



2015 Early Childhood Common Agenda

SOUTH CAROLINA

*Building a smart, comprehensive early
childhood system through effective policy
to create a brighter future for young
children and their families*



Ensuring South Carolina's Children Succeed

Three statewide organizations – Children's Trust of South Carolina, the Institute for Child Success and United Way Association of South Carolina – presented the first comprehensive early childhood vision with the publication of last year's *South Carolina's Early Childhood Common Agenda*.

Continuing that important foundational work, key stakeholders across South Carolina worked

throughout 2014 to update, expand and create specific policy recommendations for this year's revised version. Advocates approached this work within the policy contexts of quality early care, assessment and evaluation; racial/ethnic disparities; geographic disparities; business/economics and system investment, sustainability and alignment.

This agenda will be used by policy makers and advocates during the 2015-2016 legislative session to guide and determine legislative priorities and initiatives for early childhood and education policy.

Just as a sturdy foundation promotes the long-term stability of a house, the quality of the brain architecture built in the early years of life has long-term effects on children’s health and developmental outcomes. Supporting early childhood health, education, and development yields a brighter future for South Carolina – as today’s children are the basis of tomorrow’s social and economic prosperity.

South Carolina has made strides for children, but much work remains to ensure a path to success for every child. The data snapshot below looks at challenges faced by children, families and communities in our state. The data highlights the need to support policy that will improve important outcomes and was used to inform the work of the *2015 Early Childhood Common Agenda*.

INDICATOR	South Carolina	S.C. African American	S.C. American Indian	S.C. Asian Pacific Islander	S.C. Hispanic/Latino	S.C. White
Children ages 3-5 enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten	59%	61%	84%	70%	44%	61%
Fourth graders who scored at or above proficient in reading	28%	13%	S	S	21%	39%
Children who live in families with income greater than or equal to 200% of poverty	49%	27%	46%	61%	27%	64%
Children who live in low-poverty areas	65%	47%	S	83%	56%	77%

Note: S = data are suppressed if the margins of error are high.

Sources

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children. <http://aecf.org/resources/race-for-results>
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United in support of young children (ages 0-5) and their families, advocates of the *2015 Early Childhood Common Agenda* propose the following framework for building a smart, comprehensive early childhood system through effective policy for South Carolina. We urge our elected leaders and policymakers to consider this agenda as decisions are made to advance policies impacting young children and their families in order to create a brighter future for the Palmetto State.

Quality Early Care and Education

Research has consistently demonstrated that quality early childhood experiences provided in child care and preschool settings meaningfully support later school success, particularly for children identified as at-risk for school failure.¹ Programs must support parents and caregivers to create safe environments and mitigate the impact of adverse early experiences for young children.

Standards are essential in promoting high quality early care and education. We endorse work to create a comprehensive statewide system that includes a definition of quality early care and education, measurable standards and evidence-based curriculum that applies to all sectors. We also support incorporating continuous quality improvement processes and outcome assessments for all early care and education programs. Clear definitions and standards for quality early care and education, coupled with ongoing program evaluation, will provide needed accountability to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors for children and families.

Recommendations:

- Create a committee led by the Division of Early Care and Education, Department of Social Services, with participation from stakeholders providing child care and

early care and education services to young children. This committee would recommend ways to increase participation in the quality improvement system, which includes established quality standards for child care and early care and education providers.

- Change the State Advisory Committee on the Regulation of Childcare Facilities to modify membership and responsibilities, in order to strengthen the quality early care and education system.

Strong Family Supports

Children from low-income families and communities benefit most from access to services.² According to Nobel Prize-winning economist and professor James Heckman, gaps open early in life between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged children and have lasting impacts on a child's readiness for school and the workplace.³ Early intervention for struggling families can improve the health, cognitive and social-emotional abilities of children and families. Parents in low-income and at-risk communities must be supported by programs and policies that enable them to have equitable access to quality early care services for their children.

Adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress, including growing up in poverty, can negatively affect

a child's physical and emotional development and have lasting impact into adulthood.⁴ We support economic strategies that reward work and lift families out of poverty.

With limited resources, it is critical we use standards and tools that consider geography, household income and race to ensure we are equitably and adequately serving all children and families in South Carolina. Innovative policy seeks to borrow ideas that are working elsewhere and apply them to long-standing challenges.

Recommendations:

- Expand voluntary home visiting programs. Vulnerable pregnant and parenting families benefit from home visiting and intervention services, which support children from prenatal to age five. We endorse a 50 percent expansion of these programs by 2020 to allow for pregnant women and their families to access needed services and develop skills that aid in raising children who are physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy and ready to succeed in school and life.
- Support a state-earned income tax credit (EITC), a refundable tax credit for eligible people who work and have income less than specified amounts. EITC can give families financial flexibility and increase access to early childhood resources, including safe and high quality early care.
- Use the Self-Sufficiency Standard to measure cost of living across the state. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is based on basic needs, no-frills budgets created for all family types in every county. Using standards to map areas where working parents are struggling to receive early care resources guides policy makers to better allocate limited resources.

- Support the use of racial impact assessments and production of opportunity impact statements that are applied to policy addressing early care and education. Just as fiscal impact statements are recognized as a responsible practice to determine the financial impact of legislation, opportunity impact statements bring attention to unintended consequences of proposed legislation on communities of color throughout the state.

Investment and Accountability

Nurturing future citizens is long-term work that requires patience and commitment. We support investment in evidence-based solutions and holding early childhood providers, funders, and state agencies that serve young children and their families responsible for positive outcomes.⁵ Existing early childhood programs, which have proven their effectiveness in South Carolina, need to be expanded to serve more families.

Recommendations:

- Support parent-to-parent early care models and programs with proven track records of success. Children benefit from the full maintenance and regulatory review of organizations charged with supporting their health, education, and social development.
- Support revenue-neutral solutions that reduce instability and turnover for childcare licensing and service provision staff.
- Allocate funds for additional staff to conduct compliance visits to Family Care Home facilities and reinstate full funding for second year ABC voucher program recipients. These investments allow access to quality early care for middle and low-income families and ensure that all children are safe within regulated environments.

Supporting early childhood health, education, and development yields long-term returns on investments and a brighter future for South Carolina. We envision all children ready for school, stronger families, safer communities, significant government cost avoidance, healthy and productive adults, a more competitive workforce and a stronger economy for the Palmetto State.⁶



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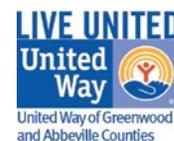


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Supporting organizations

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* The Mary Black Foundation endorses the public policy agenda but does not take a position on specific pieces of legislation.

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