

South Carolina First Steps e-Spotlight

March 25, 2016



Lexington County First Steps' Countdown to Kindergarten Program Reaches New Heights



Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a home visitation program pairing the families of high-risk rising Kindergartners with their future teachers during the summer before school entry. SC First Steps began offering the CTK program in 2004 with the goals of: 1) increasing family awareness of Kindergarten expectations and the importance of home activities relating to literacy and hands-on learning, 2) ensuring a smooth transition into the school environment for the child and family, and 3) creating a positive relationship between the family and the child's school.

Lexington County First Steps started implementing CTK in the inaugural year of the program, serving 50 students and their families and partnering with 12 schools. It has since grown to become the largest CTK program in South Carolina, serving over 200 children and families in each of the past three years. Lexington County First Steps leverages the strong support of the school districts for the CTK program and has a broad reach across all five of its districts, having offered the program in 72% of elementary schools in Lexington County (a total of 28 schools). Jim Riddle, Executive Director of Lexington County First Steps, spoke of the Lexington school community's awareness of the importance of CTK for their rising Kindergartners, particularly the relationship-building that occurs between the teacher and their new students and families. A critical component of CTK is to increase family involvement in the early grades when children's learning is foundational for school and life success. According to surveys conducted in the 2014-15 school year by Kindergarten teachers of Lexington County CTK students, 87.5% of CTK parents were more involved than other parents in their child's education, demonstrating the impact of the program on families continuing through the school year.

In the CTK program, teachers make visits to the homes of participating children, introducing them and their families to materials and activities that they will see in Kindergarten. Over the past three years, Lexington County has had 82 Kindergarten teachers participate in the CTK program. Teachers are required to make five home visits and the sixth, and final visit, is conducted at the school where the child will attend class in the fall. Not only do these visits increase the child's awareness of classroom expectations, but also build the child's self-confidence and comfort-level in entering school for the first time.

Last summer, Lexington County First Steps began offering districts a bilingual CTK home visitor to work with participating Spanish-speaking CTK children and families. This idea was born out of both the awareness of the increasing Spanish-speaking population and understanding the benefits to students from having teachers who both speak their language and reflect their culture. Lexington County First Steps will continue offering five students from each district a Spanish-speaking CTK home visitor in this coming year with the continued goal of supporting these children and their families with the transition to Kindergarten.

The growth and success of the CTK program in Lexington County is a credit to Lexington County First Steps, the school district administration, teachers, and the community. Together they recognize that making children and families feel prepared and confident about entering school is a key element of school readiness.

Upcoming Dates

April 14: South Carolina READ IN / ED meeting following

April 19: Partnership Monthly Webinar

May 2nd – 5th: Smart Start Conference

May 6: Renewal Plans Due

May 17: ED Meeting or Webinar

June 16: State Board of Trustees Meeting

News/Opportunities:

SCANPO Board Leadership Summit

In response to growing demand, SCANPO is offering its first-ever Board Leadership Summit on Friday, April 22nd.

This Summit is **ONLY** open to board members and CEOs of SCANPO member organizations. Highlights will include a conversation with former Charleston Mayor Joe Riley and his sister, Jane Riley-Grambrell, about the Board's role in public-private partnerships; a session on "How Boards Lead Today" with Susan Meier, a national board governance expert; and, breakout conversations that build upon popular Summit sessions.

[Click here](#) to sign up now. Registration will close on April 15th.