



Annual Report

2020-2021



OUR MISSION

We will continue to serve as a convener of early childhood champions to coordinate services to measurably improve the early childhood development of all children in Pickens County.

OUR VALUES

Pickens County First Steps Board of Directors and staff recognize the importance of the following values in helping us to achieve our goals:

- Operational and Fiscal Transparency
- Delivering Research Based Initiatives
- Convening Collaborative Partners
- Engaging the Community
- Supporting Parents as their child’s first teacher

OUR APPROACH



High quality programs and services for children and families



Intensive training, resources and support for childcare providers



Strategic partnerships and community education



We rely on a community of partners, donors, and volunteers – **people like you** – who believe in a brighter future for children and families in our community.

OUR OVERARCHING MEASURES OF SUCCESS

INCREASE THE REACH OF FIRST STEPS SERVICES

By FY25, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by Pickens County First Steps will increase from 37% to 40%.

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

By FY25, the percentage of children directly served by high intensity programs funded by Pickens County First Steps will increase from 4% to 6%.

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. FAMILIES WILL LEARN TO MAXIMIZE LOVE, MANAGE STRESS.

2. CHILDREN WILL TALK, SING AND POINT.

3. CHILDREN WILL COUNT, GROUP AND COMPARE.

4. CHILDREN CAN EXPLORE THROUGH MOVEMENT AND PLAY.

5. FAMILIES WILL READ AND DISCUSS STORIES.

JOIN US



Gain valuable experience and give back to your community through service with First Steps AmeriCorps. Our AmeriCorps members **engage directly with families and communities**, helping to ensure that all children start school ready to reach their highest potential. Apply at scfirststeps.org/AmeriCorps.

First Steps successfully gets children ready for school.

South Carolina

341,977
children under age 6

46%
of young children live in poverty
or low-income households

Data Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey

In fall 2020, **27%** of entering
kindergartners were ready.

Data Source: 2020 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Results

Compared to their like peers, children
who received First Steps services
were...

34% less likely to be chronically
absent in kindergarten.

74% more likely to enter
kindergarten ready.

Data Source: 2019 External Evaluation of First Steps

Pickens County

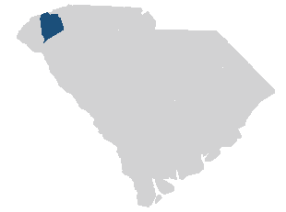
7,163
children under age 6

41%
of young children live in poverty
or low-income households

Data Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey

In fall 2020, **24%** of entering kindergartners
in Pickens County were ready.

Data Source: 2020 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Results



903
children, adults, and workforce members were served
by Pickens County First Steps in FY20-21.

Since inception,
Pickens County First Steps
has leveraged
\$2,211,458.71
from sources outside of
state government.

That is
\$0.33
for every
state dollar.

School District	# of children <6	% of young children living in poverty or low-income households	# entering kindergartners tested	% ready
Pickens	7,163	41%	1,095	24%



@SCFirstSteps | SCFirstSteps.org

For details about Local Partnerships Programs,
visit: tinyurl.com/FirstStepsLP



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



AMITY BUCKNER

Executive Director
Pickens County First Steps

Pickens County First Steps has been an organization rooted in collaboration and partnership. These values were put to the test like never before as we sought to serve the changing needs of children, families, and community partners facing increased challenges during a pandemic. We are grateful for the generous and steadfast support of our collaborating partners who worked quickly to understand the needs of our community and did not hesitate to adapt their strategies and resources to better serve young children and families.

Like many communities, the continued Covid-19 crisis has only highlighted our county's economic and opportunity disparities. Existing strong relationships with community partners has allowed us to link arms and work toward solutions. We are grateful for our board's forward-thinking commitment to the young children in Pickens County, and for an efficient and experienced staff that could modify services and communication during this unprecedented time. Most importantly, we are grateful for the children and families who allow us to step into their lives and offer our support, even when that support is offered virtually instead of in-person. Each family has a unique story and we seek to honor the experiences of others in our language, attitudes, actions, and services. Our hope is that our efforts always reflect the real and present needs of Pickens County families.

My team and I remain grateful for the opportunity to serve the children and families of Pickens County,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amity Buckner".

GETTING CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL

All children are ready to benefit from a quality kindergarten experience when they are five years old by September 1 of that school year. But kindergarten readiness—the critical stage at which children are prepared for learning and success—is more than a matter of age. For a strong start in school, children need positive relationships and supportive learning environments beginning at birth. At First Steps, we partner with families, caregivers, and communities to ensure that all children are prepared for success.

South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner

Developed by SC First Steps and the SC Department of Education, the state's description of school readiness includes 60 developmental milestones across 5 categories:



Approaches to learning & inquiry



Emotional & social development



Physical development, self-help & motor skills



Mathematical thinking



Language & literacy development



OUR VISION

Families and early childhood educators are equipped with tools and resources needed to ensure children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.



EARLY IDENTIFICATION & REFERRAL



an evidence-based program

First Steps' Early Identification and Referral (EI&R) programs serve families with young children with suspected delays in development, acting as a local portal to connect families to community-based services they may need or desire to ensure the school readiness of their children. EI&R services include:



Screenings for children ages 0-5 with suspected delays in development



Referrals, based on screening results, to appropriate resources and support services



Patient information including strategies to monitor growth and development

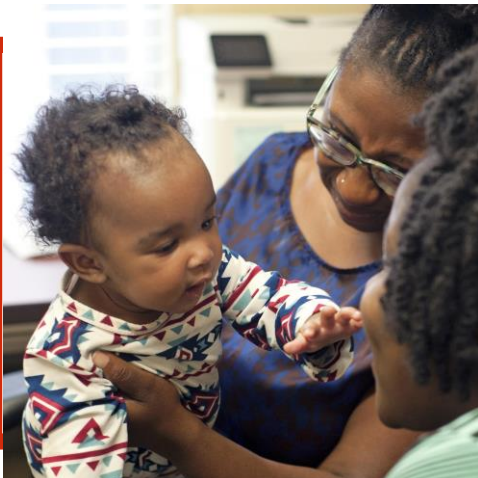
EI&R BY THE NUMBERS 2020-2021

4

children served

4

referrals to BabyNet or other local services



Early detection of delay is essential to the growing brains of our county's youngest learners. Early Intervention services can change the trajectory of a child's developmental path and improve outcomes for children, families and communities.



NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP



an evidence-based program

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) helps transform the lives of first-time mothers and their babies. Through ongoing home visits from registered nurses, moms receive the care and support they need to have a healthy pregnancy, provide responsible and competent care for their children, and become more economically self-sufficient. From pregnancy until the child turns two years old, Nurse-Family Partnership Nurse Home Visitors form a much-needed, trusting relationship with their clients, instilling confidence and empowering them to achieve a better life for their children – and themselves.

BY THE NUMBERS 2020-2021

20

children served

266

number of home
visits provided





PARENTS AS TEACHERS



an evidence-based program

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a home visiting program designed to build strong communities, thriving families and children who are healthy, safe and ready to succeed. PAT services include:



Personal visits from a parent educator at least twice monthly



Monthly group connections with other PAT families



Screenings and assessments to identify developmental concerns



Connections to outside resources that families may need to succeed

PAT GOES VIRTUAL

Due to COVID-19, Parents as Teachers (PAT) National provided guidance for affiliates to deliver virtual services via interactive video conferencing and phone calls. South Carolina PAT affiliates rose to the occasion by engaging families in creative and meaningful ways while continuing to meet the Essential Requirements of implementing a quality PAT program during the pandemic.

PAT IN PICKENS COUNTY 2020-2021

48

families served

753

total home visits



Parents as Teachers.
Model Affiliate



CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS



an evidence-based program

For many families in Pickens County, the cost of quality childcare is a barrier to financial stability. Our scholarship program makes tuition assistance to childcare providers for children from families who do not qualify for SC Vouchers but do not make a livable wage. Our scholarships allow their caregivers to return to school or work.

Pickens County First Steps offers scholarships to families enrolled in any of our programs as well as income-eligible children whose parent attends school or works at least 20 hours per week.

SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2020-2021

7

number of children
served

4

number of providers
served

14

number of
developmental
screenings provided

100% the money paid to childcare providers goes back into our local economy to benefit the citizens of Pickens County.



FOUR-YEAR OLD KINDERGARTEN





an evidence-based program

South Carolina First Steps provides eligible children with free enrollment in full-day four-year-old kindergarten. In coordination with First Steps local partnerships and more than 230 private, community and faith-based preschool providers, First Steps 4K expands access to quality early education across the state.



ELIGIBILITY

To qualify for enrollment, a child must be:

-  4 years old on or before September 1
-  Eligible for Medicaid, SNAP or TANF, experiencing homelessness or transiency, or in foster care

FIRST STEPS 4K IN PICKENS COUNTY 2020-2021

29
children enrolled

2
First Steps 4K providers

PREPARING FOR STATEWIDE EXPANSION

With First Steps 4K, families are in the driver's seat. They choose the program that best meets their needs. Families can enroll their child in any of the 244 private, nonprofit, or faith-based childcare centers or schools participating in the program. The majority of First Steps 4K providers offer 8-hour day and year-round instruction, including summers, which is at no cost to parents.





RAISING A READER



an evidence-informed program

Raising A Reader is a literacy program where children drive the process and parents learn to and engage in read-aloud strategies. The Raising A Reader program leads to healthy brain development, intrinsic motivation, and improved reading and language outcomes.

RAISING A READER BY THE NUMBERS 2020-2021

222

caregivers served

198

children served

17,873

books read



BOOK FLOOD PROGRAM



an evidence-informed program

Book Flood is a program that fosters a love of reading in both children and parents. Children self-select a high quality, multi-genre book to take home four days a week. This year, due to COVID, books were only sent home once a week. Each book provides the opportunity for the child and a caregiver to cuddle up and read.

BOOK FLOOD BY THE NUMBERS 2020-2021

480

caregivers served

419

children served



PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Palmetto Basics are five fun, simple, powerful ways to help all children become the happiest and most successful they can be. The Palmetto Basics campaign is working to make sure that every parent and caregiver knows what they can do to make the most of every opportunity to give the youngest learners they love a great start in life!

The Five Basics are:

1. Maximize Love, Manage Stress
2. Talk, Sing, Point
3. Count, Group and Compare
4. Explore through Movement and Play
5. Read and Discuss Stories

PALMETTO BASICs BY THE NUMBERS 2020-2021

75

materials
distributed

432

Weekly text
messaging
subscribers

770

total social
media
engagement



Maximize Love,
Manage Stress



Talk, Sing,
and Point



Count, Group,
and Compare



Explore through
Movement
and Play



Read and
Discuss Stories



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Addressing the needs of our county's youngest learners is not done alone. In addition to providing services to families and support for childcare providers, Pickens County First Steps mobilizes partners and community members to ensure all children in Pickens County begin school ready for life. We serve as a:

LOCAL PORTAL

connecting preschool children and their families to services

CONVENER

of community stakeholders to develop an effective and comprehensive early childhood system

CHAMPION

of the importance of school readiness to our children's future

OUR PARTNERSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2020-2021

11

community convenings

105

total attendance



OUR SUPPORTERS

Through partnerships and collaborations, as well as financial support from grants and contributions, Pickens County First Steps leverages state dollars to enhance and expand services to children and families.

FUNDING SUPPORT

South Carolina First Steps

United Way of Pickens County

IN-KIND SUPPORT

School District of Pickens County

Prisma Health-Upstate

JOIN US

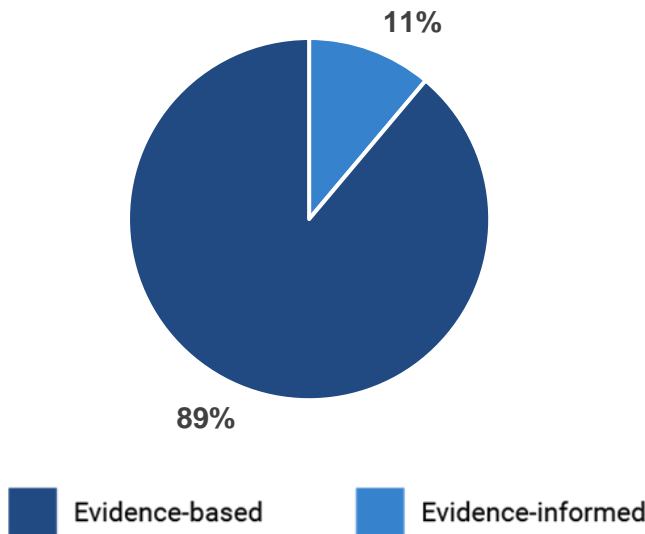
For more information on partnership opportunities, visit our website at www.pickenscountyfirststeps.org or email us at pickensinfo@gmail.com.



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

OUR INVESTMENT IN QUALITY

Expenditures of State Funds by Program Type



ESTIMATION OF COST SAVINGS

Since inception, Pickens County First Steps has leveraged **\$2,211,458.71** from sources outside of state government.

That's **\$0.33** for every state dollar.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES BY STRATEGY

	State Funding	Federal Funding	Private Funding	In-Kind Contributions	Total
Parents as Teachers	\$97,476	\$1850.00	\$0	\$23,960	\$123, 286
Book Flood	\$8,825	\$0	\$450	\$0	\$9,275
Raising a Reader	\$21,362	\$	\$	\$	\$21,362
Nurse Family Partnership	\$0	\$78,500.00	\$0	\$12,815	\$91, 315
Childcare Scholarships	\$26,863	\$	\$6050	\$0.	\$32,913
Early Steps Identification	\$10,4849	\$	\$	\$	\$10,849
Partnerships & Community Education	\$20,558	\$3972.00	\$0	\$0	\$24,530
Administrative Support	\$20, 390	\$	\$	\$	\$20, 390
Total Expenses	\$206,303	\$84,322.00	\$6,500	\$36,775	\$333,901



LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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John Schafer

Kasey Swords

Cecilia Vazquez, Secretary

Erica Walters

Carol Wiley

Martha Williams

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