

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 – 2026





## Mission

To optimize school readiness for all children by helping those communities to: **Recognize** the role and responsibilities families have as the first and most important teacher of children. **Motivate** individuals and communities to help stabilize, strengthen, and empower families. **Enable** the communities to successfully accomplish tasks through the coordination of personnel, education, and financial resources.

## Vision

Our vision is that every Fairfield County child will be prepared for success in school.

## Values

The years of early childhood are a critical window of development during which much of human potential is shaped. Families are the single most important influence on the development of their young children. The work of supporting families and caregivers is a collaborative effort between state and local stakeholders within the public, private, and faith sectors. School readiness is the result of a child's development in many areas, with each contributing to the child's success. Services must be individualized and adaptable to meet the unique needs of children and families. We value, and demonstrate in our collaborative work and advocacy, diverse perspectives of public policy and programs. To achieve desired results, services must be high quality and grounded in strong evidence. First Steps operates within a culture of accountability.

# Message from the Executive Director



**PATTI WILKES**

Executive Director  
Fairfield County First Steps

In 2022 we have worked extra hard to be sure our services are available for all of Fairfield County. Working together with our board and partners, we have been able to reach parents in need of diapers and other baby supplies, we have participated in local 'Family Fun Days' and started having our Parent Workshops in person again after COVID forced us to go virtual. Our role within Fairfield Forward allows us the opportunity to get our message out across the county to every different type of group. We continue to grow. The Strategic Planning process allows us to make sure we are aware of the needs and gaps and can provide our services to as many clients as possible. Thanks to everyone who helped in this effort.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patti Wilkes".

# Message from the Board Chair



**Darreyl Davis**  
Board Chair  
Fairfield County First Steps

As the elected board chair of Fairfield County First Steps, I am excited to share our Strategic Plan with the community. I am confident we will enjoy another great year of helping the youngest citizens in Fairfield County.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darreyl Davis", written on a light-colored background.

# Strategic Plan Process

## CONVENE

Held community convenings to develop a vision for young children and their families

October 2022 – January 2023



## UNDERSTAND

Reviewed local data and map assets to understand the state of young children, their families, and the early childhood system

October 2022 – March 2023



## PRIORITIZE

Organized the insight gathered from the convenings and data to prioritize the concerns, needs, and gaps the partnership wants to address and formalized Needs Assessment

January 2023 – March 2023



## PLAN

Wrote the partnership's three-year Strategic Plan using the Needs Assessment

March 2023 – May 2023



## APPLY

Utilize the Strategic Plan to inform the partnership's Annual Formula Funding Grant Application

May 2023, May 2024, May 2025



## IMPLEMENT

Execute the programs and services outlined in the Strategic Plan

July 2023 – June 2026



## MONITOR

Track the partnership's progress on implementing programs to fidelity and on achieving the Strategic Plan

July 2023 – June 2026



# Priority Needs: Summary

Through a series of community convenings, a needs assessment and asset mapping process, the following needs were prioritized for Fairfield County. See our full needs assessment here: <link>.

## **1. Quality and availability of childcare**

43% of census tracts are considered childcare deserts in Fairfield County. The population of children 5 and under is estimated at 1.016 and capacity of licensed childcare is only for 413 children. We are also concerned about the quality of childcare in the county.

## **2. Parenting classes**

Parenting classes are the best way for First Steps to improve school readiness, yet our capacity is limited by our resources.

## **3. Ability to read, for both children and adults**

Adult literacy in Fairfield County is 7.2% lower than the state average. Children's reading scores suffered during COVID. Adult literacy was brought up in two separate focus groups.

## **4. Changing voucher program to require more of the parents. ie, job and or school.**

The changes made to the voucher program have been detrimental to our efforts to ensure quality childcare for First Steps parents.

# Objectives

## **OBJECTIVE 1: Families are supported as their child's first and most important teachers.**

**Strategy 1.1.** Provide parents with access to support and resources that strengthen their families; build their confidence, knowledge and skills; and promote the optimal development of their children.

**Strategy 1.2.** Ensure access to parenting programs, offered at no charge, to all parents that want to participate in Fairfield County.

**Strategy 1.3.** Increase the number of families participating in evidence-based and evidence-informed parenting programs.

**Strategy 1.4.** Cultivate a community of champions and advocates for children and their families.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: Children are healthy and safe.**

**Strategy 2.2.** Provide parents with access to support and resources that strengthen their families; build their confidence, knowledge and skills; and promote the optimal development of their children.

**Strategy 1.2.** Ensure access to parenting programs, offered at no charge, to all parents that want to participate in Fairfield County.

**Strategy 1.3.** Increase the number of developmental assessments done with newborns to age 3 in Fairfield County..

# Objectives

## **OBJECTIVE 3: Literacy is improved for both children and adults in Fairfield County.**

**Strategy 3.1.** Work with the school district and the community to explore programs for adult literacy. Although literacy is not directly in our mission, we feel that it is important to ensuring all children are school ready by age 5.

**Strategy 3.2.** Continue to offer age-appropriate books at no cost for children.

## **OBJECTIVE 4: Improve the voucher program.**

**Strategy 4.1.** Discuss the option for changing the voucher program with First Steps leadership. We want to improve accountability and stress the need for quality childcare.



**Objective:** Families are supported as their child's first and most important teachers.

## **STRATEGY 1**

### Parents as Teachers

#### **SMART GOAL**

- By the end of FY24, we will increase the proportion of our clients getting an on time well-child visit by 5%.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- We will partner with First Steps 4K and the public school 4K program to recruit younger siblings of 4K students into Parents as Teachers.

## **STRATEGY 2**

### Community Education

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- Each year, we will participate in at least two community health fairs
- By the end of FY25, we will advertise the County transportation program for our PAT families to use to get to well-child visits at the local pediatrician's office, if needed.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- We will partner with the local WIC/DHEC office in planning the community health fairs.

# **Objective:** Children are healthy and safe.

## **STRATEGY 1**

### Parents as Teachers

#### **SMART GOAL**

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#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

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#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- We will partner with the local WIC/DHEC office in planning the community health fairs.

# **Objective:** Literacy is improved for both children and adults in Fairfield County

## **STRATEGY 1**

### Parents as Teachers

#### **SMART GOAL**

- By the end of FY24, we will increase the proportion of our clients getting an on time well-child visit by 5%. We will assess any parents who have literacy issues.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- We will partner with the school district and Fairfield Forward to identify programs to help with adult literacy.

## **STRATEGY 2**

### Imagination Library and Book Programs

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- Each year, we will participate in at least two community health fairs
- We will continue to offer age-appropriate books at no cost for children

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- We will partner with the local WIC/DHEC office in planning the community health fairs.

# **Objective:** Improve the voucher program

## **STRATEGY 1**

### Parents as Teachers

#### **SMART GOAL**

- By the end of FY24, we will increase the proportion of our clients getting an on time well-child visit by 5%.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- By the end of FY24, we will discuss the option for changing the voucher program with First Steps leadership.

# Overarching Measure(s) of Success

## **INCREASE THE REACH OF FIRST STEPS SERVICES**

By 2025, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by Fairfield County First Steps will increase from 17% to 20%.

## **MORE CHILDREN ARRIVE AT KINDERGARTEN READY FOR SUCCESS**

By 2025, the percentage of children who score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment will increase by 2% each year to 44%. (38% in Fall, 2021 KRA)

# Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the people who participated in the Needs Assessment, including parents, teachers, staff and community members who shared their thoughts on how First Steps can be improved.

We would also like to thank the First Steps board members and Trish Wampler from KSA for guiding the participation and recording our thoughts.

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