



# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2024 – 2026



# 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

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# Message from the Executive Director



**Spencer R. Scott**  
Executive Director  
Florence County First Steps

Determining the needs of any one county is a task that requires analyzing and factoring in several components within the community. The objectives of Florence County First Steps (FCFS) are outlined as increasing the number of children served, ensuring families have access to high intensity programs, and providing access to high quality childcare facilities to our children. We work on these daily, with it being an uphill battle, but one we come prepared to fight.

Since its inception twenty plus years ago, we acknowledged families are the single most important influence on the development of their child/children. We reflect on the previous fiscal year, and celebrate the perseverance of our mission, after facing an uncertain future following a worldwide pandemic.

FCFS programs have continued growing and flourishing, as we ensured proper protocol continued to be followed, always keeping the safety of staff, daycare providers, families, and children a priority.

Child Care Training and professional development continued its successful run, offering 14 training sessions that provided 22 training hours to 59 teachers and directors from 26 child care programs. Child Care Scholarship program served 26 children attending 9 providers across Florence County. 14 child care facilities participating the SCFS 4K program enrolled 243 children. Quality Enhancement (QE) provided 150 TA visits to 10 child care facilities, reaching 472 children. Raising a Reader (RAR) program served 55 children from 5 participating facilities. The 2 HIPPY providers served 18 families. Countdown to 4K (CT4K) trained 13 kindergarten teachers from 13 schools, serving 300 children with a total of 1800 home/school visits. Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) trained 4 teachers from 1 school, serving 32 children with a total of 30 home/school visits. 27 families served through Parent Child Plus received 1490 home visits.

The 2022 fiscal year demonstrated FCFS is an integral part of a resilient community whose continued support helps their youngest learners. Every dollar invested into FCFS goes back into the community, and your support continues to make a difference

*Spencer R. Scott* 3

# Message from the Board Chair



**Pastor Kippie Brown**  
Board Chair  
Florence County First Steps

Perhaps Coretta Scott King put it best when she said *"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."* This ties directly into the Mission of Florence County First Step (FCFS): helping 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.

I am privileged to hold the title of sitting board chairman for FCFS, and elated the board and I can be a part of the work Executive Director, Spencer R. Scott, and his staff do daily within our community. We have seen firsthand the positive effects First Step programs has had on our schools and our children. While I was participating in the MLK week of service, I was moved by how happy and receptive the children were and I was honored to have had the opportunity to read to them.

We see children stepping into their kindergarten classes with a love for reading, and prepared to continue learning. As communities grow their needs grow. Our educational facilities have seen gaps, which can be filled, if we are all willing to put in the work. Quality educators are no longer flooding to the classrooms, due to wages and high cost of living. Parents can no longer afford to enroll children in childcare programs the way they once could, as it provides a strain on the household. The choice between education and putting food on the table or paying the bills, should never be a choice any parent should face. We can enroll and impact more of our young learners with continued work and support of our elected officials, educators, and parents through programs offered by FCFS.

A heartfelt thank you to my fellow board members, FCFS staff, and most importantly, involved families. Special thanks to all teachers, caregivers, and coordinators who continue to work tirelessly towards achieving the approach of FCFS – providing high quality programs and services for children and families.

*Kippie Brown* 4

# Needs Assessment 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

Results collected from surveys and the information collected from convened events were compiled with data from various sources. Information reviewed by the partnership determined areas of greatest concern to those in the community.

January 2023 – March 2023



## 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

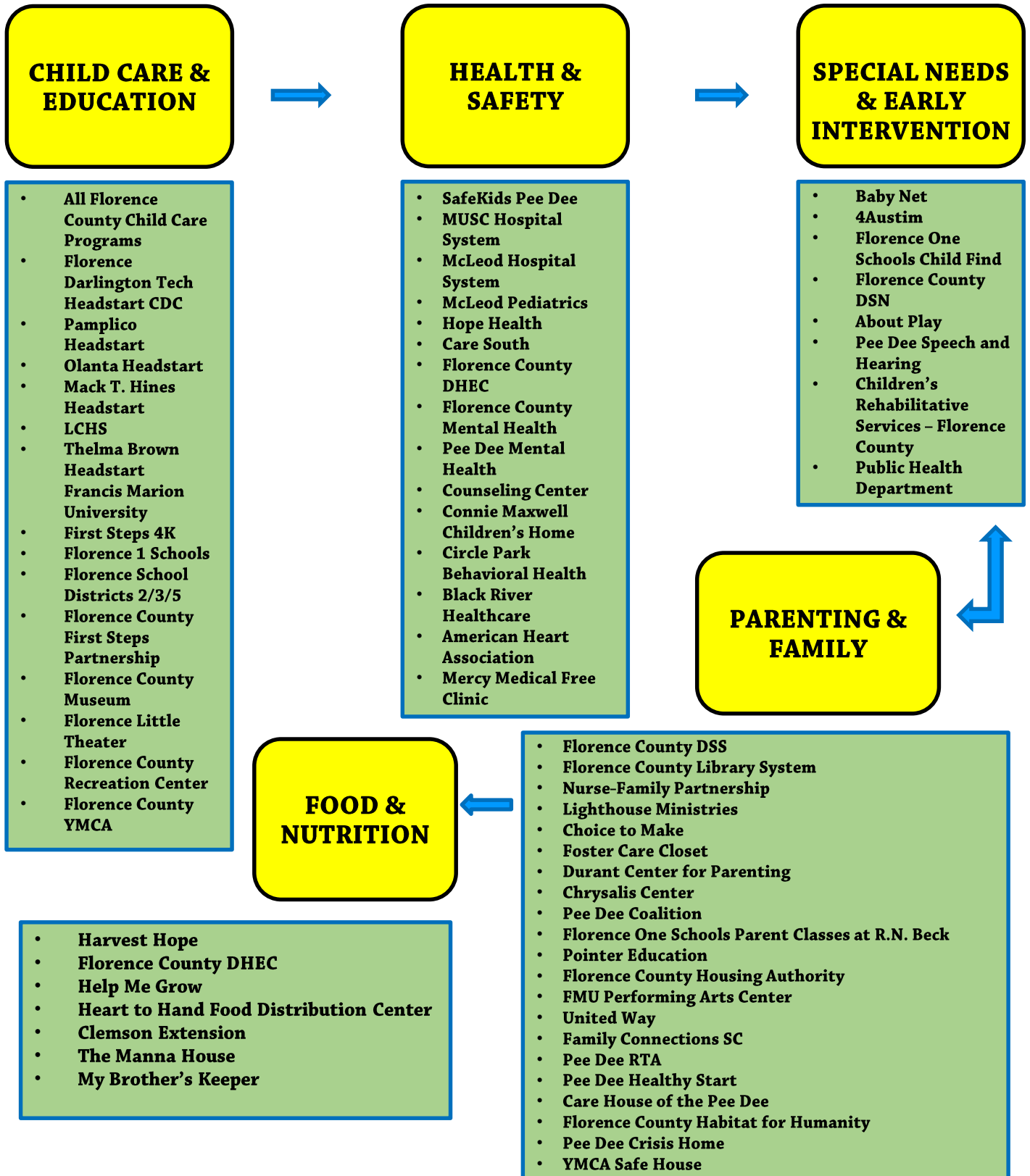
**“The HIPPY program is also getting my kids excited to do hands-on learning activities at home. Honestly, it’s helping me as a parent learn new ways to teach them.”**

**-A. Green  
HIPPY Parent**

***“I don’t know how I would have managed without your help and support. Thanks for being a blessing in my life!”***

**-A.G.  
Child Care Scholarship Recipient**

# Asset & Resources



# Priorities: Summary

## 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 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 child care services increased. Due to the decline in available child care 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 child care workforce which is being influenced by salaries that do not align with the increasing cost of living.

## 3. SCHOOL READINESS

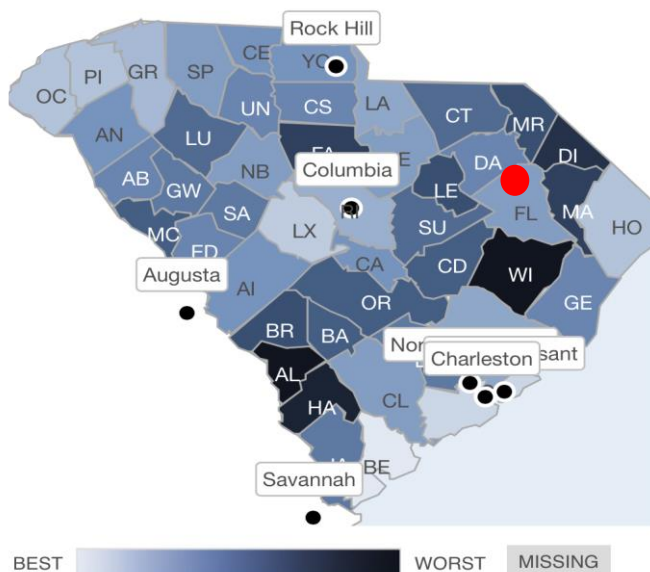
School readiness continues to be an ongoing priority in Florence County. The partnership's goal is to increase the amount of children that are entering the school system ready to learn. To do this, the partnership aims to cultivate dialogue between the public and private sectors to provide more consistency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

# Priority One: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND OBESITY

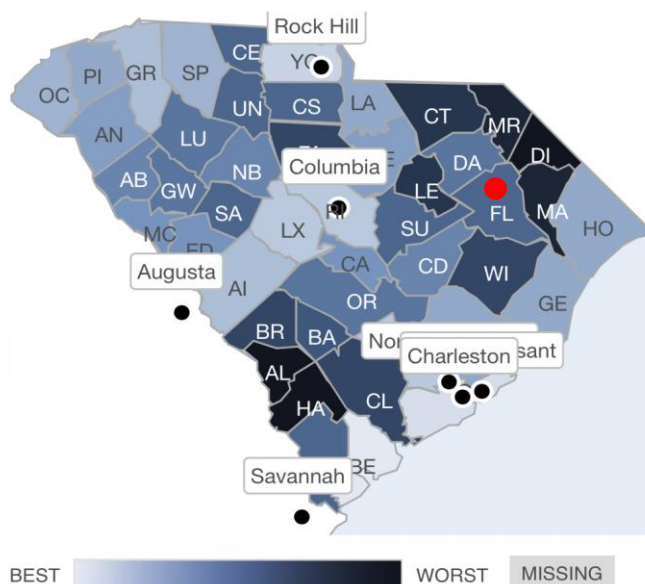
**In Florence County, South Carolina, 34% of adults reported participating in no physical activity outside of work. 36% of adults had a BMI of 30 or greater.**

Data obtained from countyhealthrankings.org on January 18, 2023.

The data from countyhealthrankings.org includes percentages, rates, and rankings for Florence County according to health outcomes and multiple health factors. Data sources included information from sources such as the U.S. Census and Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.



● Florence, (FL)  
Percentage of adults age 18 and over reporting no leisure-time physical activity (age-adjusted): 34%



● Florence, (FL)  
Percentage of adult population (age 18 and older) that reports a body mass index (BMI) greater than or equal to 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> (age-adjusted): 36%



# Priority Two: CHILDCARE WORKFORCE

## Data point

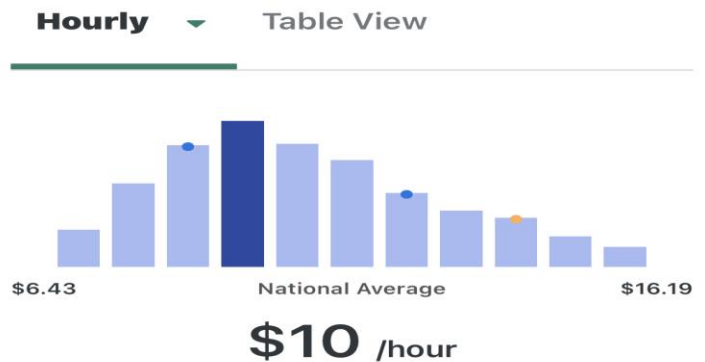
Data retrieved from ziprecruiter.com on February 23, 2023

**The average annual pay for a Child Care Worker in South Carolina is \$20,098 a year. This is the equivalent of approximately \$10/hour, \$386/week , or \$1,674/month.**

According to data from ziprecruiter.com, South Carolina ranks 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation in child care salary. Data obtained from livingwage.mit.edu calculates the living wage for an adult in Florence County with no children at \$15.32. Data indicates that while child care workers on average are making more than the U.S. Department of Labor's federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour, they are not making enough in regards to the cost of living. As a result, child care workers are leaving field for other positions whose pay aligns with their education levels and/or living wage.

### Child Care Worker Salary in South Carolina

City	Annual Salary	Hourly Wage
Columbia	\$24,132	\$11.60
Charleston	\$23,464	\$11.28
Florence	\$23,233	\$11.17
North Charleston	\$23,160	\$11.14
Greenville	\$22,562	\$10.85
Mauldin	\$21,313	\$10.25
Spartanburg	\$20,631	\$9.92
Mount Pleasant	\$20,321	\$9.77
Rock Hill	\$20,261	\$9.74
Myrtle Beach	\$19,288	\$9.27



### Child Care Worker Salary in South Carolina Comparison by Location



# Priority Three: SCHOOL READINESS

## 26% of Florence County children demonstrate readiness for school .

Data and map obtained from 2020 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment modified due to COVID-19 pandemic; South Carolina Education Oversight Committee. June 14, 2021.

According to data obtained from the KRA analysis of Fall 2020 results, Florence County children fall below the state readiness average of 27%. Data shows that out of the 5 school districts in Florence County, Florence One Schools averaged the highest out of the county with over 30% of children demonstrating readiness while Florence School District Three demonstrated the lowest level of readiness in the county with less than 10% of children demonstrating readiness.

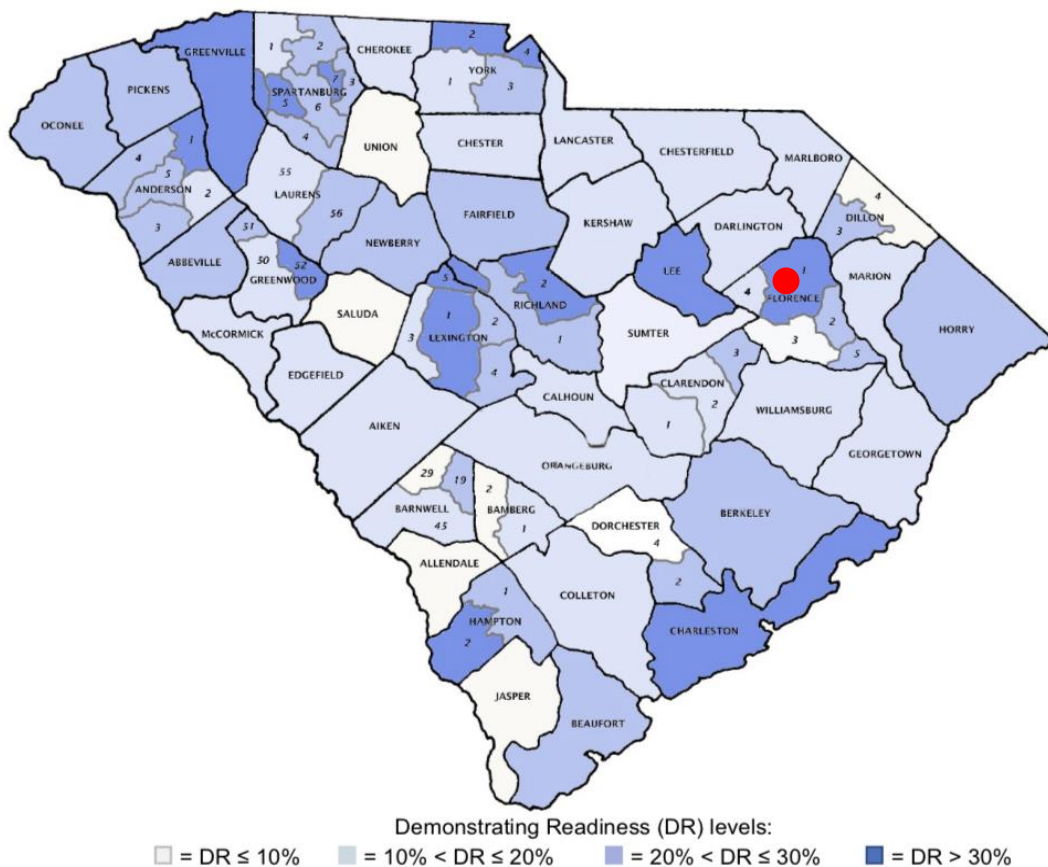


Figure 1. Percentage of Kindergarten Students Demonstrating Readiness on the Modified KRA in Fall 2020, by District

# Next Steps

