

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 – 2026



## Mission

“Every child in Dillon County is important and should experience a loving, stimulating, healthy, and safe environment ensured by a supportive family and community.

## Vision

Every Dillon County child will be prepared for success in school.

## Values

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 in the development 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



**Shirleen D. Lewis, Ed.S.**  
Executive Director  
Dillon County First Steps

Dillon County First Steps Strategic Plan for the early care and education of the county's youngest learners builds on a series of significant steps taken over the last years by South Carolina First Steps to Readiness. This strategic plan was created to support all Dillon County Families to ensure that their children arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. For 2024-2026 it is DCFS goal to build on the rich array of existing early childhood initiatives and services, while implementing additional programs to create a comprehensive early childhood service system. These efforts will come through building relationships through health services, early care and education, family support, and parent education to ensure the full development of all children. It is our goal to truly help every child in Dillon County be successfully prepared for school.

Sincerely,

*Shirleen D. Lewis*

# 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 Dillon County.

## **1. Vacant slots for 4K in the public and private sector.**

Dillon County currently has vacant 4K slots both in public and private sector that remain unfilled. There are children in the county who are not performing well on KRA, and other students who are not currently enrolled in any 4K program that meet the requirements to attend. One of the best ways to ensure kids are ready for school is to make sure all slots for quality early childhood programs are filled.

## **2. Address child obesity and diseases in young children in Dillon County.**

There are not many programs geared towards addressing obesity in young children although the number of children being diagnosed at an alarming rate. Our county needs additional programs that support getting children healthier.

## **3. Need additional services and resources for children 0-3 with special needs.**

The only resources currently in Dillon County to serve children with Special needs from 0-3 that has an actual location in Dillon County is Speech services. Families need more ways to be connected to sources that provide assessments for young children .

## **4. Services needed to address child abuse and neglect in homes and child care facilities.**

In the last three years, there are so many children in Dillon County who have been seriously hurt or died, because of child abuse and neglect. Our community needs additional funding for parenting programs.

# Objectives

## **1. Partner with Latta Schools to implement Countdown to Kindergarten model.**

To help increase KRA scores we will want to start the Countdown to kindergarten model to help start services with the most at risk students prior to starting school.

## **2. Decrease waiting list by expanding families served in parenting program.**

To expand the services provided by DCFS, staff will continuously recruit and maintain a waiting list so as additional funds become available families in need can be served.

## **3. To recruit at least three Hispanic families to participate in programs through Dillon County First Steps.**

The Hispanic population of Dillon County is underserved and it is the goal of the agency to serve children and families of the Hispanic Population in all of our programs.

## **Objective 1: Partner with Latta Schools to implement Countdown to Kindergarten model.**

### **STRATEGY 1.1**

Introduce and implement Countdown to Kindergarten

#### **SMART GOAL**

1. By FY 24, meetings will be set with at least 3 Elementary Principals to present and discuss implementation of CTK for Summer 2024.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- We will collaborate with Latta School District, more directly with Latta Elementary to complete program with 5K teachers.

### **STRATEGY 1.2**

Collaborate with Dillon County Truancy Court

#### **SMART GOAL**

1. By FY 24 we will work with Truancy court to recruit 10 children who will be attending 5K, that have siblings that are currently working with the District due to school absences.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- Our partners in this will be the Dillon County Truancy Court, school counselors, and the school district.

## **Objective Two:** Decrease waiting list by expanding families served in parenting program.

### **STRATEGY 2.1**

#### Nurturing Parenting Programs

##### **SMART GOALS**

1. By the end of FY 26, we will increase the number of clients served by 25 in the Nurturing Parenting program. to increase the impact of DCFS. (Groups and Fatherhood Initiative).
2. By the end of FY 26, we will increase the number of fathers Nurturing Parenting by 10 to reduce the percentage of violent crimes by committed the male population.

##### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- Recruitment through the DCFS Staff, school districts, Dillon County Truancy Court, Dillon County Department of Social Services, and DHEC.

### **STRATEGY 2.2**

#### Community Education

##### **SMART GOALS**

- By FY 24, FY 25, and FY 26, we will continuously advertise in the local newspaper and social media to increase recruitment of eligible families by 10%.
- By FY24, FY 25, and FY 26, we will annually host an event that will allow for us to connect with eligible families.

##### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- We will partner with Department of Social Services, DHEC, local schools, Dillon Collaborative Council, and United Way to have events and share information with the community.



## **Objective 3: To recruit at least three Hispanic families to participate in programs through Dillon County First Steps.**

### **STRATEGY 3.1**

#### **Nurturing Parenting Program**

##### **SMART GOAL**

- By the end of FY 26, we will increase enrollment of Hispanic families by at least three each year of the plan.

##### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- We will partner with local elementary schools, administrators, Head Start, and First Steps 4k program to make connections with Hispanic families to increase enrollment.

### **STRATEGY 3.2**

#### **Community Education**

##### **SMART GOAL**

- In FY 24, FY 25, and FY26, we will host at least one community outreach event which will include a Spanish interpreter and dual language information.

##### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

- We will partner with the local school interpreter and Department of Social Services in planning our community outreach event.

# Overarching Measures of Success

## Increase the reach of First Steps Services

By FY26, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by Dillon County First Steps will increase from 28% to 40%.

## Increase the number of children enrolled in high intensity programs funded by First Steps

By FY 26, the number of children and families served will increase by expanding existing programs and implementing a minimum of one new strategy.

# Acknowledgments

DCFS would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of community partners who participated in the planning and meeting sessions to complete the needs assessment and to create this strategic plan for our agency.. It was our goal to ensure we consider all children and truly identify and address the needs of this county. Our hope is to be able to partner with local resources and implement programs that give children all the resources they need to be healthy and fully prepared for school. We would like to personally thank; DCFS Staff, DCFS Partnership Board, Dillon District 4, Dillon District 3, Clemson Cooperative Extension, J'Dae Learning Center, McLeod Health, CareSouth, Fitness By Cory, Shalana Baker, and Dillon County Boys and Girls Youth Center for your participation in this process. I'm looking forward to the future, and our growth in serving our children and community.

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