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**New partnership to support rural S.C. families in helping their children learn to read**

WESTPORT, Conn. — Young children in four rural communities in South Carolina will soon get a jump start on reading as a result of a new partnership between local communities, South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness and Save the Children, a non-profit working to improve child literacy in rural communities throughout the United States.

The nationally acclaimed program, Early Steps for School Success (ESSS), will provide education and literacy services to families with children under 5 years old, including regular visits by literacy specialists to families at home. The home visits will help parents instill critical building blocks for reading in their young children so they can become successful readers.

“One of the most important things we do as parents is help our children learn to read,” said Susan DeVenny, South Carolina First Steps Director. “This partnership between First Steps and Save the Children will give hundreds of families in our rural communities the extra support they may need to build reading skills critical to our children’s future success in school and life.”

The program, which also will provide support to parents and other caregivers and ongoing training to community educators, will be based in the following schools: Macedonia Elementary in Barnwell 19 School District, Andrews Elementary in Georgetown School District, West Lee Elementary in Lee School District, and Monarch Elementary in Union School District.

“By working together on shared interests of helping children, First Steps and Save the Children can be very effective in achieving our mutual goals,” said Mark Shriver, Vice President and Managing Director of Save the Children’s U.S. Programs. “As people expect government to be more efficient and yield greater results, these kinds of public-private partnerships provide great opportunities for success.”

As South Carolina’s school readiness agency, First Steps works to ensure children reach school ready-to-learn through supporting the unique needs of families with children under 6 in communities across the state. Save the Children is dedicated to fighting for the interests of poor children living in rural communities worldwide through direct education programs and advocacy.

“Not only will this program help very young children in these rural communities, but additional programming will be offered in schools that will seek to bring closer together our school-based literacy programs with our early childhood development programs,” Shriver said. “We anticipate even better results by getting these two programs to work together.”

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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 are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.*

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