



# AIKEN COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 – 2026





## Mission

Through collaboration, Aiken County First Steps empowers families and caregivers to prepare their children for school success by delivering, enhancing, and expanding high-quality early childhood services.

## Vision

Every Aiken County child and family will be prepared for success in school.

## Values

**Children:** We believe in and encourage all children to dream and aspire to be whatever they want to be. We support the whole child.

**Families:** We provide high-quality, affordable resources and offer intensive training and support to parents and caregivers.

**Holistic education:** We are concerned about the development of a child's potential in all capacities (educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being).

**Humanity:** We acknowledge and respect the importance of every individual.

**Collaboration:** We partner with community and state organizations to connect children and families to supportive resources.

# Message from the Executive Director



**Marcia L. Nash**  
Executive Director  
Aiken County First Steps

*“There is an immense power when a group of people with similar interests gets together to work toward the same goal.”*

I cannot express enough thanks to the Aiken County First Steps board, staff and community agencies for their support in completing the three-year strategic plan. You are valuable in advancing our mission of getting children healthy and ready for school and your expertise will drive us to expand outreach, enhance our programs, and deepen our impact for the benefit of children and families in Aiken County.

*Marcia L. Nash*

# Message from the Board Chair



**Marie Davidsohn**  
Board Chair  
Aiken County First Steps

Thank you to the Aiken County First Steps Board of Directors, staff, and community partners for providing valuable insight and assistance in enabling this Strategic Planning process to succeed. Because of your hard work and contribution, we can put children on the path to success during the early years – before birth and through age five.

*Marie Davidsohn*

# Strategic Plan Process

## CONVENE

Held community convenings to develop a vision for young children and their families

October 2022 – 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 – March 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



## 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 Aiken County. [See our full needs assessment here.](#)

## **1. Increase outreach to focused areas and communities.**

Participants discussed the need to reach out to focused areas and communities that need services from Aiken County First Steps but are currently not accessing their services. Focused efforts will be made with the Hispanic population, families living in poor, poverty stricken, and rural communities. Potential strategies include partnering with local churches and creating mobile outreach satellites.

## **2. Increase capacity building of parents, grandparents and caregivers.**

Capacity building may include but not be limited to: parenting classes, basic care classes, and literacy and basic computer classes. Participants believe that providing trainings and capacity building with the caregiver will in turn support children and their educational outcomes.

# Priority Needs: Summary

## **3. Ensure quality and accessible childcare.**

A high-quality childcare center is rated by three variables: interaction, supervision and health and safety. Some childcare providers caring for children in Aiken County may or may not know how their role is connected to the long-term outcomes of a child. Participants believe that providing high-quality professional development and training to childcare providers, along with other strategies, will increase the quality provided. In addition, more assessable childcare facilities are needed throughout the county.

## **4. Promote overall health and health screenings.**

Participants shared that access to healthcare and early health screenings are top issues for families in Aiken County. The importance of health screenings and preventative health measures can also be integrated in the parent and caregiving capacity building classes. The group believed that it may be possible to partner with other organizations and advocate for more health screenings to take place in the school setting due to accessibility and transportation challenges. In addition, participants noted the importance of addressing food insecurity.

## Objectives

- 1. Every family in need of our services in Aiken County is aware of our programs.**
- 2. Increase the capacity building of families to strengthen and promote the optimal development of their children.**
- 3. Families can access and afford high quality early care and education programs that meet their needs.**
- 4. Increase access to developmental/health screenings, assessments and follow-up.**

**Objective One:** Every family in need of our services in Aiken County is aware of our programs.

### **STRATEGY 1.1**

Design and launch a robust media campaign.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2024, we will have a published website.
2. By the end of FY2026, we will have at least 100 unique website views.
3. By the end of FY2026, we will have a consistent social media presence on at least two platforms.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Consultant

### **STRATEGY 1.2**

Design and organize quarterly family fun days.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2024, we will host our first family day.
2. By the end of FY2026, we will have over 50 families in at least one family day.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- DHEC
- WIC
- Clemson Extension
- Area Restaurants
- Parks and Recreation
- Police and Fire Department

**Objective One:** Every family in need of our services in Aiken County is aware of our programs.

### **STRATEGY 1.3**

Organize an annual 'gala' fundraiser.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2025, the first annual 'gala' fundraiser will take place.
2. By the end of FY2026, we will have \$10,000 in unrestricted funds.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Board of Directors
- School District
- Local philanthropists
- Sororities and fraternities
- Equestrian community

### **STRATEGY 1.4**

Begin development of First Steps application.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2026, an online application will exist.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- State Office of First Steps
- Agencies that uses an online application

**Objective Two:** Increase the capacity building of families to strengthen and promote the optimal development of their children.

### **STRATEGY 2.1**

Expand the number of families served through the Parents as Teachers program.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2024, we will increase the number of staff members trained in Parents as Teachers.
2. By the end of FY2026, we will increase the number of families served in the Parents as Teachers program by 5.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Community Events for recruitment
- Employers
- Public Agencies

### **STRATEGY 2.2**

Connect and promote family literacy.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2026 five literacy classes will be held.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Adult Education
- Library
- Lessie Price Senior and Youth Center

**Objective Two:** Increase the capacity building of families to strengthen and promote the optimal development of their children.

### **STRATEGY 2.3**

Educate and train families and caregivers around child development milestones.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2026, five classes will be held with families.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- DHEC-CDC
- Doctor office – health development
- Babynet
- School District

**Objective Three:** Families can access and afford high quality early care and education programs that meet their needs.

### **STRATEGY 3.1**

Proactively work to decrease the percentage of Aiken County families negatively affected by child care deserts by supporting child care centers and early education programs.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- By the end of FY2026, the kindergarten readiness score will increase from 35.5% to 37%.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Aiken County Head Start
- School District
- Private preschools and family homes

### **STRATEGY 3.2**

Provide families with easy-to-find, accessible information about available early childhood program options in their community.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- By the end of FY2026, materials will be distributed to all communities in Aiken County.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- First 5 SC
- First Steps
- 211 org
- DSS

**Objective Three:** Families can access and afford high quality early care and education programs that meet their needs.

### **STRATEGY 3.3**

Provide child care centers with intensive technical assistance services offered by First Steps or other state agencies.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2025, technical assistance will be provided to at least 6 child care centers.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- First Steps
- First5sc
- Head Start

### **STRATEGY 3.4**

Increase number of child care vouchers provided to families in need.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2026, the number of child care vouchers provided annually will increase from 30 to 50.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- DSS
- First Steps

**Objective Three:** Families can access and afford high quality early care and education programs that meet their needs.

**STRATEGY 3.5**

Advocate for local representation to the Aiken county legislative delegation.

**SMART GOAL(S)**

1. By the end of FY2025, advocacy talking points will be developed and distributed.

**COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Local Legislative representation
- State office of First Steps

## **Objective Four:** Increase access to developmental/health screenings, assessments and follow-up.

### **STRATEGY 4.1**

Create a Developmental Health Guide and resource map.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- By the end of FY2026, a Developmental Health Guide and resource map will be published on the website.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Local pediatricians
- DHEC
- Aiken Hospital

### **STRATEGY 4.2**

Engage partners to increase services provided to rural areas in Aiken County.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- By the end of FY2026, two new partners will be engaged to foster new relationships in rural communities.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- School district
- Aiken County Dentists and local health providers
- SC Office of Rural Health
- Lions Club
- Tri-Development

## **Objective Four:** Increase access to developmental and health screenings, assessments and follow-up.

### **STRATEGY 4.3**

Document and share success stories.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- By the end of FY2026, three success stories will be written, video-taped, and published on the website.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Local colleges
- Consultant

### **STRATEGY 4.4**

Increase referrals to age-appropriate agencies.

#### **SMART GOAL(S)**

- By the end of FY2026, 20 referrals will be made to age-appropriate agencies.

#### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)**

- Referral partners
- DHEC

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