

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 – 2026



Mission

To help Florence County Families and caregivers prepare their children for school success by maximizing public and private community resources to deliver, enhance, and expand high-quality early childhood services.

Vision

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

Values

1. The years of early childhood are a critical window of development during which much human potential is shaped.
2. Families are the single most important influence on the development of their young children.
3. School readiness is the result of a child's development in many areas, with each contributing to a child's success.

Message from the Executive Director



Spencer R. Scott
Executive Director
Florence County First Steps

In the fall of 2022, the Florence County First Steps (FCFS) staff started collecting and processing surveyed data, meeting with our community members and listening to concerns while determining their greatest needs. After conducting working sessions, research development, dissecting current initiatives and revisiting goals, we focused on our visions, values and mission to create the right strategic plan for FCFS.

This plan embodies the results of those observations, providing insight to help us set priorities. After the profound effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had on communities throughout the world, the educational sector was hard-hit, seeing unprecedented setbacks. Yet, we adapted and as a people, persevered.

Heartfelt appreciation to everyone engaged in the planning process. The involvement of educational providers, both private and public, the community members, parents and business community provided invaluable feedback that ensured the development of focused and realistic goals that align with the needs of our youngest learners. Special thanks to our board members, who ensured breadth of vision and continuity of values, while encouraging a collaborative, inclusive process.

We are excited to share our strategic plan for 2024-2026 and look forward to our continued work within the Florence County communities.

Spencer R. Scott

Message from the Board Chair



Pastor Kippie Brown
Board Chair
Florence County First Steps

As the newly elected board chair of Florence County First Steps (FCFS), it is my pleasure to present the 2024-2026 Strategic Plan.

Our Board is the principle guide in ensuring FCFS stands behind their mission of helping families and caregivers prepare their children for school success. In that capacity, we partnered with Spencer R. Scott, the Executive Director to lend support and guidance.

It has been an eye-opening experience working with them on this strategic plan. We have gotten feedback from the community, the educators and the parents, and have learnt firsthand of the obstacles they have to overcome to ensure the youngest learners in our communities continue to strive.

This strategic plan outlines the goals of FCFS, which were developed after carefully evaluating the greatest needs of Florence County to ensure efficient and successful implementation.

In this document, key points, concerns and solutions are outlined that we consider to be the most critical to the successful fulfillment of FCFS vision and values. In evaluating our responsibilities for ensuring and maintaining the education of every child in the community, we are also aware of the challenges we face. We remain dedicated to continuously developing the ways and means to meet them.

Thanks to my fellow board members, the residents of Florence County that shared so openly, and the staff of FCFS for all their hard work and continued dedication. Our work continues!

Kippie Brown₄

Strategic Plan Process

CONVENE



Florence County convened two community events where participants were provided with information regarding the needs assessment process. The partnership stressed the importance of the data collection process as the information obtained from the surveys is a vital component in determining the course of the partnership's future initiatives to best serve the needs of children and families.

October 2022 – January 2023

PRIORITIZE



UNDERSTAND

Surveys distributed throughout the community obtain data from the partnership's stakeholders. Individuals had the opportunity to complete the survey using a variety of mediums; digitally by means of a scanned QR code or a direct link (both of which were able to be completed on mobile or desktop) or with a physical copy of the survey. As the survey process was underway, local, state, and national data was reviewed to further understand issues faced by children, adults, families, and those working in the Early Care and Education system.

October 2022 – 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 Florence County. See our full needs assessment here:

<https://www.scfirststeps.org/media/tc4bzjw3/florence-county-fy24-26-needs-assessment-pdf.pdf>

1. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND OBESITY

Adult inactivity and obesity are concerns in Florence County. Inactivity leads to obesity, which in turn leads to a continuous cycle for families as adult activity levels set the foundation for children's activity levels. Obesity can have a major effect on physical and mental health. A priority of the partnership is to encourage more physical activity for children and adults within the county.

2. CHILDCARE WORKFORCE

The COVID-19 pandemic brought childcare workforce issues to the forefront of the community's attention. The childcare workforce in Florence County decreased while the number of families needing childcare services increased. Due to the decline in available childcare teachers, facilities in the area were and continue to operate at less than full capacity. Other issues that are prevalent in the area include the quality of services being provided to children and their families. This is seen as being a direct correlation to the decline in the childcare workforce which is being influenced by salaries that do not align with the increasing cost of living.

3. SCHOOL READINESS

School readiness continues to be an ongoing priority in Florence County. The partnership's goal is to increase the number of children that are entering the school system ready to learn. To do this, the partnership aims to cultivate dialogue between the public and private sectors to provide more consistency in efforts to prepare children for school.

Objectives

- 1. Families will utilize education and local resources that address physical activity and nutrition.**
- 2. The early care and education workforce is appropriately compensated, prepared, and supported in their role of supporting the county's youngest learners**
- 3. Children are ready for kindergarten**

Objective One: Families will utilize education and local resources that address physical activity and nutrition.

STRATEGY 1.1

Community Education

SMART GOAL

1. By FY25, we will host and/or participate in at least 2 community health events which will address adult and child physical activity and nutrition.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- We will partner with the local DHEC office, local hospital systems (McLeod/MUSC/HOPE Health), the YMCA, and other health-based entities in the community to host our own community health fair and/or participate as a vendor.

STRATEGY 1.2

Child Care Training

SMART GOAL

1. Each year we will offer at least one training session on physical activity and one session on nutrition.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- We will partner with ABC Grow Health, Be Well Care Well, the CACAP, and other health-based entities in the community to provide trainers/trainings that provide participants with information to use and share with the families they work with.

Objective Two: The early care and education workforce is appropriately compensated, prepared, and supported in their role of supporting the county's youngest learners

STRATEGY 2.1

Quality Enhancement

SMART GOALS

1. By the end of FY26, we will decrease the staff turnover rates of our clients by 2%.
2. By the end of FY26, we will increase the available childcare capacity of our client's programs by 5%.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- We will partner with SC Endeavors, SC T.E.A.C.H program, ABC Quality Program, local college and technical schools, and local temp agencies to provide information and support in the creation and maintenance of a consistent workforce.

STRATEGY 2.2

Coalition Building

SMART GOAL

1. By FY25, we will host at least one community round table meeting which will address the stabilization of the local early care and education workforce.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- We will partner with local childcare owner/director, local businesses, the local college and technical college, and our state and house representatives in the planning of and participation in the meetings.

Objective Three: Children are ready for kindergarten.

STRATEGY 3.1

Community Convener

SMART GOAL

- By FY26, we will host at least one stakeholder meeting a year between public and private sector early care and education entities where discussions look to create a unified message on what a “ready kindergartener” looks like.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- We will partner with the local school districts’ public 4K programs, First Steps 4K, local childcare programs, Early Head Start and Head Start, and families of children currently enrolled in childcare to meet and create a unified plan on ensuring that children are prepared with necessary skills.

Overarching Measures of Success

INCREASE THE REACH OF FIRST STEPS SERVICES

By the end of fiscal year 2026, the percentage of children under age 6 who benefit from First Steps quality enhancement and training efforts will increase from 11% to 14%.

INCREASE THE LEVEL OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS

By the end of fiscal year 2026, the percentage of children who score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment will increase from 30% to 32%.

Acknowledgments

Through partnerships and collaborations, as well as financial support from grants and contributions, Florence County First Steps leverages state dollars to enhance and expand services to children and families.

FUNDING SUPPORT

State of South Carolina: \$433,258

(through South Carolina First Steps)

AmeriCorps SC – \$21,500

SC Endeavors: \$2,500

IN-KIND SUPPORT

Timmonsville Community

Florence School District 4

Kaplan Early Learning Company, LLC.

South Carolina Department of Social Services

South Carolina Endeavors

Marion County First Steps

Florence County First Steps Board of Directors

“The project described was supported through South Carolina First Steps by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0080-01-00 from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded to the South Carolina Department of Social Service, Division of Early Care and Education.”