

## SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS

### Summary

South Carolina First Steps is the state's school readiness agency, whose state and local services are designed to ensure a state-legislated program whose focuses are school readiness for all of South Carolina's children and ensuring that each child is prepared to reach his or her full potential arrive at school ready to succeed. Working with many parents and other partners, First Steps uses data to identify children most at-risk for school failure, and works to provide them with early learning supports that make the difference for school and life success. First Steps uses research and collaboration to ensure policies, programs, and practices are aligned with the latest research about early childhood development, and serves as South Carolina's Early Childhood Coordinating Council under the federal Head Start Act.

In addition, First Steps serves as the lead agency for BabyNet, SC's early intervention program for infants and toddlers experiencing developmental delays. BabyNet matches the special needs of infants and toddlers who have developmental delays with the professional resources available within the community. Services are provided in everyday routines, activities and places relevant to the life of the family. BabyNet is funded primarily by the US Department of Education under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA).

A sampling of First Steps programs and public policy innovations pulled from the SC First Steps website:

- *Child Development Education Pilot Program*: Created in response to SC's school equity funding lawsuit ruling, the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) provides high-quality prekindergarten to children in the trial and plaintiff communities. Since 2007-2008, First Steps has expanded 4K to over 3000 South Carolina children in partnership with private and community-based preschools who meet high-quality standards. In 2013-2014, CDEPP will be expanded to counties with a poverty index of 75% or greater.
- *Countdown to Kindergarten*: Created in 2003 to support children's successful transition to school, First Steps' Countdown to Kindergarten program serves rising 5K students with home visits by their soon-to-be Kindergarten teacher during the summer before school entry. In 2013, Countdown to Kindergarten will serve over 900 children in 22 counties.
- *Parents as Teachers*: First Steps is SC's primary funder of Parents as Teachers, an international, evidence-based home visiting program offered to families of young children. Parents as Teachers (PAT) supports a parent's role to promote school readiness and optimal child development. As the state lead for the national Parents As Teachers model, SC First Steps supports 63 sites who offer this evidence-based home visiting program to families of young children statewide.
- *Nurse-Family Partnership*: During 2008, First Steps helped to launch Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) in six sites across South Carolina. With additional funding from the Duke Endowment, Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation, SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, the Children's Trust and others, NFP serves first-time, low income mothers in 19 counties with nurse home visits designed to enhance maternal and child health from pregnancy through a child's first birthday.
- *Early Steps to School Success*: Recognizing the shared goal of promoting school readiness for children most at risk, SC First Steps and Save the Children – an international non-profit working to improve the odds for children in poverty around the world -- have entered into a partnership to implement Early Steps for School Success in South Carolina. The nationally acclaimed program provides education and literacy services to families with children under five, including regular visits by literacy specialists to families at home – to instill reading in their young children.

- *The Family Networks Project*: One of only four projects funded across the country, the Family Networks Project was developed to test two new ways to support the families of young children with developmental disabilities. The approaches include an evidence-based home visitation parenting intervention and a workforce enhancement intervention for BabyNet providers, both of which are designed to strengthen families' skills and ultimately prevent child maltreatment. Randomized controlled trials are occurring in two multi-county regions of South Carolina to examine the impact of these interventions.
- *Foundations for Learning*: Built on the existing foundation of early childhood systems in Horry, Georgetown and Charleston counties, the federally-funded Foundations for Learning Project added services for caregivers to support children's healthy social, emotional and behavioral development. Using the framework, Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social and Emotional Development of Infants and Young Children, families were recruited and trained; staff and programs received training and technical assistance. Ancillary support services included scholarships to participating centers; assessment and progress monitoring of children's healthy development; program quality measures; and individualized supports to children and families, including mental health and referrals to needed services.
- *Promoting Responsive Relationships*: Designed around protective factors identified by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and funded by Zero to Three, Promoting Responsive Relationships provided training and coaching to child care programs and early education providers in Saluda and Edgefield counties in order to reduce the risk of child maltreatment and neglect among families with very young children. The Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Parent-Provider Partnerships in Child Care curriculum (PCAN), served as the "best-practice curriculum model" and all activities were integrated into existing quality enhancement activities of the First Steps' partnerships already supporting child care directors and teachers.

## Demographics

- *Target Settings*: SC 340,000 children under the age of six
- *Target Groups Served*: At-risk preschool children
- *Districts Served*: Each county in SC is served and has their own First Steps partnership

## Research and Evaluation

*What national or other research was considered during the development of this program/initiative? Describe the evidence that shows the program/initiative works.*

See <http://www.scfirststeps.org/fy08annualreport/fy08fam.htm>

## Resources

- *Annual Cost*: <http://www.scfirststeps.org/fy08annualreport/financials.htm> - see also the link on this page to each individual county partnership
- *Funding Sources*: Set up as a 501c status – State allocated dollars; private and public funds; grants; planned gifts
- *Staffing Needs*: Varies by site/program
- *Infrastructure/Equipment Needs*: Varies by site/program
- *Partner Organizations*: Parents, community and business organizations, faith-based organizations, early education professionals, social services providers

## Contact Information

Susan DeVenny, Executive Director  
803-734-0479, [1ststeps@scfirststeps.org](mailto:1ststeps@scfirststeps.org)

