



South Carolina
**Early Childhood
Advisory Council**

Meeting Agenda

Thursday, June 18, 2026

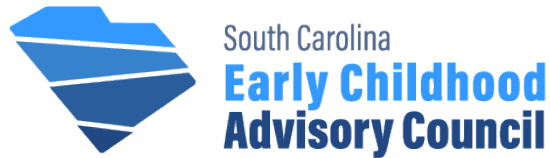
Immediately following the SC First Steps Board of Trustees Meeting

Virtual (via Zoom) <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82892094043>

- I. **Call to Order and Approve the Agenda** David Morley, Chair
Motion: To adopt the agenda as submitted
- II. **Meeting Minutes**
Motion: To adopt ECAC meeting minutes from March 19, 2026
- III. **Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) Update** Emika Aroh, Ph.D.
Chief of Strategy
- IV. **First Five Portal Update**
- V. **Early Childhood System Updates**
- SC Department of Social Services
 - SC Department of Education
 - Children’s Trust of SC
 - Head Start Collaboration Office
 - Department of Public Health
 - Other?
- VI. **Adjournment** Chairman Morley
Motion: To adjourn the meeting of the SC Early Childhood Advisory Council

Attachments:

- ECAC Meeting Minutes – March 19, 2026
- ICC Meeting Minutes – June 1, 2026
- ECIDS Update
- ECAC Update



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 19, 2026

636 Rosewood Drive or Virtual (via Zoom)

Council Members Present: Frances Brown Anderson, Dr. Robert Bank, Anthony Cantone, Jacque Curtin, Mary Lynne Diggs, Dr. James Durant, David Lisk, Jack McBride, Dave Morley (Chair), Roger Pryor, Dr. Edward Simmer, Sue Williams, Wes Wooten

Council Members Absent: Rep. Terry Alexander, Sen. Jason Elliott, Rep. Shannon Erickson, John Hayes, Sen. Greg Hembree, Constance Holloway, Jesica Mackey, Eunice Medina, Ellen Weaver, Dr. Amy Williams

Others Present: Rita Allison, Emika Aroh, Lauren Austin, Amanda Bailey, Gina Beebe, Althea Benson, Amber Bishop, Michelle Bowers, Salandra Bowman, Monica Branton-Pearson, Kippie Brown, John Browne, Tekethia Burrell, Dr. Crystal Campbell, Ashlyn Cobia, Beryl Collington, Kerry Cordan, Sarah Crawford, Dr. Taylor Dee, Linda Doherty, Paul Dowsakul, Robin Ebert, Sheneka Edens, Elliott Epps, Senekita Farmer, Jessica Fluker, Robin Frasier, Stephen Gilchrist, Caroline Goins, Rachal Hatton-Moore, Dorothy Henderson, Kenna Hoover, Samantha Ingram, Kiani J, Kristine Jenkins, Makayla Jones, Angelica Jules, Rosaland Kenner, Janice Kilburn, Deloris Knight, Candi Lalonde, Tamiko Lewis, Karen Martini-Waller, Kristen Martocchio, A Matthews, Joy Mazur, Shica McConner, Ivory Mitchell, Beth Moore, Marcia Nash, Nhi Ngo, Katie Nichols, Tami Nix, David O'Kelly, Karen Oliver, Kaylee Osbon, LaVonda Paul, Shayla Pettigrew, Alexis D. Pipkins, Duchett Polite, Dorothy Priester, Emily Prillaman, Marilyn Pyatt, Austin Reed, Kate Roach, Connie Rouse, Kathy Sanders, LaMyra Sanders, Olivia Sapier, Talisha Scott, Ashlee Simpkins, Martha Strickland, Molly Tuck, Molly Tuck, BJ Tucker, Katrina Valliere, Ann Vandervliet, Angela Walker, Betty Washington, Patti Wilkes, Anita Williams, Taylor Windell, Jade Wright, Tomeiko Wright, Baylis Wright

The meeting was called to order at 3:18 p.m.

Chairman Dave Morley asked for a motion to approve the agenda. David Lisk made the motion, seconded by Dorothy Priester. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Morley asked for a motion to approve the December 4, 2025, minutes. Wes Wooten made the motion, seconded by Jack McBride. The motion was unanimously approved.

Emika Aroh, Chief of Strategy, presented "From the Ground Up: Framing the Next Phase of the South Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)." He shared that the next goals of ECIDS are to keep the PDT5 dashboard up to date, share key insights among partnering agencies, and to work with the Data Governance Workgroup (DGWG) to define and prioritize a research program to implement. ECAC members can help by speaking with their DGWG representative about their agency's priorities.

Mr. Morley asked if there were agreements created among the members for common data sharing, and Dr. Aroh responded that all members agreed on core data elements during onboarding. Roger Pryor asked if unique student ID numbers are linked and shared between agencies. Dr. Aroh responded that each agency has different ID numbers, so agencies need to transfer data at the child records level. Roger Pryor asked when the system is updated, and Dr. Aroh responded that they are still trying to understand the frequency among different partners.

Ann Vandervliet gave an update on SC's Birth to Five Plan. There will be an update in June with a focus on measurable strategies.

Ann Vandervliet invited agency partners to share updates. Tony Catone, Department of Social Services Director, shared that the Teach Early Childhood scholarship program is celebrating 25 years. DSS received \$5 million in disaster funding for providers who experience damage due to storms. Michelle Bowers, Department of Social Services Program Manager II, shared that the Working Families Childcare scholarship application clause is still in effect and DSS is monitoring for updates. She updated that the ABC Quality review revealed ways to reduce barriers to providers. There will be a pilot with childcare providers to revise standards, and there will be a new attendance audit. Ann Vandervliet gave updates from Children's Trust on behalf of Sue Williams. April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and there will be a press conference. Mary Lynne Diggs, SC Head Start Director, shared the SC Head Start Census from May 1, 2025. Head Start and childcare programs will secure \$170 million in FY2026. Dr. Simmer, Department of Public Health Director, shared that maternal mortality rates and measles cases have dropped. Last year, legislature provided \$1.5 million for the Hear Her campaign for pregnant and new moms, so a campaign will be rolled out.

Mr. Morley asked for a motion to adjourn. David Lisk made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Jack McBride. The motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting adjourned at 3:58 p.m.



**Interagency Collaboration Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 1, 2026, 1:30 PM**

Present: Amber Gillum, Department of Social Services; Michele Bowers, SC Department of Social Services; Kerrie Schnake, SC Infant Mental Health Association; Cathy Ramage, Children's Trust; Elizabeth Biddle, Department of Public Health, Maternal Child Health; Jennifer Jacques, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; Alisha Green, SC Department of Education, Mary Lynne Diggs, Head Start Collaboration Office; Dorothy Priestler, Cherokee County First Steps; Salandra Bowman, SC ETV; Beth Moore, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Stephanie McDonald, Department of Health and Human Services, BabyNet

Absent: Leesa Aiken, SC State Library; Eric Bellamy, Children's Trust; Susan Callahan, Help Me Grow/ SC Infant Mental Health Association; Sherrie Evans, SC Department of Education; Heather Googe, SC Child Care Inclusion Collaborative; Erin Laughter, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Mental Health; Anita Ellison-Porter, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Mental Health; Kristen Shealy, Department of Public Health; Ann Vandervliet, SC First Steps

ECAC Staff: Emika Aroh, Karen Oliver, Emily Prillaman, Martha Strickland, Molly Tuck

Early Care and Education Update

Michele Bowers, Division of Early Education (DECE) at SC DSS, Alisha Green, Department of Education, Martha Strickland, South Carolina First Steps, and Mary Lynne Diggs, Head Start Collaboration Office, reported.

- There is a pause on DSS scholarships, waiting for more information late summer/early fall
- All scholarships for protective services are still ongoing (ex. HeadStart, First Steps) without interruption and no one lost eligibility
- DSS will be submitting year three PDG request
- Cost of care study is being conducted for July 2027
- The governor is recommending a pilot to expand 4K eligibility to children from households at or below 300% federal poverty (was previously at 185% for CERDEP)

Parenting and Family Support Updates

Cathy Ramage, Children's Trust, reported.

- Home visiting Consortium - Making Connections Workgroup making quarterly calls to engage perspectives (last meeting was May)
- Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals offers certifications and core competency training for free

- Building Hope for Children Conference in Columbia on August 19-20 will provide intentional content for home visitors

Food and Nutrition Updates

Amber Gillum, SC Department of Social Services, reported.

- Healthy Food SC Program: Beginning August 31 SNAP recipients will no longer be able to purchase candy, energy drinks (with more than 65 mg caffeine per 8 oz), soft drinks with more than 5 g of added sugar, or most sweetened beverages

Early Health Updates

Elizabeth Biddle, Department of Public Health, Stephanie McDonald, BabyNet, Kerrie Schnake, Help Me Grow/Mental Health Association, reported.

- DPH: Developmental screening vendor identified, and next steps are to bring together an advisory committee
- Baby Net: federal determination in June
- Looking at policies and procedures to combine into new manual in July
- Mental Health Association: June workgroups occurring
- New cohort for childcare psychotherapy

Communications Round Table Update

Beth Moore, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, reported.

- Welcome Baby, a 24-page consumer-style magazine resource for families with newborns
- Looking for content experts for first draft (reach out if interested in being content reviewer)
- Looking for distribution, funding partners
- Print resource, virtual version's landing page will be First Five

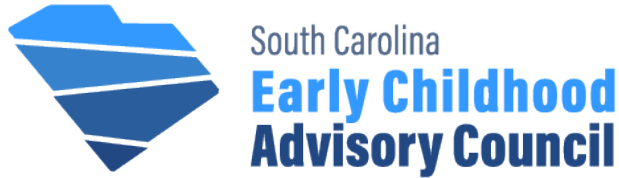
Proposal to consolidate Palmetto PreK with First Five

Karen Oliver, First Steps/Early Childhood Advisory Council, reported.

- Reduces maintenance costs of two websites
- Palmetto PreK will have landing page on First Five site

26-27 ICC Meeting Dates

- Monday, August 3, 2026, 1:30 PM
- Monday, November 2, 2026, 1:30 PM
- Monday, February 1, 2027, 1:30 PM
- Monday, May 3, 2027, 1:30 PM



Action: Consolidate Palmetto PreK with First Five SC

The following is a proposal to consolidate Palmetto PreK with First Five SC, two portals in which the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) serves as the organizational home.

Background

In February 2019 the ECAC committed to “providing an organizational home for “Palmetto Pre-K,” the joint outreach and coordinated enrollment effort for subsidized Pre-K 4 programs in South Carolina, including hosting and maintaining a single portal for families to learn about and access these programs.”

Palmetto PreK was leveraged as a proof of concept to develop First Five SC, a more robust and comprehensive portal. In February 2020 the ECAC affirmed that it would “take ownership and responsibility for the development and maintenance of First Five SC, South Carolina’s portal into publicly-funded early childhood programs and services, ensuring data integrity and privacy.”

First Five SC includes all of the features of Palmetto PreK.

Proposal Rationale

Palmetto PreK and First Five SC have been funded largely by Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds. This funding ends in September. Maintaining separate websites is costly.

Palmetto Pre-K will have its own landing page on the First Five site. Parents and navigators will be able to find Palmetto PreK through organic search and paid promotion about preschool. Features like information about preschool locations, quality ratings, and distance from an address will continue.

Parents and providers will have the same ease of access to information and applications, though the “backend” will be maintained by First Five SC. Further, parents and providers will be able to find additional resources on First Five SC for which there may be interest.

ECAC’s consolidation of Palmetto PreK and First Five SC ECAC aligns with its board commitments and legislative responsibilities. Moreover, it achieves two important objectives. The proposed change makes portals more useful for families, and more cost effective for state taxpayers.

There are 280,000+ infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in South Carolina

Knowing what is working for them matters because



early childhood experiences determine their trajectory for lifelong success

The South Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)



is a groundbreaking effort to connect data across SC's early childhood programs and services and link it to K-12 data.



uses sound data governance to safeguard privacy and confidentiality of data



will be a place to get answers to key questions like:

What early childhood programs, statewide, are available for eligible young children?

How many young children are there?

How many young children are eligible for early childhood programs?

How many young children are enrolled in early childhood programs?

Are those enrolled in early childhood programs on track to succeed?

What is the return on investment for early childhood programs?

Interested? Email the ECIDS Data Governance Coordinator at:
ECIDS@scfirststeps.org

What's in it for you?



Get support with ECIDS data submission & analysis



Direct data sharing policy for entire state

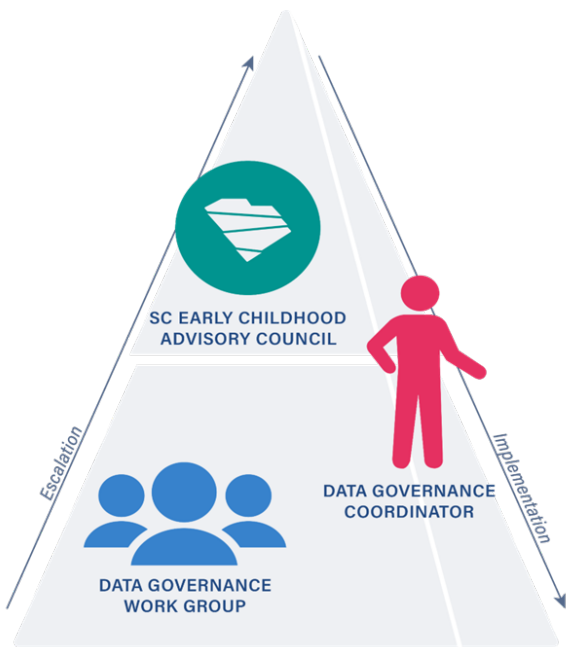


Improve program quality and effectiveness



Demonstrate impact to funders & families

Early Childhood Data Governance in SC



is housed at the Early Childhood Advisory Council



is facilitated by a Data Governance Coordinator



maintains data ownership with originating agency or entity

Current Initiatives

The **Early Learning Extension** will extend the K-12 data system to include early childhood education data for longitudinal study to increase student success and decrease achievement gaps.

The **Palmetto Drive to Five** dashboard will integrate early childhood data from the birth through five landscape of South Carolina to support data driven decision making.

Interested? Email the ECIDS Data Governance Coordinator at: ECIDS@scfirststeps.org



Staff Report on Early Childhood Advisory Council Activities

Presented June 18, 2026

ECAC staff are updating the First Five SC portal and consolidating Palmetto PreK with First Five SC.

First Five data show that there are some declines in visits and a lower percentage of visitors completing the screener compared with the first two years of implementation.

First Five Website	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	July 2025- April 2026
Unique visitors	122,300	155,881	77,533	72,179
Families completing screening	12,903	12,838	4,076	3,166
Families eligible for at least one program)	10,023	9,888	3,133	2,637
Total number of Leads	18,651	17,375	7,442	4482

To increase engagement with the site by families, the home page will be updated, making it easier for families to determine eligibility for programs and services. Other site features will be optimized attract families at various milestones during a child’s development, like the needs of newborns and transition to preschool and kindergarten.

To increase use by local system navigators and supporters, a series of trainings will be offered statewide to partners like library staff, home visitors, and local health providers. The trainings will be offered in person, virtually, and through videos.

First Five staff is working with ICC to consolidate Palmetto PreK with First Five SC, two portals in which the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) serves as the organizational home.

BACKGROUND

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RATIONALE

Palmetto PreK and First Five SC have been funded largely by Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds. This funding ends in September. Maintaining separate websites is costly.

- Palmetto Pre-K will have its own landing page on the First Five site. Parents and navigators will be able to find Palmetto PreK through organic search and paid promotion about preschool. First Five SC includes all of the features of Palmetto PreK. Key Palmetto Pre-K features like information about preschool locations, quality ratings, and distance from an address will continue.
- Parents and providers will have the same ease of access to information and applications, though the “backend” will be maintained by First Five SC. Further, parents and providers will be able to find additional resources on First Five SC for which there may be interest.
- ECAC’s consolidation of Palmetto PreK and First Five SC ECAC aligns with its board commitments and legislative responsibilities. Moreover, it achieves two important objectives. The proposed change makes portals more useful for families, and more cost effective for state taxpayers.