

# South Carolina First Steps e-Spotlight

July 8, 2016



## For Spartanburg County's Children and Families "Quality Counts"



**QualityCounts**  
*recognizing excellence in early care & education*

*Quality Counts is one of the most exciting initiatives with the greatest potential to make a real difference in the quality of early learning and early childhood education I have seen in my 35 years in education. Our county's investment and support of Quality Counts is critical in our collective efforts to ensure all our children are ready at every age and stage to learn and thrive and be successful in school and life.*

*- Terry Pruitt, Deputy Superintendent Spartanburg County School District 7*

### Why Quality Counts

The evidence is strong – the early years of a child's life set the foundation for future development and success. Research by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University reminds us that 90% of the architecture of a child's brain is built from birth to age four. High quality child care and early learning programs positively impact young children's development, resulting in greater success in school and life.

Quality Counts is a community-based quality enhancement initiative designed to build and sustain high quality in early care and education programs. In its fifth year, Quality Counts is the result of a partnership between the Mary Black Foundation and Spartanburg County First Steps based on the belief that when young children spend time in learning environments that provide stimulating experiences, they are more likely to succeed academically, socially, and economically. Spartanburg County stakeholders embrace the cradle to career philosophy, recognizing that the first step in creating a healthy and prosperous community is to ensure that Spartanburg County's youngest learners arrive at school prepared for success. Critical in this first step was the development of an initiative to support local early care and education programs around early childhood best practice and in collaboration with the existing child care systems in South Carolina, including **DSS, ABC Quality, and CCR&R.**



*A Quality Counts teacher supports literacy at Creative Learning Kids CDC.*



*Sharing books in the infant room at Precious Little Angels Child Development Center.*

### A Continuous Quality Improvement Loop

The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) loop begins with an assessment using 5 nationally recognized standards: 1) Learning Environment (ECERS-3 and ITERS-R for 50% of the classrooms by a reliable rater), 2) Teacher: Child ratios and Group Size, 3) Staff Qualifications, 4) Program Management, and 5) Family Engagement. The total score of the assessment is then translated into a star rating level. More importantly, the details of this assessment provide a starting point for each program's quality journey and are the foundation for the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Quality Counts Technical Assistance Providers are trained to use relationship-based TA and a practice-based coaching model. These two components are the backbone of the TA framework used to support the CQI loop.

Technical assistance is the heart of the CQI model. Center directors and the Quality Counts TAs write goals together. As goals are accomplished, new goals are added and the loop of continuous quality improvement begins but has no end. QIP's are individualized depending upon the needs of the program. Quality Counts job is to meet programs where they are and build relationships based on trust and respect. The amount and type of TA varies depending upon the size and needs of the program. Other components of the CQI loop include best practice trainings for staff, Director Network meetings, vision development, and quality improvement grants.

***(The e-Spotlight on SCFS' Quality Counts is continued on the next page)***

## Quality Counts by the Numbers

Quality Counts has experienced strong success in Spartanburg County and currently has 45% of the eligible child development centers enrolled. A new cohort of centers will be enrolled this summer pushing the percentage to over 50%. In Spartanburg County, Quality Counts currently benefits:

- 2487 Children 6 weeks to five
- 542 Directors, teachers and assistants
- 156 Classrooms
- 36 Participating centers

## Expansion in South Carolina

Dorchester County First Steps implemented Quality Counts two years ago and this year Kershaw County First Steps will begin Quality Counts. The expansion is exciting as we all want South Carolina's young children to succeed. As Quality Counts continues to see success, growth, and replication, it is a testament to the importance of engaging the community in a well-thought out approach to meet the needs of children and families. An initiative that works towards SC First Steps mission to ensure children are ready for school success, Quality Counts provides children with a solid foundation that will result in a productive future and, in turn, build stronger, more prosperous communities.



*Participating Quality Counts directors and teachers attend a Conscious Discipline training.*

**For more information on Quality Counts visit their website at [www.spartanburgqualitycounts.org](http://www.spartanburgqualitycounts.org) or contact Spartanburg County First Steps Executive Director, Carolyn Brooks at [cbrooks@1steps.org](mailto:cbrooks@1steps.org).**