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SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS TO PARTNER IN USC'S CHILDREN, LIBRARIES AND LITERACY INITIATIVE

"Children, Libraries and Literacy," launched today by The University of South Carolina's School of Library and Information Science, ties USC's research, training and teaching mission to that of other entities who promote early literacy across the state. With the goal of eliminating illiteracy in the Palmetto State by specifically targeting young children, parents and teachers, USC hopes to enhance existing literacy programs, provide literacy research specific to South Carolina, and offer early literacy training to those who serve young children.

As a partner in the initiative and as part of its mission to increase school readiness outcomes of young children, First Steps' 46 partnerships will echo the call for greater attention to early literacy efforts through greater collaboration among community agencies at the local level.

"Research shows a significant gap in vocabulary among children as early as age 3," First Steps to School Readiness state director Susan DeVenny said. "The gap is largely dependent on a child's exposure to words and language in the earliest years. Increasing quality reading time and instilling a love of reading can make a tremendous difference in eradicating the achievement gap found in later years. Specific training on early literacy, for those already serving SC children and families, is a great teaching asset the University extends to all of our partners statewide. The School of Library Science is to be commended for their bold step to bring partners to the table to extend the reach of this exciting initiative."

Since inception in 1999, First Steps partnerships have invested nearly \$5.7 million in expanded services targeting early and family literacy. Integrating local libraries, early childhood educators and family literacy partners as part of a collaborative planning at the local level ensures limited resources reach as far as possible into communities across the state. "Building high quality early learning experiences for children, when the brain is most formative in those first few years, is the goal of First Steps across the state," says DeVenny. "Collaboration and leverage among partners is how we get our work done best."

"We are very interested in the research focus of the USC initiative," states Dan Wuori, School Readiness Officer for South Carolina First Steps. "Our work in expanded early literacy, particularly with our partners in child care settings, should return a strong investment in greater reading proficiency at third grade. USC's research will help us determine reach and impact, and allow us to help local communities --as well as other states-- struggling with the same issue."

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First Steps is a statewide initiative created by law to increase the school readiness of children through local partnerships and expanded collaboration at state and local levels. First Steps to School Readiness strategies are primarily focused in one or more of five primary lines of work: early education, child care, family literacy and parenting support, school transition, and health.

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