



# 2024 Progress Report

South Carolina's  
Birth through Five Plan

March 2024



South Carolina  
**Early Childhood  
Advisory Council**



# South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council

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## Introduction

In February 2022, the South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) released *For Our Future: South Carolina's Birth through Five Plan* – a roadmap for optimizing the state's early childhood system and working towards a shared vision of success for every child. The plan represents the collaboration of numerous state agencies, input from dozens of leaders, and the voices of thousands of parents and caregivers.

We are pleased to present the ECAC's second annual progress report. This report reflects our dedication to maintaining focus on outcomes for young children and their families. Additionally, it demonstrates our commitment to continuous improvement and transparency regarding both the areas where we have made significant strides and those where progress remains challenging.

This report is organized into three sections. The first section presents salient data points related to child and family needs. The second section describes progress made towards priorities set in 2023. The final section sets forth our priorities in 2024.

As in 2023, our annual strategic priorities represent a sustained commitment to the collaborative spirit of *For Our Future*. We recognize that real change for South Carolina's children can only be achieved when our early childhood system is aligned, coordinated, and centered around the needs and aspirations of families.

# Needs and Resources

The Early Childhood Advisory Council regards data as an important instrument for gauging progress and identifying opportunities for improvement within the state’s early childhood system. Presented here are select data points that underscore the persistent and emerging needs of young children and their families across the state.

## HEALTH & WELL-BEING

**50%** 50% of South Carolina’s children 0-5 received coordinated, ongoing, comprehensive care within a medical home in 2020-21, compared to 53% in 2018-19.

All but five counties in South Carolina were whole or partial dental Health Professional Shortage Areas in 2022.

## FAMILY & COMMUNITY

More parents/caregivers reported the need for help in early learning and education (56%-75%) than in health and well-being (20%-55%) and family support (22%-53%).

**80%** Most parents/caregivers (80% or more) agreed that their communities are safe, supportive, appreciate and respect diversity and cultural differences, and have resources and services for children.

## EARLY LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

**52%** 52% of licensed, registered, or approved child care providers in South Carolina participate in ABC Quality, the state’s voluntary quality rating and improvement system.

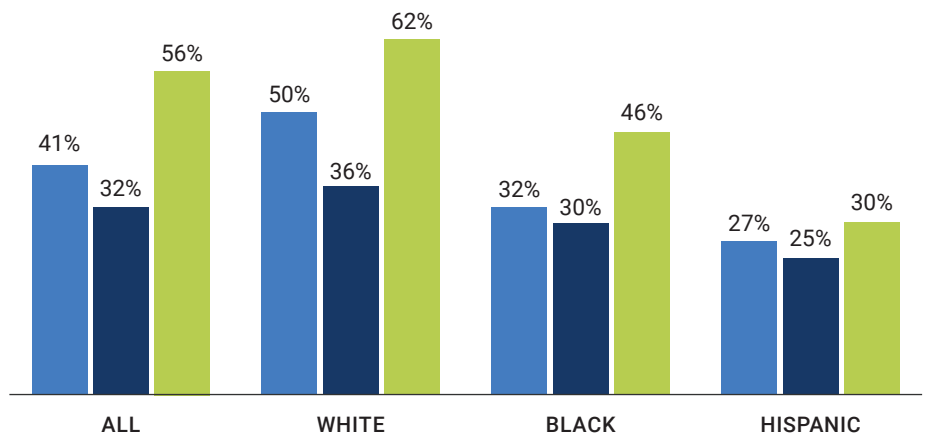


According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in South Carolina, there were 340 more child care workers, 1520 fewer preschool teachers, 120 more kindergarten teachers, and 10 fewer directors/administrators in early education settings in 2022 than in 2018.

### PERCENT OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS DEMONSTRATING READINESS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND POVERTY

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (Fall 2023)

- Overall
- In Poverty
- Not in Poverty



# Progress on 2023 Priorities



1

## Increase participation in publicly funded preschool programs.

According to the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), there are fewer children in poverty, and more four-year olds attending pre-K (CERDEP) programs. Four-year-olds living in poverty who participated in high quality programs demonstrated greater readiness on assessments compared with similar four-year-olds who did not (41% of students served in a state-funded CERDEP program were demonstrating readiness on the KRA, compared to 27% percent of non-CERDEP pupils in poverty). However, disparities in readiness are growing. Fewer Black and Hispanic children demonstrated readiness in 2022 than in 2020. Increasing participation in publicly funded programs should continue as a priority through 2024.

2

## Increase availability of quality child care, particularly in high need areas.

SC Department of Social Services (DSS) served 38,836 children in calendar year 2023 via the COVID 300 and SC Working Families Child Care Scholarship programs. In October 2020, DSS expanded the SC Voucher program to all working parents whose household income is at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. Beginning October 1, 2023, SC Working Families Child Care Scholarships were made available for parents with income at or below 85% of the state median income (\$64,068 for a family of three).

In August 2023, DSS approved more than \$87 million in materials grants for 2,052 existing providers, funding a wide range of activities, such as classroom materials, outdoor equipment, renovations, and other improvements. DSS also developed and implemented a startup grants process for new child care providers in collaboration with the South Carolina Child Care Resource and Referral Network. More than 80 applicants enrolled in the Success Grant program.

3

## Recruit and retain early education professionals.

DSS developed three initiatives to recruit and retain child care professionals. First, in September 2023, DSS' SC Endeavors doubled Smart Money Bonus payments for individuals who earn a credential. Second, contracts were completed on January 1, 2024, with Palmetto Shared Services Alliance (PSSA) to begin providing access to services for all regulated child care programs in South Carolina. These contracts include the development of a substitute pool for programs. Finally, SC BOO\$T, a pilot program of SC Endeavors developed a one-time wage supplement for child care teachers to help increase retention for child care employees. This pilot program launched in February 2024.

4

## Provide families with the ability to apply for publicly funded programs at times and in ways that meet their needs.

First Five SC was introduced in 2022. Like its predecessor, Palmetto Pre-K, First Five SC launched as an eligibility screener for publicly funded programs based on where a family lives. Since its launch in February 2022 and through December 2023, 221,986 unique visitors went to the First Five SC website, and 23,269 (10%) completed the eligibility screener. In May 2023, First Five SC began offering a common application for many programs and services where the entered information pre-fills onto additional forms. From May through December 2023, 1737 applications were submitted.

5

## Collect, integrate, and share data to better understand who is served, where service gaps exist, and where to target resources and services.

Integrated early childhood program data helps stakeholders make informed decisions and target resources to meet the needs of South Carolina's youngest children and their families. Data sharing initiatives will make aggregate-level data publicly available, while maintaining privacy and security.

# 2024 Priorities

1

## **Increase participation in publicly funded preschool programs.**

To reduce achievement gaps, including but not limited to race, ethnic group, and income, and to ensure that more eligible children are enrolled in high quality programs, increasing participation in programs must remain a priority in 2024. High quality programs include Head Start, a federally funded program, state supported programs like First Steps 4K, and state, federal and locally supported programs like public school pre-K.

2

## **Collect, integrate, and share data to better understand who is served, where service gaps exist, and where to target resources and services.**

The importance of integrated data is exemplified by the complexity of pre-K enrollment. To understand where to “fill slots or build slots,” partners must collect and report data that includes all pre-K enrollments, not just those required by CERDEP legislation. A fully functioning shared and integrated data system will allow questions like these and others to be answered. Through 2024 ECAC will review and approve policies that build and support a robust integrated data system.

3

## **Expand support to help families access the services and supports they need.**

A range of initiatives are underway to understand the environment and maximize opportunities for families to obtain the program and services they need. Projects include completing a language access landscape analysis, increasing access to parenting and home visiting programs, promoting enrollment in programs like WIC and Healthy Steps, and submitting collaborative applications to finance this work.

4

## **Expand access to screening, identification of disabilities and referrals for treatment and services.**

Early identification of delays or disabilities is essential to assuring that young children receive the treatment they need to thrive. A statewide screening registry is the first step. Assessment, referrals, and intervention then can follow.

5

## **Promote and support personal and social-skill building.**

Nurturing and responsive relationships in early childhood are the foundation for lifelong resilience and mental health. The following activities will support strong foundations: professional development that includes reflective supervision, as well as training about trauma-informed care and pyramid models; access to consultation to address challenging behaviors; and updating suspension and expulsion policies in early childhood settings.







## Needs and Resources Data: Citations

National Survey of Children's Health (2020-21). [Available from: <https://www.childhealthdata.org/learn-about-the-nsch/NSCH/data>].

From page 131 of South Carolina State Health Assessment (December 2023). [Available from: <https://scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/SHA-Report-1.8.24.pdf>].

"Preschool Development Grant: Parent/Caregiver Survey Summary (April 2023)". University of South Carolina College of Education. [Available from: <https://www.earlychildhoodsc.org/media/ujzashhb/needs-assessment-parent-caregiver-survey-and-interview-summary.pdf>].

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Fall 2023 South Carolina Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. Data obtained directly from the SC Department of Education.

Data from South Carolina Department of Services reported (reported for July 2023).

As cited in "Early Childhood Education Program and Workforce Needs Assessment: Preliminary Synopsis (April 2023)". Table 22. University of South Carolina's Research Evaluation and Measurement Center. [Available from: <https://www.earlychildhoodsc.org/media/m5afgpf3/pdg-ece-workforce-needs-assessment-april-2023-update.pdf>]. 2018 vs. 2021 data: child care workers: 6,700 vs. 5,780; preschool teachers: 5,940 vs. 4,570; kindergarten teachers: 2,120 vs. 2,190; child care administrators/directors: 540 vs. 590. And May 2022 data from Bureau of Labor Statistics <https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/geoOcc/Multiple%20occupations%20for%20one%20geographical%20area>



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