

Evaluation Snapshot of South Carolina First Steps Local Partnerships FY 2019-2023

About: An evaluation led by Child Trends examined how South Carolina First Steps local partnerships have met their legislative goals, purposes, and core functions, as well as what impacts their services had on young children and families in South Carolina during fiscal years 2019-2023.

Evaluation methods used



1 survey
of 276 local
partnership
staff and
boards



4 focus groups
with 14 local
partnership
staff and
boards



9 interviews
with families



**Up to 23
program
guidelines**
reviewed



**5 child
and family
outcomes**
analyzed

Question 1: How did First Steps local partnerships meet their intended legislative objectives?

Answer: Local partnership staff, board members, and families overwhelmingly agree that local partnerships are meeting their legislative goals, purposes, and core functions.

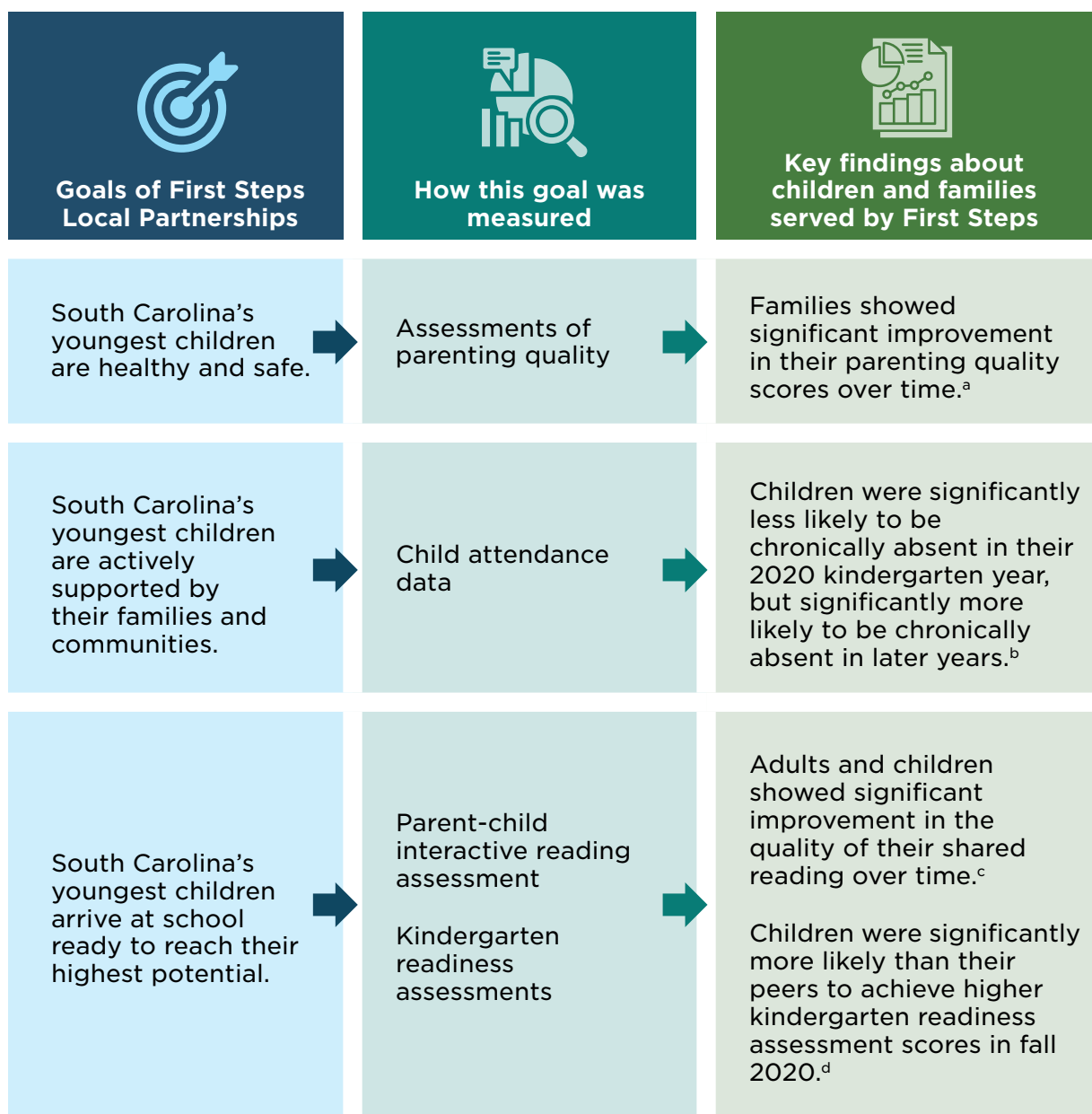
Question 2: How are First Steps' guidelines aligned with national model guidelines?

Answer: First Steps is well-aligned across monitoring standards and has opportunities to continue streamlining data reporting expectations.

Question 3: What was the impact of First Steps local partnerships on expected outcomes for children and families?

Answers:

- ▶ The number of families and children served by First Steps decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but later increased, exceeding pre-pandemic levels.
- ▶ Programs funded by First Steps improved two-generation outcomes, as seen in improved parenting quality and interaction scores over time.
- ▶ In FY 2020, children enrolled in First Steps programs were significantly less likely to be absent in their kindergarten year and significantly more likely to achieve higher kindergarten readiness assessment scores compared to their peers. These effects were not found in later years.¹



^a To be included in this analysis, families had to complete at least two Keys to Interactive Parenting (KIPS) assessments or at least one Healthy Families and Parenting Inventory (HFPI) during the evaluation period.

^b For this analysis, children were propensity-score-matched with peers not enrolled in First Steps programs.

^c To be included in the analysis, adults and children had to participate in at least two Adult-Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI) assessments during the evaluation period.

^d This finding was only significant during FY 2020 and not in other years. For this analysis, children were propensity-score-matched with peers not enrolled in First Steps programs.

¹ These findings highlight the valuable role of First Steps local partnerships while also reflecting the significant challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted operations and outcomes across all education-related sectors during the evaluation period. Other community-level factors may also explain outcome changes beyond children and families' participation in programs funded by First Steps, such as community demographics or investments in early childhood at the community or state level.