

South Carolina First Steps e-Spotlight

March 4, 2016



Pickens County First Steps: [I CAN] engage my community in building a foundation for school readiness!

In December, the “[Profile of the Ready Kindergartner](#)” was unveiled – a new description of school readiness for the children of South Carolina, as well as benchmarks for how ready children can be supported by families, educators, and communities. The [I CAN] public awareness campaign was launched in conjunction with the unveiling in the hopes of building understanding of the importance of school readiness statewide and of engaging a greater percentage of the public in supporting early childhood within their communities.

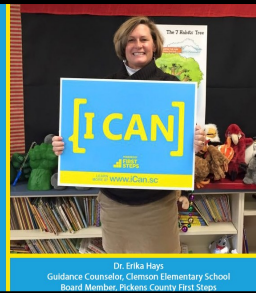
Pickens County First Steps (PCFS) has embraced the campaign and the idea that all of their community members can contribute to increasing school readiness through simple, everyday tasks. In a recent [blog post](#) and [op-ed in The Greenville News](#), PCFS provided a list of “10 Everyday ways [You Can] build a foundation for school readiness,” including tasks such as volunteering to take a meal to a new mother and donating books to a local preschool or childcare center. In addition, PCFS has worked to include all community members, not just those who have education backgrounds or young children, in the campaign. Recently, they took pictures of local board members, of varying backgrounds and professions, with [I CAN] signs. The pictures were then posted on their Facebook page with the board member’s [I CAN] pledge and “tagged” to the board member, generating many “likes” and “shares” across the board members’ networks!



George Hicks, family advocate at S.H.A.R.E. Headstart and PCFS board member, pledges to be an [I CAN] advocate for Pickens County families.



Dr. Erika Hays, guidance counselor and PCFS board member.



In working to bring community awareness to the [I CAN] campaign, PCFS has tried to not “reinvent the wheel” but instead blend the [I CAN] campaign into programs and initiatives that they are already doing. PCFS has an active presence on social media, maintaining the aforementioned blog and Facebook page, and has worked to incorporate the [I CAN] campaign into their postings.

For instance, they used the messaging, “[I CAN] register my child for kindergarten at my local elementary school!” to encourage families to register for 4K for the coming year. In April, PCFS plans to use the [I CAN] campaign for its Week of the Young Child celebrations with the theme of “[I CAN] be a superhero!” They plan to have [I CAN] signs at the events to bring more understanding of the importance of school readiness and how the community can contribute.

In continuing their approach of incorporating [I CAN] into programs and services they are already involved in, PCFS invited their childcare centers to become [I CAN] centers. These centers committed to participating in one “everyday ways” activity each month to create a more positive learning environment for children. For example, in March centers are committed to, “[I CAN] sing an age-appropriate song to my class every day.” In return for their participation, centers received [I CAN] signs to place on their property, [I CAN] buttons to wear, promotional materials to provide for parents, and prizes throughout the year for posting their “everyday ways activities” on PCFS’ Facebook page, sharing it or tagging PCFS, and using the hashtag #icansc.

Through its [I CAN] campaign PCFS has worked to convey the message that the work of supporting young children and their families is something that all community members can contribute to, even through simple, everyday tasks. PCFS wants community members to realize that they can and should invest now so that children can enjoy success later. And when that happens, families, schools, and communities thrive.

Opportunities:

New Early Head Start Expansion and Childcare Partnership Grants



In February, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) announced the availability of approximately \$135 million to be competitively awarded for the purpose of expanding access to high-quality, comprehensive services to low-income infants and toddlers and their families through Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnerships, or through the expansion of Early Head Start services.

ACF will accept applications from public entities, including states, or private non-profit organizations, including community-based or faith-based organizations, or for-profit agencies that meet eligibility for applying as stated in section 645A of the Head Start Act. Interested applicants may email EHS.CCPartnerships@acf.hhs.gov for additional information or view the grant summary and description [here](#).

For more information on Pickens County First Steps [I CAN] campaign, please contact Marian Vischer, PCFS Communications Coordinator, at mvischer@scfirststeps.org.