



# EVERY CHILD READY.

2020-2025 Strategic Plan



## Every Child Ready: An Overview

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## Vision

We will be successful when all children reach their highest potential.

## Mission

South Carolina First Steps works collaboratively to ensure that all children start school ready to reach their highest potential with engaged support from their parents, caregivers, and communities.

## Values

### **CHILDREN**

From prenatal development through age five, our focus and priority are young children and their families and caregivers.

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

We cultivate positive, supportive, respectful, and reinforcing interactions between people that shape development, build community, increase success and productivity, foster learning and growth, and affirm the unique value of individuals, caregivers, parents and children.

### **EQUITY**

We ensure all people have the opportunity and resources to be successful and that all voices are solicited and heard.

### **HIGH QUALITY**

We ensure that our programs and services are culturally-responsive, inclusive, and developmentally-appropriate and are delivered with fidelity to the model being implemented. Our products, services, and operations are marked by excellence.

### **RESULTS**

We produce meaningful and measurable impact and outcomes.







## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It is my honor to introduce South Carolina First Steps' Strategic Plan, Every Child Ready. The words on these pages were crafted with great care, recognizing the importance of each priority, strategy, and objective.

Over one hundred people directly lent their voices and vision to this plan. Trustees, local partnership leaders, and staff at all levels of the organization contributed through a year-long process involving regional meetings, strategy sessions, surveys, retreats, and collaborative document writing. We listened to over 5000 families, parents, child care providers, early childhood experts, and community leaders whose wisdom shaped our understanding of the needs South Carolina First Steps must address.

We refreshed our mission statement and in so doing renewed our purpose. We aligned our vision intentionally with the broader early childhood state system vision. Our Board of Trustees embraced and adopted five values that now guide the decisions and actions of our agency, our staff, local partnerships, and 4K providers.

This plan offers our collective commitments to South Carolina's children, their families, and communities. By tying these commitments to quantifiable measures of success, as outlined in the final pages of this plan, we are asking you, the public, to hold us accountable. Our work is critically important to the future of our state. We will be successful when all children reach their highest potential.

Georgia Mjartan  
Executive Director  
South Carolina First Steps



# Process

## 1

### **DIRECTED BY LEGISLATION**

South Carolina First Steps was established in 1999 by Act 99, and most recently reauthorized through June 30, 2025 by Act 152 of 2018. The Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) was created through proviso in FY 2006–2007 and later enacted as the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP) as part of Act 284 of 2014, giving South Carolina First Steps responsibility for implementation of publicly-funded full-day 4K in private child care centers.

The Early Childhood Advisory Council was first established by executive order in 2010 and was later codified into law through Act 287 of 2014. These laws and associated provisions direct the scope, purpose, and goals of South Carolina First Steps' work and therefore shape the development and direction of the

agency's strategic plan. Other legislative reports and recommendations were also reviewed in the planning process including a 2019 Senate Oversight Report and a 2016 Legislative Oversight Committee Report of the SC First Steps Study Committee.

## 2

### **SHAPED BY PARENTS**

As the state's only dedicated early childhood agency, South Carolina First Steps is committed to offering this strategic plan as a direct response to South Carolina's Early Childhood Needs Assessment. Funded by a federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five in 2019, SC First Steps, the Early Childhood Advisory Council, and agency and academic partners collected input from more than 5,000 people to determine South Carolina's statewide early childhood system priorities and needs. 15 regional meetings were held across the state with



440 participants. 130 focus groups facilitated by First Steps local partnerships engaged more than 1,495 people, specifically families and caregivers of young children, in every county of the state. And 3,114 people responded to an online survey. More than half of the respondents were parents and caregivers.

## 3

### INFORMED BY PARTNERS

South Carolina First Steps' network of 46 county-level local partnerships gathered for a full-day strategic planning retreat in early 2019 where they provided input on the values, vision, and strategic direction of the organization. Other partners were involved as well, through input on a values survey sent to 4K providers, local partnerships and others in the First Steps network, and through the statewide early childhood needs assessment data collection process.

## 4

### GUIDED BY THE FIELD

As a unique, hybrid organization, both a 501(c)3 nonprofit and a state agency, operating programs directly and serving as a funder, South Carolina First Steps adopts best practices from government, philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector. This plan aligns with Together SC's "Guiding Principles and Best Practices for South Carolina Nonprofits." We also looked to other state government examples including Oregon and Colorado whose early childhood system plans and frameworks offer a helpful model. We were guided by publications, research, learning communities, and consulting support from national organizations including Alliance for Early Success, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, Bipartisan Policy Center, BUILD, CLASP, Education Commission of the States, Forum for Youth Investment, National Conference of State Legislatures and National Institute for Early Education Research.

## 5

### DRAFTED BY STAFF

Staff provided input on the strategic plan throughout the process, from an initial planning retreat in late 2018 where core values and vision were discussed to regional strategy sessions where staff worked together with board members to outline organizational priorities. Team members were invited to wordsmith the plan itself through collaborative document writing and the development of values statement definitions.

## 6

### ADOPTED BY THE BOARD

From beginning to end, the Board of Trustees has guided the strategic planning process through the leadership of the Strategic Planning and Evaluation committee. Special thanks to Committee Chair Dr. Amy Williams, committee members Alexia Newman and Angel Johnson-Brebner, and Board Chair David Morley. The board began by developing a system-wide vision statement that was later adopted as the agency's vision. Board members participated in regional strategy sessions.

Collaboratively, at a strategic planning retreat, trustees sifted through pages of input from staff and local partnerships, ideas generated from the regional strategy sessions, and collected through surveys from parents, partners, and providers. With this input in mind, they began developing a draft mission statement, selected the top five values, and identified the agency's strategic priorities for 2020-2025. By early 2020, the Board of Trustees was ready to formally adopt a five-year strategic plan, having adopted a new mission statement, vision statement, values, and values definitions. This plan and its accompanying measures of success are presented with unanimous support of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina First Steps.



# Ensure Children Are Ready for Kindergarten

## OBJECTIVE 1.1

**Families are supported as their child's first and most important teachers.**

### Strategy 1.1.1

Provide parents with access to support and resources that strengthen their families; build their confidence, knowledge and skills; and promote the optimal development of their children.

### Strategy 1.1.2

Ensure access to parenting programs, offered at no charge, in every county in South Carolina.

### Strategy 1.1.3

Increase the number of families participating in evidence-based and evidence-informed parenting programs.

### Strategy 1.1.4

Promote and support evidence-based parenting and home visiting programs by ensuring high-quality program implementation and

model fidelity, attracting funding and support for programs, and serving as the state's hub of training and capacity-building for evidence-based parenting and home visiting programs.

### Strategy 1.1.5

Maximize parent and family knowledge, choice and engagement in their child's early learning and development. Engage in public information campaigns and parent outreach efforts to promote and educate about available options.

### Strategy 1.1.6

Actively engage parents of First Steps 4K students in their child's learning and development through shared home reading activities, intentional teacher-parent interactions, and school-home connections.

### Strategy 1.1.7

Cultivate a community of champions and advocates for children and their families.

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## OBJECTIVE 1.2

**Families can access and afford high quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of their children and families.**

### Strategy 1.2.1

Expand statewide the geographic reach and enrollment in state-funded, full-day 4-year-old Kindergarten available at no charge for eligible children in public schools, private schools and private child care centers.

### Strategy 1.2.2

Engage early care and education programs and providers in training, quality enhancement, and coaching, equipping them with the skills and resources to promote positive child development.

### Strategy 1.2.3

Increase the availability of early care and education programs that align with families' geographic and transportation needs and enable parents to work including: preserving the availability of state-funded 4K schedule options: traditional school day & school year, extended school day, extended school day & school year, and summer; supporting child care providers offering evening, weekend, and non-traditional schedule options; and intentionally including Family Child Care Home providers, Family, Friend and Neighbor, and non-licensed caregivers in child care training, quality enhancement and professional development opportunities.

### Strategy 1.2.4

Support and develop the early childhood workforce through training and professional development, fostering community and connection among providers and educators, and developing policies and policy recommendations that promote successful recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

### Strategy 1.2.5

Work collaboratively to blend and braid funding streams and to coordinate cross-agency efforts to ensure maximum affordability and access to high-quality early childhood programs and services for children birth through five.

### Strategy 1.2.6

Increase the collective impact of state and federal investment in improving the quality of child care by aligning with and incentivizing participation in ABC Quality, South Carolina's Quality Rating and Improvement System.

### Strategy 1.2.7

Increase public awareness about the importance of access, availability, affordability, and quality in early care and education, as well as implications for workforce participation.



Children arrive at Kindergarten with the physical well-being, motor skills, social-emotional development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking and cognitive skills necessary to ensure early school success.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



### OBJECTIVE 1.3

#### Children are healthy and safe.

##### Strategy 1.3.1

Support and expand the reach of programs that have a measurable impact on the health and safety of children, including programs that support healthy, safe and attached families.

##### Strategy 1.3.2

Increase access to developmental screenings and assessments and follow-up, and, when appropriate, referrals to early intervention services for children birth through five so that children with identified delays receive services as early as possible.

##### Strategy 1.3.3

Build the capacity of parents, caregivers, and early childhood professionals to promote nurturing relationships for infants, young children and their families through resources, policies and practices that foster healthy social-emotional development, prevent mental

and / or behavioral health problems, and treat mental and / or behavioral health disorders.

##### Strategy 1.3.4

Support families and early childhood professionals in addressing children's nutrition, physical activity, and safety by increasing access to resources, building knowledge and skills, and collaborating with other existing programs targeting related outcomes.

##### Strategy 1.3.5

Support families in establishing medical and dental homes for their children and in getting services that meet the pediatric health, dental and developmental needs of their children.

##### Strategy 1.3.6

Engage communities in fostering safe, nurturing environments in which children and families can thrive.

### OBJECTIVE 1.4

#### Children and families experience seamless transitions and a sense of belonging across early learning programs and from early childhood into Kindergarten.

##### Strategy 1.4.1

Support parents' knowledge of early childhood milestones, Kindergarten readiness, and build parents' skills in supporting their children's successful transitions across early learning programs and into Kindergarten.

##### Strategy 1.4.2

Promote communication between parents, early care and education providers, and kindergarten teachers about curriculum, expectations for kindergarten, and individual children to help educators meet the needs of children and families.

##### Strategy 1.4.3

Increase public awareness about the significance of early childhood transitions, the availability of transition programs and support, and the choices available to parents for their child's early learning and development.

##### Strategy 1.4.4

Support early childhood professionals, including child care providers and parent educators, in developing strategies that help children

and families transition smoothly across early childhood settings, including: communication and collaboration between families and professionals, continuity of care and expectations, development of family leadership and advocacy, and knowledge of how to navigate the early childhood system.

##### Strategy 1.4.5

Collaborate with local school districts to establish relationships and agreements to strategically implement to fidelity kindergarten transition practices.

##### Strategy 1.4.6

Enhance data sharing and integration across early childhood programs and within First Steps programs to address data gaps, ensure better measurement of early childhood outcomes, and transfer data during child transitions such as from pre-k to kindergarten.

##### Strategy 1.4.7

Offer resources and recommendations to assist with the implementation of a unified student assessment system that bridges early childhood education and early elementary and is useful to parents, caregivers, and educators.

##### Strategy 1.4.8

Evaluate the impact of the Countdown to Kindergarten program using both quantitative and qualitative methods.



# Close Gaps Through Equity: A Fair Chance for Every Child

## OBJECTIVE 2.1

**Disparities in educational, developmental, and health outcomes for children of color and from low-income families are reduced**

### Strategy 2.1.1

Target investment in programs, services, and local partnerships that are most effectively reducing racial and economic disparities.

### Strategy 2.1.2

Recognizing that resources are limited, put in place policies, processes, incentives and systems that prioritize services for children most at-risk of early school failure including children experiencing homelessness, involved in the foster care system, dual-language learners, and children with disabilities.

### Strategy 2.1.3

Expand reach by implementing a service delivery system that includes both programs that are intensive and targeted plus those that are light-touch and have a broader reach.

### Strategy 2.1.4

Understand through scientifically-rigorous evaluations which programs or combination of programs reduce disparities for children to start school ready to reach their highest potential and promote the implementation of these programs.

### Strategy 2.1.5

By supporting policy changes, offering professional development and teacher support, and coordinating data collection, address inequitable preschool suspension and expulsion rates for children of color and children with disabilities.

### Strategy 2.1.6

Set benchmarks using disaggregated data to track progress in reducing disparities of specific target groups.

## OBJECTIVE 2.2

**Children and families experience culturally and linguistically responsive, developmentally appropriate, accessible practices in the home, at child care, in the classroom, with healthcare providers, and with the public early childhood system.**

### Strategy 2.2.1

Support and intentionally target for inclusion in training, professional development, quality enhancement, and coaching racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse teachers and informal, license-exempt, and Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers as well as Family Child Care Home providers in diverse, low-income communities and communities of color.

### Strategy 2.2.2

Intentionally strengthen the cultural competence of First Steps programs by contracting with immigrant-serving organizations and other diverse community-based organizations to deliver services, train staff, identity providers, and refer families.

### Strategy 2.2.3

Address the needs of families with limited English language proficiency and/or low literacy skills by reviewing procedures and materials to ensure linguistic appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, and accessibility; ensuring curriculum, materials, communications, assessments, etc. are culturally and linguistically responsive and developmentally inclusive; and training staff and providers in cultural and linguistic competence, accessible practices, unconscious bias, etc.

### Strategy 2.2.4

Promote inclusivity, equity, cultural and linguistic competence, and accessibility as valued attributes in hiring, contracting, program guidelines, policies and procedures.

## OBJECTIVE 2.3

**Children and families can access and afford high quality programs and services regardless of zip code.**

### Strategy 2.3.1

Proactively work to decrease the percentage of South Carolinians affected by child care deserts by supporting child care centers, promoting policies that enable their continued economic viability,

directing funding and resources toward efforts that sustain, expand and create child care slots, and offering ongoing support to providers ranging from business training to support with teacher recruitment and retention.

### Strategy 2.3.2

Leverage state funds with local, federal and private funding for increasing the supply of First Steps 4K classrooms within child care deserts.



**Strategy 2.3.3**

Provide families with easy-to-find, accessible information about available early childhood program options in their community.

**Strategy 2.3.4**

Utilize web-based data tools that incorporate census tract level data to determine gaps in key service delivery.

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**OBJECTIVE 2.4**

**South Carolina First Steps deliberately designs and fosters an environment that recognizes, affirms and values diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels from the board of trustees and the state office to local partnerships and 4K providers.**

**Strategy 2.4.1**

When recommending for appointment members to serve on the Board of Trustees and in the recruitment of staff and volunteers, think and act strategically to ensure diversity and equitable representation of communities served.

**Strategy 2.4.2**

Establish a workplace that is family-friendly, inclusive, and supportive of continuous learning, growth, and development at all levels including through the development of relevant policies and practices.

**Strategy 2.4.3**

Encourage information-sharing and interactions among state office staff, local partnerships, 4K providers, board members, and others in the early childhood field to ensure the greatest opportunity for innovation and creativity.

**Strategy 2.4.4**

Ensure that executive leadership team models the organization's values in their day-to-day behavior.

**Strategy 2.4.5**

Encourage individuals within the organization to challenge one another when necessary and permit conflicting views to be expressed in order to reach consensus and resolution.

**Strategy 2.4.6**

Implement policies and practices that do not tolerate discrimination or harassment of any type (i.e. race, sex, age, national origin, gender identity, socio-economic conditions, religion, color, sexual orientation, political affiliation, physical disability or military status).

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**OBJECTIVE 2.5**

**The voices of stakeholders including, most importantly, families and children, as well as early childhood educators, providers, local partnerships and community partners, will be solicited and heard, and changes will be made based on continuous feedback / quality improvement cycles. Communication, openness, and transparency with stakeholders at all levels will be considered a valued duty of the organization.**

**Strategy 2.5.1**

Implement a formal process for collecting feedback from program participants using a model piloted in other social service agencies nationally.

**Strategy 2.5.2**

Establish a Family Voice Council or similar group made up of stakeholders who have used the services offered by the early childhood state system, and engage the group in providing ongoing input, feedback and ideas for how the early childhood state system and South Carolina First Steps could be improved.

**Strategy 2.5.3**

Build on efforts to communicate with stakeholders and the public about First Steps' and the Early Childhood Advisory Council's mission, activities, grant-making, finances, and decision-making, being inclusive and transparent.



# Increase Funding for First Steps' Investment in Early Childhood

## OBJECTIVE 3.1

**State funding for early childhood programs through South Carolina First Steps is significantly increased, providing sufficient resources to ensure the school readiness of South Carolina's children most at-risk for early school failure.**

### Strategy 3.1.1

Increase public support for investments in early childhood by raising awareness about the need and promoting the value, long-term benefits, and return on investment of optimal early development and school readiness.

### Strategy 3.1.2

Increase public awareness of and support for South Carolina First Steps.

### Strategy 1.1.3

Develop and implement targeted strategies to educate and inform legislators and policymakers about the need for early childhood investment, the efficacy of First Steps programs, and the opportunity for measurable impact with the allocation of additional state funds.

### Strategy 1.1.4

Offer options for funding early childhood programs through SC First Steps to improve the likelihood of successfully receiving funds (i.e. recurring, one-time, competitive grants, formula, targeted, tax-credit).

### Strategy 1.1.5

Build coalitions and broad-based support for First Steps' state budget requests.

## OBJECTIVE 3.2

**Federal funding for South Carolina First Steps increases.**

### Strategy 3.2.1

Pursue and successfully obtain direct federal funding through federal grants, bringing additional dollars for early childhood systems and services into South Carolina.

### Strategy 3.2.2

Actively support other agencies' and organizations' applications for federal funding, deploying resources such as staff time and non-

federal match to increase the chances of an award, while pursuing sub-grants or sub-contracts to First Steps through federal grants made to other organizations and agencies.

### Strategy 3.2.3

Develop a funding strategy for the expansion of First Steps programs and services through fee-for-service mechanisms including those funded by federal sources (i.e. Medicaid, IV-E).

## OBJECTIVE 3.3

**Private funding for South Carolina First Steps grows significantly, helping to diversify the organization's sources of funds, providing flexibility to innovate, target specific needs, and expand promising programs.**

### Strategy 3.3.1

Develop and implement a resource development plan, aligned to the strategic plan priorities, that sets quantifiable targets for individual, foundation, and corporate giving and actively engages staff, board members, volunteers and partners in its implementation.

### Strategy 3.3.2

Support local partnerships' efforts to raise private funds through communications and branding support, training, and back-office support including online giving and donor management capacity.



## OBJECTIVE 3.4

First Steps is recognized for good governance, transparency, continuous quality improvement, administrative and fiscal excellence, and innovation in the development and administration of a unique public-private partnership model.

### Strategy 3.4.1

Implement and evaluate good-governance practices aligned with both public administration and nonprofit management.

### Strategy 3.4.2

Ensure the fiscal health of First Steps through strong fiscal oversight, accurate budgeting, inclusive planning and accountability to funders including the General Assembly and taxpayers.

### Strategy 3.4.3

Explore and pursue ways to fully utilize the value of First Steps' unique public-private partnership model, learning from other organizations and sharing best-practices nationally.

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## OBJECTIVE 3.5

First Steps establishes itself clearly as a statewide grant-maker, funder, and intermediary, operating collaboratively with other funders and within funder networks to learn from each other, enhance impact through collective efforts, and pool resources when appropriate in order to more successfully drive positive outcomes for young children and their families in South Carolina.

### Strategy 3.5.1

Pursue opportunities to apply on behalf of First Steps local Partnerships with regional, state, and national funders when doing so would be most beneficial (i.e. would bring more funding than if the local partnership applied directly, would provide value-add to the funder, or would open opportunities that would otherwise not exist, etc.)

### Strategy 3.5.2

When appropriate, provide and promote grant opportunities that target specific geographic areas or populations to achieve equity in school readiness across the state.

### Strategy 3.5.3

By participating in grant-making networks and other collective impact strategies, work to influence and direct additional philanthropic focus toward early childhood.

### Strategy 3.5.4

As a team and an organization, learn and implement grant-making best practices and strategies, becoming a better funder for our grantees.

### Strategy 3.5.5

Through clear and open communication, offer transparency and access to funding opportunities – directly or indirectly – through South Carolina First Steps and its grantees.

### Strategy 3.5.6

Provide and share strong evidence of impact of grantmaking through rigorous evaluation and reporting, and offer lessons learned for the field that can help shape and direct other philanthropic investment in early childhood in South Carolina.



# Create A Coordinated And Family-Centered Early Childhood System

## OBJECTIVE 4.1

**The early childhood state system works collaboratively, aligning resources, strategy, and focus across agencies to benefit young children and their families.**

### Strategy 4.1.1

Develop, fund, and fully-utilize the Early Childhood Advisory Council, a statutorily-mandated initiative of South Carolina First Steps, as a shared, cross-agency governance mechanism for state-level leadership and decision-making related to early childhood policies, systems, and practices.

### Strategy 4.1.2

By strengthening the Early Childhood Advisory Council and better communicating its role, position it to be a trusted source of advice for policymakers including the Governor and legislators.

### Strategy 4.1.3

Use the Interagency Collaboration Committee of the Early Childhood Advisory Council to ensure cross-agency early childhood strategic

and regulatory alignment and interagency governance for shared projects such as data systems or portals of entry.

### Strategy 4.1.4

Establish an Early Childhood Data System that connects information about participants in publicly-funded early childhood services with K-12, workforce and other state longitudinal data systems.

### Strategy 4.1.5

Develop and implement an ongoing process for communicating across the early childhood state system.

### Strategy 4.1.6

Collaborate across agencies to pursue funding that results in additional investment in programs and services that benefit young children and their families or builds and strengthens the early childhood state system while ensuring the most effective and efficient use of state, federal and local resources.

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## OBJECTIVE 4.2

**Families with young children will have knowledge about and be able to access all publicly-funded programs, services and resources for which they and their children are eligible.**

### Strategy 4.2.1

Taking a “no wrong door” approach, develop and implement family-friendly mechanisms for joint outreach and enrollment, cross-promotion of programs, successful referrals, shared eligibility and enrollment portals, and communication to the public focused on educating families about available resources regardless of funding source or agency home.

### Strategy 4.2.2

Develop, maintain and promote Palmetto PreK as a single portal into publicly-funded prekindergarten programs for 3 and 4 year old children in South Carolina.

### Strategy 4.2.3

Develop, maintain and promote First Five SC as an early childhood system outreach tool and single portal into publicly-funded early childhood programs and services for South Carolina’s children prenatal through age five and their families across the domains of child care and early education, health and safety, special needs and early intervention, food and nutrition, and parenting and family support.

### Strategy 4.2.4

Engage families with young children in the development, outreach for, and improvement of tools intended to increase successful engagement with public systems.

## OBJECTIVE 4.3

**Early childhood professionals, policymakers, system and community leaders, advocates and business allies will have the opportunity to learn from experts and peers to advance in their profession through collaborative, cross-agency, and cross-system learning and professional development opportunities.**

### Strategy 4.3.1

Convene the SC Summit on Early Childhood annually as the state's preeminent early childhood conference.

### Strategy 4.3.2

Through Palmetto PreK Jamboree, Baby Jam, and other avenues offered locally and at the state level, offer professional development and learning opportunities for early educators from across diverse contexts (i.e. Head Start, First Steps, child care, public school) to learn together and from one and other.

### Strategy 4.3.3

Explore and pursue ways to fully utilize the value of First Steps' unique public-private partnership model, learning from other organizations and sharing best-practices nationally.

### Strategy 4.3.4

Work collaboratively to ensure the state's home visitors and parent educators receive training, professional development and support that strengthens their practice and enhances their services for families and children.

### Strategy 4.3.5

Strengthen partnerships across agencies offering quality enhancement and quality improvement support to child cares and early childhood teacher training to ensure that efforts are coordinated, aligned, and targeted to meet the greatest need and to reach as many centers, teachers and benefit as many students as possible.

### Strategy 4.3.6

Develop and support learning opportunities focused on early childhood for policymakers, advocates, and business allies

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## OBJECTIVE 4.4

**The voices of early childhood leaders and of the families impacted by the early childhood state system are solicited and heard by institutions and agencies serving children and their families.**

### Strategy 4.4.1

Actively and routinely engage families and participants in the early childhood state system in providing ongoing feedback and advise to agencies and policymakers based on their lived experiences and interactions with the system through the development and support of a formal avenues such as a Family Voice Council.

### Strategy 4.4.2

Create feedback loops to continuously inform the statewide early childhood needs assessment and strategic plan in collaboration with

local First Steps partnerships through story collection and sharing, focus groups, and surveys of constituents.

### Strategy 4.4.3

Maximize the participation and contributions of parents, caregivers, and families in professional and leadership development and learning opportunities by elevating parents and caregivers as presenters and offering scholarships and other supports for participation.

### Strategy 4.4.4

Intentionally lift up the voices, stories, and experiences of children and families in South Carolina in communications.



### OBJECTIVE 4.5

**Build on First Steps' presence in every county to serve as a hub for early childhood services and local system building.**

#### Strategy 4.5.1

Tap into local leadership and decision-making to produce buy-in, additional funding, and development of strategies that meet local needs.

#### Strategy 4.5.2

Explore and further develop the role that local First Steps partnerships can play in serving as a community "hub" for early childhood services, ensuring that the services and programs offered by different organizations and agencies are reaching families most-in-need and for whom the services would be most beneficial and appropriate.

#### Strategy 4.5.3

Strengthen the First Steps local boards to ensure cross-sector collaboration for early childhood systems at a local, county level.

#### Strategy 4.5.4

Support and continue to build out the learning community of First Steps local partnerships facilitating opportunities for them to learn from each other and from state and national experts, highlight successes and lessons learned, and collaborate on multi-county initiatives.

### OBJECTIVE 4.6

**South Carolina First Steps becomes a state and nationally recognized leader in the early childhood field.**

#### Strategy 4.6.1

Actively seek and participate in opportunities to share the work of First Steps and the Early Childhood Advisory Council on statewide, regional and national platforms.

#### Strategy 4.6.2

Develop a research agenda and communications strategy that elevates First Steps' work.

#### Strategy 4.6.3

Support staff in pursuing fellowships, publishing their work, and highlighting accomplishments.













# Overarching Measures of Success

*Approved by the South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees on April 23, 2020.*

**1**

## **INCREASE THE REACH OF FIRST STEPS SERVICES**

By 2025, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by First Steps will increase from 17% to 20%.

**2**

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

By 2025, the percentage of children directly served by First Steps enrolled in high intensity programs will increase from 28% to 40%.

**3**

## **INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY FIRST STEPS**

By 2025, the percentage of children under age 6 who benefit from First Steps quality enhancement and training efforts will increase from 12% to 15%.

**4**

## **MORE CHILDREN ARRIVE AT KINDERGARTEN READY FOR SUCCESS**

By 2025, the percentage of children who score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment will increase by 2% each year to 47%.

**5**

## **REDUCE THE RACIAL/ETHNIC GAP IN KINDERGARTEN READINESS**

By 2025, the gap in the percentage of children who score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment between White Kindergartners and Black/Hispanic Kindergartners will reduce by 1% each year to 15%.

**6**

## **CREATE AN ACCESS PORTAL TO INCREASE SOUTH CAROLINA CHILDREN'S KNOWLEDGE OF AND ACCESS TO SERVICES**

By 2025, First5SC.org will launch and include five categories: child care & early education, health & safety, special needs & early intervention, food & nutrition and parenting & family support.





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SCFIRSTSTEPS.ORG

