class Closures

- July 31 and Aug. 1: Fall Palmetto Pre-K Jamboree
- Aug. 2-4: New Teacher and New Leadership Academies (Virtual)
- Aug. 7-8: Leadership Academy (Columbia)
- Aug. 9-11: All Teacher Academy (Columbia)
- Sept. 25: PD Day, 4K class closed
- Nov. 3: PD Day, 4K class closed
- Jan. 9-11: New Teacher Academy (virtual)
- March 1: Spring Palmetto Pre-K Jamboree, 4K class closed

Holidays/Class Closures

- Sept. 4: Labor Day
- Nov. 23-24: Thanksgiving Holiday
- Dec. 18-Jan. 1: Winter Break
- Jan. 15: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- February 19: President's Day
- March 31: Easter Sunday
- April 1-5: Spring Break
- May 27: Memorial Day
- July 4-5: Independence Day Observance

Important Dates

- Aug. 21: Day #1 (First Day of School)
- Oct. 24: Day #45
- Nov. 15: Day #60 (1st progress report to parents, conference week)
- Jan. 16: Day #90
- Jan. 30: Day #100 (Celebration)
- Feb. 28: Day #120 (2nd progress report to parents, conference week)
- March 21: Day #135
- May 31: Day #180 (Last day of school for 180-day programs, 3rd progress report)
- June 3: Day #181 (First day of Summer School)
- July 30: Day #220 (Last day for 220-day programs, 4th progress report)

Checkpoints

- Nov. 10: Fall Gold Assessment Closes
- Feb. 22: Winter Gold Assessment Closes
- May 23: Spring Gold Assessment Closes
- July 25: Summer Gold Assessment Closes

Incident Weather Make-Up Days: December 18, December 19, February 19. First Steps 4K has designated 3 incident weather days. In case of incident weather, these days become normal school days, if needed. If no incident weather make-up days are required, these days will be holidays for First Steps 4K classes. Since there is high likelihood these days will become school days, we encourage you NOT to plan trips or special events on these days. Adjustments are likely to be made during the year. For the most recent school calendar, visit www.Free4KSC.org Updated 6.9.2023