

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 – 2026





Mission

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

Vision

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

Values

The years of early childhood are critical windows of development during which much of human potential is shaped.

All children are inherently worthy of receiving the best possible start in life and are the most valuable resource for the future of our community. Responsive, nurturing relationships with consistent caregivers in a safe, stimulating learning environment create the best possible chance for children's healthy development and school readiness.

Families are the single most important influence on the development of young children.

The work of supporting families and caregivers is a collaborative effort between state and local stakeholders within the public, private, and faith sectors.

School readiness is the result of a child's development in many areas - including physical development, approaches to learning and inquiry, social and emotional development, language and literacy development, and mathematical thinking - with each contributing to the child's success.

We value and demonstrate diverse perspectives in the development of programs. Services must be individualized and adaptable to meet the unique needs of children and families and we ensure that all families have the opportunity to be successful.

Services must be high-quality and have evidence of success. First Steps operates within a culture of accountability.

Message from the Executive Director



Candi Lalonde

Executive Director

Edgefield County First Steps

On behalf of the Edgefield County First Steps Partnership Board, I am proud to present the Edgefield County First Steps Strategic Plan for 2024-2026.

This plan represents several months of work that involved focus groups, community surveys, and interviews with key community and agency staff across Edgefield County.

Our Partnership Board of Directors renews our commitment to our mission, vision, and core values as part of our efforts to provide high-quality, affordable, and equitable programs for the young children and their families in Edgefield County.

Candi Lalonde

Strategic Plan Process

CONVENE

Distributed over 500 surveys to parents with young children and community partners

Held two community convenings with 20 participants and developed a vision for young children and their families

January - February 2023



UNDERSTAND

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

January –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

February 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 an asset mapping process, the following needs were prioritized for Edgefield County.

1. Increase Community Awareness of Available Resources

35% of parents and 36% of community partners state that resources in our community are hard to locate, cannot locate, or are unsure of how to locate.

2. Provide More Opportunities for Parent Education

84% of community partners state that parents needing parenting skills are one of the top 3 reasons why children are not ready for school.

3. Assist Childcare Centers with Quality Training and Improvements and Provide Assistance for Families to Afford Quality Child Care

The three licensed child care centers (apart from Early Head Start/Head Start) in Edgefield County are either still pending an ABC rating, or are rated as a C level. 57% of parents responded they would like affordable quality child care to be a priority for Edgefield County First Steps.

4. Provide Tutoring to Children Identified With Needing Extra Support to Master Age/Grade Level Skills

Only 30% of Edgefield County Kindergarteners demonstrate readiness on the most recent SC Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

64% of parents and 55% of community partners state that they would like tutoring programs for young children to be priority for Edgefield County First Steps

See our full needs assessment here: www.edgefieldfirststeps.org

Objectives

- 1. Increase community awareness about programs, services, and resources offered not only by Edgefield County First Steps, but other community partners as well**
- 2. Ensure that high quality programs will be accessible, equitable, and affordable for Edgefield County families**
- 3. Provide education and support for families as their child's first and most important teacher**
- 4. Provide tutoring and support for children to master age-appropriate and/or grade level skills**

Objective One: Increase Community Awareness About Programs, Services, and Resources Offered by Edgefield County First Steps and Other Community Partners

STRATEGY 1.1

Increase presence at community events and local meetings

SMART GOAL(S)

1. We will participate in at least 4 community events yearly, to include parent education for local elementary schools, Early Head Start, Head Start, and local child care centers.
2. Partnership staff will attend at least 6 local interagency and community meetings yearly.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will partner with the local community organizations and groups that host meetings and/or events that reach children and families in the county.

STRATEGY 1.2

Increase use of local signage, brochure distribution, and both social and print media

SMART GOAL(S)

1. There will be three unique posts on our Facebook page weekly.
2. There will be an article in our local newspaper three times yearly.
3. Brochures and signage will be placed in at least 12 locations throughout the county.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will partner with local agencies and businesses to acquire space for brochures and signage.

Objective One: Increase Community Awareness About Programs, Services, and Resources Offered by Edgefield County First Steps and Other Community Partners (cont.)

STRATEGY 1.3

Imagination Library

SMART GOAL(S)

1. By FY 26, we will increase our enrollment in the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program by 10%. When receiving enrollment forms by mail from families that we do not serve in other programs, we will send additional information to them to ascertain if they can benefit from any of our other programs.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will provide enrollment forms for our community providers who serve families with young children (Edgefield County Health Department, Edgefield County Department of Social Services, and Early Head Start) so they can assist us with enrolling more children.

STRATEGY 1.4

County Resource Directory

SMART GOAL(S)

1. We will work with community partners to develop both a print and an online county resource directory by early 2024.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will partner with the Edgefield County Interagency Council and other community partners in this effort.

Objective Two: Ensure That High Quality Programs Will Be Accessible, Equitable, and Affordable For Edgefield County Families

STRATEGY 2.1

Early Education for Children Under 4

SMART GOAL(S)

1. By FY 26, the number of children enrolled in quality early education programs will increase by 10%.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will work with the Edgefield County School District to provide funding for staffing for the early childhood education classroom.

STRATEGY 2.2

Child Care Scholarships

SMART GOAL(S)

1. By FY 26, we will increase the number of child care scholarships awarded by 10%.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will work with the licensed child care providers in Edgefield County to recruit and refer families for child care scholarships that we will offer via the ABC Scholarship program.

Objective Two: Ensure That High Quality Programs Will Be Accessible, Equitable, and Affordable For Edgefield County Families (cont.)

STRATEGY 2.3

Child Care Quality Enhancement (QE) and Training

SMART GOAL(S)

1. By FY 26, we will increase the number of certified training hours offered each year by 10%.
2. By FY 26, the number of licensed child care, family child care, and early childhood education staff members who attend at least 10 hours of certified training provided by Edgefield County First Steps will increase by 10%.
3. By FY 26, the average number of monthly coaching visits to the centers enrolled in our child care quality enhancement program by our child care technical assistant will increase by 10%.
4. BY FY 26, the average ABC Quality rating of licensed child care centers participating in our QE program will increase to a B or better.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will work with all licensed child care providers; group and family home providers; private and church preschool providers; Early Head Start and Head Start; and the Edgefield County School District 4K programs to provide quality trainings that meet their training and professional development needs.

Objective Three: Provide Education And Support For Families As Their Child's First and Most Important Teacher

STRATEGY 3.1

Nurturing Parenting

SMART GOAL(S)

- By FY 26, we will increase the number of families enrolled in Nurturing Parenting by 10%.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will work with the Edgefield County School District, the Department of Social Services, Head Start/Early Head Start, local physicians' offices, and Cornerstone to get referrals for our program.

STRATEGY 3.2

Nurse Family Partnership

SMART GOAL(S)

- By FY 26, we will increase the number of families enrolled in Nurse Family Partnership by 10%.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will work with the Edgefield County Health Department, the Edgefield County Department of Health and Human Services, the Edgefield County Department of Social Services, local physicians' offices, and the Edgefield County School District to get referrals for our program.

Objective Four: Provide Tutoring and Support For Children To Master Age-Appropriate and/or Grade Level Skills

STRATEGY 4.1

Enhanced Early Education

SMART GOAL(S)

1. By the end of FY 26, we will increase the number of children served through our Enhanced Early Education (EEE) program by 10%

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will partner with the Edgefield County School District to identify children who are prioritized as most in need of services and support, as identified by SC First Steps risk factors and/or student assessment information (examples include MAP, PALs, and/or WIDA scores).

STRATEGY 4.2

Countdown to Kindergarten/Countdown to 4K

SMART GOAL(S)

1. By the end of FY 26, we will increase the number of children enrolled in CTK and/or CT4K services by 10%.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will partner with the Edgefield County School District to identify teachers and children who will participate in the program.

Overarching Measure of Success

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HIGH INTENSITY PROGRAMS FUNDED BY FIRST STEPS

By FY 26, the percentage of children and families enrolled in high intensity programs funded by Edgefield County First Steps will increase from 5% to 15%.

Acknowledgments

The process to complete this Strategic Plan began with the Edgefield County First Steps Needs and Resources Assessment process. Surveys were distributed to community partners and parents with young children.

These survey results were tabulated and additional sources were utilized for data reports, including KidsCount, County Health Rankings and Roadmaps from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, the South Carolina Department of Social Services, South Carolina DHEC Vital Records, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, and the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2016-2020).

Community meetings were held in February 2023 with participants attending representing the local school district, local child care providers, Early Head Start, faith community, Adult Education, Family Literacy, local charter school, law enforcement, mental health, and local non-profit organizations. The attendees reviewed data relevant to young children and their families and brainstormed the vision and values of an early childhood system where all children reach their highest potential and mapped the county resources/assets and identified needs of the community. The meetings concluded with the group discussing the gaps in the resources.

Edgefield County First Steps wants to acknowledge those who completed surveys as well as the attendees at the community meetings. All contributions were invaluable as we completed our needs and resources assessment, which then informed our 2024-2026 Strategic Plan.

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