LANCASTER COUNTY FIRST STEPS

Getting children ready for school.

Needs and Resources Assessment

February 2023

**Prepared by
ISI Consulting**

Message from the Executive Director

Lancaster County First Steps is a dedicated and comprehensive early education non-profit located in Lancaster County, S.C. We provide high quality early education programs, strengthen family interactions , support early literacy and assist rising kindergarteners transition into the public school system.

With the information provided in the Community Needs Assessment, Lancaster County First Steps adapt to the changed environment after Covid and adjust to support the new needs of Lancaster County so that our organization can continue to provide children and families opportunities to achieve success.

Anthony Howell

Anthony Howell

Executive Director

Lancaster County First Steps

Executive Summary

The Lancaster County First Steps responded to the needs of the families and organizations working "collaboratively to ensure that all children start school ready to reach their highest potential with engaged support from their parents, caregivers, and communities." The Needs Assessment was created to serve as a key reference document for Lancaster County First Steps, and other partners implementing data-driven changes to promote school readiness.

The 2023 Needs Assessment was fully funded by the Lancaster County First Steps and would not have been possible without the help of key individuals and organizations. It is our hope that the findings from this Needs Assessment will assist leadership in identifying windows of opportunity and stewarding resources.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected as part of this two-month process from January to February 2023. Detailed analysis of well-being indicators (income and poverty, education, overall-wellbeing, health, teen childbearing, child maltreatment, adverse childhood experiences, affordable housing, and food environment) provide insight into trends occurring over the last seven to ten years. In addition, a focus group with four mothers was conducted and four interviews were conducted by phone with educators and content experts to identify root causes of issues that have been identified.

The complexity and nuance of issues surrounding kindergarten readiness and disparities in educational, developmental and health outcomes for children, require systems-thinking and a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Eleven individuals met on February 27, 2023 to review the Needs Assessment and determine priorities.

The priorities that emerged from this Needs Assessment include:

- Increase awareness and ensure access to community resources for the entire family. *(Indicator: Number of individuals reached and type of outreach)*

- Promote healthy parent and child interactions (education, social skills, discipline). *(Indicator: Number of classes taught, and parents reached.)*

- Enhance affordable and quality childcare providers throughout Lancaster County. *(Indicator: Assessment results from individual childcares, number of quality and accessible childcare options and number of childcare vouchers)*

Based on these priorities, the following next steps will be taken.

- Develop a three-year strategic plan based off the Needs Assessment with clear priorities and detailed strategies that can be tracked over time.

- Develop action plans based off each of the identified strategies.

- Select two to three key performance indicators to track regularly to see if progress is being made.

Quantitative Data Analysis
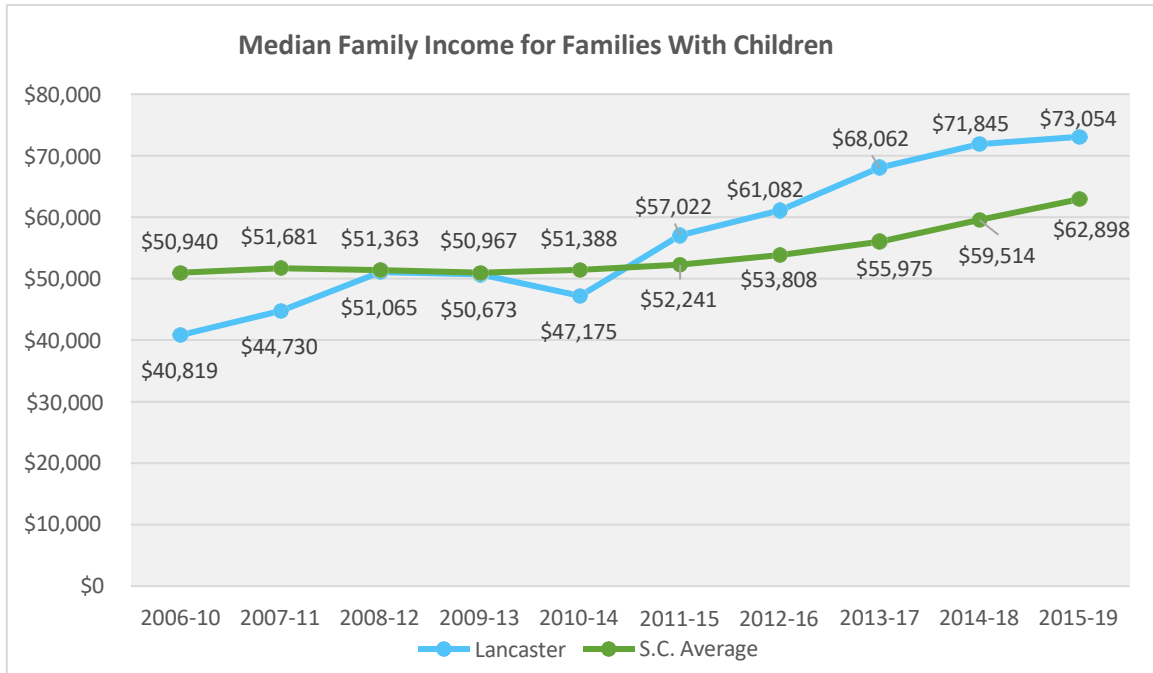
Primary Wellbeing Predictors

Primary wellbeing indicators, or "root cause indicators" are those factors that drive and predict multiple related outcomes in wellbeing. The primary root causes of poor outcomes for children are low income, poverty, undereducation, and lack of opportunity to thrive. These factors are difficult to tease apart in a "chicken or egg" manner, and typically most of these factors exist together, resulting in "deprivation amplification".

Income and Poverty

Insufficient income, such that wealth cannot be built and transmitted generation to generation, drives poverty. Poverty is a multifaceted concept which may also include social, economic, and political elements. At its most basic, poverty is the scarcity or lack of material possessions or money. However, full understanding of poverty requires consideration of asset poverty, an economic and social condition that is more persistent and prevalent than income poverty. Even when income is sufficient to get by, there is frequently the inability to access and build wealth resources such as homeownership, savings, stocks, and business assets. In this case, assets are unavailable to support basic needs in cases of emergency and are unavailable to pass on to children for intergenerational wealth-building. Children, especially, are vulnerable to the effects of poverty. Children who live in poverty often experience chronic, toxic stress that disrupts the architecture of the developing brain, resulting in lifelong difficulties in learning, memory, and self-regulation, and poor health outcomes in adulthood. Children in poverty are much more likely to experience exposure to violence, chronic neglect, and the accumulated and synergistic burdens of economic hardship, or "deprivation amplification".

Income

Median family income, that measure where half of the income falls above and half below, is a good reflection of the average income in a place, since it controls for outlier data (very low or very high incomes). The follow graph demonstrates that for families with children in Lancaster County, median income has increased faster than the South Carolina average and generally year over year. It is now significantly higher than the state average.

Median Family Income for Families With Children

Lancaster: $40,819 / $44,730 / $51,065 / $50,673 / $47,175 / $57,022 / $61,082 / $68,062 / $71,845 / $73,054

S.C. Average: $50,940 / $51,681 / $51,363 / $50,967 / $51,388 / $52,241 / $53,808 / $55,975 / $59,514 / $62,898

Years: 2006-10, 2007-11, 2008-12, 2009-13, 2010-14, 2011-15, 2012-16, 2013-17, 2014-18, 2015-19

Legend: Lancaster, S.C. Average

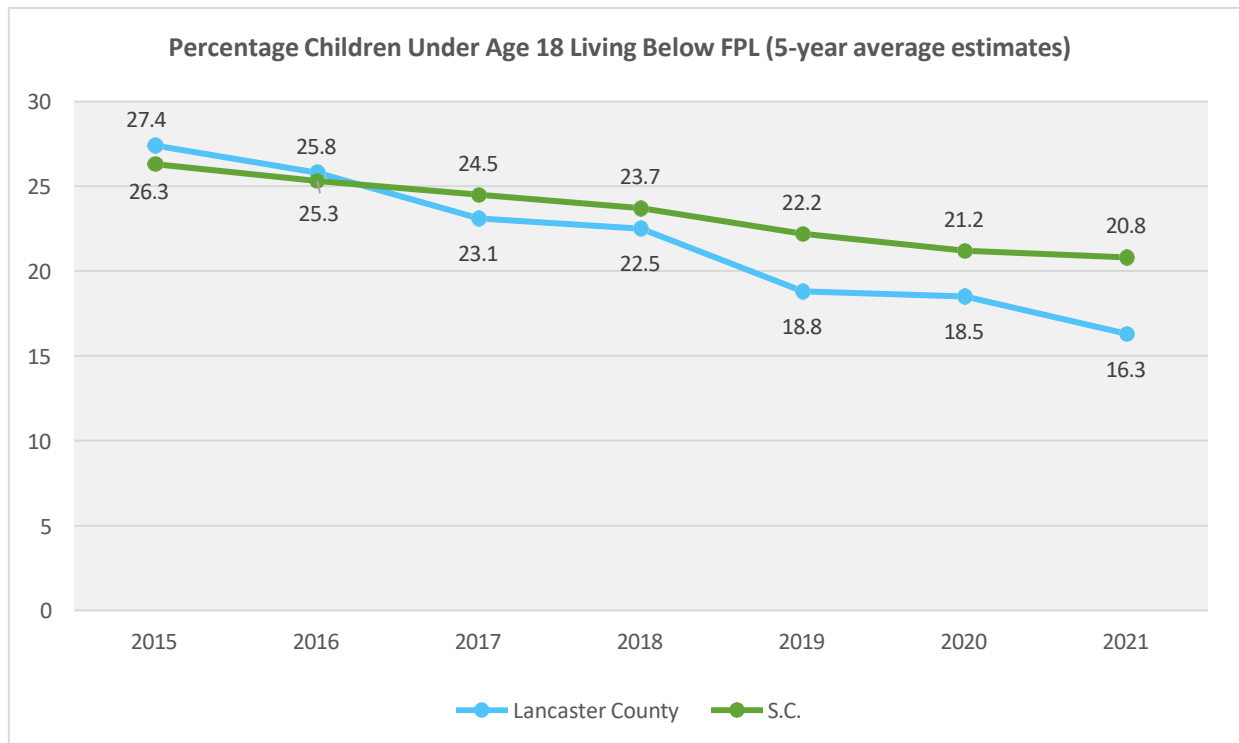U.S. Census and Kids Count Data Center

Poverty Rates

Poverty rates can (and should) be examined at several levels: individual poverty, family poverty, household poverty, child poverty, and levels of poverty. Poverty metrics should also be disaggregated by race since Black and Hispanic residents have significantly higher poverty rates.

As of 2021, 11,200 residents of Lancaster County (12.1% of the county population) live below Federal Poverty Level (FPL), including 3,246 (16.3%) of the county's children. Both of these rates are below the state averages of 14.5% for all residents and 20.8% for children.

Children in Poverty

In most geographies, poverty rates for children are higher than poverty rates for the general population. In Lancaster County, the poverty rate for children has been decreasing over the last seven years and is now well below the average for the state's children.

Percentage Children Under Age 18 Living Below FPL (5-year average estimates)

Year	Lancaster County	S.C.
2015	27.4	26.3
2016	25.8	25.3
2017	23.1	24.5
2018	22.5	23.7
2019	18.8	22.2
2020	18.5	21.2
2021	16.3	20.8

Legend: Lancaster County, S.C.

Source: U.S. Census S1701

Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty

Aggregated poverty data do not show how poverty is distributed across geographies. In the report *The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America,*[1] the Federal Reserve and the Brookings Institution studied communities where poverty is geographically concentrated at rates of 40% and above, finding that concentrated poverty is nuanced from place to place, and that place matters. There are common themes across all communities struggling with concentrated poverty: lack of human capital development, high rates of unemployment, and inadequate housing.

*A large middle class is one of the five predictors of communities with good social and economic mobility. Large disparities in income, or income inequality, means that there is a small middle class in a given community. When children live to adulthood in communities with income inequality, lifetime earnings potential is low, and the cycle of poverty endures. Conversely, t*he literature shows that multiple benefits derive from mixed income housing developments and income-diverse neighborhoods,[2] including safer environments, access to more and improved services, good quality housing, and neighborhood amenities. In addition, as low-income neighborhoods become more economically diverse, poverty is alleviated,

---

[1] Federal Reserve and the Brookings Institution. "The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America: Case Studies from Communities Across the U.S." (2008). http://www.frbsf.org/cpreport/
[2] https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/27116/412292-Effects-from-Living-in-Mixed-Income-Communities-for-Low-Income-Families.PDF

property values increase, and residents demonstrate an increased tolerance of diversity for neighbors of all *incomes.*

To provide an accurate picture, these data must be disaggregated by race. The data reported in the following graph show that in Lancaster County, Black children are significantly more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty, compared to White children. The trend for Hispanic children is extremely variable, likely due to smaller sample sizes.
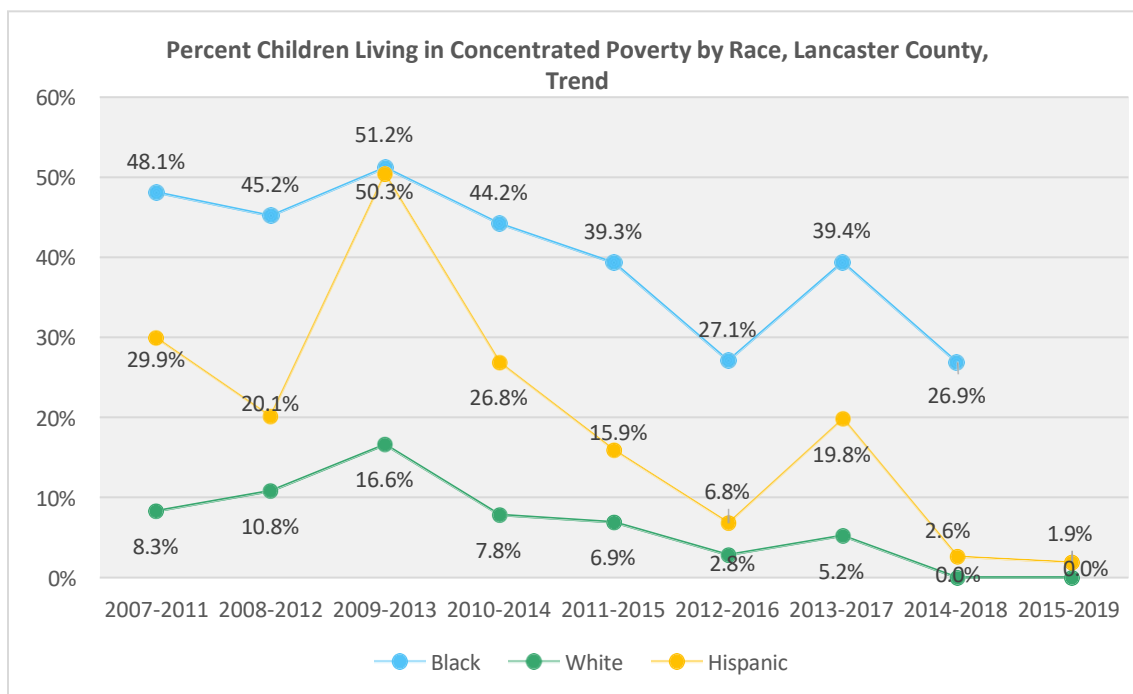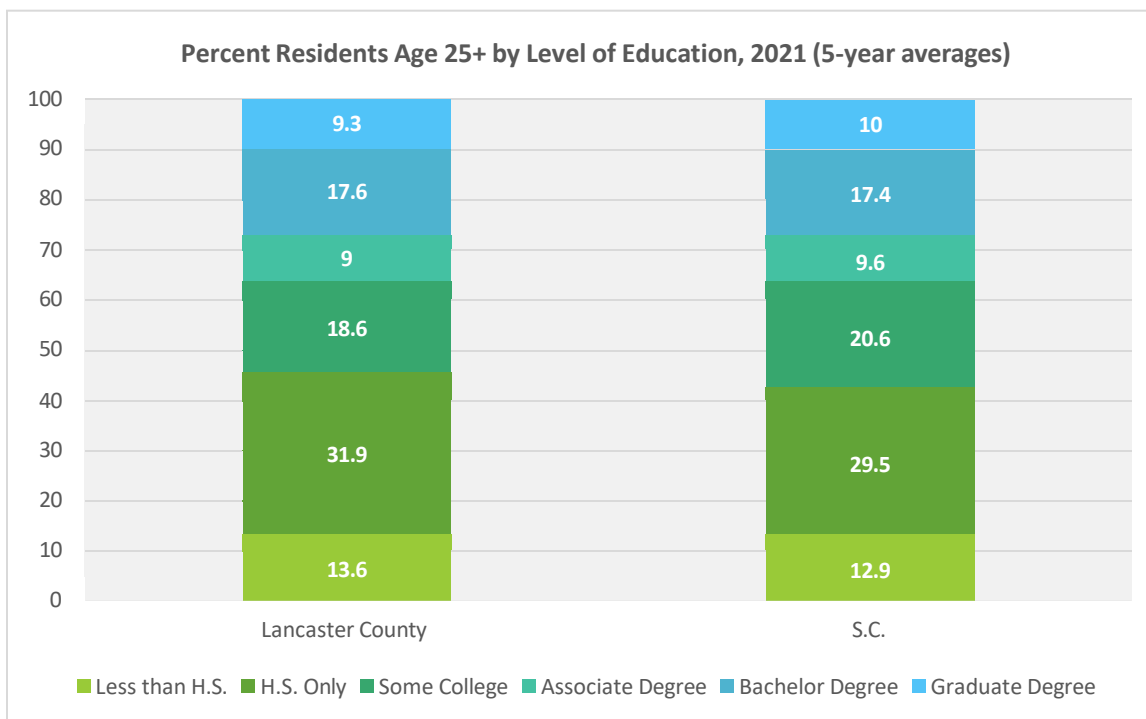

Source: Kids Count Data Center

Education

Education has multiple purposes but is always at the foundation of societies characterized by economic wealth, social prosperity, and political stability. Education strengthens democracy by providing citizens the tools that allow them to participate in the governance process. It is an integrative force to foster social cohesion and supports critical thinking, skill development, and life-long knowledge acquisition. Moreover, there is a direct correlation between education attainment and earnings, income, and wealth; the more education an individual has (on average) the higher the income.

The Children's Trust of South Carolina ranks Lancaster County 14th among the state's 46 counties for education in 2020.

Education Attainment

The future demands higher education attainment of the local workforce if our cities and counties are to be economically competitive. Obtaining a post-secondary credential of some kind is critical to opportunity and positive life outcomes. Residents of Lancaster County have approximately the same education attainment as residents of South Carolina on average.

Percent Residents Age 25+ by Level of Education, 2021 (5-year averages)

	Lancaster County	S.C.
Graduate Degree	9.3	10
Bachelor Degree	17.6	17.4
Associate Degree	9	9.6
Some College	18.6	20.6
H.S. Only	31.9	29.5
Less than H.S.	13.6	12.9

Legend: Less than H.S. ■ H.S. Only ■ Some College ■ Associate Degree ■ Bachelor Degree ■ Graduate Degree

Source: U.S. Census S1501

Daycares

According to SC Department of Social Services, there are 27 licensed or registered childcare facilities in Lancaster County. These include licensed and approved childcare centers, registered faith-based centers, licensed group childcare homes, licensed or registered family childcare homes. The total capacity of these centers is 3,434 children.

Number of Residents under Age 5, Lancaster County
(5-year average estimates)
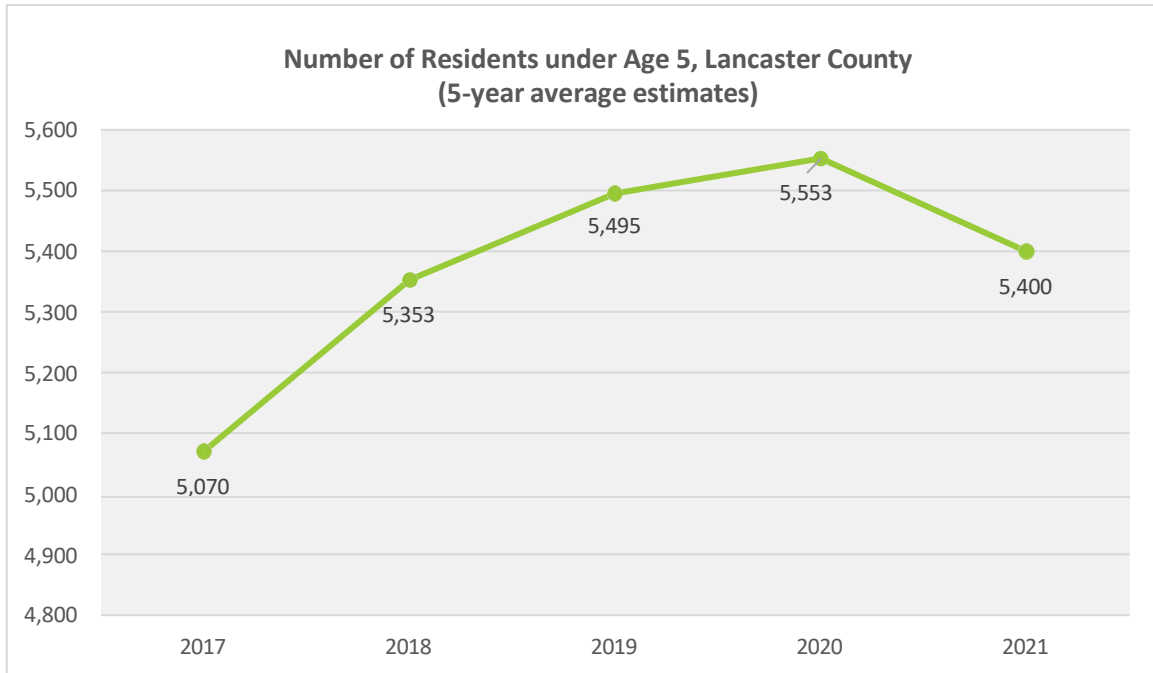
Source: US Census DP05

School Readiness

School readiness is a comprehensive connection between children's readiness for school, families' readiness to support their children's learning, and schools' readiness for children. Children are ready for school when they possess the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success as they enter school and for later learning. This requires age-appropriate physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Children's School Readiness is affected by the early care and learning experiences they receive. Research in brain development emphasizes that early learning (especially from birth to five) directly influences a child's ability to succeed in school. These studies have contributed to a growing awareness of the importance of quality early education, pre-kindergarten, and K-4 experiences as predictors of school readiness. Communities do well when they ensure that children have widespread access to these programs, and especially programs like Head Start, targeted to children most at risk. Children's readiness for successful transition into kindergarten is best viewed as a community responsibility.

Compared to the state average, Lancaster School District falls below the state average for overall readiness to learn in terms of foundational skills and behaviors that prepare students for instruction. However, on two sub-domains of this measure – Social Foundation and Physical Wellbeing – Lancaster students perform better than the state average.

Percentage of Students enrolling in Kindergarten and Demonstrating Readiness to Learn, 2021-2022 by District					
	Overall	Language and Literacy	Mathematics	Social Foundation	Physical Wellbeing
Lancaster School District	33.7	22.8	25.8	56.1	57.9
S.C. Average	36.0	29.8	28.1	52.2	51.5

Source: SC DOE School Report Cards

Academic Achievement

South Carolina Department of Education monitors academic achievement across the spectrum of grades and via a variety of instruments. The SC Ready assessments for English Language Arts (reading and writing) and Mathematics are administered in grades 3,4,5,6,7, and 8. Academic performance in the elementary years is predictive of ongoing achievement, graduation from high school, and enrollment in post-secondary education.

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a crucial marker in a child's educational development. Failure to read proficiently is linked to higher rates of school dropout, which suppresses individual earning potential as well as the nation's competitive-ness and general productivity. Currently, 50% of Lancaster County third graders are below standards in reading. This is better than the state average of 57%. In the last two years, Lancaster County students have demonstrated significant improvement on this measure.

Percentage of 3rd Graders Testing Below Standards in English / Language Arts (on SC READY)					
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2020-2021
Lancaster	57.9	58.7	58.8	49.3	49.8
S.C.	56.3	57.9	54.9	50.2	56.7

Source: Kids Count Data Center

Mathematical performance at the 8th grade is also a critical metric. If a child has received relevant mathematics training and performed well by eighth grade, that child will have a higher likelihood of going to college and will likely be more successful in high school, college, and careers beyond. Currently, 70% of Lancaster County eighth grade students fall below standards in math, approximating the state average. Lancaster County generally mirrors the state average on this metric for the last few years.

Percentage of 8th Graders Testing Below Standards in Math (on SC READY)					
	2015-2016	**2016-2017**	**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**2020-2021**
Lancaster	67.0	65.4	61.7	63.8	70.1
S.C.	67.6	65.5	63.4	63.4	69.3

Source: Kids Count Data Center

These data and many other academic achievement data, disaggregated for each school district across the state, can be found in the SC Department of Education School Report Cards.

On-Time Graduation

Students who graduate on time – earning a standard high school diploma in four years – are more likely to continue their education at the post-secondary level. Although Lancaster County School District has experienced variable four-year graduation rates, the rate is currently lower than the state average.
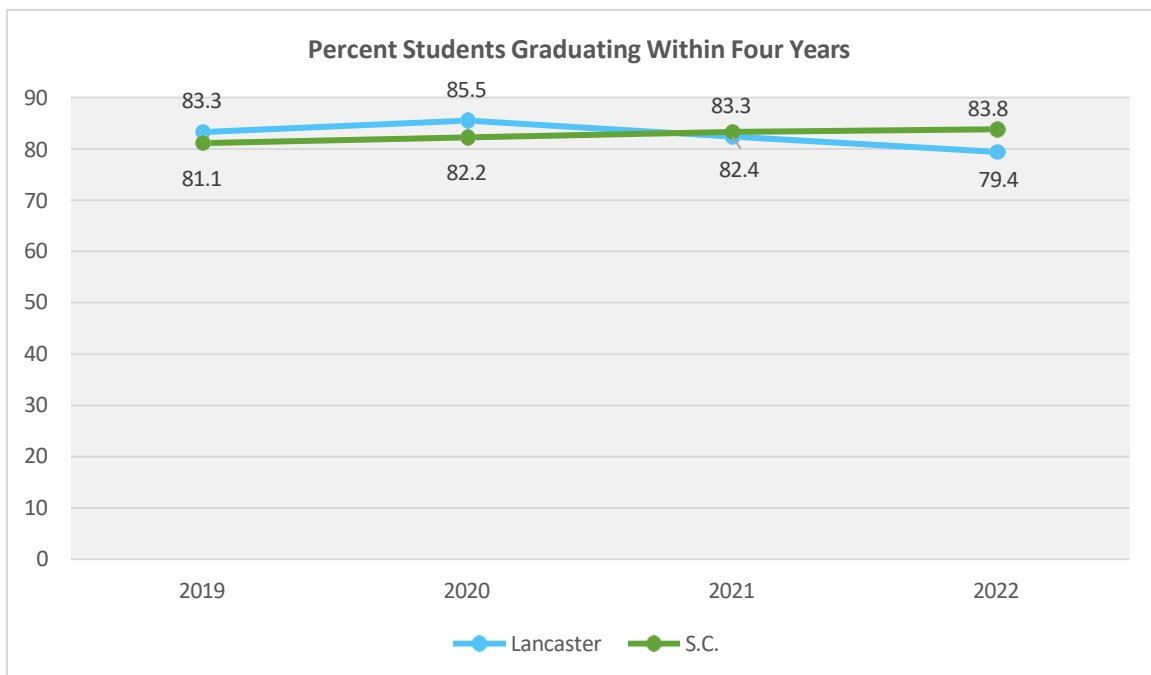
Source: SC DOE Report Cards

Generally, when time graduation rates are disaggregated by student demographic, Whites and non-economically disadvantaged students graduate on-time at higher rates, compared to economically disadvantaged, Black, and Hispanic students.

The 2020 South Carolina Child Well-Being Data Profile, produced by the Children's Trust of South Carolina,[3] ranks Lancaster County as 22nd of the state's 46 counties for dropout (#1 is best). The latest data show that there were 2% dropouts of the total enrollment for grades 9-12 in Lancaster County in 2018-2019. The state average is 1.9%.

Because capturing dropouts is often difficult at the school and district levels, the U.S. Census offers two alternate measures: percent teens not enrolled in school and not a high school graduate, and an "idleness" measure for teenagers – residents ages 16-19 who are not enrolled in school and not working. These may be a more accurate measure of dropout. Because numbers are small, especially in rural counties, 5-year rolling averages are used for this measure.

The percentage of teens who are not enrolled in school and not high school has been variable in Lancaster County since 2007 and is currently above the state average.

Percent Teens age 16-19 Not Enrolled in School and Not a High School Graduate									
	2007-2011	2008-2012	2009-2013	2010-2014	2011-2015	2012-2016	2013-2017	2014-2018	2015-2019
Lancaster	7.0	5.1	4.7	4.0	3.7	4.6	4.4	6.2	7.0
S.C.	6.8	6.0	5.8	5.4	5.0	4.4	4.1	3.9	4.0

Source: Kids Count Data Center

The percentage of "idle" teens in Lancaster County shows a similar variable trend and is currently essentially at the state average.

Percent Teens age 16-19 Not Attending School and Not Working									
	2007-2011	2008-2012	2009-2013	2010-2014	2011-2015	2012-2016	2013-2017	2014-2018	2015-2019
Lancaster	6.0	8.3	7.9	7.3	7.4	8.6	6.5	5.5	6.7
S.C.	9.1	9.1	9.3	8.7	8.5	7.8	7.1	6.9	6.9

Source: Kids Count Data Center

Opportunity

Where a child grows up in the US has a major impact on his or her financial future. Economic mobility has significant relevance for communities of color since they tend to have the lowest income and fewest opportunities to move up on the economic ladder. In their recent Equality of Opportunity Project[18], three Harvard economists used "big data" to map upward mobility across the country. The results showed wide variation among the nation's cities and counties in intergenerational mobility, leading the researchers to
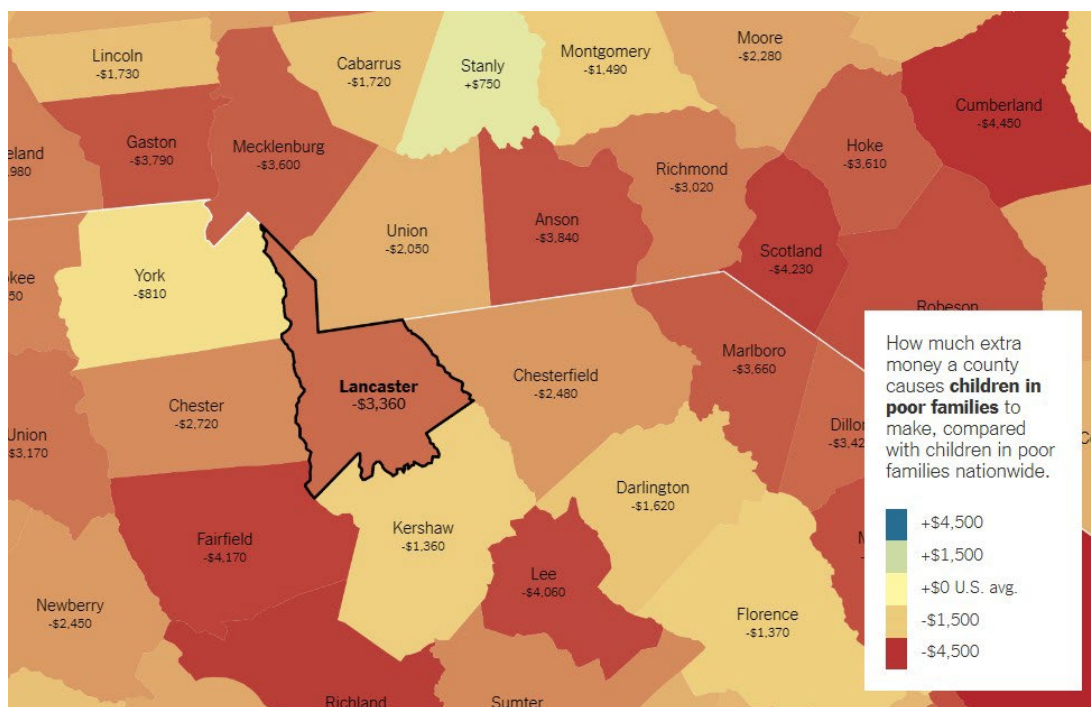
---

[3] 2020 South Carolina Child Well-Being Data Profiles. https://scchildren.org/resources/kids-count-south-carolina/child-well-being-data-county-profiles/

conclude that some areas provide significantly more opportunity for children to move out of poverty, and other areas offer children few opportunities for escape. Where children are raised has a significant impact on their chances of moving up economically. The research found that communities with high levels of upward mobility tend to have five characteristics:

- lower levels of residential segregation by race

- a larger middle class (lower levels of income inequality)

- stronger families and more two-parent households

- greater social capital

- higher quality public schools

The latest calculations and comparisons of the 2,478 counties in the U.S. show that South Carolina counties rank among the lowest in the country for chances of upward mobility for poor children. Lancaster County is considered to be "extremely bad" in helping poor children up the income ladder. Lancaster County ranks 99th worst out of 2,478 U.S. counties, better than about only 4% of counties for opportunity for poor children to break out of poverty.

If a child in a poor family were to grow up in Lancaster County, instead of an average place, he or she would make $3,360 (or 13%) less at age 26.

Source: The Upshot[4]

Overall Wellbeing

For overall wellbeing for children, Lancaster County ranks 7th best of the state's 46 counties.

2020 South Carolina Child Well-Being Data Profile

RANK 7 — **LANCASTER COUNTY**

Children under 18 years of age (2018)

Lancaster County	20,519
South Carolina	1,107,050

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING — DOMAIN RANK 6

Children 0-17 in households with incomes below the poverty level	Children under age 18 whose resident parents are not in the labor force	Owner-occupied housing where household spends at least 30 percent of their income on housing	Teens age 16-19 not enrolled in school and not working
20.2%	**8.9%**	**17.6%**	**5.5%**
South Carolina 22.1%	South Carolina 8.6%	South Carolina 20.4%	South Carolina 6.9%
County Ranking 8	County Ranking 19	County Ranking 12	County Ranking 10
IMPROVED	IMPROVED	IMPROVED	IMPROVED
2018	2014 - 2018	2014 - 2018	2014 - 2018

EDUCATION — DOMAIN RANK 14

Cumulative percent of children failing grades 1, 2, or 3	Third graders testing below state standards in English/ Language Arts[1]	Eighth graders testing below state standards in math[1]	Dropouts as a percentage of the total enrollment for grades 9-12
0.7%	**49.3%**	**63.8%**	**2.0%**
South Carolina 1.4%	South Carolina 50.2%	South Carolina 63.4%	South Carolina 1.9%
County Ranking 8	County Ranking 11	County Ranking 16	County Ranking 22
IMPROVED	N/A	N/A	IMPROVED
2018	2018 - 2019	2018 - 2019	2018 - 2019

HEALTH — DOMAIN RANK 10

Low-birthweight babies	Infant mortality rate per 1,000	Child deaths, ages 1-14, rate per 100,000	Teen deaths, ages 15-19 rate per 100,000
7.6%	**9.8**	**12.1**	**40.8**
South Carolina 9.6%	South Carolina 7.2	South Carolina 19	South Carolina 71.9
County Ranking 2	County Ranking 31	County Ranking 22	County Ranking 11
IMPROVED	WORSENED	IMPROVED	WORSENED
2018	2018	2018	2018

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY — DOMAIN RANK 11

| Children living in single parent families	Families where householder lacks a high school diploma	Children living in concentrated areas of poverty	Births to teens 15 to 19 years of age, rate per 1,000
37.6%	**9.9%**	**6.3%**	**25.1**
South Carolina 40.3%	South Carolina 10.3%	South Carolina 11.0%	South Carolina 1.6
County Ranking 9	County Ranking 11	County Ranking 17	County Ranking 19
IMPROVED	IMPROVED	IMPROVED	IMPROVED
2014 - 2018	2014 - 2018	2014 - 2018	2018

Source: Children's trust of SC

Other Wellbeing Indicators

Overall Health

Where health-promoting factors do not exist, the cost to the community is high. Social and economic factors are the strongest determinants of health outcomes. If people do not have access to safe places to live and be active, to healthy food, to clean air and water, and to preventive care and treatment, they will not be healthy. When community conditions are not health-promoting, there is a lower quality of life for everyone.

Lancaster County is ranked in the higher middle range of counties in South Carolina for health outcomes.

These outcomes include length of life / premature death and various quality of life measures. Lancaster County is ranked among the higher middle range of counties in South Carolina for health factors. These factors include various health behaviors, clinical care factors, social and economic factors, and measures of the physical environment.

Within-State Overall Health Ranking, Lancaster County (2022)	
Health Outcomes	Health factors
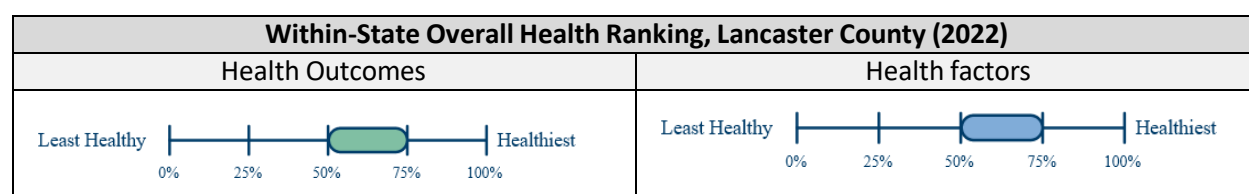
Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps

Teen Childbearing

Births to teens have substantial implications for educational and socioeconomic outcomes for the teen mother. Parenthood is the leading reason that teen girls drop out of school. More than 50% of teen mothers never graduate from high school, whereas approximately 90% of teen who do not give birth will graduate from high school. Additionally, less than 2% of teen moms earn a college degree by age 30. Because many teen mothers live in poverty, care for both mother and child can be publicly funded for years, including assistance programs for food, medical care and childcare. In addition, daughters of teen mothers are more likely to become teen mothers themselves, creating cyclical poverty over generations.[5]

For the combined years 2014-2020, there were 29 teen births per 1,000 females in Lancaster County age 15-19. Disaggregated by race, this equates to a rate of 35 for Black teens, a rate of 43 for Hispanic teens, and a rate of 26 for White teens. Lancaster County has a higher rate of teen childbearing than the state average of 23 per 1,000 and the national average of 19 per 1,000.

---

[5] Fact Forward: https://www.factforward.org/news/high-costs-teen-pregnancy

BEST   WORST   MISSING
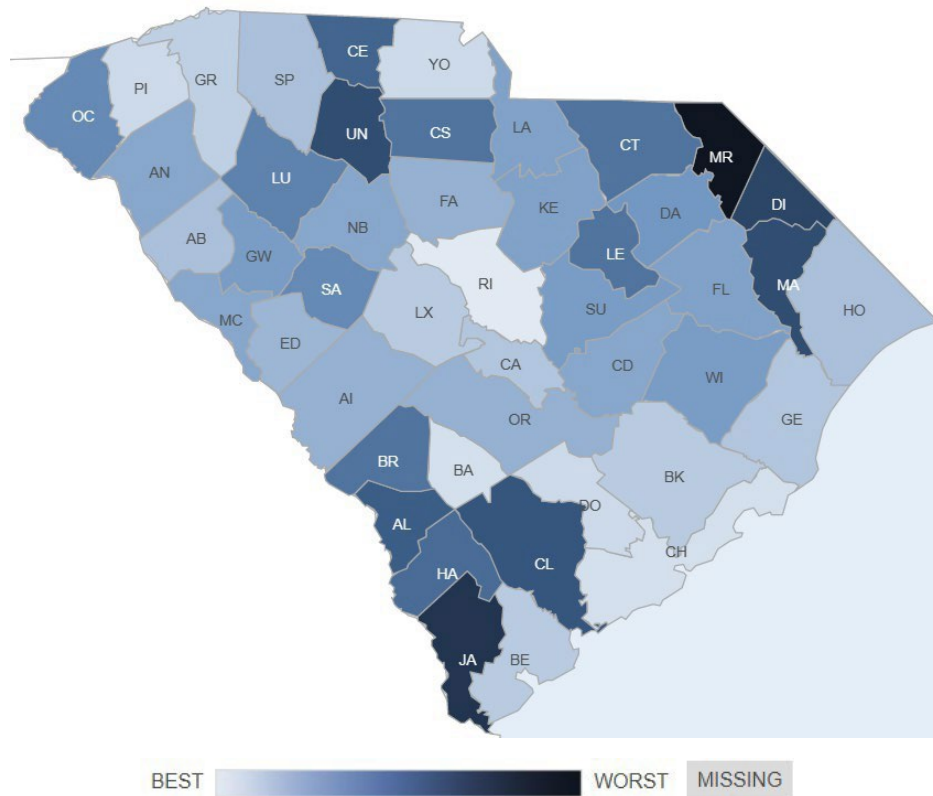
Teen childbearing has decreased substantially in South Carolina, mirroring the national trend.

Health Insurance

Health insurance coverage is a strong indicator of access to health care (as is provider availability) and the likelihood of receiving quality care. Rates of health insurance coverage in a community speak not only to the health status of that community, but also to the economic status of the community and the distribution of well-paying jobs. Further, when health insurance coverage is low, costs to society are often high since the uninsured frequently seek treatment in emergency departments for non-emergent conditions and often do not get timely treatment for chronic illnesses, resulting in higher costs and lost worker productivity.

In Lancaster County, 3.6% of the residents under age 19 are uninsured (neither public or private insurance) in 2021. This equates to 766 children and youth.

Infant Mortality

Infant mortality is a good measure of population health since it reflects the economic and social conditions that impact health in a community. The United States has the highest maternal and infant mortality rates among comparable developed countries. The current (2022) infant mortality rate in the United States is 5.547 deaths per 1,000 live births. South Carolina is among the states in the US with the highest infant mortality rates, 6.64 per 1,000 live births in 2020, constituting 370 infant deaths in that year.

Because numbers of child deaths within the first year of life are relatively low, especially for sparsely populated geographies, multiple year averages are often used to measure infant mortality. For the combined 2017-2019 period, 21 babies died in their first year of life in Lancaster County, equating to an infant mortality rate of 7.0 per 1,000 live births, just above the state average rate.

It should be noted that there is a significant racial inequity in this measure. Black infants in the U.S. are more than twice as likely to die as White infants – 10.8 per 1,000 Black babies, compared to 4.6 per 1,000 White babies. This racial inequity is wider than in 1850 and in one year constitutes 4,000 inequitable deaths of Black babies. Education and income do not mitigate this inequity – a Black woman with an advanced degree is more likely to lose her baby in its first year of life than a White woman with less than an eighth-grade education. Disaggregated trend data for infant mortality in Lancaster County and the state averages can be found in the following table. Infant mortality is more than twice as high for Black babies compared to White babies across South Carolina, and the inequity is frequently even greater in Lancaster County.

Infant Mortality Rate,* by Race (combined year averages)							
		2012-2014	2013-2015	2014-2016	2015-2017	2016-2018	2017-2019
Lancaster County	**Total**	**8.1**	**8.1**	**8.7**	**6.1**	**6.5**	**7.0**
	White	6.0	6.7	6.3	5.4	4.5	5.1
	Black	13.4	10.5	14.7	8.1	11.8	12.0
S.C.	**Total**	**7.0**	**6.8**	**6.8**	**6.8**	**6.9**	**6.8**
	White	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.0	4.7
	Black	10.7	10.9	10.6	10.5	10.6	11.0

*per 1,000 live births

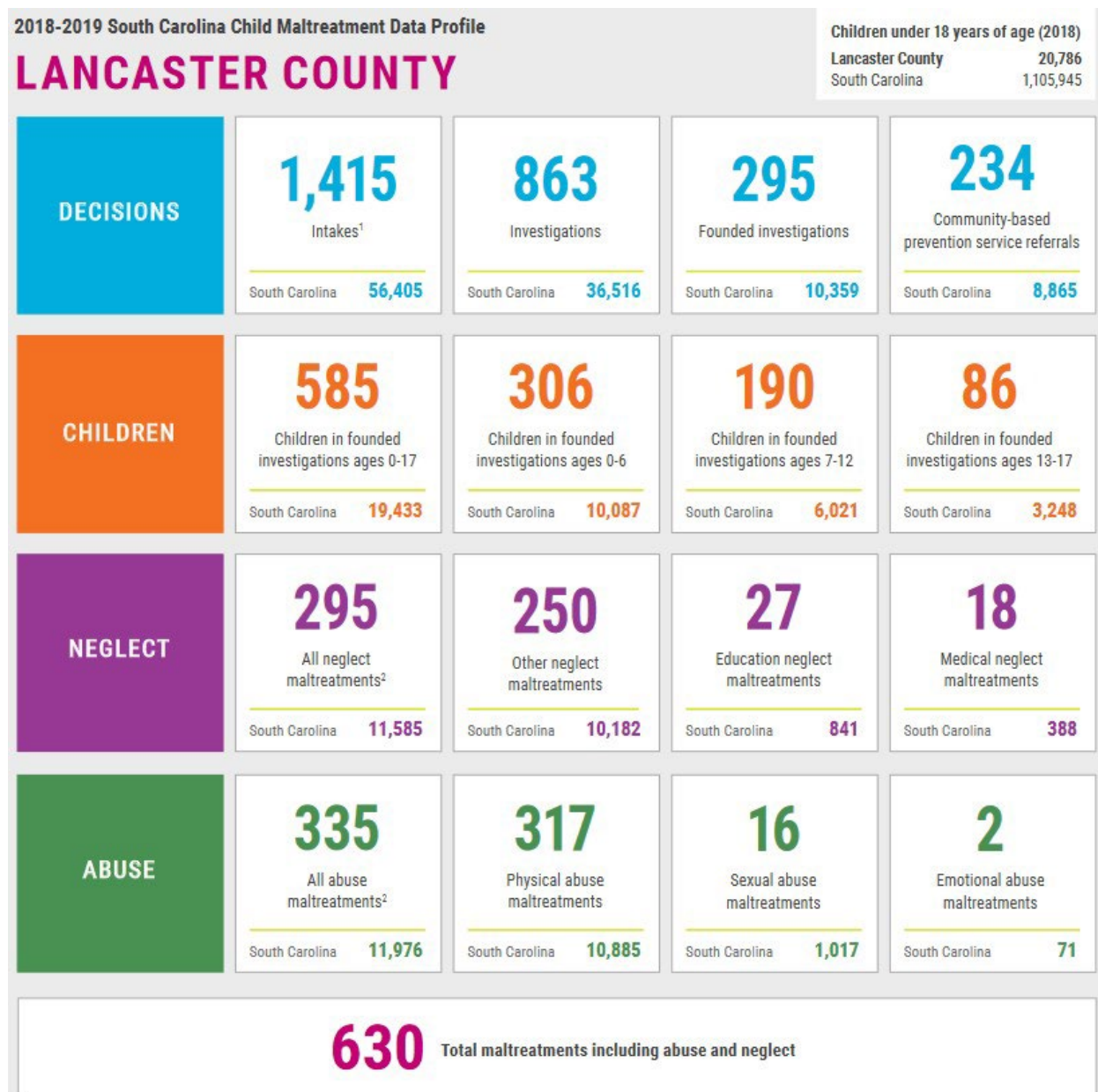Source: SC DHEC and Kids Count Data Center

Child Maltreatment

Child maltreatment is abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in addition to all forms of neglect, negligence, and exploitation of children. It is difficult to obtain valid and reliable comparative statistics on child abuse and neglect even though it cuts across all communities in South Carolina. The data reported in the following table are offered as static information without inference. These are founded investigations; that is, the determination following an investigation by a child protection worker is that, based on available information, it is more likely than not that child abuse or neglect did occur. These investigations are not "unique"; that is, they may include multiple investigations for the same children.

Total Number of founded Investigations for Child Abuse and Neglect by SC Fiscal Year										
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Lancaster	134	134	91	130	225	301	324	309	322	254

Source: Kids Count Data Center

For more detailed 2018-2019 data regarding child maltreatment in Lancaster County, see the following tables, provided by the Children's Trust of South Carolina, for each county.

2018-2019 South Carolina Child Maltreatment Data Profile

LANCASTER COUNTY

Children under 18 years of age (2018)
Lancaster County 20,786
South Carolina 1,105,945

DECISIONS

1,415	863	295	234
Intakes[1]	Investigations	Founded investigations	Community-based prevention service referrals
South Carolina 56,405	South Carolina 36,516	South Carolina 10,359	South Carolina 8,865

CHILDREN

585	306	190	86
Children in founded investigations ages 0-17	Children in founded investigations ages 0-6	Children in founded investigations ages 7-12	Children in founded investigations ages 13-17
South Carolina 19,433	South Carolina 10,087	South Carolina 6,021	South Carolina 3,248

NEGLECT

295	250	27	18
All neglect maltreatments[2]	Other neglect maltreatments	Education neglect maltreatments	Medical neglect maltreatments
South Carolina 11,585	South Carolina 10,182	South Carolina 841	South Carolina 388

ABUSE

335	317	16	2
All abuse maltreatments[2]	Physical abuse maltreatments	Sexual abuse maltreatments	Emotional abuse maltreatments
South Carolina 11,976	South Carolina 10,885	South Carolina 1,017	South Carolina 71

630 Total maltreatments including abuse and neglect

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur in a child's life prior to the age of 18. Researchers have recently discovered a dangerous biological syndrome caused by abuse and neglect and other ACEs during childhood. The toxic stress that characterizes childhood adversity can trigger hormones that cause damage to the brains and bodies of children, putting them at a greater risk as adults for disease, homelessness, incarceration, and early death. Further, childhood adversity often harms a child's brain and its development, which can result in long-term negative health and social outcomes.

The latest data show[6] that 62% of South Carolina adults report having experienced at least one ACE, and 59% of Lancaster County adults also report having experienced at least one ACE. The primary ACEs for Lancaster County are:

- Parental divorce / separation – 29%
- Emotional abuse – 28%
- Household substance abuse – 27%

Children of Color experience higher rates of ACEs. In South Carolina, 59% of White children have experienced at least one ACE, while 65% of Black children and 67% of Hispanic children have experienced at least one ACE.

Affordable Housing

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the generally accepted definition of affordable housing is that for which the occupants are paying no more than 30% of gross income for housing costs, including utilities. In South Carolina, almost 20% of residents are not in affordable housing situations, spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs. Lancaster County residents fare better than the state average at 17.5% not in affordable housing situations, and the trend suggests that housing affordability is improving in Lancaster County, mirroring the state trend.

Percent of Housing Units Where Householders Spend at Least 30% of Income on Housing									
	2007-11	2008-12	2009-13	2010-14	2011-15	2012-16	2013-17	2014-18	2015-19
Lancaster	24.4	24.0	25.0	25.3	23.0	21.2	19.8	17.6	17.5
S.C.	25.5	25.1	24.8	24.2	23.1	21.9	21.1	20.4	19.6

Source: Kids Count Data Center

---

[6] Children's Trust of South Carolina https://scchildren.org/resources/adverse-childhood-experiences/ace-data-county-profiles/
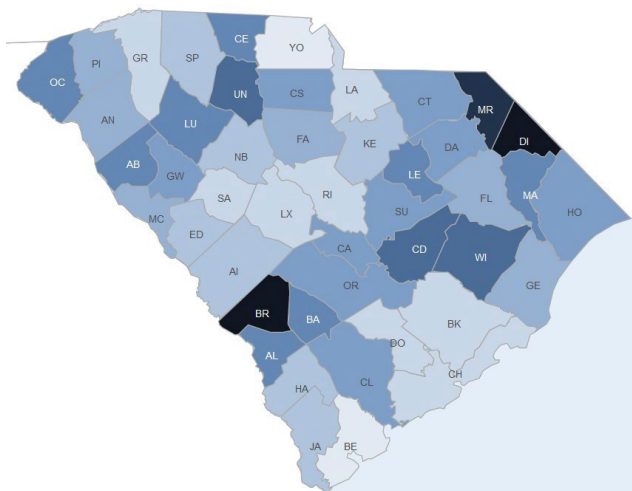
Food Environment

There are two basic measures that comprise the Food Environment Index measure:

- **Limited access to healthy foods**: the percentage of the population that is low income and does not live close to a grocery store.
- **Food insecurity**: the percentage of the population that did not have access to a reliable source of food during the past year.

Although the data are not disaggregated by race, low- income people and People of Color are generally the most at-risk populations for food insecurity and limited access to healthy foods. Compared to the South Carolina averages, Lancaster County fares better on both food insecurity and access to healthy foods.

Food Environment, 2019		
	Lancaster County	**S.C.**
Food insecurity:	9%	11%
Limited access to healthy foods	7%	10%

Food Insecurity Map   Limited Food Access Map
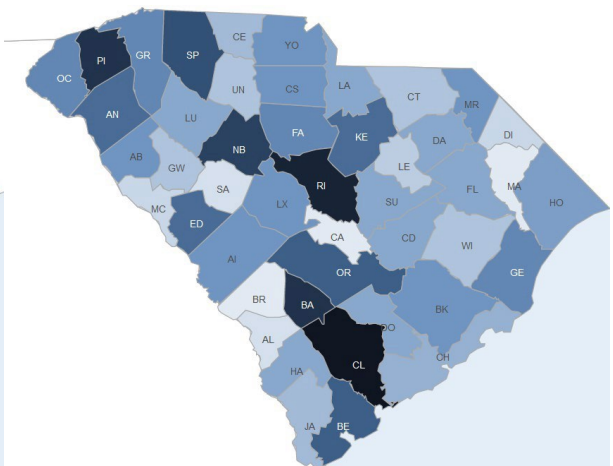
BEST ▢▢▢▢▢ WORST

Food Deserts

Certain communities, particularly lower-income or minority communities, often lack supermarkets or other sources of healthy and affordable foods. Food deserts, a component measure of food insecurity, is defined as at least 500 people and / or at least 33% of a census tract's population residing more than a mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (more than 10 miles for rural census tracts). The following map shows no portions of Lancaster County and surrounding areas, in orange, as food deserts.
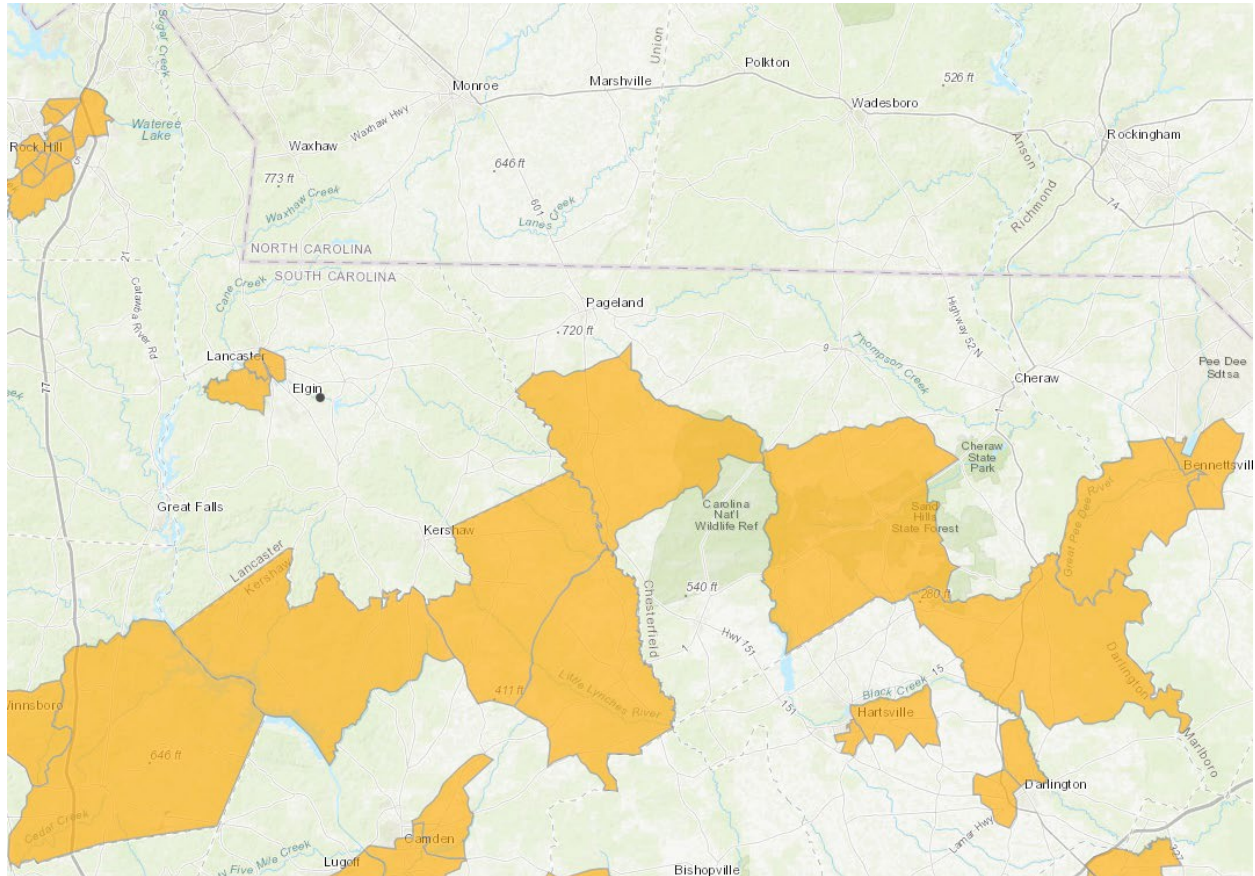
Source: SC DHEC

Qualitative Data Analysis

Key Informant Interviews Report

Executive Summary

ISI Consulting conducted four key informant interviews with content experts identified by Lancaster County First Steps. The informants included two teachers, one program coordinator, and a board member. The participants were interviewed over the phone to obtain their perspective as part of the Community Needs Assessment of Lancaster County and ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. Key informants were selected for their knowledge of and proximity to early childhood education or development within the county. Interviews were manually transcribed by the interviewer, and all participants were informed that their name and other identifying information would not be attached to anything they shared.

The major findings from these interviews were as follows:

Many problems can be addressed with more money.

The key informants indicated that the root cause of many of the problems facing young children and their families is financial. Low-income families are economically disadvantaged, which has a direct impact on how much they are able to do for and provide their child or children, according to multiple key informants. Informants shared stories of mothers working multiple jobs, struggling to find childcare that covers their shifts, and the cost of childcare being very high, safe and affordable housing, getting gas, and a stable environment were all listed as things impacted by a family's finances that directly impact a child's early development.

Not just families, but organizations in Lancaster County were said to need more funding to properly address the barriers holding back children in the county. There is not a lack of ideas to address early childhood developmental concerns, but a lack of proper funding to carry out those plans. "Parents need additional support and programming, and all of that takes money," said one informant. Informants also said that inflation was adding more stress to this compounding problem. There is an increase in need, paired with an increase in cost, without the increase in funding.

There are not enough mental health services.

Mental health was brought up as a big concern within the county. This concern extended to all ages and was said to have gotten worse during the pandemic because more pressing concerns made people sweep mental health under the rug. To address this, multiple informants said there needed to be more mental health care providers in the county. However, "the turnover rate for therapists and counselors is ridiculous," said one informant with knowledge of the field, that could make accomplishing that difficult.

Specifically regarding young children, informants noted that the pandemic took away crucial years for many to learn and develop social skills. This is being reflected in classrooms with reported increases in behavioral problems. Children were said to be having more meltdowns as a result of being unable to cope with the school environment. They were also said to have more separation anxiety from their parents

after spending so much time with them during the first year and a half of COVID. Teachers are not equipped to deal with that, and there are currently not enough in the county to fully address the needs of the county.

Parents are unengaged from their child's development.
Informants emphasized that an important part of improving the development of children in Lancaster County is working with the parents. Informants believe most parents mean well, but do not have the understanding or knowledge of how to support their child's development. Informants gave many reasons for this, the parent could be undocumented or doesn't speak English, some parents haven't received an education themselves, many parents work a lot and do not have the time or energy, and some think education begins in kindergarten. Regardless of the reason, informants thought it was crucial to extend services and early childhood development resources to parents to explain the importance of reading to your child and having conversations with them. Parental engagement was always mentioned in relation to kindergarten readiness.

The Hispanic population needs more outreach.
Some of the informants brought up the Hispanic population as an underserved community in the county. Not having resources or programs offered in Spanish was a big factor causing that, but also the lack of trust in the Hispanic population was said to need addressing if First Steps wants to do more work within that community. Some people are undocumented and fear deportation which prevents many Hispanic families from seeking out services.

Parent Focus Group Report

Executive Summary

On Thursday, January 26, 2023, ISI Consulting hosted a focus group from 4:00 PM to 5:00 PM at the First Steps offices in partnership with Lancaster County First Steps. This was done in part of an ongoing community needs assessment. Elizabeth Carpenter of ISI Consulting met with parents who were currently receiving services or participating in a program hosted by First Steps to ascertain their thoughts and opinions on the work of Lancaster County First Steps as well as to identify windows of opportunity for improvements to early childhood development in Lancaster County. A total of four mothers participated in the focus group for a stiped of $30 cash per participant.

The major findings from the focus group were as follows:

There needs to be more mental health services.
The mothers expressed a strong need for more mental health services within the county. The mothers reported feelings of isolation, stress from being a single parent, and a history of drug abuse, amongst things like depression and anxiety as the main drivers of them seeking out mental health help. "I would like any form of social support," said a mother. The other mothers agreed that being a mom comes with a lot of expectations but little in the way of support. So, the problem this group encountered was many could not access mental health services in Lancaster when they did seek out support. Some mothers reported having to drive to Rock Hill to see a therapist. "I've been trying to find a therapist for four months, but when I do find one, then I have to pay," said another mother, highlighting the other barrier to care: cost. Health care services were reported to be very expensive by the moms.

Parents want more resources for their kids.
The focus group also discussed needed more resources for their children within the county. The mothers referred to recreational activities and health or developmental services when identifying the resources they were referring to needing. Mothers reported a huge need for more childcare options in the county. "They are either full or there is a two-year waiting list," said one participant. The mothers also reported that childcare is expensive and the hours they watch their children for do not align with their work schedules, making it difficult to get their children in to a center. Additionally, there is a lack of fun things to do with children like go to different parks, roller skating, or going to a museum in Lancaster, according to the mothers. One mother shared that the lack of things to do leads many kids and teens to start doing drugs out of boredom. The group agreed that there needed to be more for children in the county.

Quality and affordable housing is hard to find.
Most mothers participating in the group expressed a lot of frustration with the status of affordable housing in Lancaster County. The consensus was the there is not enough affordable housing, and the

housing that is classified as such is typically in a state of disrepair and still costs a large percentage of their paycheck every month. "I see people posting all the time there is no housing at all. Especially affordable housing," said one mother. It was also reported to be difficult to qualify for housing as well, which is touched upon in the final finding.

It is hard to access services.

The focus group was in agreement that getting access to services in the county is difficult. The group mentioned various factors behind this, such as a lack of information of resources in the county, it being hard to qualify to aid, and unfriendly people providing the services. In this group particularly, lack of information was big factor. Only one mother in the group was familiar with the services Lancaster County First Steps offered, despite all four of them currently participating in a First Steps' program. Parents know of some of the services offered, but not the organizations that are providing them. Participants felt if information of resources available, more families would get the help they needed.

For the people who are trying to access services such as housing or bill assistance, food stamps, WIC, etc., the focus group said that the requirements are too strict. A lot of documentation is needed to access help, however, mothers reported that once they start receiving services, it is real easy to lose them. One mother shared her story of having to quit her job because she was told that she was making too much money and would lose her housing assistance, but the increase in rent was more than increase in income from this job. She further said, she was not even happy with her housing, and it should not cost that much to begin with. Another mom said, "there is a stigma attached where you want to have a job, but the moment you do, they take away help. I can't win here." This makes it so families cannot improve themselves because the moment things start looking up, all their supports are taken away, according to the moms.

Lastly, when discussing this topic, the mothers mentioned how the people who provide services in Lancaster County can be rude and disrespectful. It was said that people are made to feel stupid for not having all the correct documentation with them when applying for a program, or that the people at the county agency or nonprofit get an attitude which makes people feel bad and second-guess reaching out for more help. More patience would be appreciated.

Community Engagement Session

After a formal presentation of the quantitative and qualitative data by ISI Consulting on February 27, 2023, Eleven Lancaster County First Steps team members and partners from Hope in Lancaster, Lancaster County Head Start, Lancaster County Partners in Youth, Lancaster County Sheriff's Department, Lancaster Police Department, NAMI, Promise Neighborhood, and the United Way of Lancaster County discussed the findings and its implications. Small groups were formed, and participants completed a worksheet to identify gaps and areas of needed focus for the local First Steps. ISI Consulting facilitated the conversations between the small group to reach shared agreement. The group then drafted a list of assets that can be found on the following page.

The priorities that emerged from this Needs Assessment include:

Increase awareness and ensure access to community resources for the entire family.
(Indicator: Number of individuals reached and type of outreach)
Various community resources exist that families may not be aware of or have difficulty accessing needed services. The team will investigate First 5 SC, which helps connect families with SC's public services for young children. In addition, participants emphasized that linking family members to needed mental health services will be very important.

Promote healthy parent and child interactions (education, social skills, discipline).
(Indicator: Number of classes taught, and parents reached.)
Participants believe that to improve the outcomes of young children, emphasis needs to be placed on parents. Participants shared several evidence-based programs, trainings, and potential ways to model and promote healthy parent and child interactions.

Enhance affordable and quality childcare providers throughout Lancaster County.
(Indicator: Assessment results from individual childcares, number of quality and accessible childcare options and number of childcare vouchers)
The team agreed that enhancing affordable and quality childcare providers is very important. Discussions included trainings with childcare workers, increasing advocacy of children and educating physicians on EPSDT Screenings (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment).

Lancaster County Asset Map

- Arras Foundation
- Catawba Mental Health
- Christian Services
- Businesses of Lancaster County
- The Children's Council
- Coalition for Healthy Youth
- Counseling Services of Lancaster County
- Greater New Hope
- Community Action
- A Father's Way
- Hope in Lancaster
- J T Stevens Foundation
- LC First Steps
- Hope on the Hill
- Kare in Kershaw
- LC Head Start
- Lancaster County Partners in Youth
- Lancaster County School System
- LC Library
- Lancaster Police Department
- Lancaster County Sheriff's Office
- MUSC Health
- Nutrimax
- Local Churches
- NAMI
- Oceana Gold
- Promise Neighborhood
- United Way of Lancaster
- Plexus
- USC: Lancaster

Kathleen Brady, PhD

Elizabeth Carpenter

Holly Hayes

Diana Kimmich

ISI Consulting

803.920.1736

sharpertogether.com