



Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee Meeting **Wednesday, March 26, 2025 11-12:30 PM via Zoom ([link to join](#))**

Meeting ID: 873 0000 2784 | Passcode: 064776

Staff Liaison: Dr. Chelsea Richard, Chief of Staff

Committee Members: Dr. Amy Williams (Chair); Dave Morley; Janie Neeley

All Board Members invited to participate

AGENDA

- 2026 Prevalent program evaluation focus
 - Proposed motion: Select Child Care Quality Enhancement (FY21-22 through FY24-25) as the subject of the next local partnership prevalent program evaluation (due November 1, 2026)
- Strategic planning discussion
 - Progress on 2020-2025 strategic plan
 - Initial framing of 2025-2030 strategic plan

UPCOMING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- May 28
- July 23
- September 24
- November 26 (day before Thanksgiving) – discuss later potentially moving to November 19?

ATTACHMENTS

- Prevalent program evaluations
- Progress on 2020-2025 strategic plan
- Initial framing of 2025-2030 strategic plan



Prevalent Program Evaluations

OVERVIEW

Legislatively, South Carolina First Steps is required to evaluate prevalent programs on a five year schedule (SC State Code § 59-152-50). Prevalent programs are defined as >10% of total expenditure of Local Partnership formula funding. The legislation dictates that First Steps before June 30, 2015 shall:

“contract with an external evaluator to develop a schedule for an in-depth and independent performance audit designed to measure the success of each prevalent program in regard to its success in supporting the goals of the State Board and those set forth in Section 59-152-20 and Section 59-152-30. Results of all external performance audits must be published in the First Steps annual report.”

HISTORY

On May 18, 2020, the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee voted “to adopt a flexible evaluation schedule for the next five years”. This was adopted by the full board at their June 18, 2020 meeting.

Program (years)	Evaluator	Submitted/Deadline
Parents as Teachers (FY17-FY19)	UofSC Institute for Families in Society and Pacific Research & Evaluation	October 29, 2021
Child care technical assistance and training (FY19-FY21)	UofSC Institute for Families in Society	November 1, 2022
Child care scholarships (FY18-FY22)	UofSC Institute for Families in Society	November 1, 2023
5-Year Agency Evaluation: All local partnership programs with child-level data (FY19-FY23)	Child Trends	November 1, 2024
Parents as Teachers (FY20-FY24)	Child Trends	November 1, 2025

FUTURE EVALUATION NEEDS

Program (years)	Deadline
Prevalent program 2	November 1, 2026
Prevalent program 3	November 1, 2027

PROPOSED SUBJECT OF PREVALENT PROGRAM 2

Program	FY22-FY24 Average of State Funding	FY22-FY24 Average % of State Funding
Total State Funding Spent on all Programs	\$12,192,030.90	-
Parents as Teachers	\$3,974,983.66	32.5%
Child Care Quality Enhancement	\$1,839,399.66	15.0%
Child Care Training	\$1,347,860.65	11.1%

Note: FY23 was the first year of READY funds



MISSION

South Carolina First Steps works collaboratively to ensure that all children start school ready to reach their highest potential with engaged support from their parents, caregivers, and communities.

VISION

We will be successful when all children reach their highest potential.

VALUES

Children

From prenatal development through age five, our focus and priority are young children and their families and caregivers.

Relationships

We cultivate positive, supportive, respectful, and reinforcing interactions between people that shape development, build community, increase success and productivity, foster learning and growth, and affirm the unique value of individuals, caregivers, parents, and children.

Equity

We ensure all people have the opportunity and resources to be successful and that all voices are solicited and heard.

High quality

We ensure that our programs and services are culturally-responsive, inclusive, and developmentally-appropriate and are delivered with fidelity to the model being implemented. Our products, services, and operations are marked by excellence.

Results

We produce meaningful and measurable impact and outcomes.

Every Child Ready

2020-2025 Strategic Plan



Ensure children are ready for kindergarten

- 1.1 Families are supported as their child's first and most important teachers.
- 1.2 Families can access and afford high quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of their children and families.
- 1.3 Children are healthy and safe.
- 1.4 Children and families experience seamless transitions and a sense of belonging across early learning programs and from early childhood into kindergarten.



Close gaps through equity: A fair chance for every child

- 2.1 Disparities in educational, developmental, and health outcomes for children of color and from low-income families are reduced
- 2.2 Children and families experience culturally and linguistically responsive, developmentally appropriate, accessible practices in the home, at child care, in the classroom, with healthcare providers, and with the public early childhood system.
- 2.3 Children and families can access and afford high quality programs and services regardless of zip code.
- 2.4 South Carolina First Steps deliberately designs and fosters an environment that recognizes, affirms and values diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels from the board of trustees and the state office to local partnerships and 4K providers.
- 2.5 The voices of stakeholders including, most importantly, families and children, as well as early childhood educators, providers, local partnerships and community partnerships and community partners, will be solicited and heard, and changes will be made based on continuous feedback/quality improvement cycles. Communication, openness, and transparency with stakeholders at all levels will be considered a valued duty of the organization.



Increase funding for First Steps' investment in early childhood

- 3.1 State funding for early childhood programs through South Carolina First Steps is significantly increased, providing sufficient resources to ensure the school readiness of South Carolina's children most at-risk for early school failure.
- 3.2 Federal funding for South Carolina First Steps increases.
- 3.3 Private funding for South Carolina First Steps grows significantly, helping to diversify the organization's sources of funds, providing flexibility to innovate, target specific needs, and expand promising programs.
- 3.4 First Steps is recognized for good governance, transparency, continuous quality improvement, administrative and fiscal excellence, and innovation in the development and administration of a unique public-private partnership model.
- 3.5 First Steps establishes itself clearly as a statewide grant-maker, funder, and intermediary, operating collaboratively with other funders and within funder networks to learn from each other, enhance impact through collective efforts, and pool resources when appropriate in order to more successfully drive positive outcomes for young children and their families in South Carolina.



Create a coordinated and family-centered early childhood system

- 4.1 The early childhood state system works collaboratively, aligning resources, strategy, and focus across agencies to benefit young children and their families.
- 4.2 Families with young children will have knowledge about and be able to access all publicly-funded programs, services and resources for which they and their children are eligible.
- 4.3 Early childhood professionals, policymakers, system and community leaders, advocates and business allies will have the opportunity to learn from experts and peers to advance in their profession through collaborative, cross-agency, and cross-system learning and professional development opportunities.
- 4.4 The voices of early childhood leaders and of the families impacted by the early childhood system are solicited and heard by institutions and agencies serving children and their families.
- 4.5 Build on First Steps' presence in every county to serve as a hub for early childhood services and local system building.
- 4.6 South Carolina First Steps becomes a state and nationally recognized leader in the early childhood field.



Overarching Measures of Success

Progress Report, FY20 - FY24

1. Increase the reach of First Steps services.

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

FY20 = 19% **FY21** = 24% **FY22** = 37% **FY23** = 37% **FY24** = 45%

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

By 2025, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by First Steps high intensity programs will increase from 5% to 8%.

FY20 = 3% **FY21** = 4% **FY22** = 5% **FY23** = 8% **FY24** = 8%

3. Increase the availability of high quality early care and education opportunities offered by First Steps.

By 2025, the percentage of children under age 6 who benefit from First Steps quality enhancement and training efforts will increase from 12% to 15%.

FY20 = 12% **FY21** = 18% **FY22** = 15% **FY23** = 19% **FY24** = 24%

4. 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 from 37% to 47%.

FY20 = 39% **FY21** = 27% **FY22** = 36% **FY23** = 38% **FY24** = 41%

5. Reduce the racial/ethnic gap in kindergarten readiness.

By 2025, the gap in the percentage of children who score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment between White kindergartners and Black/Hispanic kindergartners will reduce by 1% each year from 20% to 15%.

FY20 = 20% **FY21** = 19% **FY22** = 23% **FY23** = 19% **FY24** = 19%

6. Create an access portal to increase South Carolina children's knowledge of and access to services.

By 2025, First5SC.org will launch and include five categories: child care & early education, health & safety, special needs & early intervention, food & nutrition, and parenting & family support.

FY20 = Funding secured; RFP posted

FY21 = Procurement process completed; eligibility criteria mapped

FY22 = Eligibility screener launched

FY23 = Common application launched

FY22 = Full year of common application



2025-2030 First Steps Strategic Plan

Initial Framing

Effective: July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2030

OVERALL GOAL: At least 75% of SC's children entering kindergarten achieve "demonstrating readiness" on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

THREE CORE STRATEGIES

1. Ensure at least 75% children in 4K classrooms in private settings achieve "demonstrating readiness" on SC's kindergarten readiness assessment (currently KRA).
2. Increase capacity for the implementation of evidence-based, high intensity programs administered by First Steps local partnerships to increase number of children served by programs with highest impact over the longest period of time.
3. Increase partnerships with other agencies funded to support young children and families to create a more aligned continuum of support for vulnerable families.