

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY



Getting children ready for school.

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

November, 2005

Chesterfield County
First Steps
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What is First Steps?

South Carolina First Steps to school Readiness ('First Steps') is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare our children to reach first grade healthy and ready to succeed. Signed into law in June 1999, First Steps is for children



pre-first grade and their families. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.

What is Chesterfield County First Steps?

Chesterfield County First Steps started in 1999, funded by the state of South Carolina and administered by community leaders.

Community collaborations are formed to assist efforts of agencies, private providers, and public and private organizations and entities, at the community level in order to focus and intensify services.

First Steps board members are a team of volunteers dedicated to the needs of the children of Chesterfield County, and along with the CCFS staff members strive to plan, finance, evaluate, and create community awareness of these needs.

Services focus on increasing parents' access to the support they might seek to strengthen their families and promote optimal development of their preschool children; promoting high quality preschool programs that provide a healthy environment that will ensure normal growth and development, and enhancing services so that children have reduced risk for major physical, developmental, and learning problems.

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Our Community Partners

Chesterfield County
Department of Social Services

Fiscal Year
2004-2005

Chesterfield County
Public Schools

Chesterfield County
Head Start

Northeastern
Technical College

Chesterfield County
Library System

Robert Smalls
Family Center



SC Employment Security Commission

Chesterfield County First Steps School Readiness Profile

<u>Population Characteristics</u>	<u>Figure</u>
Population of Young Children (Ages 0-5)	3,520
Children Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch (5 K)*	62.7%
Average Per Capita Personal Income	\$20,981
Children in Poverty (Ages 0-5)****	29.7%
Children Who Are Over Age in Third Grade***	14.9%
Children in Third Grade Performing below Basic on PACT Reading**	18.1%
Children in Third Grade Performing below Basic on PACT Math**	22.2%
Low Birth Weight Infants	9.6%
Births to Mothers with Less than High School Education	26.8%
Less than Adequate Prenatal Care	14.7%

Note: Data is for 2003 except where noted (*2005, **2004, ***2001, ****1999).

Child Care Quality

More and more research confirms that the early years of a child's life are more important than ever. A child's first formal school experiences can set the precedent for learning throughout his/her life. Chesterfield County First Steps Partnership programs support the early childhood educator and help them to fulfill their potential to set the foundation for a child to become a lifelong learner.

Quality Enhancement Grants

This strategy assisted existing childcare providers in improving their quality of service to preschoolers. Mini-grants ranging of up to \$8,000 were awarded to two childcare providers. The grants assisted centers in the purchasing age-appropriate product as based on best practice models. Technical assistance was provided to assist the providers with the pre-assessment, post-assessment, a plan or action and mentoring. Technical assistance (TA) tailored the mentoring as directed by the environmental assessment, and other best practices models. The results were reviewed with each center's director and a Plan of Action was developed based on the centers' strengths and targets for improvement.



Lillie Black-Burns and 39 other participants in the First Steps sponsored childcare workshop *Using Language to Develop Reading Skills* investigate how to use sound cubes and other materials to promote young children's phonetic awareness and thinking. The workshop took place Saturday, March 19 NETC. This is the first of three sessions sponsored by First Steps.

Child Care Providers Professional Development

In partnership with Northeastern Technical College (NETC) three childcare trainings were offered to county providers. NETC coordinated, as in-kind, the registration of participants. All trainers were registered or certified through the Center for Childcare Career Development. Childcare providers received CEUs in curriculum for participating in the training. In addition to the training, mentoring was provided to those who received educational products (\$400 bonus materials) for center. Each participating center received a follow-up mentoring visit to ensure appropriate usage of the products.

Child Care Professional Development Quick Facts

- A** 39 child care staff received an average of seven hours of professional development on early childhood best practices
- B** 93% (36 of 39) of child care providers showed an increase in knowledge related to using language to develop reasoning skills
- C** 71 (28 of 39) of child care providers showed an increase in knowledge related to teaching math to 3 and 4 year olds and introducing science and nature concepts
- D** 414 children were impacted

School Transition

School entry is a pivotal transition point in each child's educational career. In an effort to ensure strong collaborative relationships between the county's families and schools, two initiatives were provided to maximize parents' understandings of state and local expectations and ensure a smooth and beneficial school transition for each child.

Countdown to Kindergarten

Countdown to Kindergarten is a school transition strategy, designed to successfully bridge at-risk students into the K-12 school environment.

There are three components to the strategy:

1) **PUBLIC AWARENESS:** Practical tools and articles distributed through South Carolina media and other community locations to help parents and communities prepare children for kindergarten; 2) **KINDERGARTEN HOME VISITATION;** 3) **COUNTDOWN CELEBRATION:** Rising kindergarten students, their families and teacher celebrated this important summer milestone at EdVenture Children's Museum marking the end of home visits and the start of school.

During the home visits, children and families are introduced to actual materials used in Kindergarten classrooms, and are given a Kindergarten Transition Toolkit (books, puzzles, clay, blocks, floor mats, etc) to keep. First Steps will build ongoing relationships with the COUNTDOWN teachers, children, schools, and families in order to measure longer-term impact of student success and parent involvement.

Chesterfield County First Steps works collaboratively with its agency partners, the faith community and private sector to support parents and families in their own efforts to maximize the school readiness, well being and long-term academic success of the state's young children.

Kindergarteners Improving Transition (KIT)

In partnership with Chesterfield County School District, this activity provides home visits and educational packets to rising kindergarten children and their families and is intended to engage parents and teachers in the kindergartener's educational career. Certified Kindergarten teachers and teacher assistants make a home visit to their registered kindergarteners in the two weeks prior to the beginning of school. During the visits parents and students meet the teacher and the assistant, and, families are introduced to school policies, expectations, and school calendar. In addition an overview of the kindergarten day and schedule is given and parent questions are addressed. Children and families receive a packet of early education materials such as crayons, glue stick, books, scissors, etc. Another educational packet is given at the end of the school year to support continued learning opportunities during summer vacation.



Jodi Jacobs enjoys six of Countdown to Kindergarten with teacher Pam Moore as they work with patterns and color, developing motor skills by coordinating and patterning blocks.

Family Strengthening

Early Intervention

This program provided weekly in home early intervention visits to children (0-3) with mild to moderate developmental delays who were not eligible for BabyNet services. Children's development was assessed using *The Carolina Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs*. Areas of delay were targeted by teaching and modeling developmentally appropriate activities for family/caregivers to use to teach their child on a weekly basis. Families also received assistance in accessing other community services as needed/ requested. Information about early intervention services was also shared at a couple of community health fairs.

Imagination Library

As an affiliate of the Dolly Parton's Imagination program, targeted children in Chesterfield County receive an age-appropriate book each month until his/her 5th birthday. Chesterfield County First Steps and local community partners finance the cost the of books and the mailing and directly oversees the registration, data base, and program evaluation. The program intends to place rich early literacy materials (children's books) in homes of those would not otherwise have access, there by, promoting much needed early literacy opportunities.

Parents As Teachers

Petersburg Primary School's Early Reading First Program parenting component was expanded to serve more families with children from birth to age 5 in this high risk poverty school. This program is designed to enhance child development and school achievement by offering support to families from all socio-economic levels. The mission of the program is to provide parents with the information, support, and encouragement to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life.



Hailey Bryant enjoys being read one her Imagination Library books by her mother Stephanie at the Imagination Library Reading Party sponsored in partnership with the Chesterfield Library. More than 3000 books were distributed, assuring children receive early literacy opportunities in the home.

Kindergarteners Improving Transition (KIT) Quick Facts

- A** 95% (533 of 564) kindergarten students and their families received a home visit prior to the beginning of kindergarten
- B** 76% of parents reported they felt more welcome at the child's school as a result of the home visit
- C** 95% of parents reported their child was more comfortable and/or excited about starting school as a result of the KIT program
- D** 100% or 564 of all kindergarten students received beginning of the year educational packets with needed school supplies

PALSS

PALSS (Parenting and Life Skills Seminars) attempts to break the cycle of poverty in Chesterfield County by providing empowering skill building seminars from which parents can walk away with the knowledge and ability to: (1) improve their employability; improve their personal financial management; (2) navigate the public assistance and social service system; (3) understand and manage their families' health; and (4) become an active partner in their children's academic experience. PALSS targets families living in poverty with children less than 5 years of age. There are 325 families in Chesterfield County meeting this discription. While no family in poverty with small children were turned away, families headed by single parents were aggressively recruited because they comprise approximately 70% of the target population. Families in poverty, with children less than 5 years of age were selected as target populations because statistical evidence suggests that children in poverty are less likely to succeed and are less likely to be ready for kindergarten or the first grade. PALSS is a six-week seminar with speakers from Employment Security Commission, DHEC, DSS, and the School District.



Pictured above are McBee area parents learning how to use music to teach their child in the Parenting and Life Skills Seminars. Forty-four parents participated in these workshops offered in the county.

Dear Friends:

It is a pleasure to report the successes of the Chesterfield County First Steps Partnership for School Readiness. As executive director, I have seen the community join together to plan ways to benefit all of the children of Chesterfield County from birth to age 6.

We are pleased to bring together people from various public and private agencies, educational institutions, the religious community, as well as parents, teachers, business people, child care providers and other community members to serve as stewards of the funds entrusted to us by the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness, as well as from various grants and the donations of area businesses, agencies and citizens. The Board of Directors is proud that all our service providers are doing a fantastic job and that the results are evident.

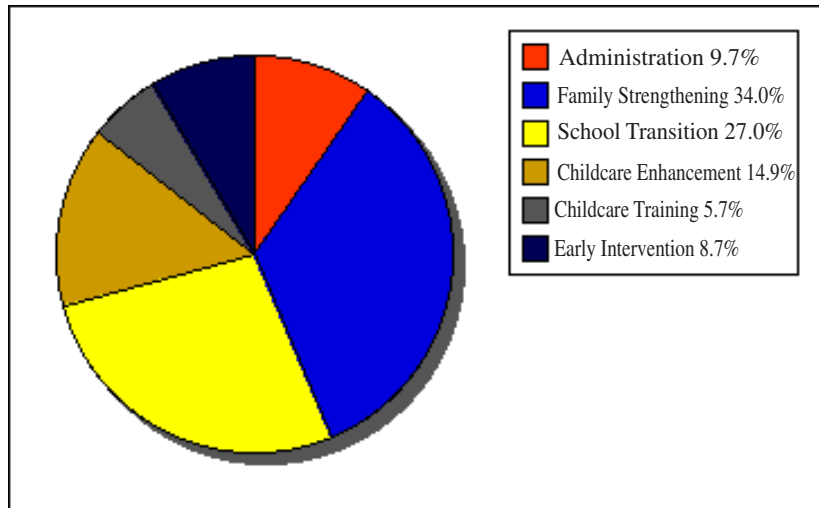
In collaboration with our community partners, who have generously donated time and financial resources, we have made tremendous strides. However, the work ahead of us is still great. Our collective efforts must not cease until every child in Chesterfield County enters school ready to succeed and reaches their fullest potential. We must also encourage our families to access and use information to make appropriate decisions that are in the best interest of their children. We hope you looked over the information in this report and will join us in creating a Chesterfield County that is committed to the well-being of its youngest members, who are, after all, our future.

Sincerely,
Karen Martini
Executive Director

"We pay a price when we deprive children of the exposure to the values, principles, and education they need to make them good citizens." - Sandra Day O'Connor

First Steps investments in Chesterfield County

In the 2004-2005 fiscal year, approximately 931 young children in Chesterfield County benefited from First Steps funded services and activities. This chart details our investments of approximately \$277,987 in services for young children and families for the fiscal year 2004-2005.



Become a Champion for Children! Donate to Chesterfield County First Steps!

Donor's Name: _____

Total of Donation _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

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Make checks payable to CCFS. Donations are tax deductible.

Mail to :
Chesterfield County First Steps
PO Box 553
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