

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness



Annual Report 2012

Director's Message

Dear Friends of South Carolina's Children and Families:

The research is clear: *fully 90% of a child's potential is formed by age four.* We at First Steps know how important the early years are to ensuring academic and life success, and we are proud to stand with parents and caregivers as they embrace the challenge of making every day count for our youngest learners.

First Steps, and all of our partners across South Carolina, work together to support the needs of our young children and their families—connecting them to the early childhood experiences that help them prepare for school. Our community partnerships draw together the best early learning services - **public and private** - so that each of South Carolina's children is equipped to reach his or her full potential in school and in life. From a child's prenatal days, where we've helped pair a registered nurse with a new mom to promote child development and community connection, to a child's summer before kindergarten, where we proudly offer nationally acclaimed **Countdown to Kindergarten** each summer to rising primary students, First Steps works to ensure each family we serve is matched with community services to help their child thrive! We are pleased to provide this annual report which features our work since inception.

Thank you, South Carolina, for your commitment to our bright future: each and every one of our children!

Join us today. Your leadership for our youngest children matters!



Susan W. DeVenny, Director



About First Steps

South Carolina's comprehensive school readiness initiative helps parents as they prepare their young children for success in school and life.

Why we need to start early.

Investing in strong early learning experiences for kids makes good sense. We know from brain research that a child is born with 100 billion neurons, and that fully 90% of the brain's full potential is formed by age four. We have a great opportunity to help families and caregivers during this critical window. Studies show that positive early experiences for young children help shape their long-term success, while also saving public dollars by reducing the need for retention, remediation, incarceration and social services.

First Steps Legislation

"There is established South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness, a comprehensive, results-oriented initiative for improving early childhood development by providing, through county partnerships, public and private funds and support for high-quality early childhood development and education services for children by providing support for their families' efforts toward enabling their children to reach school ready to learn."

--SECTION 59-152-10

How First Steps can help.

In each of South Carolina's 46 counties, First Steps provides or expands community early learning services available for young children, their families and caregivers. These services fall in five important areas:

- Family Strengthening
- Healthy Start
- Quality Child Care
- Early Education
- School Transition

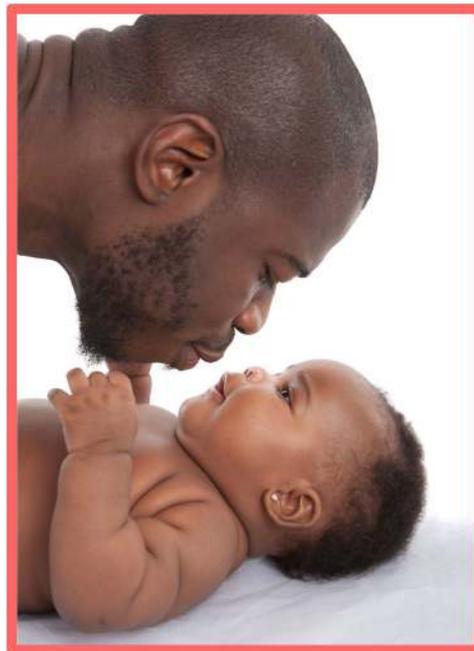
How you can find us.

Each county is served by a **local First Steps Partnership**, whose local board of directors and staff team matches program investments to the needs of their community.

South Carolina First Steps provides both funding and technical assistance to the state's network of independent, non-profit **First Steps County Partnerships** so that services are available to the children who need them.

SC First Steps works with other agency and community partners to offer **BabyNet**, South Carolina's early intervention program under Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). BabyNet provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers (birth-36 months) with identified developmental delays.

We also sponsor two nationally-acclaimed home visitation programs for families in South Carolina: **Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** and **Parents as Teachers (PAT)**. In 2012, we are proud to be in our 6th year of service to SC's eligible 4-year olds, through our partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education to offer Pre-K services to families through the **Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)**.



**SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS TO SCHOOL READINESS
BOARD OF TRUSTEES/SOUTH CAROLINA EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL
2011-2012**

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GOALS

"The goals for South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness are to:

1. Provide parents with access to the support they might seek and want to strengthen their families and to promote the optimal development of their preschool children;
2. Increase comprehensive services so children have reduced risk for major physical, developmental, and learning problems;
3. Promote high quality preschool programs that provide a healthy environment that will promote normal growth and development;
4. Provide services so all children receive the protection, nutrition, and health care needed to thrive in the early years of life so they arrive at school ready to learn; and
5. Mobilize communities to focus efforts on providing enhanced services to support families and their young children so as to enable every child to reach school healthy and ready to learn."

--SECTION 59-152-30

QUICK FACTS – FIRST STEPS

5

Independent Audits of Performance – 2003, 2006, 2009, 2011, (2012 pending).

14

Years in existence – 1999-2012

\$6.05 million

Federal BabyNet dollars administered annually through First Steps.

\$17.9 million

Current state appropriation.

\$21 million

Saved each year by reduced Grade 1 retention.

48%

Reduction in first grade retention – 2001-2010.

65.9%

Percentage of parents with low parenting skills who improved to moderate or high levels of skill after parent education home visits.

\$311

Costs per child for 6 summer home visits from kindergarten teachers.

1,939

Reduction in number of children repeating first grade – 2001 vs. 2010.

\$10,974

Average costs for one student to repeat first grade.

\$97 million

Private, philanthropic and other funds leveraged by First Steps partnerships since inception

75%

Percentage of teachers changing their instruction and method of communication with parents after Countdown to Kindergarten home visits.

35,071

Hours of technical assistance delivered to child care centers.

45,600

Visits by Countdown to Kindergarten teachers to students' homes.

58,088

Child care training attendees.

532,007

Parent home visits completed



Getting children ready for school.

Parent Home Visitation

“Under First Steps’ leadership, Parents as Teachers in South Carolina has set the national example in fidelity and accountability. We hold you up to other states doing home visitation as an example of how it can be done right.” - Scott Hippert, CEO, Parents as Teachers National Office

First Steps’ Home Visitation Impact:

- ✓ 58,770 families served since 2001
- ✓ 532,007 home visits since 2001

High/Scope Evaluation:

“Parents in First Steps’ home visitation programs saw significant increases in their pre- and post-assessments. Overall, 54% of participants who scored at a low quality of parenting improved to a moderate quality of parenting, 44% who had moderate parenting skills moved to high quality, and 11.9% who had low quality parenting at pre-test increased their skills to high quality.”

Why is Home Visitation Important?

Home visitation brings one-on-one coaching and education directly to families to help with their most important job: to be great parents.

First Steps believes that parents are a child’s best teacher and promotes rigor in South Carolina’s home visitation programs as a school readiness strategy, currently supporting several nationally-recognized, research-based and promising home visitation models:

Program Model	2012 Impact
Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) <i>Nurses paired with first-time mom prenatally to age 2; training, support and referral</i>	716 mothers 19 counties
Parents as Teachers (PAT) <i>Parent mentor trained to enhance effective parent-child interaction, developmental parenting skills, and literacy for children 0-5. Developmental screenings, validated curriculum, and assessment.</i>	1,154 families 30 counties
Parent-Child Home (PCH) <i>Parent mentor trained to support effective early literacy behaviors in children ages 0-5</i>	134 families 3 counties
Save the Children Early Steps to School Success <i>Community and school tied to home visitor and literacy activities; assessment and mentoring, group meetings augment program</i>	122 families 4 counties

Home visitation includes:

- ✓ Personal Visits with Families
- ✓ Child Developmental Screening and Assessment
- ✓ Community Resource and Referral

How First Steps Impacts Home Visitation in South Carolina

Improves Accountability in SC Programs

- ✓ In 2006, First Steps established the **first program standards for home visitation in South Carolina, requiring funded programs** to meet quality benchmarks for:
 - Intensity of service (visits per month per family)
 - Staff qualifications and training
 - Targeting those with multiple risk factors
 - Common assessments
- ✓ First Steps’ funded programs track results statewide in a web-based data system, developed by SC Office of Research and Statistics and monitored by SC First Steps.
- ✓ First Steps parenting education is often paired with additional early childhood services, based on the risk assessments completed with families.

Embeds National Best Practice in SC Programs

- ✓ In 2006, First Steps established the **first required use of interactive assessments** within home visitation programs making our state a model for the nation.
- ✓ First Steps **partnered with the General Assembly and the Duke Endowment to bring Nurse-Family Partnership to South Carolina** in 2008. The current investment in NFP in South Carolina now stands at nearly \$25 million, leveraged from a state investment of \$1M.
- ✓ First Steps **partnered with Save the Children International to help establish Early Steps programs** for children under 3, bringing with it Save the Children’s literacy, afterschool, nutrition and fitness programs for local preschool and elementary school children.

Program Description

For infants, toddlers and preschoolers, the quality of care they receive is crucial to their healthy development and eventual readiness for school. Child care providers strive for quality care, but often lack the resources that are commonly available to publicly-funded early childhood programs, such as educational materials, on-site professional development, and other support.

First Steps' Child Care Quality Enhancement (QE) is intended to produce measurable improvements in the quality of care for young children. Participating child care providers must serve a significant percentage of at-risk children, and are selected through a competitive process.

Program Components

1. On-site Technical Assistance (TA) at least twice monthly by staff certified through the SC Center for Child Care Career Development
2. Equipment and materials funding
3. Integration with locally available training, provided by First Steps and other partners
4. Workforce Development
5. Coordination with community partners
6. Pre/post assessments of the classroom environment and teacher-child interaction, using nationally-recognized observational tools for infant/toddler and preschool settings (ITERS, ECERS, FCCERS)

Efforts to improve the quality of child care must include providing affordable, high quality training that meets the needs of the local child care workforce.

First Steps-sponsored training is certified through the SC Center for Child Care Career Development and includes topics in the areas of nutrition, health and safety, curriculum, child guidance, professional development and program administration. Best practices in training include not only the training, but also follow-up with supported practice in the classroom.

Thank you to our national partners!

Zero to Three - National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families funded grant projects:

- Parent Provider Partnerships in Child Care
- Promoting Responsive Relationships

U.S. Department of Education - Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools:

- **Foundations for Learning Grants Program**
Promotion of School Readiness through
Early Childhood Emotional, Behavioral and
Social Development

First Steps' Quality Enhancement and Training Impact

2001 to 2012		Average per year
Providers served	3,856	350
Children enrolled in centers served by First Steps	167,198	15,200
Staff attending First Steps child care training	58,088	5,281
FY 2008 to FY 2012		Average per year
Child care quality assessments administered	1,488	298
Assessment improvement pre- to post (7 point scale)	-	10 % (.68)
Technical assistance visits to providers by First Steps	17,066	3,401
Technical assistance hours	35,071	7,014

High/Scope Evaluation

Universally, child care centers and providers who participated in First Steps Quality Enhancement strategies showed **significant increases in pre/post scores of assessed child care quality.**

First Steps Evaluation
 High Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2009

Through this project, we have been able to provide more information to the parents. I have also seen my staff interact more with parents, helping them to understand their child's development. The ability to reward staff has been wonderful, and helps us to let them know how much they are appreciated.

Judy Layman, Director
 Creative Learning Center
 Edgefield, SC



South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)

“Despite negative economic conditions, the General Assembly should continue funding CDEPP and similar pre-kindergarten programs and when funds are available, expand the program in both public schools and private centers statewide. The across year modest yet meaningful gains made by students in CDEPP provide evidence of the program’s success in better preparing young children who are at-risk for school failure for kindergarten.” - *Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP): 2009-10 Student and Classroom Assessment Report*

Giving Parents a Choice for Preschool

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness partners with high-quality private for-profit, private non-profit, faith-based, and other eligible child care centers to expand four-year-old kindergarten for families in eligible counties. Programs focus on developmental and learning supports that children must have in order to be ready for school and incorporate research-based curriculums, ongoing assessment and parenting education.

The South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) utilizes a public-private service delivery model so that parents may enroll their child in either a public school 4K or an approved private CDEPP center. Eligible children must be four on or before September 1, reside in one of 37 specified school districts, and qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch or Medicaid. CDEPP is jointly administered by SC First Steps (private sector) and the SC Department of Education (public schools).

First Steps’ CDEPP Impact:

PROGRAM YEAR	# OF CDEPP CHILDREN	# OF CDEPP PROVIDERS
2006-07 (FY 07)	309	40
2007-08 (FY 08)	482	48
2008-09 (FY 09)	459	40
2009-10 (FY 10)	524	39
2010-11 (FY 11)	548	36
2011-12 (FY 12)	583	43
TOTAL	2,905 Children	

High Scope Evaluation:

“With only one year of data, [private] CDEPP children were not significantly different... on every SCRA scale compared to [public school] full-day 4K and non-4K children. They also had significantly lower speech impairment and learning disability diagnoses. This may demonstrate the potential for implementing public programs in private settings in a less expensive manner with similar results.” pp. 148-149

Further Steps to School Readiness: 2009 Evaluation of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Initiatives, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Education Oversight Committee:

“Children’s findings for the cross-year sample indicate modest and meaningful progress in language, achievement, and social and behavioral development. Children’s retention of important educational skills also shows that the competencies learned in pre-kindergarten were maintained through their kindergarten year.” p. 14

Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP): 2009-10 Student and Classroom Assessment Report

Key Results:

- Private CDEPP students are receiving comparable learning experiences for 20% less cost to taxpayers (\$4,690 vs. \$5,812 per child)
- First Steps is leveraging the availability of existing space in private child care centers, with no capital costs to taxpayers.
- First Steps ensures quality and accountability by making announced and unannounced monitoring visits approximately twice monthly. Participation in First Steps’ CDEPP program, in combination with other quality supports, has positively influenced overall center quality (100% of CDEPP providers have maintained quality levels; nearly half have advanced one or more ABC child care quality levels since the program’s inception.)

Countdown to Kindergarten

“Countdown is the greatest thing that’s ever happened to children in South Carolina. The relationships built over the summer between the teacher and families created a trust and support that has helped the children blossom in kindergarten. The only way to break the cycle is to model for parents how effectively they can work with their own children through reading and playing and learning with hands on materials.”

- *Gayle Troutman, Kindergarten Teacher, Burnside Elementary School*

Why focus on School Transition?

The weeks before school entry provide a unique window of opportunity to connect families and schools.

Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a home visitation program pairing the families of **high-risk rising kindergartners with their future teachers** during the summer before school entry. Teachers complete six visits with each family, centered upon classroom and curriculum expectations.

Countdown to Kindergarten is designed to:

- Establish lasting home-school bonds rooted in trust and mutual respect;
- Enable parents and teachers to reach common understandings of both familial and classroom expectations for the coming school year; and
- Establish strong student-teacher relationships that will facilitate the home-school transition and enhance classroom learning.

First Steps’ School Transition Impact:

✓ **7,600 families served since 2004**

✓ **45,600 teacher visits since 2004**

During the summer of 2012, Countdown to Kindergarten served **756 children** at an estimated cost of **\$311 per child**.

In 2005, the National Governors Association identified Countdown to Kindergarten as a promising state practice in their publication *Building the Foundation for Bright Futures: A Governor’s Guide to School Readiness*.

High Scope Evaluation:

In 2009 the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation completed an external review of Countdown to Kindergarten, noting the strategy’s potential to powerfully shape both subsequent interaction and classroom practice. Researchers noted that:

“Over 75% of home visitors reported making some or a great deal of change in their instruction, experiences, practices, activities on the first day of school and the methods by which they communicate with parents as a direct result of their CTK experience.” (p.93)

And concluded that:

“All participants, whether home visitor or parents, report the significant impact this strategy has on professional practice, parent-teacher relationships, and parent participation in and child attitudes toward kindergarten.” (p.148)

Further Steps to School Readiness: 2009 Evaluation of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Initiatives, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Key Results:

Asked at the conclusion of their 2011 CTK experience:

- **100% of participating** teachers noted their belief that the **program had met its three goals**, with **52% reporting** that these goals were far exceeded.
- **Participating teachers reported that 86% of CTK parents were as involved or more involved** than others on a measure of six key indicators of parental involvement (attendance at parent teacher conferences, communicating with the teacher, volunteerism, etc.).

AGENCY INCOME		(in thousands)
State Appropriations		
	General Funds	13,665
	Child Development Education Pilot Program	2,485
	BabyNet	1,647
	Total State Appropriations	17,797
Federal Grants		
	US Department of Education	7,620
	US Department of Health and Human Services via SC Department of Social Services (T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood) <i>-partial year contract, ended September 2011</i>	573
	Total Federal Grants	8,193
Interagency Transfers		
	SC Department of Health and Environmental Control	390
	SC Department of Education	3,098
	SC Department of Revenue	1,182
	Total Interagency Transfers	4,670
Private and Other Contributions		
	Center for the Study of Social Policy	280
	SC Children's Trust	250
	Interest	103
	Private Contributions	15
	SC Tax Check-Off	6
	Total Private/Other Contributions	654
Carry Forward Funds		
	Private Grants	150
	Earmarked	85
	Total Carry-Forward	235
	TOTAL INCOME	31,549
AGENCY EXPENSES		
Local Services		
	Local Services (46 partnerships)	12,809
	Central Operating Support	947
	Total Local Services	13,756
State Services		
	BabyNet	9,659
	Child Development Pilot Program	2,461
	Child Care Career Development Center-Greenville (T.E.A.C.H.)	1,066
	Nurse-Family Partnership	279
	Quality Improvement Center	274
	Foundations for Learning	124
	Countdown to Kindergarten	57
	Total State Services	14,077
Policy and Accountability		
	Payroll and Agency Expenses	941
	SC Early Childhood Advisory Council (USC and Clemson research)	126
	Total Policy and Accountability	1,067
	TOTAL EXPENSES	28,900
	Anticipated reimbursements FY2013	1,320
	NET Carry Forward into FY2013	1,329
	TOTAL	31,549