

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2024 – 2026



Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the parents and caregivers that utilize First Steps in Fairfield County for their time and contributions to the Needs Assessment process. We would also like to thank the Board members for their participation and ongoing support. We also appreciate the community members who support Fairfield First Steps and willingly participate in surveys, meetings, and activities.

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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. Our role within Fairfield Forward allows us the opportunity to get our message out across the county to every different type of group. Our numbers served continues to grow. We expect this year to be one of our best yet. The Needs Assessment process allows us to make sure we are aware of the needs and gaps to providing our services. Thanks to everyone who helped in this effort.

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

Needs Assessment Process

CONVENE

Held two community convenings with 20 participants and developed a vision for young children and their families

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 – February 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 – February 2023

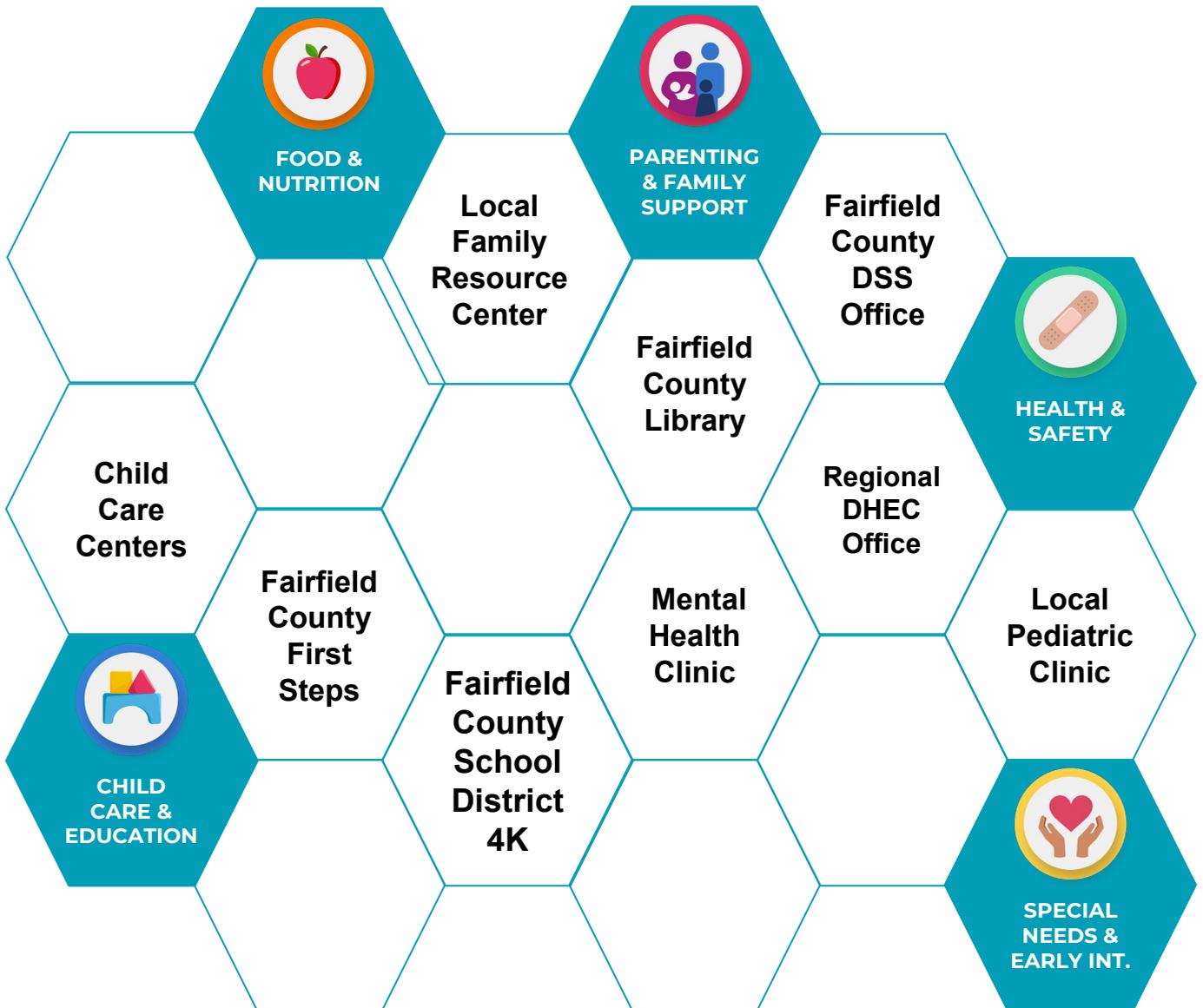
“I would not be able to work without the assistance of First Steps”

-Participant, January 17 session

“Quality childcare remains our number one priority in Fairfield County”

-Participant, January 18 session

Asset Map: Fairfield County



Priorities: Summary

- 1. Quality and availability of childcare**
- 2. Parenting classes**
- 3. Ability to read, for both children and adults**
- 4. Changing voucher program to require more of the parents.
ie, job and or school.**

Priority 1: Quality and availability of Childcare

43% of census tracts are considered childcare deserts in Fairfield County.

Provider location and center capacity obtained from sccchildcare.org on October 30, 2022. Definition of a child care desert obtained from the Center for American Progress, "A child care desert is any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots" (<https://www.childcaredeserts.org/>). Population under age 5 by census tract obtained from the American Community Survey 2016-2020 Five Year Estimates (Table B01001). US Census Bureau.



There are not enough childcare establishments in Fairfield County, and they are not located where they are most needed, as transportation is a huge issue in our rural county. The population of children 5 and under is estimated at 1,016 and there is licensed childcare capacity for only 413 children. We are more concerned with the quality of childcare than the availability. Few centers are licensed, and others have not participated in the ABC rating. First Steps has been working with childcare operators in a training program with good results but extremely limited participation.

Priority 2: Parenting Classes

106 parents and caregivers participated in Parenting Classes.

We hope to increase this number by 5% each year.

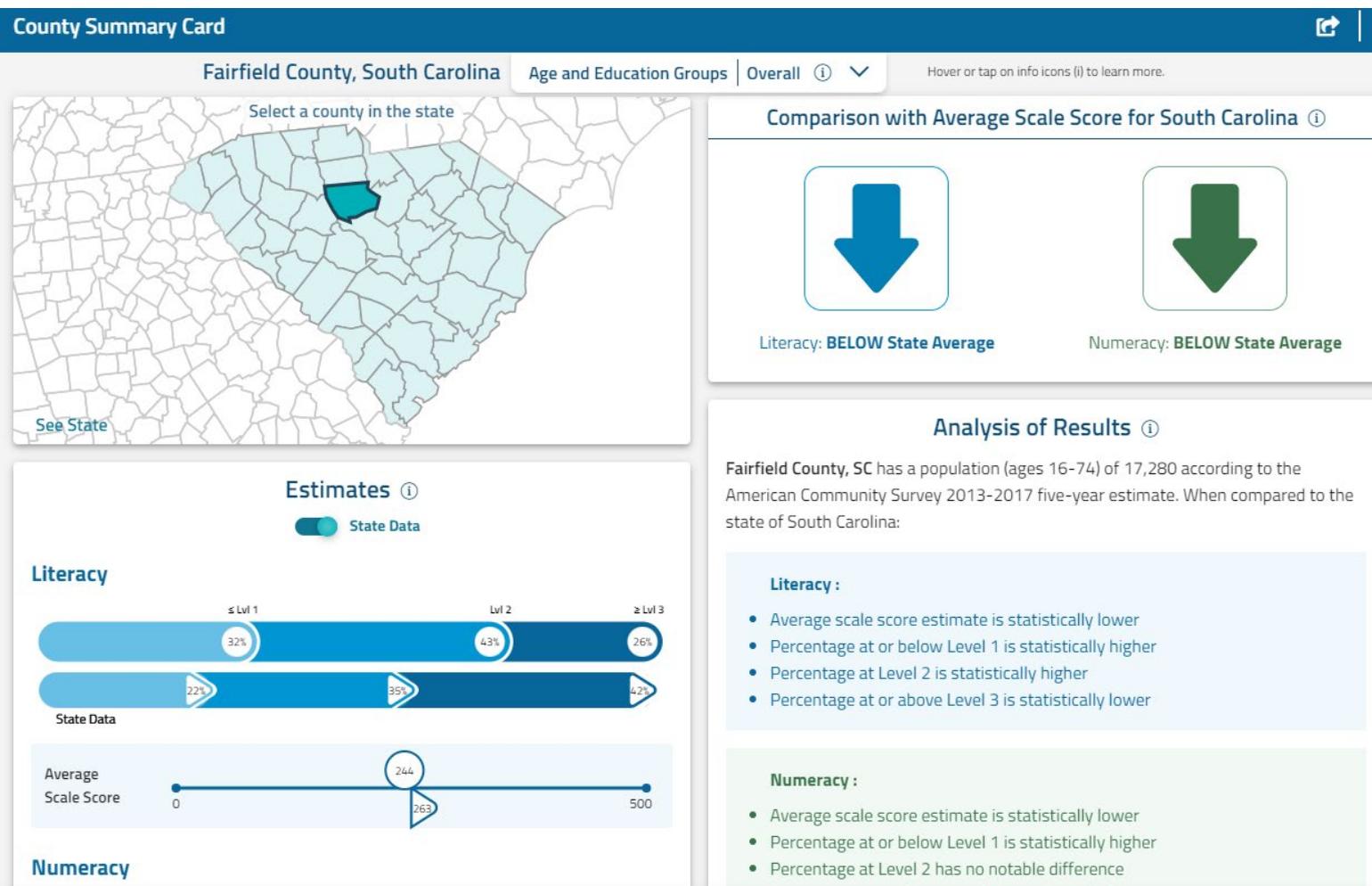
“I have learned a great deal from the parenting classes. I learn as much from the other mothers as I do from the speakers, and I find the support invaluable.” *- Participant at January 17 session*



Priority 3: Ability to Read

Adult literacy in Fairfield County is 7.2% lower than the state average for South Carolina.

PIACC – Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, 2017



First Steps will continue to work with Fairfield County agencies, local partners and Fairfield Forward to address the issues of adult and child literacy.

Priority 4: Changing voucher program

The State Board of First Steps changed the voucher program to allow for payment to all providers, regardless of quality, and no longer requiring that the parent(s) be employed and/or in school.

We believe this was a mistake and it has resulted in a decline in the quality of childcare that our clients receive.

We respectfully suggest that a discussion be held on this matter for the entire State of South Carolina, and that this decision be overturned or amended for the sake of the children.

i(cs) provided a report on the Early Childhood Workforce in December 2021. This report highlights the many issues facing this workforce and the loss of so many employees. "Quality childcare involves well-trained, committed, and caring professionals, and yet has historically taken a back seat." The median income for child care providers remains lower than any other sector.

Next Steps



PLAN

Write 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

