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### **First Steps Approves 14 Private Preschool Providers for Groundbreaking 4K Expansion Pilot**

**Columbia, S.C.** – Fourteen private preschools have been identified by S.C. First Steps as the first approved for participation in the South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program. Created by the S.C. General Assembly in June, the pilot is a groundbreaking effort to expand high quality 4-year-old kindergarten in both public and private settings. Bishopville-Lee Child Care Center in Lee County received the agency’s first approval.

“We are delighted to recognize Bishopville-Lee as a private 4K pioneer. With its 32-year history of providing high quality services to the children of Lee County, we know the program will serve as a model for others statewide,” said First Steps’ Deputy Director Dan Wuori. “Today, Bishopville-Lee joins 13 other outstanding providers in offering new choices to South Carolina children and their families.”

Current 4K expansion funding is targeted to serve children from plaintiff school districts named in the state’s recent equity funding lawsuit. Since the pilot program allows parents to choose centers across district and county lines, however, preschool providers need not be physically located within plaintiff districts to serve eligible children. In the four weeks since launching the program, First Steps has received applications from more than 80 private, faith-based, and Head Start providers in 23 South Carolina counties and over 300 preschool providers have attended informational meetings to learn more about the program. The final deadline for applications is September 29, 2006.

To become an approved center, private for-profit, private non-profit, faith-based, Head Start and other non-school district settings must meet the following qualifications:

- be licensed, registered OR approved by the SC Department of Social Services;
- use an approved, research-based curriculum;
- offer 180, 6.5-hour instructional days per year; and
- employ a teacher who has at least a two-year degree in early childhood education and is working toward a four-year teacher education degree.

Once approved, providers may enroll children who reside in a plaintiff school district, are 4-years-old by September 1, 2006, and qualify for Medicaid or free- or reduced-price lunch. Centers enrolling eligible children will qualify for \$3,077 per child, up to \$185 per child for transportation, and materials and equipment grant funding of up to \$10,000 to equip new classrooms.

A full list of approved providers and application materials can be found on the S.C. First Steps webpage ([www.scfirststeps.org/4K.htm](http://www.scfirststeps.org/4K.htm)).

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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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