



2025 - 2030

# Strategic Plan



Strengthening the foundation for South Carolina's  
K-12 system and economy, **together.**

## OUR GOAL

By 2030, at least **75%**  
of **South Carolina's**  
**children** will enter  
kindergarten ready  
to thrive.

## ABOUT US

**South Carolina First Steps** is both a state agency and a nonprofit, working collaboratively to ensure every child starts school ready to succeed. Partnering with parents, caregivers, early educators, and other organizations, we serve children from birth to age 5 and their families. Services are delivered through 46 **Local Partnerships**, one in each county, and through **First Steps 4K**, which provides a high-quality preschool experience for vulnerable 4-year-olds in more than 390 classrooms across licensed child care centers, private schools, and charter schools.

We also convene the state's **Early Childhood Advisory Council** (ECAC), fostering high levels of collaboration among Head Start; the SC Departments of Education, Social Services, Public Health, Health and Human Services, and Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities; Children's Trust of South Carolina; other family-serving organizations; and the business and medical communities to build a stronger, more coordinated early childhood system.

## WHY IT MATTERS

From birth to age 5, the human brain develops more rapidly than at any other stage of life. Every early experience, positive or negative, shapes the architecture of the developing brain and leaves lasting effects on health, learning, and potential. When early childhood systems are well-designed, coordinated, and adequately resourced, they strengthen families and equip parents and educators to give children the secure foundations they need. The benefits extend far beyond childhood: stronger school readiness, higher educational attainment, and the resilient workforce on which our state's economic vitality depends.



## SC BY THE NUMBERS

**280,000**  
children birth to age five

**41%**  
live in poverty or low-  
income households





**56,000**

children enter  
kindergarten each year

**39%**

achieved “demonstrating  
readiness” in Fall 2024\*

\*The state's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) measures children's preparedness for school across key developmental domains.

## STRATEGIES

### Strengthen the First Steps 4K model.

- Reduce chronic absenteeism.
- Strengthen consistency of high-quality teacher-child interactions, classroom environments, and instructional support.
- Increase on-site coaching in 4K classrooms.
- Decrease teacher turnover.
- Enroll more eligible children.

### Increase access and utilization of evidence-based, high-intensity programs through First Steps Local Partnerships.

- Ensure programs are delivered with fidelity to model.
- Increase enrollment and retention in local partnership programs.
- Strengthen local and regional collaboration.
- Expand parent engagement in publicly funded preschool classrooms.
- Expand capacity and training for promising school-readiness practices.
- Increase awareness and value of school readiness services and supports.
- Strengthen technical assistance provided to child care providers.
- Strengthen training and policies provided by SC First Steps to local partnership staff and boards.

### Strengthen collaboration and alignment among all organizations serving children birth to age five.

- Increase enrollment in publicly funded preschool.
- Reduce teacher turnover in publicly funded preschool settings.
- Expand collaborative outreach to increase WIC participation.
- Increase availability of and participation in home visiting programs.
- Increase the number of women accessing prenatal care.
- Increase developmental screening rates for children ages 9–35 months.
- Increase the percentage of children with a medical home.



## Foundations for Success

- **Advanced collaboration** among all organizations with funding for children birth to age 5.
- **Research and evaluation capacity**, including the development of the Early Childhood Integrated Data System.
- **Communications capacity** to engage families, providers, and the public.
- **State-level fiscal mapping** to maximize and ensure best of use of all existing early childhood funding.
- **Modern technology and data systems** to support service delivery, data collection, and decision-making.
- **Focused and effective training** for staff, local partnership staff and board members, and program implementers.
- **Updated fiscal and programmatic operating policies** to strengthen internal and external operations.
- **Regular progress monitoring** to track outcomes, inform decision-making, and drive continuous improvement.

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## Enabling Legislation

South Carolina First Steps' activities are authorized by the S.C. Code of Laws:

- **59-152:** Establishes First Steps as a state agency and its local partnership structure
- **59-156:** Designates First Steps as the private provider arm of the state's Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)
- **63-11-17:** Defines the structure of the Board of Trustees and Early Childhood Advisory Council

## Learn More

[www.scfirststeps.org](http://www.scfirststeps.org)

