

LANCASTER COUNTY



Getting children ready for school.



*Countdown to Kindergarten*

*Early Head Start – Child  
Care Partnership Program*

*Early Identification  
and Referral*

*Imagination Library*

*Incredible Years Parenting*

*Step By Step  
Resource Center*

*Weekend Backpack  
Feeding Program*

# Annual Report

2015-2016



**OUR VISION:**

**Every Lancaster County child  
will enter kindergarten  
ready to succeed.**

*First Steps WORKS for the children of Lancaster County.*



## By The Numbers

Indicator	SC	Lancaster County
Children Under Five	289,990	4882
Children In Poverty	26.4%	30.3%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Graders Below Standard in Reading	21.1%	20.8%
Births to Mothers With Less Than a High School Diploma	15.7%	17.5%

KIDS COUNT data provided by: Children's Trust

- ✓ Since inception, Lancaster County First Steps has leveraged \$5,372,591 from sources outside state government. **That's an additional \$1.26 for every dollar received.**
- ✓ Lancaster County First Steps continued extensive work on a \$6 million grant to implement the Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership initiative which will provide nine (9) high-quality classrooms at four (4) local child care centers.
- ✓ Lancaster County First Steps always strives to use resources wisely. In 2015-2016, our organization reported an administrative cost of only 2.61 %.
- ✓ Over 13,000 books were provided to children all across Lancaster County during FY16.

## Lancaster County First Steps

**Board Chair**  
**Brian Bass**  
**Executive Director**  
**Lora P. Bryson**

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[www.lancastercountyfirststeps.org](http://www.lancastercountyfirststeps.org)

## Lancaster County First Steps

**Lora P. Bryson**  
**Executive Director**

From the day children are born, they begin learning. Their early experiences are crucial to their long-term development. Yet studies show that children living in poverty can be a full academic year behind their peers when they enter kindergarten – a gap that grows wider as school progresses. Excellent early education can change that, making the earliest and lifelong impact on a child's life.

In this report, you will see the many ways we provide excellent early education opportunities that offer a continuum of comprehensive programs, services and initiatives so that children and families thrive in Lancaster County. This year, we are especially proud to report that for every state dollar we have received we have raised an additional \$4.69. In April 2015, we received approximately 6 million dollars to implement a federally-funded community-based program for low-income families with infants and toddlers. We have partnered with four (4) local child care centers to provide children ages 6 weeks to 3 years with a quality Early Head Start education designed to enhance the development in infants and toddlers. The Springs Close Foundation provided funds to serve 425 children with the Weekend Backpack Program at Clinton Elementary and Brooklyn Springs Elementary and provided partial funding to serve 100 Countdown to Kindergarten children across the county. Our local United Way provided the additional funds for this program as well as the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program which provides developmentally appropriate books each month.

Lancaster County First Steps serves as a local portal connecting families of preschool children to community-based services they may need or desire to ensure the school readiness of their children. We act as a community convener serving the needs of our youngest citizens and their families; a county-wide needs assessment is conducted every three (3) years to assure that our goals are meeting the needs of the most at-risk families in Lancaster County.



Healthy Start



Family Strengthening



Early Intervention



Quality Child Care



Early Education



School Transition

### County Programs

- Countdown to Kindergarten
- Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership
- Early Identification & Referral
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- Incredible Years Parenting
- Step by Step Resource Center
- Weekend Backpack Feeding Program

### State Programs

- BabyNet
- First Steps 4K

# What We Do

Each of the six color blocks of the First Steps logo represents a core area of service, outlining our comprehensive strategy to prepare children for long-term school success.

**With measurable outcomes across each of its six school readiness strategy areas, Lancaster County First Steps is getting results.**



**Healthy Start**

We begin with a focus on providing a healthy start to life. This includes prenatal and post-partum services for both mother and baby. In 2007, First Steps collaborated with key philanthropic and agency partners to bring Nurse-Family Partnership to SC having a significant impact on reducing premature births and Medicaid costs.



**Quality Childcare**

Quality childcare starts with quality childcare providers. Our quality enhancement and training strategies lead to improved teacher-student interaction, which research shows has a significant impact on a child’s development and success in school.



**Family Strengthening**

Our home visitation strategies, such as Parents as Teachers, Parent-Child Home and Early Steps to School Success, are helping parents understand their responsibilities to care for and be positive models for their children. As a result of First Steps’ intervention and parenting support, 66% of clients initially assessed at “low” levels of parenting have achieved moderate or high levels of parenting skill.



**Early Education**

Private-public partnerships through First Steps 4K have led to significant cost efficiencies in the delivery of publicly funded 4K. One recent analysis suggests First Steps is achieving comparable results, without the need for costly capital construction, for 80 cents on the dollar.



**Early Intervention**

According to recent federal evaluations, outcomes for clients participating in BabyNet early intervention programs are above national averages. BabyNet matches the special needs of infants and toddlers who have disabilities and/or developmental delays with customized, community-based resources.



**School Transition**

Each of the corresponding blocks of services leads ultimately to the goal of transitioning children successfully to school. Programs like Countdown to Kindergarten and From Day One to Grade One are ultimately preparing children for school success.

**Based on the needs of our community, Lancaster County First Steps focuses its investments in all six strategy areas to best serve at-risk children and their families. The initiatives operating in Lancaster County include: Countdown to Kindergarten, Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership, Early Identification and Referral, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, Incredible Years Parenting, Step By Step Resource Center and Weekend Backpack Feeding Program.**



# Imagination Library



**Children's reading scores improve dramatically when parents are involved in helping them learn to read.**

## Program Description

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the peak period for children developing neural connections related to language is around **nine months of age**. **One of the easiest and most effective ways to build the language neural connections in a young child's brain is to read to them.** Lancaster County First Steps is the local sponsor of Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which provides free age-appropriate books to children from birth to 5 years. Operated by the Dollywood Foundation, Imagination Library is currently active in more than 1,600 local communities and mails books to about 750,000 children each and every month.

Children who register with Lancaster County First Steps receive one book per month by mail through the month of their fifth birthday. All books are quality, age-appropriate books carefully selected for each age group by a committee of educational specialists.

A major benefit of the Imagination Library program is that it requires very little overhead or administrative obligation. Since the Dollywood Foundation in Tennessee administers the operation of the program and book distribution, the cost to local communities is as low as \$30 per child per year.

**Here's great feedback from a parent!**  
*Our sincere thanks to Dolly Parton and Lancaster County First Steps! My son and I love the Imagination Library Program so very much. He looks forward to getting a new book each and every month and can't wait for us to read them together. We are creating a library at home that we will use for years to come.*

## Imagination Library by the Numbers, 2015-2016

Children Served	961
Books Given to Children 0-5	11,534

### This year, our Dolly Parton Imagination Library program:

- ✓ Reports 98% of participants are extremely satisfied with the program.
- ✓ Increased literacy materials provided in every home served by this program.
- ✓ Served 77% greatest at-risk children.



### *Thank you to our partners!*

**The Dollywood Foundation**  
**United Way of Lancaster County**  
**Indian Land Rotary Club**  
**Literacy Review Club**  
**Lancaster County Partners for Youth**  
**Individual Donors & Community Partners**



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# Countdown to Kindergarten



Bringing parents and teachers together as partners sets the foundation for success in school.

## Program Description

Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a First Steps program based on other successful school transition models from around the country. Its goals are:

- to increase the successful transition of South Carolina’s most at-risk children into the K-12 school system
- to increase parent involvement in the early grades (particularly in hard-to-reach communities), when children’s learning is foundational for life success
- to increase public awareness of the importance of school readiness and provide ways for parents and communities to impact children’s early school success

### The Countdown to Kindergarten initiative integrates all of the following components:

**Home Visitation:** Teachers make six visits over the summer to the homes of participating students and families. Children and families are introduced to actual materials used in kindergarten and are given a Kindergarten Transition Toolkit to keep and use throughout the school year.

**Learning Celebration:** The last visit is a “field trip” to the school where the child will attend class in the fall.

**Public Awareness:** Throughout the summer, Lancaster County First Steps releases tips to the media to help parents and caregivers get children ready for kindergarten.

The Lancaster County School District places as many CTK children as possible in their home visitor’s classroom for kindergarten, thereby building upon the teacher-child and parent-teacher relationships created during the summer.

*Here’s a great quote from a client!*

“I was looking for new ways to help Khloe learn. Mrs. Benson shared so much knowledge and many ways to work with my daughter. She also provided us with the tools and supplies so that we had everything we needed to keep practicing the skills that she needed to know for Kindergarten.”

**Gwynette Kirkland, Mother of CTK Participant at Clinton Elementary School**

Lancaster County First Steps serves families in greatest need. Among our Countdown to Kindergarten families:

- 2.70 ... risk factors per child (i.e., low maternal education, teen custodial parent, low birth weight, etc.)
- 86% ... live in poverty and/or receive free lunches
- 60% ... have never attended a full-time preschool outside of the home

### \*CTK by the Numbers, Summer 2015

Children Served	116
Families Served	113
Home/School Visits	696

\*CTK program data is for June-August 2015, whereas CTK fiscal data includes expenditures from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016.

### This year, our Countdown to Kindergarten program:

- ✓ Increased the amount of time parents spent reading to children by 53%.
- ✓ 75% of parents reported a significant, positive impact for their entire family.
- ✓ All thirteen (13) of the teachers that participated in the CTK program reported stronger relationships with the children and families that they served.
- ✓ 28% of parents planned to be more involved in their child’s school experience.

### Thank you to our partners!

The Springs Close Foundation  
 United Way of Lancaster County  
 Kaplan Early Learning Company  
 Lancaster County Partners for Youth

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# Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership Initiative

The goal of the program is to improve child and family outcomes, including school readiness, by providing a continuum of comprehensive services that support children's development and family functioning.



## Program Description

Lancaster County First Steps Early Head Start-Child Care Program a federally-funded community-based program. Our organization has partnered with local child care centers to provide infants and toddlers from 6 weeks to 3 years of age with a quality Early Head Start (EHS) education designed to enhance the development in infants and very young children. To be eligible for this program, parents must be employed, enrolled in school full time and receive an ABC Voucher.



## WHY IT WORKS

Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships provide and promote comprehensive early childhood development, support families and encourage growth in all members of the family. The program offers support in the following areas:

- Individualized Services
- Health and Dental Screenings
- Family Support
- Parent Involvement
- Services to Meet Special Needs
- Full Nutrition Program
- Community Resources



## This year, our Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership initiative:

- ✓ Received a \$6 million federally-funded EHS-CCP Partnership Grant.
- ✓ Is partnering with four (4) local child care centers to provide infants and toddlers ages 6 weeks to 3 years with a quality Early Head Start education designed to enhance the children's development.
- ✓ Remodeled nine (9) child care classrooms to meet the EHS-CCP Standards.
- ✓ Providing developmentally appropriate EHS-CCP space for 72 children.
- ✓ Hired a Director, two (2) Family Service Specialists, and a Health, Nutrition and Safety Coordinator.
- ✓ Deliver high-quality, comprehensive services to infants and toddlers from low-income families.

## Thank you to our partners!

- Buford Child Development Center
- A Brighter Future Child Development
- Greater New Hope Child Development Center
- Southside Early Childhood Center

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# Early Identification & Referral

Helping vulnerable first-time parents empowers them to achieve a better life for themselves and their children.

## Program Description

The Early Identification and Referral (EI&R) Program began in April 2014 and continues to operate successfully in Lancaster County. This initiative serves as a community liaison between Lancaster County First Steps, BabyNet, local families, and various community resources. All parents are encouraged to utilize this service should their child display potential developmental delays.

Lancaster County First Steps manages the success of EI&R in four areas:

- **Public Awareness:** One of the integral factors to the program's success is through public awareness. By demystifying the concerns regarding financial and insurance barriers, the EIR program can serve more families seeking resources for their children.
- **Screenings:** The EIR Strategy uses two screening tools to identify potential developmental delays and determine the need for a follow up evaluation or referral to BabyNet: The Ages and Stages 3 (ASQ-3) and The Ages and Stages Social Emotional (ASQ-SE). Once a child has been observed and screened, support services are identified if needed and referred to Lancaster County First Steps community resource partners or BabyNet.
- **Community Referral Partnerships:** Once a potential delay is identified with a child, it's imperative that proper follow-up care and referrals are established. For this reason, Lancaster County First Steps has a strong network of resource partners and collaborations within the community.
- **Follow-Up:** Many parents are overwhelmed with the news of possible developmental delay with their child. For this reason, the EI&R program offers continuous follow-up to families and encourages parents to be the first advocate for their children.



### EIR by the Numbers, 2015-2016

Children Served	27
Materials Distributed	698

### This year, our Early Identification and Referral initiative:

- ✓ Operated an Early Identification and Referral Program in Lancaster County.
- ✓ Chaired and coordinated the Lancaster County Early Identification and Referral Task Force.
- ✓ Increased public awareness in the importance of early identification and developmental delays.
- ✓ Matched the needs of 27 children with the appropriate resources.

### Thank you to our partners!

- BabyNet
- Lancaster County Child Care Centers
- Lancaster County School District
- Local Pediatricians
- The Children's Council
- Springs Memorial Hospital
- DSS, DHEC, Disabilities and Special Needs Board

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# Incredible Years Parenting & Step By Step Resource Center

**Responsive and nurturing parenting sets the stage for children's social, emotional and academic development.**

## Program Description

In an effort to support positive social and behavioral development in young children, Lancaster County First Steps implemented the Incredible Years Program at Southside Early Childhood Center. Incredible Years has been effective in reducing children's aggression and behavioral problems in early childhood classrooms and at home. The Incredible Years program provides 10 weeks of group training for parents, with an emphasis on positive parenting strategies that promote children's social skills.

The following has been proven:

- Increases in parent positive affect such as praise and reduced use of criticism and negative commands
- Increases parental use of effective limit-setting by replacing spanking and harsh discipline with non-violent discipline techniques and increased monitoring of children
- Reductions in parental depression and increases in parental self-confidence
- Increases in positive family communication and problem solving
- Reduced conduct problems in children's interactions with parents and increases in their positive affect and compliance to parental commands.
- Increased access to books and educational items for use in the home through the use of the Step by Step Resource Center.

*Here's a great quote from a parent!*  
*The parenting sessions helped me and my family so much. I learned how to prepare my children for school. I really loved our trip to the Lancaster County Library to get library cards and the session that taught us how to make healthy snacks.*  
*Thank you Lancaster County First Steps!*

## Incredible Years Parenting & Step By Step Resource Center by the Numbers, 2015-2016

Children Served	55
Families Served	44
Training Sessions Offered	8



**This year, our Family Literacy & Learning initiatives had the following results:**

- ✓ 83% parents reported an increase in effective limit setting vs. spanking and harsh discipline.
- ✓ 72% parents reported an increase in praising instead of criticism and negative commands.
- ✓ 93% parents reported increasing the number of hours spent interacting with their children.
- ✓ 600 high-quality books were distributed to 100 children in local child care centers through collaboration with the BEE literacy program.

### *Thank you to our partners!*

**Southside Early Childhood Center**  
**Lancaster County Early Head Start**  
**Comporium Communications**  
**Community Investment Partners**

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# Weekend Backpack Feeding Program

**Children are more equipped to learn when their nutritional needs are met.**

## Program Description

Through our collaboration with Clinton Elementary School and Brooklyn Springs Elementary, it has become apparent to Lancaster County First Steps that many of the children that participate in the free and reduced lunch program have no way for their nutritional needs to be met on the weekends. In response to this need, the Weekend Backpack Feeding Program has been implemented at both schools.

Each week during the school year, Lancaster County First Steps will ensure that at-risk elementary students will receive a Weekend Backpack designed to supplement meals for children, who depend on school breakfasts and lunches, during the week. The Second Harvest Food Bank delivers packs of nutritious, child-friendly, nonperishable, easily consumed and vitamin fortified food packed in backpacks each Thursday. Several volunteers tag and distribute these backpacks to each classroom on Thursday afternoons.

On Friday, both schools discreetly distribute these bags to children to carry home for the weekend. Lancaster County First Steps also includes newsletters, lists of helpful resources for parents, developmentally appropriate fact sheets, nutrition, health and fitness tips, fun and informational education materials with the backpacks each week. If interested in volunteering to assist with this program, please call the Lancaster County First Steps office at (803) 286-8000.



## Weekend Backpack Feeding Program by the Numbers, 2015-2016

Children Served	425
Total Backpacks Distributed	13,713



### This year, our Weekend Backpack Feeding Program:

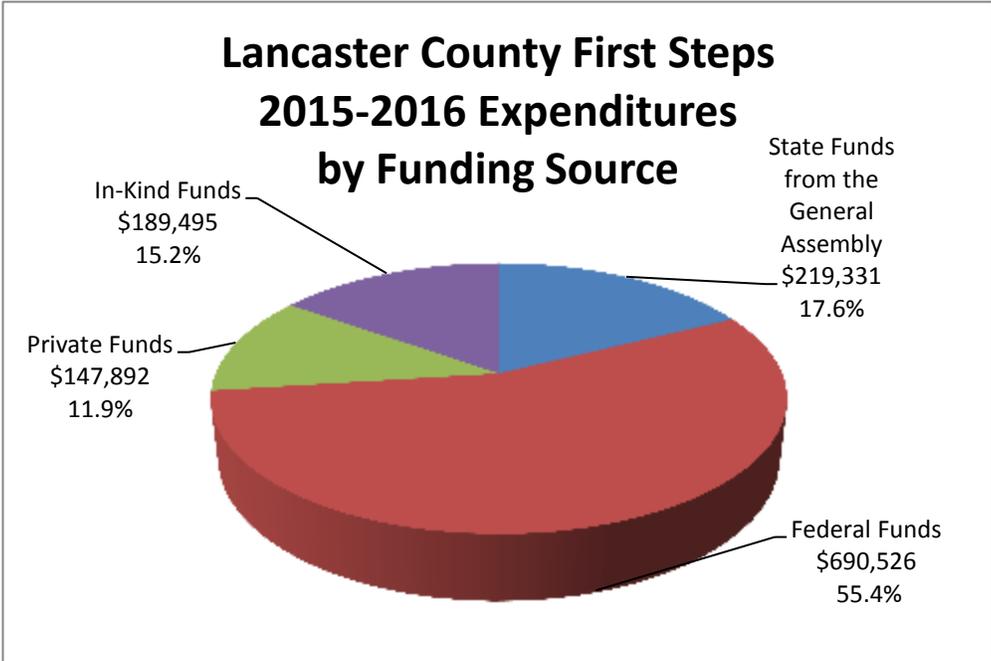
- ✓ Delivered 13,713 total backpacks to children at Clinton Elementary School and Brooklyn Springs Elementary School. Backpacks included non-perishable food items such as macaroni and cheese, canned goods, peanut butter, etc.
- ✓ On average 425 children were served each week.
- ✓ Ten (10) volunteers from the community assisted and made the program possible.
- ✓ Received funding from The Springs Close Foundation in conjunction with Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina.
- ✓ Served children in 4-K, Kindergarten, First Grade & Special Needs classrooms.

### Thank you to our partners!

- The Springs Close Foundation
- Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina
- Christian Services
- Clinton Elementary School
- Brooklyn Springs Elementary School
- Community Volunteers

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# Financial Impact



**Total 2015-2016 Expenditures: \$1,247,244**

**State Funds Leveraged in 2015-2016\*: 468.7%**

*\*Percentage of state dollars matched by additional federal, private, and/or in-kind funds*

## 2015-2016 Expenditures by Strategy

	State \$	Federal \$	Private \$	In-Kind \$	Total \$	% of 2015-16 Expenditures
Family Literacy / Parenting	\$64,005	\$0	\$5,536	\$0	\$69,541	5.6%
Imagination Library	\$0	\$0	\$25,474	\$141,717	\$167,191	13.4%
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$2,062	\$0	\$26,987	\$5,291	\$34,340	2.8%
EHS-Child Care Partnership Grant	\$45,339	\$690,526	\$750	\$16,471	\$753,085	60.4%
Backpack Feeding Program	\$14,587	\$0	\$83,008	\$0	\$97,595	7.8%
Early Identification & Referral	\$36,476	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$36,476	2.9%
Program Support	\$26,422	\$0	\$4,075	\$26,016	\$56,513	4.5%
Administrative Support	\$30,440	\$0	\$2,063	\$0	\$32,503	2.6%
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$219,331</b>	<b>\$690,526</b>	<b>\$147,892</b>	<b>\$189,495</b>	<b>\$1,247,244</b>	

*Unaudited numbers for the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016*

**Since inception, Lancaster County First Steps has leveraged \$5,372,591 from sources outside of state government. That's \$1.26 for every state dollar!**

## COUNTING DOWN TO SUCCESS IN KINDERGARTEN *Countdown to Kindergarten*

Countdown to Kindergarten allows children and their parents/caregivers to become familiar with the learning standards for Kindergarten and to feel comfortable with their very own Kindergarten teacher and classroom. Lancaster County elementary school principals believe that it is vital to begin working with incoming students as soon as possible and welcome Countdown to Kindergarten in their schools year after year.

Alberto Glavan Nava, grandmother of a Brooklyn Springs CTK participant, said: **"It meant so much to us that Wendy's teacher would come into our home during the summer and help us all know what to expect when she started school. This really gave her a head start. We loved it so much and only wish that she could come more often!"**



Sherry Bowers, a Kindergarten Teacher at Discovery School, said: **"Countdown to Kindergarten is so beneficial to all persons involved. For the parents, it allows them to meet and get to know who will be watching over and leading their children for the next 9 months. For the students, it allows them to know their teachers before they ever walk through the doors of the school and for the teachers, it allows them to get to know those students and gain knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses before the first formal assessment is ever given. To me Countdown to Kindergarten takes most of the speculation out of starting kindergarten and allows everyone to begin with a serene approach to this new venture."**

## *Thank You to Our Partners!*

### Funding Support

State of South Carolina: \$219,331  
*(through South Carolina First Steps)*

The Springs Close Foundation: \$86,700  
*(For Weekend Backpack Feeding Program)*

The Springs Close Foundation: \$24,300  
*(For Countdown to Kindergarten Summer 2016)*

United Way of Lancaster County: \$13,500  
*(For Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and  
 Countdown to Kindergarten)*

Lancaster County Partners for Youth: \$7,000  
*(For Early Childhood Initiatives)*

### In-Kind Support for 2015-2016

*Learn TV: \$26,016*

*Dollywood Foundation: \$141,717*

*Kaplan Early Learning Company: \$21,762*

**TOTAL IN-KIND FOR 2015-2016: \$189,495**



**Support Lancaster County First Steps today through a tax-deductible donation, or become a volunteer!**

## **NUTRITION IS ESSENTIAL TO LEARNING** *Weekend Backpack Feeding Program*

Clinton Elementary and Brooklyn Springs Elementary have the most at-risk elementary students in Lancaster County. To that end, the Weekend Backpack Feeding Program has been in operation at Clinton since September 2012 and at Brooklyn Springs since September 2015. According to Ms. Shirnetha Stinson, Principal of Brooklyn Springs, *"The Weekend Backpack Program has had a wonderful impact on the students of both schools. Each Friday, students receive a backpack of items that ensures a healthy meal is provided in their homes over the course of the weekend. The students and parents are very grateful as beneficiaries of such an awesome program. Parents and students look forward to receiving the backpack, and many have called to show their appreciation."*



## **GIVING INFANTS AND TODDLERS A HELPING HAND** *Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership*

Babies throughout Lancaster County are going to get a helping hand, even before they can walk.

Lancaster County First Steps was named the recipient of a \$6 million grant to establish an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership to ensure that children in Lancaster County, from infancy to age 3, receive a healthy and enriching start in life. Awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the funding marks an effort to expand the reach of Head Start programming by 25 percent nationwide. Lancaster County First Steps will continue to receive funding for this program through 2019.

In addition to this grant providing high-quality child care, the partnership would move families toward the important role of self-sufficiency. There will be intense work with the parents to best meet their needs, whether it is job training, medical care, nutrition education or other services.

Another component of the Early Head Start grant is professional development and coaching to improve caregivers' ability to provide early learning experiences that will promote the children's readiness to enter kindergarten.

Professional training will involve nine (9) licensed child care classrooms serving 72 children, but will also be open to all child care centers operating in Lancaster County.

Comprehensive services will include mental health counseling if needed, medical exams and screening, nutrition education, early diagnosis of developmental delays or disabilities, adult education and job training, and efforts to support family stability.



## IMAGINING A BRIGHTER TOMORROW FOR OUR CHILDREN

The Lancaster County First Steps Partnership Board Members are innovative individuals who join together to form a creative and imaginative entity. The Board is made up of gifted local leaders who are strong advocates for the most at-risk children in Lancaster County. This diverse body has served unselfishly, empowered staff members, engaged with local business leaders and policy makers in the Lancaster community, and managed resources purposefully to provide for the needs of young children. Each Board Member serves with dedication to make a compelling case for investing in early childhood education and helping our children imagine and achieve a better tomorrow.

*First Steps makes a difference in the lives of children in Lancaster County!!!*



## Lancaster County First Steps Partnership Board, 2015-2016

Name	Position	Board Category
Brian Bass ( <i>Board Chair</i> )	Founders Federal Credit Union	Parent of Pre-School Children
Dr. Paul N. McKenzie ( <i>Vice Chair</i> )	Lancaster County School District ( <i>Office of R &amp; D</i> )	Family Ed, Training & Support Provider
Diane Harrell ( <i>Board Secretary</i> )	Nurse Practitioner ( <i>CVS Minute Clinic</i> )	Healthcare Provider
Denise Pettit ( <i>Board Treasurer</i> )	Keller Williams Realty	Transportation Provider
Fred Witherspoon ( <i>Past Chair</i> )	Steele Hill AME Zion Church	Non-Profit Organization
Charlene McGriff	Palmetto Citizens Against Sexual Assault ( <i>PCASA</i> )	Non-Profit Organization
Crystal Adams	Lancaster County DSS	DSS Board Representative
Jackie Harris	Lancaster Children's Home	Early Childhood Provider
Jan Blackwell	DHEC Region Immunization Coordinator	Healthcare Provider
Janet Ellis	Lancaster County DHEC	DHEC Board Representative
Jeffrey Chandler	Chandler's Collision Center	Business Community
Jennifer Hammond	Comporium Communications	Business Community
Kathryn Plyler	Key Benefit Administrators	Business Community
Kerri Baker	Lynches River Electric Cooperative	Parent of Pre-School Child
LaVilla Brevard	Lancaster County School District ( <i>Southside Early Childhood</i> )	Faith Community / Head Start Rep
Lisa Willis	Retired Elementary Teacher	Early Childhood Provider
Narcizo Gonzalez Alvarez	Lancaster County DSS	DSS Board Representative
Nicole Trull	Comporium Communications	Business Community
Reo King	Retired Kindergarten Teacher	Early Childhood Provider
Sandra Meadows Jowers	Lancaster County School District ( <i>Clinton Elementary School</i> )	Pre-Kindergarten thru Primary Educator
Veronica Thompson	Lancaster County Chief Financial Officer	Accountant

# Getting children ready for school.

## What is First Steps?

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness was created in 1999 by the South Carolina General Assembly for the purpose of **having every child in South Carolina arrive at kindergarten ready to learn**. Sadly, many South Carolina children possess one or more risk factors that put them at **high risk** (greater than a 1 in 3 chance) for **“early school failure”** – either being retained or scoring below grade level in reading or math – by third grade.

First Steps works to accomplish its mission through a state coordinating office and a network of county partnerships (46), each a private non-profit organization led by a board of early childhood stakeholders. With a modest recurring appropriation of state funding, First Steps leverages cash and in-kind resources at the federal, state and local level to improve services for young children in five strategy areas:

### **Family Strengthening**

A parent is a child’s first and best teacher.

### **Healthy Start**

Children’s development and ability to learn are profoundly impacted by their health.

### **Quality Child Care**

Access to high-quality child care is a critical component of a child’s healthy development.

### **Early Education**

Quality preschool opportunities set the stage for success in school.

### **Early Intervention**

Addressing disabilities and developmental delays early for positive outcomes.

### **School Transition**

Preparing children and parents for a successful transition into kindergarten.

Each First Steps county partnership determines how to spend its funds based on a needs and resources assessment and collaboration with community partners to fill gaps in local services for young children and their families. First Steps has proven its impact through strong program and fiscal accountability and independent evaluations - a requirement of its enabling legislation.

All programs that receive First Steps funding must adhere to standards that require programs to be research-based and operated with fidelity; staff who have appropriate qualifications, training, and supervision; services to be comprehensive and coordinated with available community resources; standard assessment instruments that document client outcomes; and programs that target services to children most at-risk for not being developmentally ready for school.



**BabyNet**

South Carolina’s Early Intervention System

First Steps is the lead agency for BabyNet, South Carolina’s early intervention system for children under 3. Parents of children 0-2 years old with disabilities or suspected developmental delays should contact their local BabyNet office to schedule an evaluation.

BabyNet in Lancaster County:  
 (803) 222-5360

<http://scfirststeps.org/babynet/>

## The Goals of First Steps

- (1) **Provide parents with access to the support they might seek and want** to strengthen their families and to promote the optimal development of their preschool children;
- (2) **Increase comprehensive services** so children have reduced risk for major physical, developmental, and learning problems;
- (3) **Promote high-quality preschool programs** that provide a healthy environment that will promote normal growth and development;
- (4) **Provide services** so all children receive the protection, nutrition, and health care needed to thrive in the early years of life so they arrive at school ready to succeed; and
- (5) **Mobilize communities** to focus efforts on providing enhanced services to support families and their young children so as to enable every child to reach school healthy and ready to succeed.

-- Section 59-152-30

**Lancaster County  
 First Steps**

**Board Chair  
 Brian Bass  
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