



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Countdown to Kindergarten “Learning Celebration” Tonight**

**Columbia, S.C.** – An estimated 55,000 children will be starting kindergarten in S.C. this fall – many will not be ready to make the most out of their kindergarten experience. This summer, nearly 1,200 of our state’s most at-risk young learners have been preparing for school through First Steps’ Countdown to Kindergarten program. To celebrate their accomplishments, participating children and their families are invited to **EdVenture Children’s Museum tonight (July 28) from 5-8 p.m.**

This year’s celebration will include performances by Miss South Carolina, Shelley Bethall, Miss South Carolina Teen, Maggie Hill, and “Double Dutch Forces.” Also present will be a children’s music DJ, a storyteller, and a balloon twister to make hats and animals for the children. For the teachers who served as Countdown home visitors, Kaplan and S.C. Center for Children’s Books and Literacy will raffle items for teachers’ classrooms.

“Tonight marks the third year of the Countdown to Kindergarten Learning Celebration,” said First Steps Director Susan DeVenny. “It’s been a privilege to see young faces excited about learning hurrying to explore all the celebration and museum have to offer. Thanks to Countdown, these children will arrive at kindergarten’s doorstep more prepared than they might otherwise have been. Home visitors have spoken to the great value of having instructional time with the children and their families before school begins – they find the children are more confident and parents are more trusting.”

Earlier in the day, the Riverbanks Zoo also opened its doors to the rising kindergartners, offering free admission to any 2006 Countdown to Kindergarten participants.

Designed to successfully lead S.C.’s most at-risk rising kindergartners into the K-12 school system, the nationally recognized Countdown to Kindergarten enrolled children from 32 South Carolina counties this summer. The children received summer home visits from a certified teacher who worked to familiarize children with the S.C. kindergarten standards, improve the quality of parent-child learning interactions, open the relationship with the child’s school and teachers, increase the parent’s involvement in the child’s education, and introduce parents to educational resources in their communities.

Founding partners S.C. First Steps, EdVenture and Voices for S.C.’s Children developed the program in 2004 to help transition children into kindergarten and heighten public awareness of the importance of school readiness. Other major partners include the Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation, WLTX-Channel 19/UPS, and the Kaplan Early Learning Company. Their support has created a backpack of supplies and learning materials for each participating child, a 2006-2007 Countdown to Kindergarten Calendar, Countdown to Kindergarten T-shirts, and a series of television public service announcements full of helpful hints to help prepare children for the first day of school.

Held after EdVenture’s hours of operation, The Learning Celebration is for Countdown children and their families and not intended to be a public event. Members of the media are welcome to attend.

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*South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private support is combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.*

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