



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First Steps and the United Way Association of South Carolina Convene Early Childhood Quality Standards Task Force

Columbia, S.C. – South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness and the United Way Association of South Carolina announced today the formation of the Early Childhood Quality Standards Task Force, charged with developing recommendations for quality standards in programs serving children from birth to age 4. Last June, the S.C. General Assembly directed First Steps (in proviso 1.80) to convene the group and report its recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor by January 9, 2007.

“Considerable longitudinal research reveals the impact of high quality care on young children, as measured by both school and life success,” said First Steps Executive Director Susan DeVenny. “South Carolina families, child care providers, employers, and policy leaders must be united in efforts to increase access to high quality care for our children, right from the start. As they build their recommendations, the task force will benefit from the work of many local and national experts and the voices of South Carolina parents and industry leaders.”

The task force will develop its recommendations in concert with state and national researchers, practitioners, parents, and community leaders. The group will meet five times over the next three months: October 4, October 18, November 1, November 15 and a fifth date to be determined.

“A recent report by USC’s Dr. Donald Schunk showed that the private child care industry alone has a \$787 million economic impact and provides care for over 118,000 young children,” said United Way Association of South Carolina President Tim Ervolina. “Higher quality and positive change will only improve these market forces, leading to better prepared children and a higher return on S.C.’s annual \$100 million investment in early care and education. Taxpayers and parents have the expectation that their money is invested in quality programs. Our task is to figure out how to assure that.”

The 20-member task force is comprised of parents, business leaders, policy makers, educators, public and private child care providers, including: Senator Mike Fair (R-Greenville); Senator Linda Short (D-Chester); Representative Alan Clemmons (R-Horry); Representative Jimmy Neal (D-Lancaster); Terence Alexander, faith-based child care provider; Trina Austin, parent of children in child care; Kim Aydlette, S.C. Department of Social Services director; Charmeka Bosket, Governor’s education advisor and former public school teacher; Mary Teresa Devine, public 4K teacher; Shannon Erickson, private child care provider; Sal Estrada, parent of children in child care and business leader; Jim Hart, business leader; Thomas Manigo, military base child care provider; Susan Marlowe, retired teacher and Education Oversight Committee member; Ann Robinson, business leader; Ida Thompson, non-profit child care provider; Danny Varat, S.C. State Department of Education Board member; Kathy Woods, Head Start provider; and Task Force Co-chairs Susan DeVenny, SC First Steps executive director and Tim Ervolina, United Way Association of S.C. president and CEO.

For more information, go to www.scfirststeps.org/standards.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.