



Vision 2013: Connect South Carolina’s high-risk children to coordinated, individualized interventions designed to improve their educational and developmental trajectories.

THEME A:
**SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN SOUTH CAROLINA’S TARGETED
SCHOOL READINESS INTERVENTIONS**

RECOMMENDATION A1. Recognizing the high costs and diminished outcomes associated with exposure to compounded readiness risk factors, develop methods to provide coordinated, individualized interventions to the state’s most high-risk children.

Strategy A1a. Work with selected First Steps County Partnerships to pilot the Board’s proposed “individualized readiness plan” methodology. Consider the use of BabyNet’s individualized service model as a model framework through which to link priority First Steps clients to comprehensive supports to include contracted services as necessary, with First Steps serving as a public “payor of last resort.” (e.g. Prioritize linkages to other public/community services, use First Steps funds to procure supports unavailable via alternate means.)

Strategy A1b. Refocus the First Steps program standards for FY11 around providing integrated services to high-risk clients (those possessing multiple readiness risk factors). Require county-level planning designed to ensure the early identification of these clients and additional standards involving systematic referrals on the basis of individual need, and the gradual integration of certain funded strategies.

RECOMMENDATION A2. Expand the availability of affordable, high-quality child care for high-risk children across South Carolina.

Strategy A2a. Work in concert with South Carolina policymakers to create a quality-based incentive system for the state’s early education providers their employees and customers.

Strategy A2b. Continue and expand First Steps efforts to support the state’s early education workforce. Incentivize educational advancement and work with the Department of Social Services and General Assembly to modify provider training requirements in ways that will support sequential learning and advanced educational attainment over the collection of disparate “clock hours.”

Strategy A2c. Pilot the use of supplemental vouchers and/or center bonuses as a method through which to link high risk children to care within the state’s best early learning environments.

Strategy A2d. Continue to explore synergies between the lead agency for the Child Care Block Grant (SC DSS) and SC First Steps, and build strong work relationships that maximize limited resources in improving and sustaining child care quality.

RECOMMENDATION A3. Support programmatic innovations designed to better address the needs of high-risk children.

Strategy A3a. Establish additional guidelines around the development and evaluation of non-prevalent strategies in an effort to encourage innovation while ensuring efficacy.

Strategy A3b. Explore the feasibility and potential desirability of both limitations on the percentage of overall state funding allocated to non-prevalent strategies (to ensure that the majority of First Steps funding is devoted to well-validated methods) and the allocation of small, supplemental grants designed to encourage innovative approaches to improving client outcomes at both the individual and population levels.

THEME B:

MAXIMIZE THE STATE’S CHILD-FOCUSED RESOURCES AND OPTIMIZE THEIR ASSOCIATED STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS

RECOMMENDATION B1. Ensure systemic communication, coordination and collaboration by renewing the state and local boards’ mandates to provide leadership coordination and support to ensure all communities are focused upon – and meeting - the needs of the state’s at-risk children.

Strategy B1a. Reinvigorate the roles of partner agencies at the state and local board levels by convening regular agency forums, focused opportunities for coordination and collaboration.

Strategy B1b. Incorporate regular partner agency highlights into state and local board meetings.

Strategy B1c. Pursue the incorporation of additional collaboration criteria within the First Steps program standards, annual reporting process and into performance-based funding criteria.

Strategy B1d. Pursue, as the state’s newly-named ECAC, the creation on an inter-agency “Children’s Budget” for South Carolina (beginning in FY11, as feasible).

RECOMMENDATION B2. Strengthen and expand First Steps’ outcomes-based accountability focus; incorporate performance-based funding.

Strategy B2a. Continue and advance First Steps recent efforts to ensure outcomes-based accountability through a data-driven annual renewal process. Explore the use of community-level indicators as one means of outcome measurement.

Strategy B2b. Expand the agency’s use of performance-based Partnership funding as a means through which to leverage quality, accountability, collaboration and leadership at the local level and to encourage strong local implementation of statewide strategic priorities.

RECOMMENDATION B3. Strengthen internal capacity on a statewide basis.

Strategy B3a. Increase Board-to-Board dialogue and communication with and among local board leaders.

Strategy B3b. Increase and standardize local board training opportunities – particularly those aimed at new partnership board members. Explore the creation of a mentoring program for new board chairs.

Strategy B3c. Create standardized processes for conducting comprehensive, local needs/resource assessments and multi-year strategic planning/renewal documents – along with tools designed to support local boards in implementing Vision 2013 recommendations and strategies.

Strategy B3d. Establish operational, collaboration, and/or partnership board standards to accompany First Steps’ program standards. Increase monitoring efforts to ensure effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION B4. Maximize First Steps own resources through the ongoing pursuit of internal, structural improvements and regional/inter-agency collaboration.

Strategy 8a. Incentivize regional and/or cross-agency staffing and organizational structures to minimize administrative expenses. Seek to reduce fixed costs like rent, contracts, through inter-agency partnership agreements, etc.

Strategy 8b. Maximize First Steps’ statewide investments through the introduction of new partnership-to-partnership “in-kind support” requirements.

Strategy 8c. Reexamine the agency’s approach to capturing partnership and state-level “overhead” to ensure rigorous compliance with the agency’s enabling legislation – ensuring both its agency-wide minimization and appropriate and consistent depiction.

THEME C:
**SUPPORT READINESS-FOCUSED PUBLIC POLICY EFFORTS ACROSS SOUTH
CAROLINA**

RECOMMENDATION C1. Develop aggressive advocacy and resource development strategies designed to support the needs of high-risk children at both the state and local levels.

Strategy C1a. Use First Steps' structure and dollars as a means to draw and leverage additional investments in SC children and families - to include the creation of a South Carolina School Readiness Endowment. Assist stakeholders in understanding the exponential effects of First Steps funding.

Strategy C1b. Develop a focused resource development strategy for the initiative, incorporating grant writing, private fundraising, and other means of resource development.

Strategy C1c. Explore opportunities to blend/braid public funding (across agencies) and increase focus on quality child care - maximizing private sector investments.

RECOMMENDATION C2. Create a state-level readiness measure (using indicators of early school success) through which to assess the impact of South Carolina's collective investment in young children.

Strategy C2a. Work to develop a statistical, policy-level measure of readiness in South Carolina, incorporating both "leading" (or predictive) and "trailing" (or reflective) indicators. Use this index to expand the state's and Board's view of First Steps' systemic effectiveness, by focusing on real-world readiness outcomes in addition to the agency's internal program measures.