



MEETING AGENDA

Thursday, September 18, 2025

Immediately following the SC First Steps Board of Trustees Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87091312058?pwd=aWNlyFOFUEjipXTJQWaBMyqUf2G2j5.1>

- I. **Call to Order and Approve the Agenda** Dr. Amy Williams, Vice-Chairman
Motion: To adopt the agenda as submitted
- II. **Meeting Minutes** Dr. Williams
Motion: To adopt ECAC meeting minutes from June 19, 2025
- III. **Preschool Expulsion: Making Progress** Kerrie Schnake, CEO
SC Infant Mental Health Association
- IV. **Early Childhood System Updates**

Alisha Green, Ed.D., Director, Office of Instructional Supports, SC Department of Education
Amber Gillum, Deputy State Director, Economic Services, SC Department of Social Services
Sue Williams, CEO, Children's Trust of SC
Dr. Edward Simmer, Agency Director, Department of Public Health
- V. **Interagency Collaboration Committee**
 - I. **Early Childhood Planning: A Consolidated Overview** Ann Vandervliet, Agency Director
 - II. **ECAC Workgroups**
 - III. **Birth to Five Plan - Next Steps**
- VI. **Adjournment** Dr. Williams
Motion: To adjourn the meeting of the SC Early Childhood Advisory Council

Attachments: ECAC meeting minutes from June 19, 2025; PEAR Expulsion Report; ICC meeting minutes for August 26, 2025; An Overview of Early Childhood Related Strategic Plans and Proposed Workgroups



SC Early Childhood Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 19, 2025

Virtual (via Zoom)

Council Members Present (15): David Morley (Chairman), Tony Catone, Jacque Curtin, Mary Lynne Diggs, Sen. Jason Elliott, John Hayes, Sen. Greg Hembree, David Lisk, Dorothy Priester, Roger Pryor, Mary Anne Scott, Dr. Ed Simmer, Dr. Amy Williams (Vice Chair), Sue Williams, Wes Wooten

Council Members Absent (9): Rep. Terry Alexander, Dr. Robert Bank, Shannon Erickson, Dr. Matthew Ferguson, Constance Holloway, Jessica Mackey, Jack McBride, Eunice Medina, Janie Neeley

Others Present (70): Ann Vandervliet, Alexis D. Pipkins, Amber Gillum, Amira Hulwe, Amy Breault, Betty Gardiner, Betty Washington, Candi Lalonde, Caroline Goins, Carrie Turner, Charshina McMillian, Chelsea Adamson, Cindy Galloway, Darnell Byrd McPherson, David O'Kelly, Derrek Cromwell, Kristen Martocchio, Dwana Doctor, Elmore Raven, Emily Prillaman, Emma Matzko, Felicia C. Patrick, Hannah Espeleta, Ivory Mitchell, Jade Wright, Jaiden Branch, Jenny May, Joy Mazur, Julia A. Nelson, Julia Nelson, Karen Oliver, Kate Roach, Kathy Jenkins, Kaylee Osbon, Kenna Hoover, Kerry Cordan, Kim Trudell, Kristine Jenkins, LaMyra Sanders-Dukes, Laura Baker, Lekecia Clemons, Linda Gabriel Doherty, Loreal Nelms-Howard, LaMyra Sanders, Melanie Barton, Melissa Johnson, Melissa Roper, Molly Tuck, Naya Hall, Paige Wall, Pauletta Plowden, Peyton Mosher, Rachal Hatton-Moore, Sally McClellan, Samantha Ingram, Santasha Highley, Sarah Eargle, Shante Burton, Shayla Pettigrew, Stacy Greenwalt, Sue Graham, Tanesha Sullivan, Tamatha Kohler, Tekethia Burrell, Tomeiko, Victoria Belin, Wanda Gonzalez, Winzai Amadi

The meeting was called to order at 2:44 p.m.

Mr. Morley asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Director Catone provided the motion, seconded by Superintendent Weaver. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Morley asked for a motion to approve the April 17, 2025, minutes. Mr. Lisk provided the motion, seconded by Superintendent Weaver. The motion was unanimously approved.

Communications Director Beth Moore provided an update on collaborative efforts by communication leaders from ECAC and Interagency Collaboration Committee agencies to share the First Five SC, Palmetto Pre-K and Ready for Kindergarten initiatives.

Updates were shared from ECAC agencies:

Dr. Simmer share that the Department of Public Health has three mobile health units that can be reserved to be a part of events across the state. He also shared that the entire agency, save a few special services, has completed the move Cayce.

Mr. Catone share that it was too early to assess the impact of the funding changes on early childhood activities.

Ms. Weaver shared that the Department of Education also has a goal of 75 percent for the state's third grade proficiency by 2030. She was encouraged by First Steps' Letters training.

Ms. Williams encouraged local partnerships to participate in the online Triple P program funded by AmeriHealth. She encouraged partners to participate in the Home Visiting Summit in September.

SCDSS Deputy State Director Economic Services Amber Gillum, ICC Chair, share that the ICC was working on the SC Birth through Five Plan: 2025 Progress Report and should have a report at the December meeting.

Ms. Vandervliet reported on the activities of the ECAC. First Five SC has a new messaging system to prompt parents to complete their applications and Palmetto Pre-K Enrollment Day enjoyed very good participation. She shared information on an upcoming study on the Early Childhood Integrated Data System and a landscape analysis being conducted on plans and reports..

Dr. Williams made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Sen. Hembree. The motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting adjourned at 3:12 p.m.



SOUTH CAROLINA
Infant Mental Health
ASSOCIATION

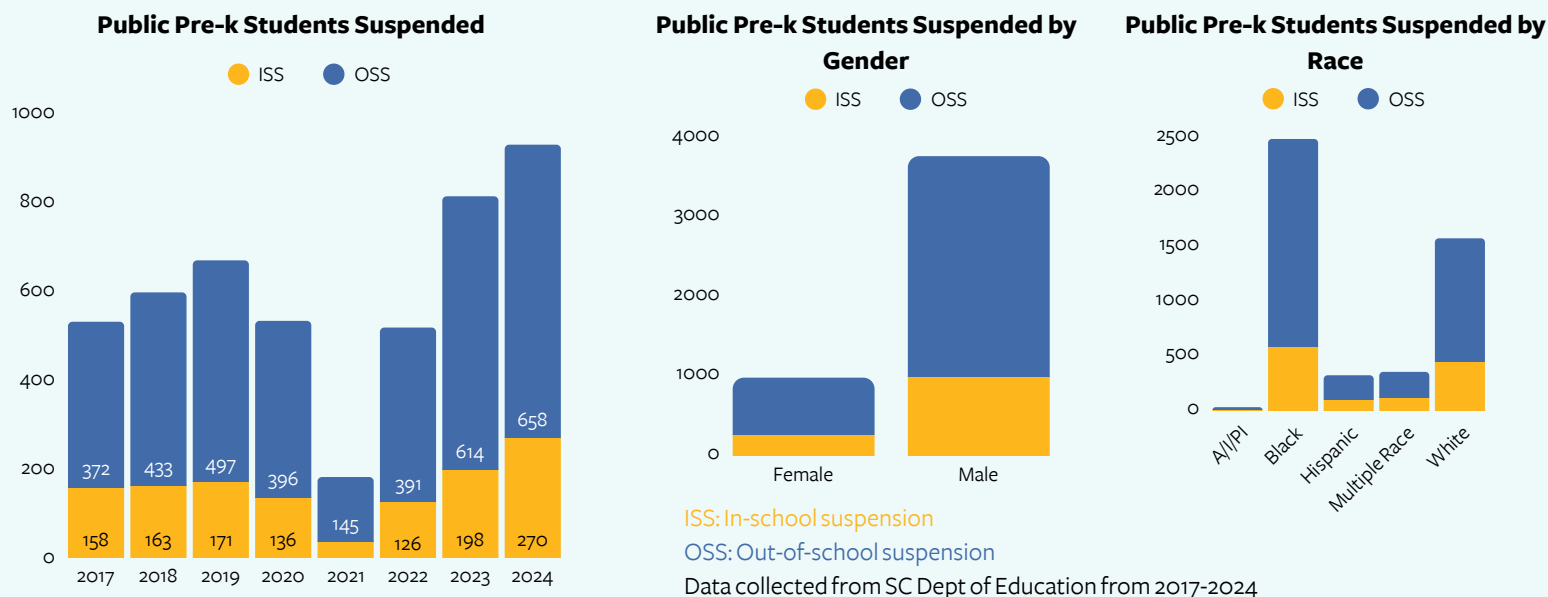


Addressing Pre-School **EXPULSION** in South Carolina

PUBLIC PRE-K SUSPENSION IN SC

South Carolina leads the nation in suspensions of preschoolers, for those suspended one or more times; the rate is double the national average for suspension of those with disabilities.

Suspending or expelling a student is one of the most severe punishments a school can impose on a student – and it can have lifelong, devastating consequences. -American Academy of Pediatrics



South Carolina's preschool expulsion rates reflect only data collected in public early education programs; no data is collected from private early care and education programs. Evidence from other states—including Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, Arkansas, and Colorado—shows that private centers exclude and expel children at higher rates than publicly funded programs. It is therefore very likely that South Carolina's true expulsion rates, and the resulting long-term harm to children, are much higher than the current data suggests.

The South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association (SCIMHA)

creates safer, more supportive early learning environments by

- strengthening relationships
- reducing challenging behaviors
- decreasing expulsion & suspension risk
- increasing teachers' sense of self-efficacy
- addressing racial inequities

Together, these changes lay the groundwork for long-term resilience and success for South Carolina's youngest learners.

“Our consultant helps everyone understand and regulate their feelings and help cope during stressful times. She was so encouraging and uplifting to us all.”

IECMH CONSULTATION PROGRAM

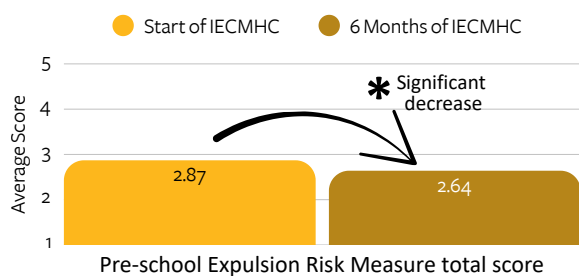
SCIMHA's Partners for Early Attuned Relationships (PEAR) Network is South Carolina's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) program. IECMHC is a preventive, strengths-based approach that partners mental health consultants with educators and caregivers to support young children's healthy development. Rather than providing direct therapy, consultants focus on building the skills of adults—teachers, administrators, and families—so they can create supportive environments, strengthen relationships, and address developmental concerns early. Consultants work to prevent expulsion, suspension, and other exclusionary practices while improving provider-child relationships.

KEY FINDINGS FROM SCIMHA & INDIGO RESEARCH

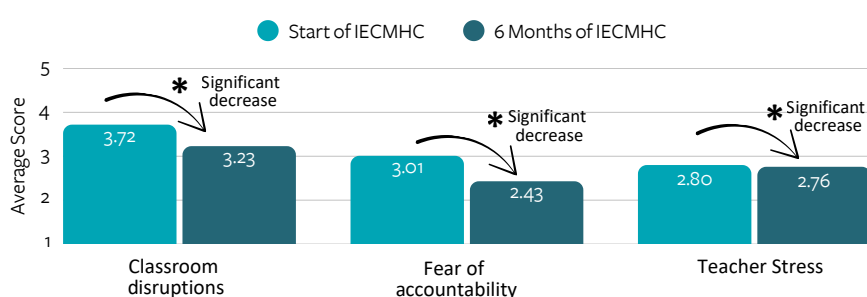
A multi-year evaluation was conducted by Indigo Cultural Center using a community-based participatory action research approach. Early care and education sites engaging in SCIMHA's PEAR Network participated in this evaluation.

SCIMHA's PEAR Network decreased both site-level and child-level expulsion and suspension risk. We also found significant decreases for classroom disruptions, fear of accountability, and teacher stress.

Children's Risk of Expulsion

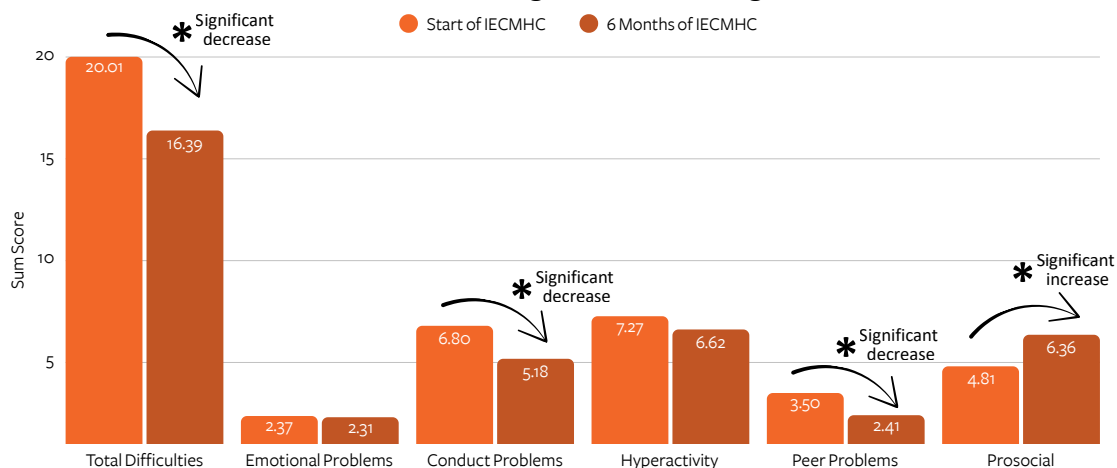


Changes Over Time



SCIMHA's PEAR Network decreases behaviors and emotions that challenge adults. Significant improvements were measured in the following areas: conduct problems, peer problems, prosocial behaviors.

Children's Strengths and Challenges



“Our consultant gave us a voice and outlet when we were frustrated and didn't know what to do or how to help a child.”

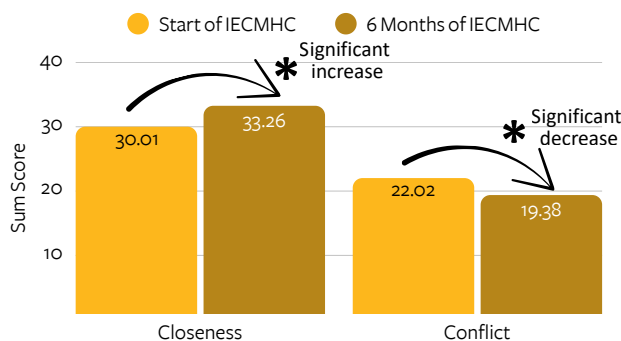
SCIMHA's PEAR Network increases teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

- When teachers develop a positive consultative alliance through SCIMHA's PEAR program, they report feeling more capable and confident in their ability to support children's development.
- This increase in self-efficacy is particularly meaningful as it suggests that SCIMHA's PEAR program strengthens teachers' professional competence and resilience, which can positively influence classroom quality and child outcomes.

SCIMHA's PEAR Network creates more attuned early relationships.

- Strengthened relational attunement not only benefits individual children—especially those facing behavioral challenges—but also contributes to a more supportive and responsive early learning setting overall, laying a foundation for improved developmental and educational outcomes.

Attuned Teacher-Child Relationships



IMPLICATIONS

IECMHC should be seen as a core component of promoting resilience and social-emotional competence by both policymakers and ECE site leaders.

Findings indicate that expanded access to mental health consultants could amplify the statewide impact of SCIMHA's IECMHC program. Participant feedback highlighted the importance of the mental health consultant's presence, especially on-site, in-person presence, in strengthening relationships and providing timely, hands-on support. Addressing geographic barriers, such as rural access, and growing the consultant workforce could enhance consistency and reach. Expanded and sustained investment in these efforts would position SCIMHA's PEAR model for comprehensive, equitable implementation across South Carolina, maximizing its potential to improve child outcomes, build adult capacity, and reduce exclusionary discipline statewide.



SOUTH CAROLINA
Infant Mental Health
ASSOCIATION

Sources:

-Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children (JLCC). (2024). Statewide Suspension Data for 3K/4K, 2016-17 to 2023-24. Retrieved from <https://www.sccommitteeonchildren.org/data>
-Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children. (n.d.). 2023 Data Reference Book. SC Committee on Children. Retrieved June 15, 2025, from https://www.sccommitteeonchildren.org/_files/ugd/587cb7_ad56685d9806442facc9of71
-American Academy of Pediatrics examines the impact of school expulsion and recommends ways to create supportive learning environments for all students. (2024, October 1). <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2024/american-academy-of-pediatrics-examines-the-impact-of-school-expulsion-and-recommends-ways-to-create-supportive-learning-environments-for-all-students/>
-Frazier, H. (2024, March 21). South Carolina leads the nation in preschool suspensions. Charleston City Paper. <https://charlestoncitypaper.com/2024/03/15/south-carolina-leads-the-nation-in-preschool-suspensions/>
-Geduld, A. (2025, June 24). SC suspends students with disabilities at a higher rate than any other state, investigation finds. Post and Courier. https://www.postandcourier.com/news/sc-special-education-disabilities-students-suspension-idea-data/article_474bea01-72f3-458d-a190-fb96bod368d8.html



**Interagency Collaboration Committee
Meeting Minutes
August 26, 2025, 1:30 PM**

Present:; Eric Bellamy, Children’s Trust; Michele Bowers, SC Department of Social Services; Susan Callahan, Help Me Grow/ SC Infant Mental Health Association (SCIMHA) Mary Lynne Diggs, Head Start Collaboration Office; Jennifer Jaques, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (Disabilities); Berry Kelly, Department of Health; Erin Laughter, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (Mental Health); Davis Lisk, York County First Steps; Dorothy Priester, Cherokee County First Steps; Kerrie Schnake, SCIMHA; Kristen Shealy, Department of Public Health; Breanne Smith, SC State Library, Ann Vandervliet, SC First Steps/ECAC; Dannielle Wingo, Department of Public Health

Absent: Leesa Aiken, SC State Library; Solandra Bowman, SC Educational Television; Stephanie Donald, Department of Health and Human Services (BabyNet); Amber Gillum, Department of Social Services Anita Ellison-Porter, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (Mental Health)

ECAC Staff: Kerry Cordan, Cortni Jones, Beth Moore, Karen Oliver, Austin Reed, Martha Strickland

WELCOME

Ann Vandervliet welcomed participants and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

Early Childhood Landscape

Karen Oliver summarized and provided an overview of an inventory of early childhood reports, plans and initiatives. The inventory is a work in progress, and helps ECAC understand the breadth and depth of work across the state. The documents are attached and were updated based on ICC feedback. ICC members were invited to review and offer additional items for the inventory. Information from the inventory will be used in production of the Birth through Five Plan Progress Report.

Review of the landscape led to feedback and opportunity to ascertain and report new information. Feedback about the landscape included adding more information where possible: Vision/purpose of plan, report or initiative; how the project is funded; numbers served as a result. Discussion included the value of fiscal mapping.

Discussion/Feedback: ECE System in Action

Ann Vandervliet led the discussion. As evidenced by the landscape analysis, there are a number of activities underway, but there are opportunities to strengthen the early childhood system. The groups discussed how ICC, as the working committee of the ICC can stay abreast and engaged with work that impacts young children across its domains of interest: early care and education; food and nutrition; health and safety; parenting and family support; special needs and early intervention. ICC identified the following to serve as leaders or conduits from workgroups back to ICC/ECAC

Early care and education—Michele Bowers. Include SDE (Tammy Graham and Alisha Green). Consider Palmetto PreK as means to convene all interested parties.

Food and nutrition—Berry Kelly. Berry works with WIC, CACFP and SNAP programs. Further, he can leverage Healthy Palmetto/Wholespire

Health and safety—Danielle Wingo and Kristen Shealy. They are links to Title V/Maternal Child Health, Safe Sleep and other programs/services. Mary Lynne Diggs will monitor and report back on the Head Start Health Network.

Parenting and family support—Eric Bellamy/Children’s Trust. The Home Visiting Consortium is the chief group for this work.

Special needs and early intervention—BabyNet is the ICC connection to a range of services and to the SC Inclusion Collaborative. The Collaborative is working with SDE and others to strengthen Part C to Part B services in the state.

ICC Updates and Opportunities

- Michele Bowers shared information about a report produced by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, *Untapped Potential* <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/education/untapped-potential-south-carolina>
The report estimates the economic loss, nearly one billion dollars, attributable to child care challenges. A press conference and working roundtable was hosted by the SC Chamber and DSS. It is expected that a coalition of business, parents and partners will develop recommendations to address the issue.
- Kristen Shealy described progress in a registry for developmental screens. The registry is being developed so providers and families can track both results and referrals. A developmental screening advisory council that includes Help ME Grow is guiding the work and its phased-in implementation.
- Beth Moore provided an overview of proposed updates to Profile of the Ready Kindergarten. First Steps is required to review and update the profile every five years. This version will retain the same information but present the information in a more family friendly way. Further, the information will be repackaged as separate products to help parents and caregivers receive and use the information.
- Kerry Schnake discussed efforts to address expulsion and suspension in child care settings. She reported there is a correlation with fewer expulsion and suspensions when Infant and early childhood mental health consultants are available to support providers.
- Karen Oliver reminded ICC members they agreed to share state Agency Accountability Reports once they were submitted to the state legislature. Information relating to early childhood will be used in producing the Birth through Five Plan Progress Report. A draft report will be circulated for review prior to the November 4 ICC meeting. The final report will be shared with ECAC at its December meeting.

ICC Meeting Dates

Tuesday November 4, 1:30 PM – SC Children’s Trust

- a) Monday, February 9, 2026, 1:30 PM
- b) Monday, April 13, 2026, 1:30 PM



Overview of Early Childhood Related Plans, Initiatives and Grants

As of Sept. 18, 2025

South Carolina's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is a collaborative body representing the state's early childhood system.

REPORT [Child Early Reading Development Education Program](#)

[\(CERDEP\) Report](#) (2022-23 & 2023-24) Established in law, the ECAC includes the directors of nine state agencies and government entities that provide state- and federally funded services to young children. South Carolina First Steps coordinates the activities of the council. The Interagency Coordinating Council coordinates collaborative approaches to strengthen SC's early care and education system. Five workgroups have been created to ensure alignment of effort and high levels of communication in between quarterly ECAC meetings.

Category	Workgroup	Lead	Participating agencies/teams	Related Strategic Tactic (FS Strategic Plan for ECAC)	Related Strategic Plans
Early Care and Education	ECAC Collaborative (and possibly the SC Birth Outcomes Initiative hosted by DHHS)	Michele Bowers, Director, Division of Early Care & Education, Dept. of Social Services	DSS, ABC Quality, SC First Steps, SC Dept. of Education, SC Endeavors, Child Care Resource and Referral	<p>3.1 Increase enrollment in publicly funded preschool. In partnership with SC Department of Education, Head Start Collaboration Office and SC Department of Social Services. <i>Baseline data pending.</i></p> <p>3.2 Reduce teacher turnover in publicly funded preschool settings by increasing collaborative training and support, and by building awareness of career pathways in early care and</p>	<p>Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Plan (2025-2027)</p> <p>Child Early Reading Development Education Program (CERDEP) Report (2022-23 & 2023-24)</p> <p>Child Care Quality Progress Report (2023)</p>

				education. In partnership with SC Department of Education, Head Start Collaboration Office, SC Department of Social Services, SC Technical College System, Coordinating Council for Workforce Development and SC Commission on Higher Education. <i>Approach to data collection pending.</i>	Child Care Untapped Potential
Food and Nutrition	Healthy Palmetto Initiative	Berry Kelly, Director, Bureau of Community Nutrition Services, Dept. of Public Health	WIC, SNAP, Child and Adult Nutrition Program, Healthy Palmetto, Wholespire	3.3 Expand collaborative outreach efforts to increase utilization of Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program. <i>The current coverage rate is 58.6% (or 98,256 women).</i> ⁶	SNAP Dashboard Healthy Palmetto
Health & Safety	SC Birth Outcomes Initiative (hosted by SC DHHS); SC Road Map (hosted by Center for Community Alignment); SC Maternal Health Innovation Collaborative (hosted by DPH and Institute for Families in Society)	Danielle Wingo, Director, Bureau of Maternal and Child Health, Dept. of Public Health	DSS, DPH - Maternal Child Health Bureau (Title V), Safe Sleep, Head Start Health Network, DSS (child care licensing)	3.5 Increase the number of women accessing prenatal care. In partnership with the SC Department of Public Health and SC Department of Health and Human Services. <i>Seventy seven percent (77%) access adequate or adequate plus prenatal care (defined by the Kotelchuck Index).</i> ⁸ 3.7 Increase the percentage of children with a medical home. In partnership with the SC Department of Public	South Carolina State Health Assessment SC Prenatal-3 Plan Maternal and Child Health Services Title V Block Grant Improving Maternal and Infant Health – Increasing Access to Care in Rural SC Taskforce

				Health and SC Department of Health and Human Services. A “medical home” is a comprehensive, coordinated and patient centered approach. <i>Fifty four percent (54.7%) of children ages 0-5 in SC have a medical home.</i> ¹⁰	
Parenting and Family Support	Home Visiting Consortium	Eric Bellamy, Chief Partner Engagement Officer, Children’s Trust of SC	Children’s Trust of SC, SC First Steps, SC Dept of Education (title I, other?), Head Start	3.4 Increase availability for and utilization of home visiting programs for families with children age 5 and under. In partnership with Children’s Trust of SC. <i>There are currently 5,389 families served statewide.</i> ⁷	First Steps Local Partnerships Evaluation (2024)
Special Needs and Early Intervention	Early Childhood Transition Work Group	Heather Googe, Ph.D., Director, SC Inclusion Collaborative (USC)	BabyNet, SC Dept. of Education, SC Infant Mental Health Association (SCIMA), DSS, other?	3.6 Increase developmental screening rates for children ages 9–35 months. In partnership with SC Department of Public Health, SC Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, and Children’s Trust of SC. <i>Forty five percent (45%) of children ages 9-35 months in SC received a developmental screening.</i> ⁹	State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Part C (2023)
Communications	Communications Round Table	Beth Moore, SC First Steps	All		

Evaluation	Utilization of SC's Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS)	Molly Tuck, Director of Research and Evaluation	All		
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