



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025





FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Dorchester County First Steps:



2,473 children

were directly served in Dorchester County



1,466 parents & caregivers

received services and support to be their child's first and most important teacher



120 educators

participated in First Steps training and professional development, benefitting 500+ children

THE NEED PERSISTS IN DORCHESTER COUNTY

First Steps works but we need to expand our reach to ensure that all children are ready.

10,614

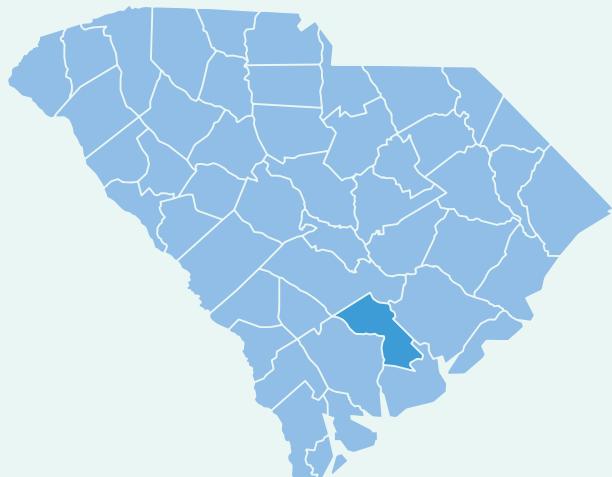
children birth to five

33%

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

64%

of kindergarteners are considered "not ready" for school



PROVEN RESULTS

A 2019 study found that children who received First Steps local partnership services were:



74% more likely

to score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment



34% less likely

to be chronically absent in kindergarten

OUR MISSION

Collaborating with other entities, Dorchester County First Steps helps families and caregivers in our county prepare their children, zero to five, for school success by maximizing public and private community resources to deliver, enhance and expand high-quality early childhood services.



Dr. Crystal Campbell
Executive Director

"It always seems impossible until it's done." – Nelson Mandela

As I reflect on the journey through Fiscal Year 2025, these words resonate more deeply than ever before. We faced significant internal changes, layoffs, financial uncertainties within our community, programmatic restrictions, and the ever-evolving needs of the children and families we serve. And yet, together, we have accomplished what once felt impossible.

None of this would have been possible without the contributions of our dedicated staff: Monique Branagan, Mariah Woodward, Valencia Mackey, Maria Michalet, and Beverly Pringle. I recognize, too, the critical role played by our local board, donors, childcare providers, and the families who trust us as partners in this work. To all who have walked this path with us, we ask—"Do you like us now?" We hope you see what your support has built: an organization ready for the future, committed to every child's promise, and inspired to continue making the impossible, possible.



Travis Shaffer
Board Chair

As the newly elected Board Chair, I have witnessed firsthand the complexities of our mission: preparing children birth to age five for school success. Despite challenges—supporting families facing homelessness, layoffs, food insecurity, and limited childcare—our staff has made the impossible, possible.

The Team's dedication has transformed obstacles into opportunities, giving hope to families and futures to children. On behalf of the Partnership Board, I extend our deepest gratitude. DCFS's unwavering commitment and compassion have ensured another year of remarkable achievement. Thank you for everyone's outstanding service. Job well done!

PROGRAMS

PARENTING

HIPPY

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home visiting program that supports parents in their role as a child's first and most important teacher.

18	17	233
children served	group meetings and events	home visits

Motherread/Fatherread

Offers adult literacy classes to parents of young children, with an emphasis on the importance of reading regularly as a family.

33	26	41
children served	families served	parent workshops

SCHOOL TRANSITION

Countdown to Kindergarten

Supports transitions into kindergarten by connecting incoming students, their families, and their teachers in a series of one-on-one sessions during the summer.

58	348
children served	home/school visits

Countdown to 4K

Supports transitions into pre-kindergarten by connecting incoming students, their families, and their teachers in a series of one-on-one sessions during the summer.

39	234
children served	home/school visits

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Quality Enhancement

Intensive support to child care centers and preschool classrooms to improve quality.

175	13	316
children served	providers served	training hours provided

Training & Professional Development

Certified and registered training hours for the early childhood workforce.

10	25
providers served	certified training hours

Child Care Scholarships

Eligible children receive tuition-free enrollment at quality child care centers.

35	12
children served	providers served

HEALTH

Reach Out and Read

Free, high-quality books provided by a child's pediatric provider during doctor's visits.

1,214	XX
children served	books distributed

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

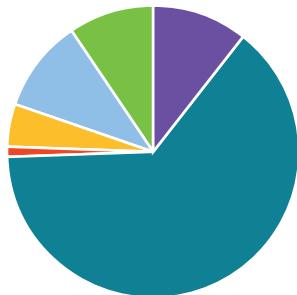


\$1 = \$1.11

Dorchester County First Steps leveraged \$43,941.29 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$0.11 for every state dollar invested.

EXPENDITURES

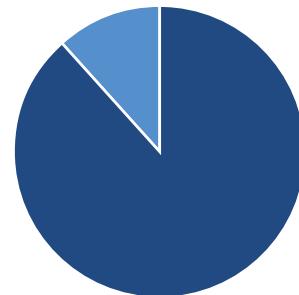
Total: \$441,661.53



- Parenting - \$46,938.94
- Early Care & Education - \$281,854.65
- Health - \$5,480
- School Transition - \$21,123.73
- Administrative - \$44,911.45
- Core Functions - \$41,352.76

FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$451,197.88



- State Funding - \$407,256.59
- Private Funding - \$215,050

FUNDING SUPPORT

State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding

State READY Funding*

Federal AmeriCorps Service Site

State Income Tax Check-off and Private Donations to SC First Steps

*Resources for Early Acceleration and Development in Youth (READY) Proviso 1.84

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CONTACT US

dorchesterfirststeps.org | (803)574-3787
crystal.campbell@dorchesterfield.com