South Carolina
First Steps to School Readiness

SOUTH CAROLINA
FIRST STEPS
Getting children ready for school.

Director's Message

Greetings from South Carolina First Steps!

As we enter our second decade of service, I am reminded that the standards by which we live -- **quality, accountability, collaboration, and leadership** -- are not only the ways we protect and enhance services for children and families, but also the way we weather the tough fiscal times that face our state and nation.

Using the board's funding principles and Vision 2013 tenets, the agency managed budget cuts while also tightening program standards, providing more intensive services to those in greatest need. We continue to look for efficiencies and improvements in our services to children, with an eye toward expanding care and leveraging key partnerships so that children and families can find the help they need to prepare for school and life.

At the state level, our work to expand preschool through the SC **Child Development Education Pilot Program** has entered its fifth year, and our nationally acclaimed school transition program, **Countdown to Kindergarten**, continues to serve families and schools in Year 8. In January 2010, First Steps became the lead agency for **BabyNet**, South Carolina's system of early intervention services. The program serves thousands of children and families each year.

As we head toward the future, we honor our many state and local partners who work every day to identify and connect deserving families to the services they need. We know these services matter to families and providers, whose results we celebrate in this report.

We thank for your commitment to South Carolina's children.

About First Steps

First Steps is South Carolina's school readiness agency. We help parents as they prepare SC's youngest children (ages birth to five) for success in school and life.

Why early childhood matters.

Investments in early childhood pay big dividends. Decades of scientific research suggest that the early years critically influence a child's success in school and life. Healthy development and enriched early learning experiences for young children can shape their long-term successes, and reduce costs associated with later school retention, remediation, crime and social services.

How First Steps can help.

First Steps provides or expands early learning services to young children, their families, and the early care and education providers touching their lives. These services span five key areas:

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

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

Where you can find us.

First Steps operates in each of South Carolina's 46 counties, matching local solutions to local needs. Each county is home to a local First Steps Partnership, overseen by a local board of directors. Partnerships tailor their program investments to the needs of their own communities, using ongoing needs and resources assessments, and evaluating results on an annual basis.

In 2010, SC First Steps was named the lead agency for BabyNet, South Carolina's early intervention program under Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. BabyNet provides special education services to young children (birth-36 months) with disabilities and/or identified developmental delays.

First Steps is also the South Carolina sponsor of two nationally acclaimed home visitation programs for families: **Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** and **Parents as Teachers (PAT).** Additionally, since 2007, we have partnered with the South Carolina Department of Education to offer full-day prekindergarten through the South Carolina **Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP).**

The agency 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.

SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS TO SCHOOL READINESS
BOARD OF TRUSTEES/SOUTH CAROLINA EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL
2010-2011

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Dr. Paul Krohne, South Carolina School Boards Association

First Steps' enabling legislation requires the Board to contract for an external evaluation of the agency every three years. The most recent report by the independent High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan, was released in November 2010. The report praises First Steps for significant improvements in its data collection and assessment methodologies and cites significant program outcomes. An excerpt from the report's conclusion is included below.

Further Steps to School Readiness
Evaluation of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Initiatives

Conclusions and Recommendations Excerpt (Pages 148-149)

"It is in data collected during the most recent fiscal years (2006-07 and 2007-08) that First Steps is able to demonstrate that funds are being spent on productive returns on investment. **The ability to match outcomes to detailed, specific intervention data is extraordinary and non-existent in most state data systems**. In these two years of data these specific findings stand out:

1. The impact of **home visitation** interventions to change parenting skills. Participants saw **significant increases in their pre- and post-assessments**. Overall, **54%** of participants who scored low quality of parenting **improved to a moderate quality** of parenting. **44%** percent who scored moderate parenting skills **moved to a high-quality of parenting**, and **11.9%** who had low quality parenting at pre-test **increased their skills to high quality.**

2. The impact of First Steps on child care quality through its child care quality enhancement strategy. **Universally, child care centers and providers who participated showed significant increases** in pre/post scores of assessed child care quality. Gains were seen for all scales on ECERS, ITERS and FDCERS as a result of quality enhancement strategies.

3. The impact of **Countdown to Kindergarten**. Through self-report data, 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**.

4. The potential demonstrated in **combined strategies**. Except for one scale, child outcomes in FY 2006-07 indicated **increased odds of scoring on a higher level** on every SCRA scale when PAT is combined with 4K compared to full-day 4K only.

5. The potential demonstrated in the **CDEPP initiative**. With only one year of data, CDEPP children were not significantly different in the odds of scoring on a higher level on every SCRA scale compared to 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."**

To read the full report: http://www.scfirststeps.org/docs/2009Eval.pdf

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

2011 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Family Strengthening

Learning begins at home. Because parents are a child's first and best teachers, First Steps works to support families in this important role - while respecting the personal environment, customs and culture of each. First Steps is strengthening South Carolina families by providing:

- Evidence-based home visitation, designed to support healthy development and proven practices. Trained educators provide health screenings, interactive parenting tips and referrals to local resources.
- Family Literacy programs, designed to nurture the home as a learning environment.
- Parent mentoring, designed to assist parents in enhancing play and literacy interactions with their children, at home or in group settings.

2010-2011 Family Strengthening Highlights:

The families of more than **1,550 high-risk South Carolina preschoolers** participated in more than **31,000 parent education home visits** during FY11.

Of these families, **more than three-quarters (76%)** were eligible for service on the basis of two or more school readiness risk factors. **72% qualified for TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) benefits as a result of income totaling **less than 50% of the federal poverty** definition. **Roughly 45%** of these households contained a mother with **less than a high school diploma**.

First Steps' home visitation programs are making a difference in the lives of **South Carolina's rural poor** – bringing evidence-based services directly to families when transportation is a barrier.

Healthy Start

Poor health can inhibit a child's development during the critical early years when children's brains and bodies are developing in ways that will shape their futures. Programs like Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) are here to help.

NFP is a nationally acclaimed nurse home visitation program that helps transform the lives of first-time, low-income mothers and their children. NFP Nurse Home Visitors work with new mothers to:

1. Improve pregnancy outcomes by promoting health related behaviors,
2. Improve child health and development by helping parents provide responsible and competent care, and,
3. Improve the economic self-sufficiency of the family by helping parents develop a vision for their own future, plan future pregnancies, continue their education, and find work.

Nurse Family Partnership is the most rigorously tested program of its kind. Randomized, controlled trials have shown:

- Improved prenatal health
- Fewer childhood injuries
- Improved school readiness
- Fewer subsequent pregnancies
- Increased intervals between births
- Increased maternal employment

Nurse-Family Partnership
Helping First-Time Parents Succeed®

2010-2011 Healthy Start Highlights:

In partnership with The Duke Endowment, The Blue Cross/Blue Shield Foundation of South Carolina, The Children's Trust of South Carolina, the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control and other local funding partners, First Steps serves as the state sponsor agency for South Carolina's **six Nurse Family Partnership sites**. These sites provided evidence-based home visitation services to more than **650 South Carolina mothers during FY11.**

Through the braiding of public, private, and philanthropic investments at state and local levels, this innovative **public-private partnership** is projected to provide more than **$21 million** in services to low-income, first time mothers **over its first seven years of operation**.

Nurse Family Partnership operates in six sites, serving 12 South Carolina counties:

- Anderson
- Charleston/Berkeley/Dorchester/Colleton
- Greenville
- Horry/Georgetown/Williamsburg
- Lexington/Richland
- Spartanburg

Quality Childcare

Recent estimates show more than 118,000 of South Carolina's children under age 6 -- at least 35% -- are enrolled in one of the state's 2,835 regulated childcare settings, allowing more than 76,500 parents to go to work. Because childcare can profoundly shape a child's early development, First Steps supports child care teachers and staff statewide. First Steps offers assistance to child care providers in the following ways:

Improving Quality. Research says childcare quality is directly related to child outcomes, so First Steps works to help providers year-round with training and support to offer safe and healthy environments, build effective relationships with children and their families, and provide a stimulating learning environment for children.

Improving Affordability. High-quality care may come at a cost that makes quality inaccessible to many families, so First Steps works to enhance the availability of full and partial childcare scholarships for families.

Providing Staff Training. Child-care staff and teachers enhance their knowledge and skills to improve the quality of their services through training and technical assistance provided by First Steps.

Advancing Credentials of Staff. First Steps and its partners work to make college-level coursework and advanced degrees more accessible to child-care staff through T.E.A.C.H. and the credentialing arm of the agency, the South Carolina Center for Child Care Career Development (CCCCD is made possible by a generous federal grant through the South Carolina Department of Social Services).

RESEARCH SAYS:

Low-income children who received high-quality, full-time childcare from infancy through age 5:

- **Scored higher on cognitive tests** from toddler-age to age 21;
- Completed **more years of education** and were **more likely to attend a four-year college**;
- Were more likely to **have their first child later** in life; and
- Had **mothers** who were more likely to achieve a **higher education level and employment s**tatus - particularly for teen mothers. (The Carolina Abecedarian Project, UNC-Chapel Hill)

At-risk children are impacted the most by high-quality childcare, and those **benefits reach well into the elementary school years.** (The Children of the Child Cost Quality and Outcomes Study Go to School, 1999)

2010-2011 Quality Childcare Highlights:

Participating centers received more than **3,399 on-site technical assistance visits**, totaling more than **5,000 hours of direct services** to these teachers and center staff.

116 childcare providers –with nearly 4,936 South Carolina children in their care-- participated in First Steps' intensive quality enhancement efforts during FY11. First Steps' quality enhancement strategies are producing measurable results – with the **average center improving** its score on a research-based measure of classroom quality by **more than 8% during FY11**.

Early Education

High quality pre-kindergarten has been shown to be especially beneficial in preparing high-risk children for school –- and life –- success. First Steps is working to expand high-quality 4-year-old kindergarten and other preschool opportunities in public and private settings.

South Carolina First Steps works in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education to administer the state's Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP). The program offers full-day 4-year-old kindergarten to income-eligible children residing in the 37 school districts involved in South Carolina's school equity funding suit, *Abbeville County School District et al. vs. South Carolina.*

Eligible families may enroll their children in either a public school or in an approved private, community or faith-based setting. First Steps oversees the preschool programs in the community and private settings, assuring they meet state quality and accountability requirements and providing training and support to each participating center throughout the school year. Eligible CDEPP families may enroll their children in any First Steps' approved provider whose location meets their needs.

Through its network of county partnerships, First Steps also works to expand preschool services to meet the needs present in their community – often contracting with school districts, child care, or Head Start programs to expand existing services for families.

2010-2011 Early Education Highlights:

524 CDEPP students were served in **39 private / community-based settings**.

7 local First Steps partnerships funded the **additional expansion of public school/community-based 4K** services (Non-CDEPP). 4 local partnerships funded full-day preschool services, 2 provided additional half-day programs, and 1 expanded an existing half-day program to full day.

The SC Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) offers:

- Full-day 4K (6.5 hours), five days per week during the 180-day school year
- Tuition and transportation funding to providers
- A research-based curriculum for children

To qualify for CDEPP, children must:

- Be 4 years old by Sept. 1
- Qualify for free/reduced-price lunch or Medicaid; and
- Live in one of the 37 school districts involved in the school funding equity lawsuit: Abbeville, Allendale, Bamberg 1, Bamberg 2, Barnwell 19, Barnwell 29, Barnwell 45, Berkeley, Chesterfield, Clarendon 1, Clarendon 2, Clarendon 3, Dillon 1, Dillon 2, Dillon 3, Florence 1, Florence 2, Florence 3, Florence 4, Florence 5, Hampton 1, Hampton 2, Jasper, Laurens 55, Laurens 56, Lee, Lexington 4, Marion 1, Marion 2, Marion 7, Marlboro, McCormick, Orangeburg 3, Orangeburg 4, Orangeburg 5, Saluda or Williamsburg.

School Transition

First Steps' nationally recognized Countdown to Kindergarten program is designed to connect families and schools during the summer months prior to kindergarten entry. These home visits strengthen critical bonds and smooth this important transition into the classroom for both children and their families. Kindergarten teachers make six visits to their future students' homes during the summer –- sharing important tips, modeling effective literacy practices, and preparing students and parents for the upcoming year.

Participants are screened for eligibility across a set of variables known to be barriers to school entry, so that resources can be targeted to those most in need. Countdown children and their families are introduced to specific practices and materials that will be used in kindergarten classrooms, and receive a Countdown to Kindergarten Toolkit (books, puzzles, clay, blocks, floor mats, etc.). The toolkit is designed to introduce children to the early learning standards in South Carolina's kindergarten classrooms. Children learn alongside their teachers during the summer sessions, and keep the toolkit to use with their families. At the end of their Countdown experience, children take a "field trip" to school, visiting their very own classroom before school begins.

2010-2011 School Transition Highlights:

During the summer of 2010, First Steps Partnerships in **18 counties** partnered with local school districts to enroll **648 rising kindergartners** in Countdown to Kindergarten.

SC Early Childhood Advisory Council

In February of 2010, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford named the First Steps Board of Trustees as the state's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC). The federal designation, part of the recent reauthorization of Head Start by the United States Congress, is designed to support the coordinated delivery of early childhood services in each of the nation's states and territories.

Pursuant to federal law, the Council is responsible for:

- Conducting periodic needs assessments concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry,
- Identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among child serving programs,
- Developing recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing early childhood programs,
- Developing recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system
- Developing recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators,
- Assessing the capacity and effectiveness of early childhood programming offered by the state's 2- and 4-year institutions,
- Making recommendations for improvements in State early learning standards and undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate.

With the input of hundreds of stakeholders, the Council has identified two main priorities areas for South Carolina:

1) **Data-driven decision making** among the state's early childhood stakeholders:
2) **Professional development** across the entire system of early childhood.

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness
Income & Expenses
2010-2011

		Thousands
	Expenses	**Income**
AGENCY INCOME		
State Appropriations		
Base Appropriation		$11,972
Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funds		$1,491
Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)		$2,188
CDEPP Transfer (EOC)		$297
Total State Appropriations		**$15,948**
Federal /Interagency Grants		
US Department of Education (Part C)		$6,044
US Department of Education (Foundations for Learning)		$300
US Department of Education (Early Reading First)		$1,040
US Department of Health & Human Services -via SC DSS (T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood)		$3,247
US Department of Health & Human Services- Assistance to Children and families- ARRA (ECAC)		$1,793
SC Department of Social Services (TANF)		$5,600
SC Department of Social Services (ARRA Scholarship Grant Year Two)		$120
Total Federal/Interagency Grants		**$18,144**
Private/Other Contributions		
Center for the Study of Social Policy (Quality Improvement Center)		$374
Children's Trust Fund (Nurse-Family Partnership)		$311
Interest		$225
SC Tax Check-off Receipts		$15
Total Private/Other Contributions		**$925**
TOTAL INCOME		**$35,017**

AGENCY EXPENSES		
County Partnership Services		
Local Services (46 partnerships)	$11,859	
Central Operating Support	$1,044	
Total County Partnerships	**$12,903**	
Direct Services to Children- State Level Programs		
BabyNet	$9,088	
Child Development Education Pilot Program	$2,485	
Nurse-Family Partnership	$234	
Countdown to Kindergarten	$65	
Total Direct Services to Children	**$11,872**	
Direct Services to Providers- State Level Programs		
Child Care Career Development Center- Greenville (T.E.A.C.H.)	$3,247	
Early Reading First	$882	
Quality Improvement Center	$239	
Scholarships- ARRA	$120	
Foundations for Learning	$29	
Total Direct Services to Providers	**$4,517**	
Interagency Collaboration		
SC Department of Social Services (Services to At-Risk Families)	$5,000	
Accountability and Oversight		
Payroll and Agency Expenses	$725	
TOTAL EXPENSES	**$35,017**	