Meeting of the Board of Trustees

Thursday, September 18, 2025, 2-4 PM

636 Rosewood Drive or Virtual (via Zoom)

https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89204937455?pwd=5YiJB9h6K5ylus5hoZ6OdaQ9RegQbn.1

AGENDA

I.   **Roll Call**   Emily Prillaman, Board Liaison

II.   **Public Comment Period**

The public is invited to provide comments relevant to the South Carolina First Steps and/or SC Early Childhood Advisory Council during this period. Members of the public wishing to speak must sign up before the meeting. Comments should be limited to no more than three minutes per speaker.

III.   **Call to Order and Approve the Agenda**   Dr. Amy Williams, Board Chairman

   Motion: To adopt the agenda as submitted

IV.   **Consent Agenda**   Chairman Dr. Williams

   Motion: To approve the consent agenda as submitted

   a.   To adopt Board of Trustees meeting minutes from June 19, 2025.

   b.   To approve proposed changes to the Evidenced Based Program determinations and SC First Steps Program Library (effective for fiscal year 2027, beginning July 1, 2026) as submitted by South Carolina First Steps staff and as recommended by the Local Partnership and Grants Committee.

   c.   To approve proposed corrective action recommendations for three (3) local partnerships; Barnwell, Marlboro, and York counties as recommended by the Local Partnership and Grants Committee. As a result of corrective action, the affected local partnerships are not eligible to apply for competitive or targeted grants until they have satisfactorily resolved the deficiencies noted on their corrective action plan as determined by SC First Steps state staff.

V.   **Executive Committee Report**   Chairman Dr. Williams

VI.   **Program and Grants Committee Report**   Wes Wooten, Committee Chair

VII.   **Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Report**   Dr. Williams, Committee Chair

VIII.   Finance and Administration Committee Report and Capital Request   David O'Kelly,
                                                                               Chief Financial Officer

Lancaster County First Steps Board of Directors has requested that the South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees approve $125,000 for kitchen renovation. The kitchen is used by its Head Start program and will be paid for using Head Start funds.

IX.   Legislative Report   Senator Greg Hembree

X.   Proposed revisions to the SC Profile of the Ready Kindergartner in fulfillment of S.C. Code Ann. § 59-152-32   Beth Moore,
                                                                              Chief of Engagement

XI.   Agency Director Report   Ann Vandervliet

XII.   Adjournment   Chairman Dr. Williams

   Motion: To adjourn the meeting of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees

Attachments:

- SC First Steps Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – June 19, 2025
- Executive Committee Meeting Minutes – June 27, 2025
- Executive Committee Meeting Minutes – August 20, 2025
- Executive Committee Meeting Minutes – August 29, 2025
- Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee Meeting Minutes – August 21, 2025
- Proposed Changes to the Local Partnership Program Catalog
- SCFS Evidence-Based Determination Process
- Corrective Action Recommendations
- Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Meeting Minutes – August 27, 2025
- Finance and Administration Committee Meeting Minutes – August 13, 2025
- Profile of a Ready Kindergartner

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 19, 2025, 2:00PM, Virtual

Council Members Present (15): David Morley (Chairman), Tony Catone, Jacque Curtin, Mary Lynne Diggs, Sen. Jason Elliott, John Hayes, Sen. Greg Hembree, Roger Pryor, Mary Anne Scott, Dr. Ed Simmer, Dr. Amy Williams (Vice Chair), Sue Williams, Wes Wooten

Council Members Absent (9): Rep. Terry Alexander, Dr. Robert Bank, Shannon Erickson, Dr. Matthew Ferguson, Constance Holloway, Jesica Mackey, Jack McBride, Eunice Medina, Janie Neeley

Others Present (70): Ann Vandervliet, Alexis D. Pipkins, Amber Gillum, Amira Hulwe, Amy Breault, Betty Gardiner, Betty Washington, Candi Lalonde, Caroline Goins, Carrie Turner, Charshina McMillian, Chelsea Adamson, Cindy Galloway, Darnell Byrd McPherson, David Lisk, David O'Kelly, Derek Cromwell, Dorothy Priester, Kristen Martocchio, Dwana Doctor, Elmire Raven, Emily Prillaman, Emma Matzko, Felicia C. Patrick, Hannah Espeleta, Ivory Mitchell, Jade Wright, Jaiden Branch, Jenny May, Joy Mazur, Julia A. Nelson, Julia Nelson, Karen Oliver, Kate Roach, Kathy Jenkins, Kaylee Osbon, Kenna Hoover, Kerry Cordan, Kim Trudell, Kristine Jenkins, LaMyra Sanders-Dukes, Laura Baker, Lekecia Clemons, Linda Gabriel Doherty, Loreal Nelms-Howard, LaMyra Sanders, Melanie Barton, Melissa Johnson, Melissa Roper, Molly Tuck, Naya Hall, Paige Wall, Pauletta Plowden, Peyton Mosher, Rachal Hatton-Moore, Sally McClellan, Samantha Ingram, Santasha Highley, Sarah Eargle, Shante Burton, Shayla Pettigrew, Stacy Greenwalt, Sue Graham, Tanesha Sullivan, Tamatha Kohler, Tekethia Burrell, Tomeiko, Victoria Belin, Wanda Gonzalez, Winzai Amadi

The meeting was called to order with a quorum present at 2:04 p.m.

A motion was made accept meeting agenda by Mr. Catone, seconded by Mr. Wooten. All voted in favor.

Chairman Morley acknowledge that the Juneteenth holiday. He thanked Matthew Ferguson for his service to the board and Superintendent Ellen Weaver who will now represent the Department of Education.

A motion was made to adopt the consent agenda by Sen. Elliott, seconded by Dr. Simmer. All voted in favor.

Chairman Morley gave a brief update from the Executive Committee. A framework was laid for the annual review process for county executive directors' compensation. Mary Lynne Diggs asked that local boards be shown where executive director salaries are drawn on their budgets.

Mr. Pryor shared an update from the Local Partnership Programs and Grants Committee. He gave additional context for the Formula, READY, and Innovation grant awards and the new streamlined application process. Ann Vandervliet noted that there are additional Innovation funds to be distributed. Local Partnership Director Derek Cromwell shared information on new HIPPY

guideline revisions, and Mr. Pryor shared that steps were taken to avert a Conflict-of-Interest situation for the Saluda County First Steps.

Vice Chair Dr. Amy Williams gave an overview the proposed SC First Steps 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. Ms. Vandervliet provided some clarity regarding how Class would be implemented and measured in 4K centers. Dr. Williams called for a motion to approve the SC First Steps 2025-2030 Strategic Plan as submitted. A motion was made by Mr. Pryor, seconded by Mr. Hayes. All voted in favor.

Chief of Finance David O'Kelly shared a financial update for the agency reporting that as of May 31, the agency has spent 96 percent of its $75 million budget to end the year in approximately the same cash position as last year. The General Assembly has increase FY 26-27 budget to $80 million to support the implementation of proactive school readiness strategies. A new financial management system is being procured and put in place next week, the agency is preparing for an audit, and a copy of the agency's Fiscal 2024 Form 990 has been submitted.

Senator Hembree shared in the Legislative update that the budget has passed for FY25-26 with First Steps to receive more than $5.7 million in new state funds.

Ms. Vandervliet gave updates on an increase in First Steps 4K providers and application approval numbers. She acknowledged the participation of 4K providers and early childhood agency partners in Class observation training indicating a healthy early childhood system. She shared that First Steps, the Department of Education, and Education Oversight Committee met to discuss implementing the General Assembly's proviso to share wait lists. In June, local partnership boards and executive directors travelled to Columbia to take part in a training to help in their processes. Ms. Vandervliet shared the counties receiving Innovation grants and how each would be using their funds. She named the organizations who have signed agreements to participate in the Palmetto Drive to Five slated to roll out in September. She introduced new staff and share organizational updates.

Dr. Williams made a motion to adjourn the meeting of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees, seconded by Ms. Weaver. All voted in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:12 p.m.

First Steps
South Carolina

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 27, 2025

Virtual (via Zoom)

Members Present (3): Dr. Amy Williams, Jesica Mackey, Wes Wooten
Members Absent (1): David Morley
Staff Present (2): Ann Vandervliet, Derek Cromwell, David O'Kelly

Dr. Amy Williams called the meeting to order with a quorum present at 11:01 a.m.

Dr. Williams asked for a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss Local Partnership personnel matters.

> **Motion:** To enter executive session for the purpose of personnel matters for the local partnerships. Motion was made by Dr. Amy Williams, seconded by Jesica Mackey, all voted in favor.

With no action taken in Executive Session, the following motion was made.

> **Motion:** To exit executive session. Motion was made by Dr. Amy Williams, seconded by Jesica Mackey, all voted in favor.

Upon exiting executive session, actions were taken on the following motions.

> **Motion:** To approve actions on personnel matters as presented in executive session, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion made by Dr. Amy Williams, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

> **Motion:** To approve a capital expenditure request of $249,500 from Lancaster County First Steps, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion made by Jesica Mackey, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

The following motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

> **Motion:** To adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by Amy Williams, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 20, 2025

Virtual (via Zoom)

Members Present (4): David Morley, Jesica Mackey, Dr. Amy Williams, Wes Wooten
Staff Present (5): Ann Vandervliet, Derek Cromwell, David O'Kelly, Molly Tuck, Beth Kienzlen

Meeting was called to order with a quorum present at 3:30 p.m. by David Morley.

Dr. Amy Williams asked for a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss Local Partnership personnel matters.

Motion: To enter executive session for the purpose of personnel matters for the local partnerships. Motion was made by Dr. Amy Williams, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

With no action taken in Executive Session, the following motion was made:

Motion: To exit executive session. Motion was made by Wes Wooten, seconded by Jesica Mackey, all voted in favor.

Upon exiting executive session, actions were taken on the following motions:

Motion: To reaffirm the decision and partially approve the Lee County First Steps executive director salary appeal for fiscal year 2026 as recommended by SC First Steps staff to be effective July 1, 2025, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion made by Jesica Mackey, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Motion: To approve the corrective action determination as presented for Barnwell County First Steps effective immediately. As a result of corrective action, the local partnership is not eligible to apply for future competitive or targeted grants until they have satisfactorily resolved the deficiencies noted on their corrective action plan as determined by SC First Steps state staff, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion made by Jesica Mackey, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Motion: To approve the corrective action determination as presented for Marion County First Steps effective immediately. As a result of corrective action, the local partnership is not eligible to apply for future competitive or targeted grants until they have satisfactorily resolved the deficiencies noted on their corrective action plan as determined by SC First Steps state staff, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion made by Jesica Mackey, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Motion: To approve the Marion County First Steps to receive a $100,000 READY grant for fiscal year 2025-2026 (to be implemented beginning July 1, 2025) as recommended by South Carolina

First Steps comprehensive grant review process, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion was made by Jesica Mackey, seconded by David Morley, all voted in favor.

Motion: To approve the capital expenditures for Richland County First Steps in the amount of $170,085 for improvements to the following Early Head Start centers, Center at Ridgewood MBC and First Steps Centers at Virginia Wingard, and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion was made by Wes Wooten, seconded by Dr. Amy Williams, all voted in favor.

Derek Cromwell bid farewell to the group as his last day is August 29.

The following motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

Motion: To adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by Amy Williams, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:41 p.m.

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Friday, August 29, 2025

Virtual (via Zoom)

Members Present (4): David Morley , Dr. Amy Williams, Jesica Mackey, Wes Wooten
Staff Present (4): Ann Vandervliet, Molly Tuck, MS, Kerry Cordan, Ph.D., David O'Kelly

Meeting was called to order with a quorum present at 2:03 p.m. by David Morley.

Dr. Williams asked for a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss Local Partnership personnel matters and expansion of services.

> **Motion:** To enter executive session for the purpose of personnel matters for the local partnerships. Motion was made by Dr. Amy Williams, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

With no action taken in Executive Session, the following motion was made.

> **Motion:** To exit executive session. Motion was made by Wes Wooten, seconded by Jesica Mackey, all voted in favor.

Upon exiting executive session, actions were taken on the following motion:

> **Motion**: To approve the recommended awards for Innovation Investment Expansion funding and to take this action on behalf of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps due to the urgency of the matter. Motion made by Dr. Amy Williams, seconded by Wes Wooten, all voted in favor.

Ms. Vandervliet provided general updates on recent agency events.

The following motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

> **Motion:** To adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by Amy Williams, seconded by Jesica Mackey, all voted in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:41 p.m.

Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee
Thursday August 21, 2025
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Virtual

Minutes

Committee in attendance: Wes Wooten, Roger Pryor, John Hayes

SC First Steps Staff: Derek Cromwell, Ann Vandervliet, Betty Gardiner, Gina Beebe, Jon Artz, Kerry Cordan, LaMyra Dukes, Jaiden Branch, Jade Wright, Jessica Fluker, Beth Kienzlen, Kate Roach, Lexi Jones, Rachel Hatton, and Kathy Fitzgerald

I. Call the meeting to order – Wes Wooten
    Meeting was called to order by Wes Wooten at 1:01 pm

II. Action Items – Derek Cromwell
    The floor was turned over to Derek Cromwell, who gave a brief introduction including the purpose of the meeting. He then turned the floor over to Kerry Cordan.

    a. **Evidenced based Program Review/Catalog Recommendations** – Kerry Cordan

    Kerry Cordan presented the changes to the program catalog in several categories. The program and the reason for the changes for each category mentioned below are included in the attached document, titled "Proposed changes to the Local Partnership Program Catalog" Presented to the SC First Steps Program and Grants Committee on August 21, 2025
    - Evidence Designation change from evidence based to evidence informed
    - Creation of a "Pre – Literacy" Program area
    - Remove as a stand-alone program
    - Remove from the program catalog
    - Program Renamed

    Motion: The Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee recommends the approval of the Evidenced Based Program determinations and SC First Steps Program Library as submitted by South Carolina First Steps staff, effective for fiscal year 2027, beginning July 1, 2026.

Motion: Roger Pryor
Second: John Hayes
Vote: all voted yes

b. **FY 2025 Programmatic Corrective Action Recommendations** – Derek Cromwell and Kerry Cordan

Derek Cromwell and Kerry Cordan presented the FY2025 programmatic corrective action recommendations. Kerry walked through the process and how we determine if a county is recommended for corrective action. For FY2024-35, we have three counties recommended for programmatic corrective action. Derek then walked through the process of notifying the counties and the process of how the counties can come off corrective action.

Motion: The Local Partnership Program and Grants Committee approves the corrective action determination as recommended for three (3) local partnerships; Barnwell, Marlboro, and York counties. As a result of corrective action, the local partnerships affected are not eligible to apply for competitive or targeted grants until they have satisfactorily resolved the deficiencies noted on their corrective action plan as determined by SC First Steps state staff.

Motion: Roger Pryor
Second: John Hayes
Vote: all voted yes

III. Meeting Adjourn – Wes Wooten called to adjourn the meeting at 1:50.

Motion: Roger Pryor
Second: John Hayes
Vote: all voted yes

Proposed Changes to the Local Partnership Program Catalog
Presented to the SC First Steps Program and Grants Committee on August 21, 2025

BACKGROUND: The SC First Steps Board of Trustees determines the evidence designation for each program in the SCFS catalog as outlined in Section 59-152-25 of the First Steps Legislation. Criteria for "Evidence-based program" are shown on the Evidence-Based Determination Process document.

PROCESS: In the fall of 2024, SCFS began the process of identifying and reviewing the literature for all programs in the FY24 Program Guidelines in order to examine new literature in the field and update evidence-based determination, as needed. A systematic review of the literature was completed for each program as well as cross-referencing with national clearinghouse evidence-based program lists.
Criteria for evidence-based, as decided by the Evidence Review State Team were:

1. Two or more studies conducted in the US and published in peer-reviewed journals
2. independent analytic samples of study subjects (published studies were not on the same set of children/families)
3. The "program", as defined by the program model, was shown to have a positive effect on the outcomes of interest and relevant to the mission of   First Steps(program-specific)
4. No known conflicts of interest

The review process was conducted in 4 phases: Literature Search, Title/Abstract Screening and Full Text Review, Extraction, and Recommendation (see attached for more details of each phase)

EVIDENCE DESIGNATION CHANGE FROM EVIDENCE BASED TO EVIDENCE INFORMED	
Parenting	
Dolly Parton Imagination Library	Although there are peer-reviewed studies that show an impact of participation in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library on children's school readiness, this program does not meet criteria 1B, 1C, and 1D (employs well-trained and competent staff to whom the program provides continual professional development that is relevant to the specific model being delivered; demonstrates strong linkages to other community-based services; operated to ensure program fidelity). Further, this program is not listed as an evidence-based program in a national clearinghouse.
Motheread/Fatheread	This program does not meet criteria 1A for a designation of evidence-based. There is only 1 peer-reviewed study that has been published demonstrating the impact of this program on child- or family-level outcomes. Further, this program is not listed as an evidence-based program in a national clearinghouse.
Nurturing Parenting- Nurturing Fathers	This program does not meet criteria 1A for a designation of evidence-based. There are no peer-reviewed studies that have been published demonstrating the impact of this program on child- or family-level outcomes. Further, this program is not listed as an evidence-based program in a national clearinghouse.
Nurturing Parenting - Nurturing Skills for Families (Secondary Prevention)	This program does not meet criteria 1A for a designation of evidence-based. There is only 1 peer-reviewed study that has been published demonstrating the impact of this program on child- or family-level outcomes. Further, this program is not listed as an evidence-based program in a national clearinghouse

EVIDENCE DESIGNATION CHANGE FROM EVIDENCE BASED TO EVIDENCE INFORMED	
Raising a Reader	This program does not meet criteria 1A for a designation of evidence-based. There is only 1 peer-reviewed study that has been published demonstrating the impact of this program on child- or family-level outcomes. Previously, this program was listed as evidence-based when connected to a parent literacy training program. Further, this program is not listed as an evidence-based program in a national clearinghouse.

CREATION OF A "PRE-LITERACY" PROGRAM AREA	
Parenting	
Dolly Parton Imagination Library	Move this program from parenting to the category of "pre-literacy" that focuses on programs that provide education on the importance of promoting literacy in the home.
Library Based and Other Learning Programs	Move this program from parenting to the category of "pre-literacy" that focuses on programs that provide education on the importance of promoting literacy in the home.
Motheread/Fatheread	Move this program from parenting to the category of "pre-literacy" that focuses on programs that provide education on the importance of promoting literacy in the home.
Raising a Reader	Move this program from parenting to the category of "pre-literacy" that focuses on programs that provide education on the importance of promoting literacy in the home.
Health	
Reach Out and Read	Move this program from health to the category of "pre-literacy" that focuses on programs that provide education on the importance of promoting literacy in the home.

REMOVE AS A STAND-ALONE PROGRAM	
Early Care and Education	
Child Care Technical Assistance and Coaching: Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) and Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS)	This program will be included in Child Care Technical Assistance and Coaching as an acceptable assessment as these are valid and reliable assessment tools. These tools can be used to provide data that informs a continuous quality improvement plan with a child care provider.
Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (Go NAPSACC)	This program will be included in Child Care Technical Assistance and Coaching as an acceptable assessment as these are valid and reliable assessment tools. These tools can be used to provide data that informs a continuous quality improvement plan with a child care provider.
Quality Counts (developed by Spartanburg First Steps)	This program will be included in Child Care Technical Assistance and Coaching as an implementation model.

REMOVE FROM THE PROGRAM CATALOG	
Early Care and Education	
Early Education Program Operations	Program will be sunset from the list of program options for FY27. Local partnerships that are currently implementing this program (as of FY26) may continue implementing; however, Early Education Program Operation is prohibited to any new Local Partnerships.
Enhanced Early Education - Enrichment Activities	There is not a clear definition of this program in the peer-reviewed literature. The number of children served and the ability to obtain child-level data for this program are limited.
LENA Grow	No counties implemented this program in FY25 and FY26.
Parenting	
Incredible Years - Parents and Babies	This program will be removed from the list of program options for FY27. The number of children served and the number of counties that implement the program is low. Further, the state office does not have the capacity to provide the necessary technical assistance and monitoring to ensure this program is operated to fidelity.
Incredible Years - Preschooler Basic	The number of children served and the number of counties that implement the program is low. Further, the state office does not have the capacity to provide the necessary technical assistance and monitoring to ensure this program is operated to fidelity.
Incredible Years - Toddler Basic	The number of children served and the number of counties that implement the program is low. Further, the state office does not have the capacity to provide the necessary technical assistance and monitoring to ensure this program is operated to fidelity.
LENA Home	The number of children served and the number of counties that implement the program is low. The national office does not support onboarding of new sites using this model.
LENA Start (Language Environment Analysis - Group Based	No counties implemented this program in FY25 and FY26.
Strengthening Families Infant and Toddler	No counties are implementing this program in FY26. Strengthening Families has pulled back on using this curriculum and has shifted the focus onto the Strengthening Families 7-17 curriculum. Further, the state office does not have the capacity or expertise to provide the necessary technical assistance to ensure this program is operated to fidelity. Further, there are no peer-reviewed studies that have been published demonstrating the impact of this program on child- or family-level outcomes. This curriculum is not listed as an evidence-based program in a national clearinghouse.
School Transitions	
Other school transitions programming	The First Steps State Office will review the literature and consider new guidelines that provide a clear definition of this program.

PROGRAM RENAMED	
Early Care and Education	
Early Education Program Support	Program will be renamed: "3K Program Support"
Enhanced Early Education - On-site Tutoring	Program will be renamed "Literacy, Early Math, and Preparation for Kindergarten; LEAP for K"

SCFS Evidence-based Determination Process

FIRST STEP LEGISLATION - SECTION 59-152-25. Definitions.

(A) "**Evidence-based program**" means a program based on a clear and consistent program model that is designated as such by the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees because the program:

(1) (a) is grounded in published, peer-reviewed research that is linked to determined outcomes;

(b) employs well-trained and competent staff to whom the program provides continual professional development that is relevant to the specific model being delivered;

(c) demonstrates strong linkages to other community-based services; and

(d) is operated to ensure program fidelity; or

(2) is commonly recognized by experts in the field as such a program.

(1) Procedure for Determining "Evidence Based" Status:

1. Is the program/strategy described in a peer reviewed research article evaluated by either a random assignment or quasi-experimental design or from a meta-analysis of multiple single studies?
2. Does the research described in the peer-reviewed journal article demonstrate program effectiveness?
3. Does the published research describe program implementation as the strategy is currently (or could be) implemented? That is, are strategy accountability standards (or could they be) written so that strategy implementation matches implementation in the research study that demonstrated effectiveness?

Peer-reviewed journals are scholarly journals that only publish articles that have passed through a review process in which an author's peers, recognized researchers in the field, read and evaluate a paper (article) submitted for publication and recommend whether the paper should be published, revised, or rejected.

University libraries provide access to electronic data bases for such articles. They have search options that allow for search refinement of peer reviewed journals only.

Identifying evidence-based qualifying programs entails the following process:

1. Conduct a literature search of the program name in peer-reviewed journals
   a. Select databases (electronically in university library system) to identify relevant articles in peer-reviewed journals
      i. Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson)
      ii. Education Research Complete
      iii. ERIC
      iv. MEDLINE
      v. PsycARTICLES
      vi. PsycCRITIQUES
      vii. Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection
      viii. PsycINFO
   b. Refine the search to "Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals" only
   c. Search by program name
2. As an additional check, contact program author for possible soon-to-be released articles that meet the criteria above
3. If a strategy is a compilation/combination of other programs, conduct literature search described above for all referenced programs and, if the programs meet the criteria of research design, peer-reviewed journal, and demonstrated effectiveness, determine which <u>components</u> of the program in the partnership strategy are also shown to be effective by the research.

(2) <u>EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE BASED PROGRAMS RESOURCE LISTS; that is, compilations of programs</u> "commonly recognized by experts in the field"

Promising Practices Network (PPN): An archived (as of June 2014) network, PPN is a group of individuals and organizations dedicated to providing quality evidence-based information about what works to improve the lives of children, families, and communities. It offers research-based information on what works to improve the lives of children and families. RAND researchers and other scientific experts screen the information for scientific credibility and only post items that contain objective, high-quality information. http://www.promisingpractices.net/

What Works Clearinghouse: An initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the What Works Clearinghouse reviews the existing research on different programs, products, practices, and policies in education. Its process in determining "what works" includes whether participants were randomly assigned, the attrition rate of participants, if groups were similar before the intervention began, and if there were confounding factors or concerns with the outcomes. Its goal is to provide educators with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE): The Department of Health and Human Services launched the HomVEE review to conduct a thorough and transparent review of the home visiting research literature. HomVEE provides an assessment of the evidence of effectiveness for home visiting program models that target families with pregnant women and children from birth to kindergarten entry. Steps of the review are: conduct a broad literature search, screen studies for relevance, prioritize program models for the review, rate the quality of impact studies with eligible designs, assess evidence of effectiveness for each model, review implementation information for each model, and address potential conflicts of interest. https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Model Program Guide (MGP): MPG uses expert study reviewers and CrimeSolutions.gov's program review process, scoring instrument, and evidence ratings. Study Reviewers analyze the most rigorous evaluation research available to determine whether there is evidence that the program achieves its goal(s). Up to three studies, representing the most rigorous evaluation research available, are selected to comprise the program's evidence base. The reviewers consider the program's conceptual framework, the study design quality, study outcomes, and program fidelity. https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/

California Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC): This clearinghouse provides child welfare professionals with access to vital information about selected child welfare-related programs. Programs are rated by review of published, peer-reviewed research articles using the Scientific Rating Scale. Typically, the raters include the topic expert, and two of the CEBC staff. Each eligible program also is examined to see which child welfare outcome(s) (e.g., safety, permanency, and/or child/family well-being) are addressed in the research evidence for that program. http://www.cebc4cw.org/

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP): This is a searchable online registry of more than 250 interventions supporting mental health promotion, substance abuse prevention, and mental health and substance abuse treatment. Programs are pre-screened to ensure that at least one evaluation study meets the minimum criteria for review. At that point, programs are reviewed based upon rigor, effect size, program fidelity, and it conceptual framework. https://www.samhsa.gov/nrepp

Blueprints for Health Youth Development (Blueprints): the mission of Blueprints is to identify outstanding violence and drug prevention programs that meet a high scientific standard of effectiveness. Their three most important factors in determining program

effectiveness are evidence of a deterrent effect with a strong research design, demonstration of a sustained effect, and multiple site replication. Housed at: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV), Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado Boulder - http://www.blueprintsprograms.com/

ChildTrends' Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfully (LINKS): Child Trends' What Works is a searchable register of over 700 programs that have had at least one randomized evaluation to assess child or youth outcomes related to education, life skills, and social/emotional, mental, physical, behavioral, or reproductive health. Evaluations of programs consider the population and participants, the program evaluations methodology, its results, and its impacts.

https://www.childtrends.org/links-syntheses/

https://www.childtrends.org/what-works/

Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (CEBP): The CEBP sought to increase government effectiveness through the use of rigorous evidence about what works in social interventions. Its purpose was to launch a competition to select and fund low-cost randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that build actionable evidence about "what works" in U.S. social spending.   The CEBP ceased operation in 2015, and the Coalition's leadership and core elements of the group's work have been integrated into the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. Its website is no longer updated but remains available. http://coalition4evidence.org/

The Smart Start Resource Guide of Evidence-Based and Evidence-Informed Programs and Practices: This resource guide was developed as a response to North Carolina's legislative requirement that Smart Start funds only be allotted to evidence-based and evidence-informed activities. Systematic searches of the research literature were made to identify articles and reports related to the commonly funded Smart Start activities. The North Carolina Partnership for Children Inc.'s Board of Directors adopted definitions of evidence-based practices: "those that have repeatedly and consistently demonstrated desirable outcomes through application of scientific research methods (replicated experimental, experimental, and quasi experimental)." http://www.smartstart.org/evidence-based-resource-guide/

Evidence Review Project

Project Process

The evidence review project was conducted in multiple phases between May 2024 and August 2025: literature search; title/abstract screening; full-text review; extraction; recommendation.

Phase 1: Literature Search

During phase 1, the Project Lead or a Research Assistant conducted a literature search for each program in peer-reviewed journals. A peer-reviewed journal is a scholarly journal that has published articles that have passed through a standardized review process during which the author's peers read and evaluate the article submitted for publication. Based on the article that was submitted for publication, reviewers will recommend whether the article should be published, revised, or rejected.

To conduct the literature search, a search strategy was created for each program. The search strategy contained keywords related to the population of interest (e.g., "infants," "children," or "early childhood educators"), the program name (e.g., "Parents as Teachers" or "Child Care Scholarships"), and the outcome of interest (e.g., "school readiness"). The search strategy was then input into three databases – ERIC, PsycInfo, and Web of Science – to identify potentially eligible articles for inclusion in the review. These databases were selected because they focus on disciplines such as education, social science, psychology, and health, domains that are relevant to First Steps' outcome domains of interest.

If the search strategy yielded any results, the results were exported and saved. The exported files contained information such as the title of the paper, the authors, the year of publication, the journal in which the paper was published, and a brief description of the paper. The exported files were then uploaded into Covidence, a web-based platform that was used to systematically conduct the evidence review process for each program.

First Steps staff also reviewed evidence-based program resource lists and national clearinghouses (i.e., compilations of programs that are commonly recognized by experts in the field) to identify eligible articles. The evidence-based program resource lists that were searched included:

- **Promising Practices Network (PPN):** An archived (as of June 2014) network, PPN is a group of individuals and organizations dedicated to providing quality evidence-based information about what works to improve the lives of children, families, and communities. It offers research-based information on what works to improve the lives of children and families. RAND researchers and other scientific experts screen the information for scientific credibility and only post items that contain objective, high-quality information. http://www.promisingpractices.net/
- **What Works Clearinghouse:** An initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the What Works Clearinghouse reviews the existing research on different programs, products, practices, and policies in education. Its process in determining "what works" includes whether participants were randomly assigned, the attrition rate of

participants, if groups were similar before the intervention began, and if there were confounding factors or concerns with the outcomes. Its goal is to provide educators with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

- **Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE):** The Department of Health and Human Services launched the HomVEE review to conduct a thorough and transparent review of the home visiting research literature. HomVEE provides an assessment of the evidence of effectiveness for home visiting program models that target families with pregnant women and children from birth to kindergarten entry. Steps of the review are: conduct a broad literature search, screen studies for relevance, prioritize program models for the review, rate the quality of impact studies with eligible designs, assess evidence of effectiveness for each model, review implementation information for each model, and address potential conflicts of interest. https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/

- **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Model Program Guide (MGP)**: MPG uses expert study reviewers and CrimeSolutions.gov's program review process, scoring instrument, and evidence ratings. Study Reviewers analyze the most rigorous evaluation research available to determine whether there is evidence that the program achieves its goal(s). Up to three studies, representing the most rigorous evaluation research available, are selected to comprise the program's evidence base. The reviewers consider the program's conceptual framework, the study design quality, study outcomes, and program fidelity. https://wwwS.ojjdp.gov/mpg/

- **California Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC):** This clearinghouse provides child welfare professionals with access to vital information about selected child welfare-related programs. Programs are rated by review of published, peer-reviewed research articles using the Scientific Rating Scale. Typically, the raters include the topic expert, and two of the CEBC staff. Each eligible program also is examined to see which child welfare outcome(s) (e.g., safety, permanency, and/or child/family well-being) are addressed in the research evidence for that program. http://www.cebc4cw.org/

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP):** This is a searchable online registry of more than 250 interventions supporting mental health promotion, substance abuse prevention, and mental health and substance abuse treatment. Programs are pre-screened to ensure that at least one evaluation study meets the minimum criteria for review. At that point, programs are reviewed based upon rigor, effect size, program fidelity, and it conceptual framework. https://www.samhsa.gov/nrepp

- **Blueprints for Health Youth Development (Blueprints):** the mission of Blueprints is to identify outstanding violence and drug prevention programs that meet a high scientific standard of effectiveness. Their three most important factors in determining program effectiveness are evidence of a deterrent effect with a strong research design, demonstration of a sustained effect, and multiple site replication. Housed at: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV), Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado Boulder - http://www.blueprintsprograms.com/

- **ChildTrends' Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfully (LINKS):** Child Trends' What Works is a searchable register of over 700 programs that have had at least one randomized evaluation to assess child or youth outcomes related to education, life skills, and social/emotional, mental, physical, behavioral, or reproductive health. Evaluations of programs consider the population and participants, the program evaluations methodology,

its results, and its impacts. https://www.childtrends.org/links-syntheses/ https://www.childtrends.org/what-works/

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Phase 2: Title/Abstract Screening

Within Covidence, each program had at least two reviewers who were assigned to complete the title/abstract screening. During the title/abstract screening, two reviewers independently examined the title and abstract of each article that was uploaded. Reviewers were instructed to vote "yes" if the title and/or abstract includes the name of the program and includes an analysis of the impact of participation in the program on at least one outcome. Reviewers were instructed to vote "no" if the title and/or abstract does not include the name of the program; the article does not examine the impact of participation in the program on at least one outcome; the article is a book chapter, conference abstract, dissertation, or position statement; or if the article is a review paper (e.g., literature review, systematic review). In some instances, the reviewer may be unable to determine whether the article should receive a "yes" or a "no" vote based on the information included in the file. In these instances, the reviewer was instructed to vote "maybe" on the article.

After two reviewers independently reviewed each article, the article had three possible outcomes. If the article received two "yes" votes, the article proceeded to the full-text review. If the article received two "no" votes, the article was excluded from further review. If the article received two differing votes (e.g., one "yes" and one "no" vote, one "yes" and one "maybe" vote), the article was flagged as a conflict. Articles that were flagged as a conflict were resolved through a consensus discussion. During the consensus discussion, the reviewers and Project Lead met to review the article in detail and determine whether the article should be included in the next phase.

Phase 3: Full-Text Review

Within Covidence, each program had at least two reviewers who were assigned to complete the full-text review. For this phase, a member of the review team located the full text of the article and uploaded the PDF into Covidence. Once the PDF of the article was uploaded, two reviewers independently read the article to determine if the article was eligible for inclusion in the extraction phase. To determine eligibility, the reviewer read the article to ensure that the article met the inclusion criteria (i.e., the article studied the identified program within the appropriate population and the article used an appropriate study design to analyze the impact of participation on at least one outcome). Based on their review of the article, the reviewers were instructed to vote "yes" or "no" as to whether the article should be included in the extraction. If a reviewer voted "no," the reviewer had to select the primary reason for exclusion (e.g., wrong intervention, wrong setting, wrong study design, etc.). Some articles may have been ineligible for multiple reasons; however, reviewers were instructed to identify the primary reason for exclusion.

After two reviewers independently reviewed each article, the article had three possible outcomes. If the article received two "yes" votes, the article proceeded to the extraction phase. If the article received two "no" votes, the article was excluded from further review. If the article received two differing votes (e.g., one "yes" and one "no" vote), the article was flagged as a conflict. Articles that were flagged as a conflict were resolved through a consensus discussion. During the consensus discussion, the reviewers and Project Lead met to review the article in detail and determine whether the article should be included in the next phase.

Phase 4: Extraction

Within Covidence, a standardized extraction template was built for each program. The extraction template included directions on what information was required to be extracted from each article. Information that was extracted from each article included the study methods, sample size, demographic characteristics of the sample, the outcomes of the study, the strengths and limitations of the study, and the study evidence rating.

For the outcomes reported in the study, reviewers were instructed to list the outcome measure, whether the finding was statistically significant, and the direction of the effect. A finding was considered statistically significant if the p-value of the test was less than 0.05 Each outcome was assigned one of three ratings: 1) favorable – a finding showing a statistically significant impact on an outcome measure in a direction that is beneficial for children and parents; 2) no effect – a finding is not statistically significant; or 3) unfavorable or ambiguous – a finding showing a statistically significant impact on an outcome measure in a direction that may indicate potential harm to children and/or parents. These criterion and instructions were adapted from the process that is used during the HomVEE review process.

Further, reviewers were instructed to provide study evidence ratings which assessed the strength of the research behind the outcomes reported. Each article was assigned one of three ratings: 1) high, there is strong evidence to conclude that at least one finding reported in the manuscript is attributable to the intervention that was examined; 2) moderate, there is some

evidence that at least one finding reported in the manuscript is attributable, at least partly, to the intervention that was examined. However, other factors not accounted for in the study might have also contributed to the finding; or 3) low, there is little evidence that the reported finding is attributable, partly or as a whole, to the intervention that was examined. These criterion and instructions were adapted from the process that is used during the [HomVEE review process](#).

During the extraction phase, one reviewer completed the standardized extraction template for each article. Once the extraction template was completed, a second reviewer checked the extraction template for quality assurance. Once the second reviewer completed the quality assurance check, the extraction phase was completed.

Phase 5: Recommendation

After extraction templates were completed for all eligible articles identified for a given program, the Project Lead completed the recommendation template for the Board of Trustees. The recommendation template highlighted which evidence-based criteria were met, the number of studies reviewed, and the findings from each included article. For programs that did not meet the criteria for a designation as "evidence-based," a justification for why the program should be considered "evidence-informed" was provided. The recommendations for each program will be presented to the Program and Grants Committee of the Board of Trustees on August 21, 2025 and then to the full Board on September 18, 2025. The decisions adopted by the full Board regarding a program's evidence designation are set to go into effect as of July 1, 2026.

Corrective Action Process

At the conclusion of the program year, program data are reviewed for compliance with established metrics for each program based on the corresponding Program Guidelines (FY25). Each program metric within a program is evaluated separately for meeting the minimum expcted value (e.g., 1.8 home visits per month for PAT).

For each program, the partnership is given a rating of Good Standing (meets or exceeds minimum value for each metric), Coaching (1-2 metrics are below the minimum expected value), or Corrective Action (3 or more metrics are below the minimum expected value).

For those in Good Standing, no additional follow-up is required.
For those receiving Coaching, Program Officers and Program Leads will develop a documented coaching plan to provide strategic support in meeting the metrics by established timelines.
For those receiving a Corrective Action, the LP team will develop a Corrective Action Plan to include coaching and deliverables by established timelines.

Local Partnership	Program	Metrics below minimum expectation
Barnwell	Triple P Level 4	Total meetings less than 8 Connections less than 80% ASQ:SE2 less than 80%
Marlboro	Parents as Teachers	Did not meet PAT fidelity essential requirements (staff meetings, personal visit observation, family centered assessments, developmental screenings) ASQ:SE2 less than 80% ACIRI less than 75%
York	Parents as Teachers	ASQ-3 less than 80% ASQ:SE2 less than 80% ACIRI less than 80% Connections less than 80%

ASQ-3: Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3

ASQ:SE2: Ages and Stages: Social Emotional-2

ACIRI: Adult-Child Interactive Reading Inventory

Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee

MEETING MINUTES

The committee met on Wednesday, August 27, 2025 via Microsoft Teams. The meeting was called to order at 11:05 AM. Committee members present were Dr. Amy Williams and Dave Morley. First Steps staff present were: Ann Vandervliet, Molly Tuck, Beth Moore, David O'Kelly, and Jaiden Branch.

The meeting was spent discussing updates for the Committee, as the schedule has recently moved to a quarterly basis. The updates discussed included changes to the Research & Evaluation team, the progress First Steps is making on each of the tactics in the first year of the Strategic Plan, outcomes of the Evidence Review project, and outlines of the first four Innovation Grant Pilots for the current fiscal year.

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 AM.

Finance and Administration Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 13, 2025

Virtual (via Teams)

Members Present (2): Jesica Mackey, Jacque Curtin

Member Absent (1): Dave Morley

Staff Present (2): Ann Vandervliet, David O'Kelly

Meeting was called to order with a quorum present by Jesica Mackey at 10:00 a.m.

Approval of May 7, 2025 minutes

Motion: To approve May 7, 2025 Finance and Administration Committee meeting minutes as submitted.

The motion was made by Jesica Mackey and seconded by Jacque Curtin. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

For Information and Review

FY 25-26 Year-end Overview: David shared the totals budgeted and expended for Fiscal 24-25, as well as a summary by funding category of amounts budgeted for FY 24-25 and 25-26.

Proposed Financial Reporting Template for FY 26-27: The committee reviewed a draft of a proposed new template for reporting on the agency's financial position and operating results.

Local Partnership Financial Management System (SAGE) Update: David shared that the implementation of the SAGE system is underway and is on track for completion in stages during November 2025 through March 2026.

Local Partnership Fiscal and Operational Guidelines issue July 24, 2025: David and Ann updated the committee on process used to produce the updated Guidelines recently issued.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Jesica Mackey and seconded by Jacque Curtin. All were in favor. The meeting concluded at 10:30 a.m.

Attachments:

- Minutes of Finance and Administration Committee meeting dated May 7, 2025
- FY24-25 Year-End Overview and FY25-26 Budgeted Revenue Slides
- Local Partnership Fiscal and Operational Guidelines
- Proposed FY 25-26 Financial Reporting Template

Proposed Revisions: South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner

For Review and Approval by the South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees
September 18, 2025

Introduction

South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner ("the Profile") was developed and adopted in 2015 to meet the requirements of Section 59-152-32 of the South Carolina Code, as established by Act 287 of 2014. The statute directed the SC First Steps Board of Trustees, in consultation with and with the consent of the State Board of Education, to adopt a description of school readiness that includes:

- The characteristics and development levels of a ready child, including but not limited to emerging literacy, numeracy, and physical, social, and emotional competencies;
- The characteristics of schools, educators, and caregivers necessary to create optimal early learning environments;
- The characteristics of optimal learning environments that promote school readiness and continued academic success.

The Profile was developed collaboratively by SC First Steps and the SC Department of Education, with input from kindergarten teachers, early childhood leaders, and public and private sector stakeholders. It was adopted by the SC First Steps Board of Trustees on June 18, 2015, and by the State Board of Education on October 15, 2015. It subsequently earned the endorsement of leading education and child advocacy organizations across the state. *The 2015 version is available here.*

The law requires the SC First Steps Board of Trustees to review the school readiness description and benchmarks every five years and adopt any revisions it considers appropriate. The Profile was last updated and approved in 2020. *The 2020 version is available here.* The proposed updates below build on that version. They:

- Preserve the formal definition of the ready kindergartner;
- Add a companion, parent-friendly definition;
- Refine the introduction and readiness benchmarks for clarity, plain language, and more concise expression (i.e. eliminating unnecessary words), while retaining the original meaning and intent.

These updates are intended to maintain the Profile's integrity as a professional standard while enhancing its usefulness as a public-facing resource for families, educators, and the public.

Current Language (2020) and Proposed Revisions

The following section presents the text of South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner as last revised and approved by the Board in February 2020, alongside proposed updates for 2025. The current language appears first, followed by the proposed revision. Any new additions are labeled "NEW." Rationale for each proposed change is also provided.

CURRENT LANGUAGE: THE READY KINDERGARTNER, with engaged support from parents, caregivers and community, has developed the skills and abilities necessary for achievement at age-appropriate levels. He/she is physically, socially and emotionally prepared to benefit from a quality kindergarten experience.

PROPOSED REVISION: THE READY KINDERGARTNER is a child who enters school with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support age-appropriate learning and achievement. With the engaged support of parents, caregivers, and the community, the child is physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally prepared to participate fully in and benefit from the kindergarten curriculum.

NEW (parent-friendly call-out): A ready kindergartner is healthy, eager to learn, and supported by caring adults.

RATIONALE: The formal definition of the ready kindergartner has long been valued by our partners as a clear, professional standard. It serves as a useful teaching tool for educators and early childhood professionals, grounding conversations about what it means for a child to be prepared for kindergarten. These revisions make the definition easier to read and understand, while preserving the clarity, professionalism, and formal style that make it a trusted standard.

To complement this formal definition, we are proposing the addition of a short, parent-friendly callout. This concise statement captures the essence of school readiness in a way that is easy to scan and remember, making the concept more accessible for families and the general public.

CURRENT LANGUAGE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE READY FOR SCHOOL?

All children are ready for kindergarten when they are five years old by September 1 of that school year. But kindergarten readiness is more than a matter of age. For a strong start in school, children need positive relationships and supportive learning environments beginning at birth. It is our responsibility as families, caregivers and communities to nurture the health and development necessary for school success.

South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner describes the physical, cognitive, social and emotional signs of school readiness. Because each child develops differently, each child will be ready in different ways. That is why schools and educators must also be ready: prepared to meet the individual needs of students at all levels of readiness and provide whatever support and services are needed for a quality kindergarten experience.

For more information, visit SCFIRSTSTEPS.ORG. Resources are available to help parents and caregivers foster school readiness from birth through age five.

PROPOSED REVISION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE READY FOR SCHOOL?

In South Carolina, children can start kindergarten if they will be five years old by September 1 of that school year. But being ready for school is more than just turning a certain age. From the very beginning, children need caring relationships and safe, engaging places to learn and grow. Parents, caregivers, and community members all share the important job of helping children build the health, confidence, and skills they need to thrive.

South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner describes the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills that help children start school strong. Every child grows at their own pace, so readiness can look a little different for each one. That's why schools and teachers also need to be ready, prepared to welcome every child and provide the services and support necessary for a quality kindergarten experience.

Find tips and resources to help children build school readiness from birth through age five at SCFIRSTSTEPS.ORG.

RATIONALE: State statute requires the description of school readiness to include characteristics of schools, educators, and caregivers that are necessary to create optimal learning environments for the early years of students' lives. The original 2015 Profile addressed this with separate descriptions of "ready families and caregivers," "ready neighbors and communities," and "ready schools and educators." While comprehensive, these sections were written in a stiff, formal style and offered little practical value for educators or families.

The 2020 revision replaced these with a single, more natural introduction that integrates the roles of parents, caregivers, communities, schools, and educators in supporting school readiness and kindergarten success. The proposed 2025 revision retains that integrated approach and further optimizes the language for clarity, readability, and plain language principles.

The benchmarks below are presented in a format that shows all edits from the 2020 version. Struck-through text shows language proposed for deletion. Blue text shows new/revised wording. These edits focus on improving clarity, using plain and natural language, and eliminating unnecessary words to make the benchmarks easier to read and understand.

Approaches to Learning and Inquiry

- ~~Demonstrates eagerness~~ Is eager to learn
- Shows curiosity ~~through questioning~~ by asking questions
- Shows creativity and imagination through pretend play
- Engages in daily ~~opportunities for~~ play and exploration
- ~~Shows willingness~~ Is willing to try new things
- Persists ~~in tasks that are challenging~~ with challenging tasks
- ~~Maintains attention~~ Stays focused on activities
- ~~Applies learning to~~ Uses what they've learned in new situations
- Solves problems with the materials on hand
- Use senses and observations to learn about the world ~~around them~~

Emotional and Social Development

- Shares, takes turns, and plays well with others
- Expresses emotions through appropriate actions and words
- Follows simple rules and directions

- Adjusts to changes in routine ~~and environment~~ or surroundings
- Shows self-control
- Shows caring and understanding of others' feelings
- Interacts positively with familiar adults
- Respects the ~~property~~ belongings of others
- Resolves conflicts using words and adult support
- Makes friends

Physical Development, Self-Help, and Motor Skills

- Moves with control and balance while walking, running, jumping, and climbing
- Uses fingers to control small objects~~, such as~~ like pencils, crayons, scissors, buttons, and zippers
- Uses hand-eye coordination for ~~to perform~~ simple tasks like putting together a puzzle
- Independently ~~performs~~ manages self-help tasks ~~such as~~ like toileting, hand washing, tooth brushing, and dressing

Language and Literacy Development

Listening, Speaking, and Understanding
- ~~Converses with others, taking~~ Takes turns speaking and listening in conversation
- Speaks clearly, expressing ideas and questions
- Uses words to seek help, answer questions, and solve problems
- Speaks in complete sentences of at least six to eight words
- Listens to stories and ~~retells~~ can retell them
- Begins to ask questions about stories that are read aloud
- Follows directions and completes tasks ~~that require~~ with multiple steps
- Asks and answers "how" and "why" questions

Early Reading
- Shows interest in books and reading
- Holds books upright, turning pages one at a time from front to back
- ~~Knows~~ Understands that printed words have meaning
- Uses pictures in ~~a text~~ books to tell and retell ~~the story~~ stories
- Recognizes and names/reads familiar signs and logos
- Listens to ~~a story being~~ stories read aloud
- ~~Makes predictions about~~ Predicts what ~~will~~ might happen next in ~~a story being~~ stories read aloud
- Begins to follow text from left to right as it is read aloud
- Recognizes and names rhyming words
- Recognizes that letters represent spoken sounds
- Recognizes some uppercase and lowercase letters and their sounds
- ~~Recognizes~~ Understands that spoken words can be represented in ~~written language~~ writing
- Recognizes their written name ~~as well as~~ and other familiar words
- Begins to use pictures and text read aloud to learn the meaning of unfamiliar words

Early Writing

- Draws pictures and ~~tells their story~~ explains what they mean
- Writes using a combination of letters, letter-like shapes, and scribbles
- Uses drawing and writing during play
- Writes their name independently or ~~using~~ with an example

Mathematical Thinking

Number Sense
- Counts in sequence up to 20
- Counts up to 10 objects, using one number for each object
- Recognizes up to five objects in a group without counting
- Compares sets of objects (*more than* or *less than*)
- Describes and compares objects by size (*big* and *small*), length (*long* and *short*) and weight (*light* and *heavy*)
- Understands and uses the terms *first*, *second*, and *third*

Matching, Sorting, and Classifying
- Recognizes and draws basic shapes, ~~such as circle, square, and triangle~~ like circles, squares, and triangles
- Recognizes and repeats simple repeating patterns, ~~such as triangle-square-triangle-square~~ like blue-red-blue-red
- Describes the positions of objects ~~by~~ using ~~the terms~~ words like *above* and *below*
- Sorts and classifies up to 10 objects into categories