4K FIRST STEPS SOUTH CAROLINA

Family Handbook

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PROGRAM GOALS

The goal of the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (4K) is to provide children and their families with the developmental and learning support necessary for school success.

Each program shall:

- Provide a healthy, safe and nurturing environment that encourages emotional, social, physical and intellectual development that children must have in order to be ready for school.
- Make learning fun so children will develop a desire to be lifelong learners.
- Encourage language development, creativity and an appreciation of fine arts.
- Support comprehensive, systemic approach to reading and successfully complete the readiness assessment.
- Encourage children to interact successfully with other children and adults and to live and work together in a cooperative environment which promotes decision making, peaceful resolution of conflicts and respect for others.
- Incorporate parenting education, including strengthening parent involvement in the learning process with an emphasis on interactive literacy.
- Identify community and civic organizations that can support early literacy efforts.

OPERATING POLICIES & PROCEDURES

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Regular attendance is crucial to your child's success. Each family must agree to send their child to First Steps 4K for 6.5 hours of instructional time, five days per week, 180 days a year (or 8 hours of instructional time for 220 days a week, if applicable). A child who is chronically tardy or absent may be released from the program.

DISTRICT/SCHOOL CALENDAR

First Steps 4K follows the traditional 180-day school year. All First Steps 4K providers are given their choice of Service Options to expand the days and/or hours of student service to 220 days and/or 8 hours each day. A copy of the school calendar is included in this handbook. Confirm your First Steps 4K provider's choice of Service Option with your Director.

TUITION

No parent is required to pay tuition or any fees solely for the purpose of enrolling in or attending First Steps 4K. Tuition or fees may be charged for Extended-Care or Wrap-Around Care provided.

EXTENDED CARE/WRAP AROUND CARE

Extended-Care or Wrap-Around Care may be provided on site at a cost for families. All First Steps 4K families are eligible to receive wrap around care through the First Steps 4K + Siblings scholarship program. First Steps 4K + Siblings scholarships are administered by SC Voucher.

Only authorized people with proper identification will be allowed to pick up your child from the provider or meet them off of the bus.

TRANSPORTATION

Providers may offer transportation for eligible students. Providers may not charge fees for transportation to eligible students. All transportation services provided must adhere with the requirements detailed in South Carolina Section 56-5-195 (See Appendix G: Jacob's Law). Providers offering transportation may specify their own transportation routes and must make parents aware of these routes upon enrollment. Parents must fill out and sign the First Steps 4K Transportation Permission Slip at the First Steps 4K provider.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Your child will engage in active learning with hands-on developmentally appropriate experiences. An opportunity for a brief rest time will be incorporated into each instructional day. Rest time may be necessary to address the specific individual needs of children. Children unable to sleep during the rest period shall be allowed to read or participate in another quiet activity. A copy of the daily classroom schedule will be provided to you by your child's teacher.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of information about the child and family will always be maintained. Enrollment forms and all other information concerning the child and family will be accessible to the parent/guardian, principal, teaching staff and licensing agency. Information concerning the child will not be made available to anyone by any means, without the expressed written consent of the parent/guardian.

DISCIPLINE AND GUIDANCE POLICY – CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE®

First Steps 4K implements Conscious Discipline® in all classrooms. Conscious Discipline® is an evidence-based comprehensive program that includes:

- School climate changes
- Social-emotional competency changes in adults
- Social-emotional competency changes in children
- Behavioral and resiliency changes
- Classroom management shift from external rewards and punishments to problem-solving
- Academic Success

Please read more about Conscious Discipline® at consciousdiscipline.com.

Punishment or harsh treatment does not encourage the goals of good discipline. Our program does not allow corporal punishment by any staff or parent/guardian. Corporal punishment is defined as any treatment that humiliates or treats the child disrespectfully. This includes, but is not limited to spanking, belittling, shaming, shaking, depriving food, water, naps, outside time, or bathroom facilities, unsupervised isolation, or improperly restricting the movement of the child. It is our strong belief that these methods work against the healthy growth and development of a child.

THE SCHOOL FAMILY

School climate impacts all achievement. The culture of a school can build cooperation, willingness and responsibility. The School Family is built on a healthy family model, with goals for all family members to meet their highest potential. The School Family builds connections between families and schools, teachers and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students to ensure the highest development of all.

These connections provide the three essential ingredients for school success:

A willingness to learn: Without willingness, each interaction becomes a power struggle instead of a learning opportunity.The School Family brings all children, especially the most difficult, to a place of willingness through a sense of belonging.

Impulse control: Connection with others is the construct that literally wires the brain for impulse control. Disconnected children are disruptive and prone to aggressive or bullying behaviors. External reward/punishment systems cannot improve a child's ability to self-regulate because they are not designed to teach new skills. The School Family uses connection to encourage impulse control while teaching self-regulation skills in context.

Attention: Our attentional system is sensitive to stress and becomes engaged with positive emotions. The School Family reduces stress while creating an atmosphere of caring, encouragement and meaningful contributions. These components are essential for children to develop and apply sustained attention.

The School Family is created through routines, rituals and structures. The School Family creates a fundamental shift in education and classroom management. Step into a world where intrinsic motivation, helpfulness, problem-solving and connection govern your child's classroom.

EDUCATIONAL INSTRUCTION

CURRICULUM

All aspects of the learning environment, including equipment and materials, classroom environment, outdoor environment, staff child interactions, teaching strategies, and learning center provisions must be founded on current early childhood research and focus on the developmental and academic needs of four-year-old children. These are the three research-based curriculum models that may be implemented in our First Steps 4K Program.

The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool

The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features exploration and discovery as a way of learning, enabling children to develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical-thinking skills. It emphasizes establishing a partnership with families and offers practical ideas for explaining the instruction to families. For more information visit, teachingstrategies.com.

HighScope Preschool Curriculum

In the HighScope approach adult-child interactions are very important, both in small groups and individually. Large group time should be meaningful to the children and limited to a small amount of time in the daily schedule. Children PLAN their learning, DO or interact with the learning in small groups or individually, then come back to group time to REVIEW what they did and learned that day. HighScope is based on the research by Dr. David Weikart. For more information visit, highscope.org.

The Montessori Method

The Montessori Method emphasizes learning as a process that cannot be determined by a child's age. Instead, learning is a process that is determined by the rate and speed at which a child acquires one skill before moving on to another skill. The method is based on respect of the child, families and environment. Montessori classrooms offer child-centered schedules, enhanced individual and small group learning, promote a community classroom learning atmosphere and commonly have mixed-aged groupings. For more information visit, montessori.org.

ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING

To individualize the curriculum to meet each child's developmental stage and areas of interests, a number of screening and assessment tools are utilized.

My Teaching Strategies GOLD® is an authentic, ongoing, observation-based assessment system. This means we...

- observe your child during regular, everyday activities
- document what we see and hear by taking notes, collecting samples of your child's drawings and writing attempts, or taking photos, audio recordings, or video clips;
- exchange information with you to gain a more complete picture of what your child knows and can do;
- compare the collected information to research-based, widely held expectations for children of similar ages; and use the information to plan experiences that support your child's learning and meet their individual needs.

To learn more about our curriculum and assessment process visit teachingstrategies.com.

The benefits of developmental child assessments are the following:

- Your child's strengths and needs are clearly identified for you, your child, and the teacher.
- Teachers focus on your child as an individual and set specific goals for him or her.
- Your child is observed and evaluated on 38 research-based objectives that include predictors of school success and are aligned with state early learning guidelines.
- The process of evaluating your child is connected to what happens in the classroom. Documentation from the assessment will be shared with families at least twice a year.

EARLY LITERACY ASSESSMENT

Proviso 1A.76 of the General Appropriations Act of 2014 requires a readiness assessment focused on early language and literacy development be administered to all students attending a publicly funded pre-kindergarten or public kindergarten by the 45th day of the school year. First Steps 4K will use GOLD® by Teaching Strategies for early language and literacy development assessment to all publicly funded 4K classrooms.

All publicly funded students participating in a First Steps 4K class will be assessed using GOLD®.

HEALTH, WELLNESS, & SAFETY

HEALTH RECORDS

All sites shall comply with the South Carolina Department of Social Services Licensing Regulations for Private and Public Child Care Health, Safety and Sanitation requirements.

A health record for each child shall be maintained in the school. Each health record shall include all of the following information:

- A statement, signed by the parent/guardian, of the child's health prior to admission to the Child Development class. (DSS Form 2900)
- A current copy of the child's immunization record signed by a physician or other health official. This record should indicate that all required immunizations are complete as recommended by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), or that the appropriate official has provided written proof that the child meets either medical or religious exemption requirements; and
- Other health information deemed necessary by the program director and/or by the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Please refer to your provider's policies concerning illness, medication, minor injuries and emergencies.

REPORTING OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

All First Steps 4K programs are mandated by law to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. The law requires reporting the following:

- Any physical injury, sexual or emotional abuse inflicted on a child other than by accidental means by those responsible for his/her care, custody and control (with the exception of discipline including spanking administered in a reasonable manner) shall be construed to be abuse.
- Failure to provide by those responsible for the care, custody and control of the child, the proper or necessary support, education as required by law, medical, surgical or any other care necessary for his/her well-being shall be classified as neglect.

Families may not be informed of reporting if such confidence may hinder a full investigation.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The SC Child Early Reading Development and Education Program recognizes that families are their child's first, longest lasting and most important teachers. We want families to be actively engaged in their child's education this school year and for many school years to come.

Research shows strong family engagement in the early years is critical to promoting children's healthy development and wellness including social-emotional and behavioral development, school preparation, seamless transition to kindergarten and academic achievement in elementary school and beyond!

PARENT/FAMILY WORKSHOPS

A series of Parent/Family workshops and/or Parenting Programs on various topics may be offered throughout the school year. Families are strongly encouraged to attend these.

FAMILY-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Schools will report at least three times a year to the parent(s)/guardian(s) on his/her child's progress.

- Contacts will include family-teacher conferences during the school year. Conferences will be a time for families to learn about their child's experiences and developmental progress. Documentation of your child's progress will be shared during the conference.
- The final review of your child's progress will be provided at the end of the school year.

Additional conferences may be scheduled at the request of either the teaching staff or family when deemed necessary.

COMMUNICATION

Each First Steps 4K program believes in building a partnership with all families of the children enrolled. Open communication is the most important characteristic of this partnership and is considered the most beneficial to the children's learning and development. Families are encouraged to share information that would be helpful in the staff's caring of their child. The teaching staff will also share information with families about their child and the program using various modes of communication including:

- Phone calls
- Face-to-face conversations
- E-mails
- Regular newsletters
- Written notes
- Virtual platforms

CLASSROOM VISITS

All families are encouraged to visit their child's class to observe or participate in classroom activities. There is always room for families to spend time with their child or to share talents, hobbies, and interests with all the children.

FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The schools that are participating in First Steps 4K truly believe families are their child's first, longest lasting, and most important teachers. The selected schools see their role as that of a partner. The Family-School Partnership Agreement symbolizes this partnership. It is a document that outlines how families and teachers can share the responsibility for the success of each child.

We ask that each parent/guardian agree to strive to the following:

- Believe that your child can learn
- Demonstrate that you value education and that school is important
- Ensure your child attends school regularly and is on time
- Set aside time each day to talk with your child about his or her learning
- Read to your child daily and allow your child to see you read daily
- Provide a home environment that encourages your child to do his/her best
- Provide structured sleeping and eating habits for your child
- Attend scheduled conferences

Your child's teacher will strive to:

- Believe that each child can learn
- Respect and value the uniqueness of each child and his or her family
- Provide a safe environment that promotes active hands-on learning
- Provide frequent communication with newsletters, reports, and telephone call
- Seek ways to engage families in the school program
- Schedule conferences to accommodate families' schedules
- Welcome the participation of families in the classroom and their support in helping their children succeed

Please sign a copy of this Agreement located at the end of the handbook, and return to your child's teacher.

The last page is for signatures - to be signed and included in child's records.

SC FIRST STEPS 4K CALENDAR 2022-2023

scfirststeps.org

AUG 2022

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	6
7	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	12	13
14	**15**	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

VIRTUAL

2-3: Palmetto PreK Jamboree

3-5: New Teacher Academy

4: New Director Academy

IN PERSON

8-9: All Teacher Academy

10-11: Leadership Academy

15: Student Day 1, (optional Family Drop-In Day)

SEPT 2022

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
				1	2	3
4	**5**	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	**26**	27	28	29	30	

5: Labor Day, 4K Class Closed

26: 4K Regional Professional Development Day, 4K Class Closed

OCT 2022

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	**18**	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

18: Day #45

NOV 2022

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
		1	2	3	**4**	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	**23**	**24**	**25**	26
27	28	29	30			

4: 4K Professional Development Day, 4K Class Closed

4: Fall Gold® Assessment Checkpoint

9: Day #60, 1st Progress Report to Parents

23-25: Thanksgiving Holiday

DEC 2022

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	24
25	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**	31

19-30: Winter Break, 4K Class Closed

JAN 2023

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
1	**2**	3	4	5	6	7
8	**9**	**10**	**11**	12	13	14
15	**16**	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	**25**	26	27	28
29	30	31				

2: Last day Winter Break, 4K Class closed

9-11: New Teacher Academy

10: Day #90

16: Martin Luther King, Jr.Day, 4K Class Closed

25: Day #100

FEB 2023

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	**17**	18
19	**20**	21	22	**23**	24	25
26	27	28				

17: Winter Gold® Assessment Checkpoint

20: Presidents' Day, 4K Class Closed

23: Day #120, 2nd Progress Report

MAR 2023

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
			1	2	**3**	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	**17**	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

3: Spring Palmetto PreK Jamboree, 4K PD Day, 4K Class Closed

17: Day #135

APR 2023

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
						1
2	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	**28**	29
30						

3-7: Spring Break, 4K Class Closed

8: Easter Sunday

28: Day #160

MAY 2023

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	**17**	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	**26**	27
28	**29**	30	31			

17: Spring Gold® Assessment Checkpoint

26: Day #180, Last Day for 180-day programs, 3rd Progress Report

29: Memorial Day, 4K Class Closed

JUNE 2023

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

JULY 2023

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
						1
2	3	**4**	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	**13**	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	**25**	26	27	28	29
30	31					

4: Independence Day holiday, 4K class closed

13: Summer Gold® Assessment Checkpoint

25: Day # 220, Last day for 220-day programs, 4th Progress Report

Inclement Weather Make-Up Days: November 23, December 19, February 20 – SC First Steps 4K has designated 3 inclement weather days. In case of inclement weather, these days will become normal school days if needed. If no inclement weather make-up days are required, these days will be holidays for the 4K classes. Since there is a high likelihood these days will become school days, we encourage all NOT to plan trips or special events on these days. Adjustments are likely to be made during the year. For the most recent school calendar, visit https://scfirststeps.org/what-we-do/first-steps-4k/

Keep this document for use during the school year

Please sign and return this document to your child's teacher.

Family-School Partnership Agreement

Please sign a copy of this Agreement and return to your child's teacher.

The schools that are participating in 4K truly believe families are their child's first, longest lasting, and most important teachers. The selected schools see their role as that of a partner. The Family-School Partnership Agreement symbolizes this partnership. It is a document that outlines how families and teachers can share the responsibility for the success of each child.

Student's Name: _____

As a parent/guardian, I, _____ will strive to:

- ☐ Believe my child can learn
- ☐ Demonstrate that I value education and that school is important
- ☐ Ensure my child attends school regularly and is on time
- ☐ Set aside time each day to talk with my child about his or her learning
- ☐ Read to my child daily and allow my child to see me read daily
- ☐ Provide a home environment that encourages my child to do his/her best
- ☐ Provide structured sleeping and eating habits
- ☐ Attend conferences

Signature: _____ Date: _____

As a teacher, I, _____ will strive to:

- ☐ Believe that each child can learn
- ☐ Respect and value the uniqueness of each child and his or her family
- ☐ Provide a safe environment that promotes active hands-on learning
- ☐ Provide frequent communication with newsletters, reports, and telephone call
- ☐ Seek ways to engage families in the school program
- ☐ Schedule conferences to accommodate families' schedules
- ☐ Welcome the participation of families in the classroom and their support in helping their children succeed

Signature: _____ Date: _____

FIRST STEPS 4K
SOUTH CAROLINA

Funding for First Steps 4K is authorized by the SC Legislature through the SC Child Early Reading and Development Education Program (CERDEP).

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