

STRATEGIC PLAN

2027 – 2029





Vision

Saluda County children will be equipped to reach their highest potential.

Mission

Saluda County First Steps works in collaboration with parents, caregivers, and our community; provides opportunities and experiences; and engages support to ensure that all children start school ready to reach their highest potential.

Values

Children: The years of early childhood are critical windows of development during which much of human potential is shaped. All children are inherently worthy of receiving the best possible start in life and are the most valuable resource for the future of Saluda County.

Relationships: Families are the single most important influence on the development of young children. Responsive, nurturing relationships with consistent caregivers in a safe, stimulating learning environment create the best possible chance for children's healthy development and school readiness.

Equity: We value and demonstrate diverse perspectives in the development of programs. Services must be individualized and adaptable to meet the unique needs of children and families, and we provide the programs necessary for all families to have the opportunity to be successful.

High Quality and Results-Oriented: Services must be high-quality and have evidence of success. First Steps operates within a culture of accountability.

Goal

At least 30% of Saluda County's children are ready for kindergarten by 2029.

Message from the Executive Director



Kim Chariker

Executive Director
Saluda County First Steps

Our journey in the data collection, discussions, work sessions, and community surveys to develop our FY27-29 Strategic Plan has been informative and rewarding. The development of new relationships, sustaining and renewing familiar relationships within our community as partners in the success of our young children has enabled us to provide the highest quality of services.

Saluda County First Steps is taking the lead in our community to ensure that young children, their families and caregivers, school district, and childcare providers are receiving programming and resources needed to ensure the highest quality of care and early education for success.

We collaborate with our community partners, donors, and supporters to establish a goal of excellence and continued success for our young children within Saluda County, SC. #OneSaluda

Kim Chariker, ED
Saluda County First Steps

Strategic Plan Process

SURVEY

Distribute a community survey to understand needs and resources for families with young children

July 2025 – September 2025



UNDERSTAND

Review local data and map assets to understand the state of young children, their families, and the early childhood system

July 2025 – November 2025



PRIORITIZE

Organize the insight gathered from the surveys and data to prioritize the concerns, needs, and gaps the partnership wants to address, and formalize the Needs Assessment

July 2025 – November 2025



PLAN

Write the partnership's three-year Strategic Plan using the Needs Assessment

November 2025 – January 2026



APPLY

Utilize the Strategic Plan to inform the partnership's Three-Year Grant Application

March 2026



IMPLEMENT

Execute the programs and services outlined in the Strategic Plan

July 2026 – June 2029



MONITOR

Track the partnership's progress on implementing programs to fidelity and on achieving the Strategic Plan

July 2026 – June 2029



Priority Area One: Provide high-intensity LEAP programming for 4K students to increase KRA scores demonstrating readiness to 30% by 2029.

INPUTS <i>What resources in the county exist? Is there funding available to support your proposed activities?</i>	STRATEGIES <i>What is the local partnership going to do? Label as program or core function activity</i>
- Longstanding partnership with Saluda School District One - Strong relationships with childcare providers, CERDEP centers, and family-home providers	- Program: Provide LEAP (Literacy, Early math, And Preparation for Kindergarten) to all identified 4K students within Saluda School District One - Program: Sustain Child Care Training for our local childcare centers and family-home providers
OUTPUTS <i>SMART, tangible indicators of progress</i>	OUTCOMES <i>SMART effects of program or services measured during or shortly after enrollment</i>
- Retain 2 part-time staff members through our local school district to implement LEAP program through June 2029 - Enroll additional students into high-intensity, evidenced-based early educational programs such as LEAP	- Increase KRA demonstrating readiness scores for Saluda County, SC from 20% to 30% by June 2029 - Increase number of 4K students served in LEAP from 48 to 52 by June 2029
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS <i>Characteristics of individuals or their environment that may affect which participants benefit more from a program and which participants benefit less or not at all.</i>	
- Maintain 2 School Readiness Support Specialists for the LEAP program to ensure all 4K classrooms are served - Additional grant resources may be requested to expand/enhanced LEAP	

Priority Area Two: Increase the number of parents enrolled in high intensity programs funded by Saluda County First Steps

INPUTS <i>What resources in the county exist? Is there funding available to support your proposed activities?</i>	STRATEGIES <i>What is the local partnership going to do? Label as program or core function activity</i>
- Continue collaboration with Westview Behavioral for Positive Parenting Program - Strong relationships with local school district, local licensed childcare centers and family-home providers, GLEAMNS, and other county agencies that provide services to families of young children	- Program: Provide Positive Parenting Program classes within Saluda County (English and Spanish) - Core: Recruitment of families for parenting classes through local community events participation
OUTPUTS <i>SMART, tangible indicators of progress</i>	OUTCOMES <i>SMART effects of program or services measured during or shortly after enrollment</i>
Increase number of parents participating in high intensity parenting program by 10% through Saluda County First Steps by the end of June 2029	Increase number of parents participating in high-intensity parenting programs from 23 to 25 by June 2029
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS <i>Characteristics of individuals or their environment that may affect which participants benefit more from a program and which participants benefit less or not at all.</i>	
- More Recruitment of Hispanic families for ever growing majority of the population within Saluda County, as well as non-Hispanic families in need - READY and Lipscomb Family Foundation Grants funding to provide additional services for families in Saluda County.	

Priority Area Three: Affordable Quality Child Care within Saluda County

INPUTS <i>What resources in the county exist? Is there funding available to support your proposed activities?</i>	STRATEGIES <i>What is the local partnership going to do? Label as program or core function activity</i>
• Strong relationships with ABC Quality childcare providers, CERDEP centers, and family-home providers • Provide continued SC Endeavors certified training for all local childcare providers • Strong relationships with ABC Quality and SCDSS	• Program: Sustain childcare scholarship program • Program: Sustain childcare training program • Core: Refer eligible families to SCDSS for childcare scholarship opportunities
OUTPUTS <i>SMART, tangible indicators of progress</i>	OUTCOMES <i>SMART effects of program or services measured during or shortly after enrollment</i>
• Increase number of childcare scholarships provided from 5 to 10 scholarships by June 2029 • Provide SC Endeavors certified childcare training hours required by SCDSS annually (15 Staff 20 Directors)	• Increase number of scholarships provided to Saluda County families of young children from 5 to 10 by June 2029
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS <i>Characteristics of individuals or their environment that may affect which participants benefit more from a program and which participants benefit less or not at all.</i>	
• Provide the SC Endeavors certified training for quality at no cost to providers • Provide Childcare Scholarships to eligible families • Currently the number of ABC Scholarships is uncertain and is dependent on maintaining and increasing enrollment	

Acknowledgments

Saluda County First Steps would like to acknowledge the support we received in successfully developing our FY27-29 Strategic Plan from our Saluda County First Steps Board members, Saluda School District One administration and staff, Saluda County DSS, Westview Behavioral staff, and other community partners. We used data collected from community survey responses and discussions. As we focused on the greatest needs within our county at this time, we were mindful to address the three greatest needs represented within our county. Our commitment to ensuring that our children succeed in school as well as in life is represented within the priorities addressed within our FY27-29 Strategic Plan.

