

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2024 – 2026



Acknowledgments

Laurens County First Steps is grateful to members of the community who continually make it a point to invest their time and energy to the improvement of our children. Special thank you to our listening session participants. They truly were instrumental in this process.

Thank you to members of the Laurens County Board of Directors as well as our child care providers who distributed information as well as participated in numerous surveys. Thank you to the following sites that provided meeting spaces: The City of Clinton, The Laurens Chamber of Commerces, and Court House Coffee. Thank you to the Jinks Perspective for their services. Special acknowledgement to our Lander University Intern, Madison Yeomans for her dedication to this project.

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Message from the Executive Director



Toni Able
Executive Director
Laurens County First Steps

This assessment is a comprehensive analysis of the needs of young children and families in our community, and it provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities we face in our efforts to support early childhood development.

The needs assessment was conducted by a team of experts in early childhood education and development, and it involved a thorough review of existing data, as well as input from parents, caregivers, and community leaders. The findings are clear: there is a critical need for high-quality early childhood programs and services in our community, and there are significant gaps that need to be addressed.

As we move forward, we will be using the needs assessment as a guide to inform our strategic planning and program development. We are committed to working with our partners and stakeholders to ensure that all young children in Laurens County have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Toni Able

Message from the Board Chair



Kena Cox
Board Chair
Laurens County First Steps

I am pleased to share with you the results from our recent needs assessment, which was conducted to help us better understand the needs and priorities of the communities we serve. The assessment was a comprehensive and collaborative effort that involved input from a wide range of stakeholders, including families, educators, healthcare professionals, and community leaders.

This needs assessment has helped our organization understand the needs of the Laurens community, particularly in regards to early childhood education and development, and will provide a guide to better serve our families and children. It has provided direction to help us identify challenges and work towards solutions that can help improve the lives of our families and children.

We will use this information to develop programs and services that meet the needs of our families and children, and that can help support them in achieving their full potential. I want to thank everyone who participated in the assessment for their valuable input and feedback. Your voices will be instrumental in shaping our future work and ensuring that we continue to provide the best possible support to families and children in our communities.

Kena Cox

Needs Assessment Process

CONVENE

Held three community convenings along with completed surveys with 40 participants and developed a vision for young children and their families

January 2023 - 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 –March 2023

UNDERSTAND

Reviewed local data and map assets to understand the state of young children, their families, and the early childhood system

October 2022 – March 2023

“After this listening session, I realized the importance of including early childhood education in our city and county planning discussions.” -Participant

**“I have heard first hand the struggle parents of young children are having due to the lack of space in quality early childhood programs.”
-Participant**

Asset Map





Priorities: Summary

1. Increase the Capacity of Quality Early Childhood Education Providers

Families in Laurens County struggle with finding space in quality early childhood education centers. Early childhood education centers struggle with capacity issues either with staffing or physical space.

2. Community Resource Connections and Awareness

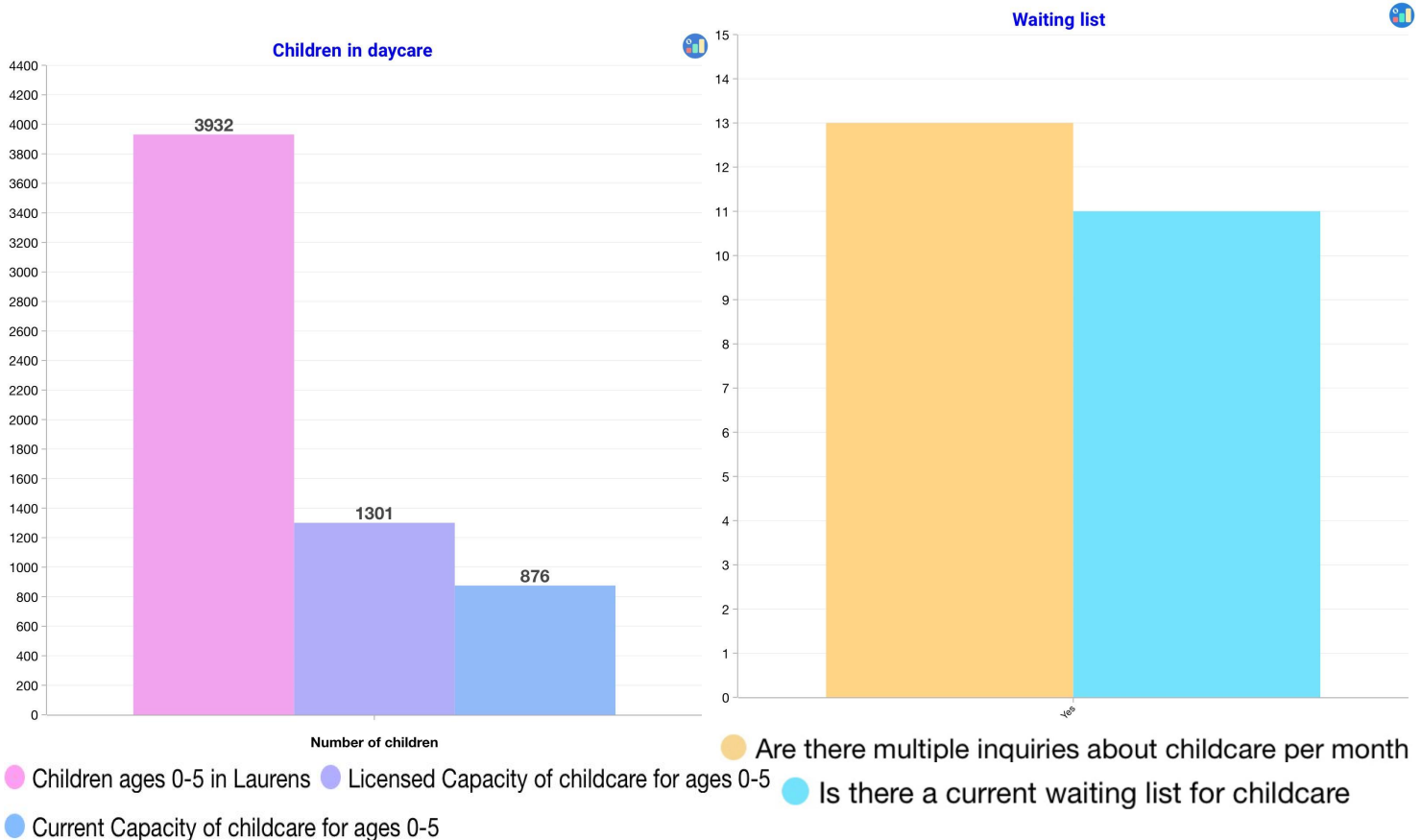
Families and caregivers need more advocacy of resources, access, and support to help them navigate the challenges of raising young children.

3. Early Childhood Education and Engagement for Parents and Families

We need to do more to engage with and serve families with young children. It is a common thread that many families and community members are unaware of Early Childhood development and its impact on readiness for kindergarten.

Priority One: Capacity of Quality Early Childhood Education Providers

Early childhood education (Prenatal to 5 years of age) is critical for a child’s overall development, and it is important to ensure that all children have access to high-quality educational opportunities. Laurens County has an estimated 3932 children age 5 and under. There is a dramatic need for additional quality early childhood education centers in Laurens County. Based on information provided by our current childcare providers, collectively they are licensed for 1,301 children. However, because of either staffing (as reported by 63% of centers) or space constraints, they report being at 67% capacity with 876 children in care.



Increase funding and pay for early childhood educators in order to attract and retain high-quality teachers, expand existing childcare options and/or create new ones, create more play spaces for young children (near existing play spaces for older children), provide family activities for all ages during evening and weekend hours (ie after regular work hours).
 - Survey participant

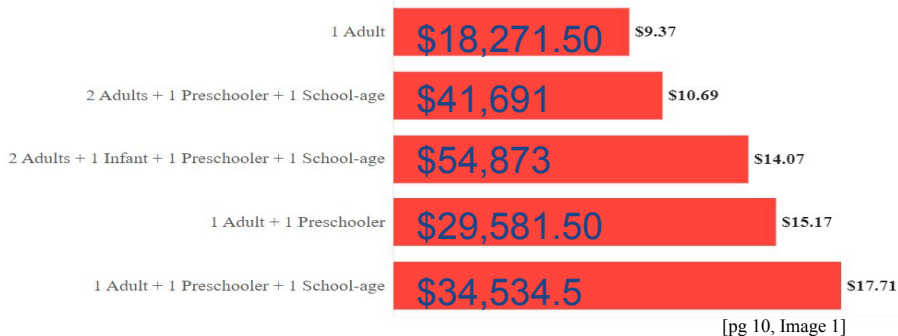
Priority Two: Community Resource Connections and Awareness

Connecting families with resources and services that can help them support the healthy development of their children is vital to self-sufficiency in our community. The United Way 211 system top three requests for assistance include basic needs of utility, housing and community shelters. This is vitally relevant due to the household income rates.

Self-Sufficiency Standard for South Carolina

The Self-Sufficiency Standard defines the amount of income necessary to meet the basic needs of working-age families in South Carolina without public or private assistance.

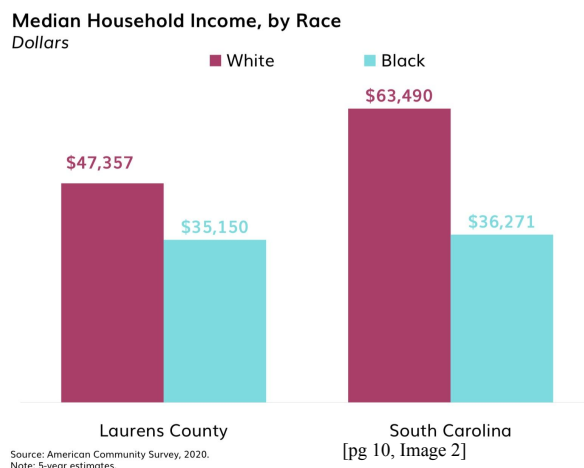
The Self-Sufficiency Standard Varies by Family Type
Hourly Wages (per adult) in **Laurens County, SC 2020**



The Self-Sufficiency Standard varies by family type; that is, by how many adults and children are in a family and the age of each child.

Annual gross salary based on 37.5/hrs a week x 52 weeks

Poverty and Income



“First off, low pay in Laurens makes it hard to even live off of. Therefore we the community rely more on resources.” - Survey participant

“....supporting working parents, providing easy and affordable access to childcare, schools, housing, transportation.” - Survey participant

Priority Three: Early Childhood Education and Engagement for Parents and Families

The overall consensus, as found in our survey results, in our community is that parents/caregivers want to be more educated on various topics on early childhood development.

Both parents and community members indicated needing further information on:

- ❖ What kindergarten readiness looks like
- ❖ What are age appropriate toys
- ❖ How to interact with children that supports learning
- ❖ How to be an advocate for children
- ❖ How to build a strong relationship with children
- ❖ How to be an effective parent
- ❖ Understanding how my child develops (Behavioral Academics Social Emotional (BASE))
- ❖ How to prepare nutritious meals

“Some enter kindergarten and have had no experiences being around other children, have never been read to, very limited preschool education and they are totally unprepared for the school environment & are often disruptive and require too much of the teacher's attention.” - Survey participant

What is the number one driver of the workforce economy 15 to 20 years from now?
The answer is early childhood development and education today.

KINDERGARTEN
= READINESS =



Results of Community Engagement Sessions

Top factors impacting early success:

- Home environment
- Family structure
- Available Support systems
- Secure attachment to at least one caring adult
- Parental engagement
- Health and nutrition
- Policy and practices

Desired System:

- Shared values and goals (common agenda and metrics)
- Sufficient supply of quality child development centers
- Access to healthy food
- Recreational opportunity
- Transportation
- Living wage practices
- Targeted interventions
- Out-of-school programs (reading, etc.)
- Access to healthcare and wellness
- Strong, healthy workforce
- Pediatric engagement
- Parental engagement

Best Practices (what's working for children who are successful)

- Family stability
- Reading and playing
- Secure attachment and role models
- Mental health resources
- Focus on **B**ehavioral **A**cademics **S**ocial **E**motional (BASE)
- Basic needs provision
- Financial literacy

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

Annotations (Resources)

[Laurens County is located in the northwestern region of South Carolina and is surrounded by seven other counties: Spartanburg, Union, Newberry, Greenwood, Abbeville, Anderson, and Greenville. Laurens County is approximately 714 square miles with a population density of about 93 people per square mile. - SCFirstSteps.org](#)

Self Sufficiency Standard; South Carolina, the income needed for a family to be meet basic needs without any private or public assistance (located on page 10, image 1)
<https://www.uwasc.org/self-sufficiency-standard>

Data walk- Laurens county assessment of health and wellness through DHEC as well as Live Health South Carolina ; American Community Survey 2020 (located on page 10, image 2)

United Way's 211 – 2022 Annual Report Laurens United Way Supplement