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CONTACT: Meghan Wedd McGuire
(803) 734-0479

S.C. FIRST STEPS RELEASES 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

Report focuses on First Steps' ability to improve school readiness of S.C.'s children from birth to first grade

Columbia, S.C. – S.C. First Steps to School Readiness today released its 2006 Annual Report to the General Assembly, public and private partners, and to the general public. The annual report highlights the 46 First Steps county partnerships' local efforts to serve young children and assist families and they prepare their children for school. By targeting children at the greatest risk of early school failure, this year First Steps served over 69,000 children ages 0-5 and their families statewide, through family strengthening, healthy start, child care quality, early education, and school transition programs.

The report also notes 2006 milestones for First Steps, such as Third Circuit Court Judge Thomas Cooper's historic ruling that S.C. must improve its early education opportunity for disadvantaged children, and the Governor and General Assembly's reauthorization of First Steps until 2013.

"Though our 2006 annual report highlights First Steps' successes, child well-being indicators like those found in *South Carolina's 2006 Kids Count Data Book* tell us that 27 percent of South Carolina's children continue to suffer the ill-effects of poverty," said S.C. First Steps Executive Director Susan DeVenny. "Clearly, there is much work yet to be done and the renewed vigor for quality early education spurred by Judge Cooper's ruling must continue into future years. We at First Steps firmly believe that partnerships focused on improving the school readiness of our state's children will lead to a better and brighter South Carolina."

The report is available on the S.C. First Steps Web site at: www.scfirststeps.org/annualreports.htm. In addition, a link can also be found on this Web page to all 46 First Steps County Partnership 2006 annual reports.

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

1300 Sumter Street • Concord Building, Suite 100 • Columbia, South Carolina 29201
Phone: 803-734-0479 • Fax: 803-734-1431 • Web site: www.scfirststeps.org